China-Russia Cooperation Exchanges in Retrospect and Cultural Communication in Prospect

-- Based on the Strategy of Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China and Harbin's Booming Winter Tourism

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Abstract. The year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia. Over the past ten years, the China-Russian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination has become increasingly close and deeply rooted in people's minds. The paper reviews the exchanges between China and Russia in the areas of political communication, economic cooperation and cultural exchanges since the 18th CPC National Congress (2012), as well as with the guidance of the strategy of Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China and under the background of Harbin's Booming Winter Tourism, Northeast China makes full use of geographic advantages and resource endowments to play the role of "transfer station" and "bridgehead" in China-Russia economic and trade cooperation and cultural exchanges. What's more, the paper discusses recommendations of Northeast China in terms of expanding the influence of culture and tourism, creating regional brand characteristics, and optimizing the main body, media and activities of external communication, to put forward a Chinese proposal with characteristics of the Northeast region from the perspective of China-Russian friendly exchanges and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: China-Russian; Harbin's Booming Winter Tourism; Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China.

1. Introduction

China-Russia diplomacy has a long history, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with New China. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, head-of-state diplomacy has engaged in frequent and friendly between China and Russia. What's more, the exchanges in terms of policy coordination, unimpeded trade and closer people-to-people ties have continued to deepen, especially in the areas of economy and trade, energy, agriculture, transportation and humanities. During the past ten years, the two sides have continued to consolidate the strategic collaborative partnership, and constantly strengthened political mutual trust; the total amount of imports and exports has increased significantly; cultural tourism, art, education and other humanistic exchanges have been carried out in an all-round manner. Thus, the new major country relations has already been forged.

Northeast China mainly covers the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning, especially Heilongjiang province, which is located in the northernmost part of China and shares a border with the southeastern part of Russia, making the Northeast region a key corridor for China-Russia exchanges. With the guidance of the strategy of Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China in 2021 and the marketing of cultural tourism, by the end of 2023, the Northeast China had successfully shaped the international city brand and entered a new stage of high-quality development of cultural tourism, with the phenomenal Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism. Meanwhile, with the 9th Asian Winter Games being held in Harbin in 2025, the China-Russia Year of Culture from 2024 to 2025 and other major foreign events in the vicinity, internal and external advantages have superimposed, exchanges between China and other countries, especially China-Russia in the Northeast region, will enter a new stage.
In this regard, the paper combs through the exchanges and cooperation between China and Russia in politics, economy and culture since the 18th CPC National Congress, and exerts the author’s advantages of majoring in the Russian, to pay attention to the relevant agenda setting, content framework and communication effect on the mainstream media and social platforms in China and Russia. Thus, the paper focuses on the statistics on the reports related to the head-of-state diplomacy, as well as the data of sharing videos with Russian style on Chinese social media. On this basis, the paper discusses how Northeast China can continue the cultural and tourism boom by taking advantage of its geographical advantages and resource endowments, promote the comprehensive revitalization of Northeast China and boost its communication power, influence and reputation in the international stage from the perspective of cultural communication. Finally, the paper provides Chinese proposal with Northeast characteristics for the high-quality development as well as for China-Russia cooperation and exchange.

2. China-Russia Political and Economic Exchanges in Retrospect

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China and Russia have continued to deepen connections in terms of policy coordination, unimpeded trade, and closer people-to-people ties and other aspects, and have issued Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the New Stage of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination (2014), the Development of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era (2019), strengthening Contemporary Global Strategic Stability (2019), the 20th anniversary of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation (2021), Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era (2023), Development Plan for Key Directions of China-Russian Economic Cooperation before 2030 (2023), etc., in terms of economic trade, energy cooperation, agricultural cooperation, cross-border transportation, humanistic exchanges and international security and other aspects.

