

Functionalist Approach to Explain Russian-Japanese Relations under Abe and Putin Administrations

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Abstract. Russian-Japanese relations present one of the most interesting cases of international relations with a perplexing historical background and a complex set of factors influencing contemporary dynamics of Russian-Japanese interaction. The relations are claimed to have improved under Putin and Abe administrations, introduction of the Eight-Point Cooperation Plan and establishment of a unique post of a Minister for Cooperation with Russia. This article analyzed the specific period of Russian-Japanese relations between 2016 and 2019. Improved bilateral relations created a historical precedent that is important to understand in light of contemporary deteriorated relations between Japan and Russia. However, Russian-Japanese cooperation in this period is complicated by a complex historical legacy and other factors and is set to be locked in a Kurilian stumbling block. International relation theories traditionally applied to analyze Russian-Japanese relations fail to suggest the way out and the mechanisms to improve Russian-Japanese relations. The present article explores the theoretical apparatus traditionally applied to Russian-Japanese relations and investigates the potential of a functionalist approach to explain Russian-Japanese relations between 2016 and 2019. Functionalism describes the way to improve relations of countries with adversarial relations by moving away from high-politics issues and *quid pro quo* logic and focusing on the problem-solving approach. The spill-over effect occurs when cooperation established in one field expands to other areas.

The article concludes by arguing that, in contemporary Russian-Japanese cooperation, there is a hybrid spill-around effect.

Keywords: Russian-Japanese cooperation, Eight-Point Cooperation Plan, functionalism, neorealism, challenger state, target state.

Introduction

Russian-Japanese relations present one of the most interesting cases of international relations with a perplexing historical background and a complex set of factors influencing contemporary dynamics of Russian-Japanese interaction. It is important to understand the character of bilateral relations between these two powerful states, with their significant political and economic influence. Russian-Japanese relations shape the political environment and stability in the Northeast Asian region with “one of the world’s most complex security environments, [with] three nuclear weapon states, great-power rivalry, multiple territorial conflicts” [Brown et al., n.d.], and complex historical relations, but also the wider international community. Russian-Japanese relations particularly come to the forefront when taking into consideration Russia’s deteriorated relations with the West, Japan’s urge for greater independence particularly pronounced under the Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō administration, the positioning of the USA, the strengthened place of China in contemporary international relations (IR), instability in North Korea and other tensions shaping world dynamics.

The climate of Russian-Japanese relations have improved under the former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s administrations and the cooperation between Russia and Japan has increased in practically all fields. The situation is claimed to have changed since 2012 with the ‘new approach to the Russian issues’ proposed by the former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. There is an intensification of Russian-Japanese cooperation in almost all fields

of bilateral relations [Pustovoyt 2019]. The potential for cooperation was highlighted by Russian and Japanese administrations.

Moreover, with regard to the development of relations with Russia, there was a unique position created within the Japanese government specifically for dealing with this: the Minister for Economic Cooperation with Russia; this position is currently held by Seko Hiroshige. Eight-Point Cooperation Plan¹ (hereinafter 8PCP), so-called roadmap for Russian-Japanese cooperation was introduced. The 8PCP can be referred to as a roadmap for the technical cooperation between Japan and Russia in different social and economic fields. It is said to be designed to focus on economic and technical variables of cooperation while setting aside political matters.

The present article focuses on the period from 2016 until 2019. The start, September 2016, was marked by the introduction of the 8PCP initiative by Japan to Russia and the end of the period, December 2019, marks the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected all international relations, especially at the early stages. This article refers to the term of former Japanese Prime Minister Abe

¹ Eight-Point Cooperation Plan for innovative reforms in the industry and economy of Russia as a leading country with favourable living conditions. It was proposed by Japanese Prime Minister Abe to Russian President Putin in 2016 at the Sochi Summit. It is “a concrete plan to unleash the potential of the highly promising Japan-Russia relationship”. This plan was offered within the ‘new approach’ to the bilateral relations policy. It is referred to as a will to “combine Japanese technology with Russian wisdom”. The 8PCP promotes cooperation for the development of eight respective areas of the socio-economic development of Russia and are as follows: 1. Extending healthy life expectancies, 2. Developing comfortable and clean cities that are easy to reside and live in, 3. Fundamental expansion of medium-sized and small companies’ exchange and cooperation, 4. Energy, 5. Promoting industrial diversification and enhancing productivity in Russia, 6. Developing industries and export bases in the Far East, 7. Cooperation on cutting-edge technologies, 8. Fundamental expansion of people-to-people interaction.

(term in office December 26, 2012 – September 16, 2020) and Russian President Putin (assumed office on May 7, 2012).