During the past ten years, the two countries have actively carried out docking cooperation based on The Belt and Road Initiative and Eurasian Economic Union, so that "bilateral economic and trade cooperation has developed in an orderly manner, with China ranking as Russia's top trading partner for 12 consecutive years [1]", "energy cooperation has made continuous breakthroughs, agricultural trade has developed rapidly [2]", and "civil society contacts have been enthusiastic". Data from the National Bureau of Statistics in China show that from 2013 to 2023, Russia's exports to China, Russia's imports from China, and the total amount of China-Russia imports and exports will all maintain an overall upward trend amidst slight oscillations. In particular, from 2020 to 2023, the total amount doubled from more than 108 to more than 240 billion dollars. Russian Foreign Minister
Sergey Lavrov has repeatedly expressed that "the two countries have established a broad, high-level cooperation mechanism."

During the visit to Russia in March 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke highly: "The development of China-Russia relations has a clear historical logic and strong endogenous impetus. Over the past ten years, the two sides have seen considerable development of cooperation in various fields and have entered a new era. High-level exchanges have played an important strategic leading role; political mutual trust has been continuously consolidated, creating a new paradigm of major country relations; the two sides have formed a pattern of all-round and multi-level cooperation, practiced the concept of generational friendship, and worked closely in the international arena.[3]"

**Table 1. Overview of China-Russia Head-of-state Diplomacy Since the 20th CPC National Congress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>News</th>
<th>Distribution of High-Frequency Words in Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2022.12.30</td>
<td>Chinese President Xi Jinping had a virtual meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin</td>
<td>pragmatic cooperation, initial intention of cooperation, multi-field cooperation(3), energy cooperation(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023.03.10</td>
<td>Putin sent a congratulatory telegram to Xi on his election as Chinese President</td>
<td>people-to-people exchanges(3), the Years of Sports Exchange(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023.03.22</td>
<td>Xi held talks with Putin</td>
<td>cooperative potential, journey of cooperation, multi-field cooperation(2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the 20th CPC National Congress (2022), official exchanges between China and Russia have entered a new period of head-of-state diplomacy, which has opened a new chapter of cooperation and development. As shown in Table 1, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have closely exchanged views through meetings, phone calls, and congratulatory letters, etc. In 2013 and 2023, Xi's first visits to Russia after being elected President were both to send a strong
signal to the world that "China-Russian friendship has a profound historical logic and strategic significance [4]". During the visit in 2023, the two sides emphasized the long-term development of good-neighborliness and friendly cooperation, and the comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation in the new era. Putin noted, "This visit is of great significance and proves once again that the Russian-Chinese partnership is of a special nature and is always based on mutual trust and respect for each other's sovereignty and interests. The political dialogue is extremely trusting and represents a comprehensive new era of strategic cooperation. [5]"

In October 2023, during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the presidents of China and Russia reached a consensus on developing the permanent good-neighborly friendship, comprehensive strategic cooperation, and mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation [6]. Russian media said "Russia and China: the highest level of relations in an era of rapid changes in the world (Россия и Китай: высший уровень отношений в эпоху стремительных перемен в мире).[7]"

3. China-Russia Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges in Retrospect

As political communication and economic cooperation continue to deepen, the interaction between China and Russia has spread from the official to the private sector and entered a new stage of cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

The 23rd Meeting of the China-Russia Cultural and People-to-People Cooperation Committee announced that from 2018 to 2023, the two sides have held three national years themed on local cooperation, scientific & technological innovation and sports exchanges, with a cumulative total of nearly 2,000 various activities; the number of institutions and programs of the two sides has increased to 116, with cooperation in various fields continuing to deepen. Tracing back, since 2016, the China-Russia Winter Youth Games have adopted Chinese traditional skills as the warm-up form [8], and "Sports + Culture" has opened up a new pathway for young people to learn each other and deepen their feelings. In 2019, the Chinese Oriental Orchestra was invited to Russia to participate in the celebrating concert of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC and the 70th anniversary of the China-Russia diplomatic relationship, as well as holding many Guzheng concerts. In the same year, as the first stop of the Belt and Road film exhibition launched by China Film Museum, the Russia demonstrated the broadcasting role of people-to-people media in cross-cultural communication [9]. Education is also a key area of China-Russian cultural cooperation, especially in higher education, where cooperative educational institutions and programs at various academic levels have achieved fruitful results, sowing the seeds of talent exchange between the two countries.

In January 2024, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the China-Russia diplomatic relationship, to further develop bilateral relationship and expand cultural ties (для дальнейшего развития российско-китайских отношений и расширения двусторонних связей в области культуры) [10], two sides designated 2024-2025 as the China-Russia Year of Culture (Год культуры России и Китая). Through organizing activities and expanding cooperation in the fields of excellent performances and exhibition tours, cultural heritage preservation and restoration, joint archaeology and professional training, China and Russia continuously improve the level and scale of cultural exchanges [11].

### Table 2. China-Russia Tourism Data for 2013 and 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chinese Tourists to Russia (Thousand People)</th>
<th>Russian Tourists to China (Thousand People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>2190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td>2720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefiting from the natural geographical advantages and diversified cultural cooperation, the civil exchanges between the two countries have further developed in the field of cultural tourism. Taking the data in Table 2 as an example, during the six years, the number of travelers between China and
Russia has shown an obvious upward trend, especially the number of Chinese travelers to Russia has doubled. After the improvement of global COVID-19, tourism cooperation has entered a period of rapid recovery, and since February 2023, China has been piloting the resumption of outbound group tours for Chinese citizens to the countries, and Russia was on the list of the first 20 pilot countries. According to the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR), "China entered the list of tourist traffic to Russia for the first time after COVID-19, with 6,200 visitors to Russia in the first quarter of 2023, compared to only 102 visitors in the first quarter of 2022. [12]" Moscow, St. Petersburg and other Russian cities has added a number of batches of direct flights to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other popular Chinese cities, to further drive the enthusiasm of Chinese and Russian tourists. In the fall of 2023, the demand for Russian tourists to travel to China compared to the fall of 2019 doubled.

4. Northeast China-Russia Political, Economic and Cultural Interactions in Retrospect

From the first proposal of Revitalization of the Northeast China in 2003, to the second proposal of Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China in 2023, Chinese major principles and policies have profoundly indicated that "Promoting Chinese modernization need strengthen the strategic support role of the Northeast China".

In the process of China-Russia building a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, both Northeast China and the Russian Far East Region play important roles as bridges with unique location advantages and policy support, especially in Heilongjiang, the Chinese northernmost province bordering Russia. In 2019, the overall program of the China (Heilongjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone emphasized "building a highland of openness and cooperation focusing on Russia and Northeast Asia, including constructing transportation and logistics hubs, upgrading the level of openness along the border and unblocking channels of communication. [13]" As the centre city of national cooperation with Russia, Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang Province, has concluded international friendship cities with 29 Russian cities and municipalities since the 1990s, and established friendly communicating relations, which has been exploring in-depth and continuously upgrading in various fields of China-Russia cooperation with its location advantages, sufficient resource endowment and wide development prospects [14]. In 2022, China's first diversified Russian goods import pavilion was set up in Harbin, which plans to open 300 ones in China. This action has created an important platform for all-round cooperation in various fields such as economy, trade, culture, tourism, science and technology, civil cooperation, etc., which will lead to the setting up of more deep-processing industrial parks and Russian production enterprises in China.

Especially with the approach of the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin in 2025, Ice Diplomacy has become a new main line between China and Russia. From 2023 to 2024, Ice and Snow Season in Harbin took the service of national diplomacy as the fundamental, the exchanges with Russia as the key point, and economic and trade cooperation as the direction, to show the influence of "ice and snow culture city" in an all-round way, which enhances the status and function of the centre city of cooperation with Russia, and constantly expands the international popularity of Harbin [15].

In this regard, Harbin has devoted itself in the domestic and international arena both offline and online. Various phenomenal cultural tourism boom sweeps the country and the world throughout the year. In 2023, Harbin created "Ice +" activities of festivals, culture, art, sports, business and trade, etc., and made full use of Russian architecture, clothing, travel photography and other existing resources, to create a Russian-style immersion tour: Central Avenue, St. Sophia Cathedral, Russian-style town and other attractions are overcrowded; Harbin "Russian Princess" travel photography requires booking 5 months in advance [16] ...

From Chinese to Russian media, from mainstream to social media, the communication matrix for Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism has been assisting. Russian C1R (Первый Канал) has focused on the Harbin ice and snow season in the form of graphics, video and other forms, for many times, saying that the scale of its record-breaking, and depicting tens of thousands of people dancing in the Harbin
Ice and Snow World with the tune of Katyusha (Фестиваль льда, рекордный масштаб. И уж, конечно, очень много сил уходит на танцы. Музыка от рассвета до заката, а под мелодию «Катюша» в Харбине танцуют все) [17].

**Table 3. Data on Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism and China-Russia Tour on Douyin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Type of Creators</th>
<th>Content and Themes</th>
<th>Likes</th>
<th>Bright Spot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2023.12.10</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Harbin &quot;Russian Princess&quot; Photo Shooting.</td>
<td>330 thousand</td>
<td>Great audition contrast based on the popular &quot;Extreme Makeover&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023.12.16</td>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Tourism in Suifenhe, a border city in Northeast China.</td>
<td>14 thousand</td>
<td>Deep exploration of regional characteristics of the border city, showing the Russian style in pictures and words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023.12.21</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Harbin Ice and Snow World.</td>
<td>326 thousand</td>
<td>Highly literate text for emotional communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023.12.29</td>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Travel from a border city in Northeastern China, to a border city in Russia.</td>
<td>46 thousand</td>
<td>Travel strategy and itinerary that can be utilized.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefiting from the crowd-sourcing and innovation attributes of new media, many netizens share new models of cross-border tours between the Northeast China and the Far East. Russia has become the preferred cross-border destination for many Chinese tourists, thanks to its good-neighbourly, friendly diplomatic relations, the cost-effectiveness of first-tier landscapes and second-tier prices. As Table 3 shown that on Douyin, one of the hottest social media platforms in China, real records, experiences, and travel strategies of Harbin's Russian-style immersion tours, Northeast China entry to Russia and other topics, have a high flow and dissemination effect. Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism continues to play a spillover effect on China-Russia tour.

5. Insights and Recommendations

By January 2024, "China has concluded mutual visa waiver agreements with 157 countries covering different passport types, and visa simplification agreements or arrangements with 44 countries. In addition, more than 60 countries and regions have granted Chinese citizens visa-free or visa-on-arrival facilities. [18]" In the post-pandemic era, with people yearning for beloved books in their hands and a vivid view in sight, China has continued to promote high-standard opening up and introduced a series of visa-free policies, ushering in a new boom in cross-border tourism. Meanwhile, the continuous improvement of China-Russia relations has also increased the enthusiasm of citizens from both sides to travel abroad, and two counties are expected to become popular cross-border destinations for tourists from each other [19]. In particular, Northeast China has attracted a large number of domestic and foreign tourists with Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism from late 2023 to early 2024. Northeast China's city image is being promoted through a carefully planned and crafted approach that quickly impresses the domestic public through emotional value, event marketing and sincere attitude. As a result, Northeast China including Harbin have laid a solid foundation for the future development of cultural tourism in different directions, such as cross-border tours and border tours, utilizing innovative forms and sincere efforts to touch people's hearts. Riding the wave of the mutually beneficial diplomatic policies, Northeast China can give full play to the role of China and Russia as an important "transfer station" for cross-cultural exchanges, and strive to enhance international influence, to seize the new opportunities brought by cross-border tourism, and to provide a new impetus for cultural tourism development in China.

Specifically, the subject of cross-border tourism is divided into domestic and foreign tourists. According to Table 3, many tourists post short videos related to Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism on Chinese social media represented by Douyin. The video content includes not only ice activities and local customs in Northeast China, but also the sharing of China-Russia outbound routes, Russian
speciality and beautiful scenery. However, in the long run, some aspects can be optimized in the creation and dissemination of videos:

As far as the main body of communication, firstly, tourists, as the original producers of self-media content, lack the sharing of local Russian elements, which reflects the insufficient excavation of local Russian cultural tourism elements in Northeast China; secondly, the official Douyin account represented by "Bureau of Culture, Sports, Radio, Electricity and Tourism in Suifenhe City" has not been novel enough in its selection of topics, and the traffic gathering effect has not yet been shown, which reflects that the international image of Harbin and Suifenhe has yet to be shaped. Generally speaking, Harbin and other places have not explored and disseminated enough in integrating Russian tourism resources, carrying out diversified tourism modes, and integrating local characteristic culture. At the same time, the cross-cultural communication and exchanges between China and other countries have certain problems due to the influence of multiple factors, such as the differences in the perception of the governments of the target countries and people, as well as the reach and influence of Chinese media [20]. Under the guidance of the strategy of Comprehensive Revitalization of Northeast China, give full play to the role of international organizations, domestic and foreign cross-border enterprises and other multifaceted communication bodies, so that can tell good stories of Sino-foreign exchanges and present a credible, lovely and respectable image of China. Carrying out exhibitions, visits, forums and other forms of communication in Northeast China, not only promotes economic and trade communication, but also can let opinion leaders of diversified backgrounds and circles feel the high-quality development of China and the customs of Northeast China, to realize the cross-cultural communication of diversified users and the interaction of different circles.

In terms of means of communication, firstly, online media can be combined with low-cost, high-flow, effective and powerful short videos and micro-dramas to tell the story of Northeast China, especially the story in foreign communication, to attract traffic. At the same time, it can be translated into different languages to promote the media "going abroad" and continuously improve the influence in Russia, Central Asia and other countries; secondly, as for offline communication, the region can create a unique multi-dimensional comprehensive tourism model in the integration of culture and tourism, and design diversified special routes and tourism experiences for different groups of tourists. For example, launch the winter "ice tour", summer "cool tour" and year-round "Russian cultural immersion tour" for Chinese tourists, to meet the tourism needs of different periods; design "Chinese culture immersion tours", "Northeast China folk customs tours" and other special routes for tourists from Russia, Central Asia and other countries and regions, to deeply experience China's high-quality development, as well as the connotations and extensions of Chinese culture. Refined, different and customized design will continue to bring breakthroughs in the development of cultural tourism in Northeast China.

To summarize, in the Spring Festival of 2024, Northeast China has already driven several phenomenal tourism booms through the integration of diversified tourism modes. Based on this, we can continue to explore the cross-border cultural tourism model covering a variety of cultural experiences, make good use of foreign propaganda media, communicate well with the mainstream media of the other country, and make full use of the new media channels of the two sides, and seize opportunities such as the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin in 2025, the China-Russia Year of Culture, Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism, etc., and the use of "online for offline empowerment, online and offline together through" to enhance the impact of the international communication and realization rate, and then actively promote Chinese tourists through Northeast China outbound, so that Chinese tourists "want to go", and attract Russian tourists to enter from Northeast China to travel to China, so that Russian tourists "want to come". Thus, Northeast China will promote the booming development of cross-border tourism and the Chinese and Russian people "go in both directions" in-depth communication.
6. Summary
Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2013, China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era has become increasingly close and deeply rooted in people's minds. Benefiting from "policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration", intensive and friendly head-of-state diplomacy has injected a "shot in the arm" into China-Russia diplomatic relations, mutually beneficial policies have been put into practice to promote cooperation in many fields, economic and trade exchanges have been on the rise in the past ten years, and a wide range of high-level transnational cooperation mechanisms have been established, resulting in "closer people-to-people ties". From official to civil society, from mainstream to we media, all-around people-to-people exchanges and cross-cultural communication have contributed to the continuous integration of China and Russia. Based on this, Northeast China, with both location advantages and resource endowments, has seized the opportunity to serve as a bridge for China-Russia exchanges and cooperation. Empowered by traditional and new media, Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province, makes good use of event marketing and emotional value, closely follows the theme of ice and snow, and continuously broadens the main roles and circles of cross-cultural communication. In the future, Northeast China can enrich the customized and differentiated cultural tourism routes offline, and make self-produced short videos, micro-skits dramas and other new communication modes online, to ignite the explosion point of Harbin’s Booming Winter Tourism to continue to play the role of China-Russia Tour. We can show open and inclusive city image of Harbin as the representative of Northeast China, and the charm of the major country's high-quality rapid development to the domestic and foreign.

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[1] Hongjian Yu, Xin Sui, et al. China has been Russia's top trading partner for 12 consecutive years - China-Russia economic and trade cooperation has been fruitful. People's Daily. (2022) No. 03.