However, the prospects for wider Russian-Japanese cooperation remain unclear with the issues of the lack of a peace treaty, and the contested territories among other factors. There is a wide amount of scholarly literature highlighting the role of the territorial dispute and its hampering effect on the cooperation of the two countries. Scholars see the Southern Kuriles/Northern Territories as a stumbling block in the bilateral relationship [Miller 2004] and the research on Russian-Japanese relations focuses mostly on its ideological and historical contexts, highlighting the likelihood of continued adversarial relations unless the territorial dispute is resolved.

Russian-Japanese relations remain ambiguous with the unresolved territorial dispute over the Southern Kuriles/Northern Territories, the absence of the post-Second World War peace treaty, continuous historical mutual distrust, as well as significant influence of other states involved in shaping the dynamics of Russian-Japanese relations. Bilateral relations of the two neighbours “tell a story of geopolitical illusions and frustrations, geo-economic promise and failure, and increasingly divisive historical memories that, to date, overwhelm pragmatic diplomacy” [Rozman (ed.) 2016].

There is frustration from scholars (for instance, [Rozman (ed.) 2016]) at the constant state of ambiguity between Russian-Japanese relations and inability of IR theories previously applied to this case to propose a strategy for the normalization of bilateral relations. The present article investigated different theoretical approaches traditionally used to explain Russian-Japanese relations and suggests that the theoretical approaches traditionally used to analyze Russian-Japanese relations, although applicable to describe the state of Russian-Japanese relations and the problems preventing the full-fledged cooperation between the two, have failed to suggest ways out of the territorial stumbling block. These theoretical approaches are iterated prisoner’s dilemma, neorealism, neoliberalism, two-level games, constructivism, and the challenger state – target state approach to bilateral relations of countries with adversarial relations.

Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma

According to the prisoners' dilemma [Snyder 1971], states' interactions are games with insufficient information about the counterparts and states competing for maximal competitive gain acting as rational actors. The prisoner's dilemma is used to describe how two parties decide in a condition of insufficient information. The gain can be achieved when both states cooperate. The traditional prisoner's dilemma describes the decision-making process taking place once. The later theoretical developments refer to the iterated (repeated) prisoner's dilemma when the decisions are made for an infinite number of times.

"In either case, if the game is only played once, then each player gets a higher payoff from defecting than from cooperating, regardless of what the other player does. However, if both players defect, they both do worse than had both cooperated. If the game is played repeatedly (the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, or IPD), there is greater room for cooperation" [Axelrod & Dion 1988]. The counterparts follow a *quid-pro-quo* logic making a reciprocal act of repeating the counterpart's move made in the previous occasion on the next occasion. Thus, "a repeated prisoner's dilemma in which mutual cooperation can be sustained as an equilibrium outcome with a strategy of punishing defection should it occur" [Powell 1991] or, on the contrary, praising the counterpart.

As it was explained by scholars reviewing Russian foreign policy in general, prisoner's dilemma can be a mechanism explaining Russian decisions about international relations in the Northeast Asian region in particular and in the world in general. "Russia, as a rational egoist, cares only about its own gains and not about the gains or losses of the United States, Japan, China, Korea, thereby making cooperation more likely" [Hopf (ed.) 1999]. Thus, the motivation to cooperate with Japan, for example, can be dictated by similar considerations. With the lack of trust and absence of the common government, Russian willingness to "cooperate in building security mechanisms is seen as means of minimizing the negative effects of cheating in the prisoner's dilemma situation coming from regional anarchy" [Hopf (ed.) 1999].

Iterated prisoner's dilemma has some potential in explaining Russian-Japanese relations, particularly when explaining the complicated advancement of the cooperation. However, it lacks the capacity to accommodate the complexity of Russian-Japanese relations embedded in a set of external, internal, economic, historical, social, political factors shaping their dynamics. Nevertheless, it is important to understand prisoner's dilemma as it lies at the core of the neorealist and neoliberal approaches to international relations discussed below.

Neorealism

The dynamics of Russian-Japanese relations are often explained through the neorealist lens. Neorealists explain the world order as an anarchy with no central regulation leading to the distrust of the countries and seeing other countries as enemies [Baldwin (ed.) 1993]. The states therefore are perceived as self-concerned IR actors worried about the survival [Baldwin (ed.) 1993]. Thus, the primary function of interstate relation is security competition [Streltsov & Lukin 2017]. The cooperation can be based on security considerations about the counterparts and the potential of the effect of this cooperation projected on other states in the anarchic environment. The competitive self-centred behaviour is normalized within the neorealist approach as the path of an actor and the other actors' behaviour is supposed to be shaped by the same logic.

Following the debate on the necessity of decreasing Japan's reliance on American security provisions and the development of military potential of Russia, there is a mutual interest for the cooperation. Another factor in favor of cooperation is the need to protect remote Far Eastern territories and economic underdevelopment of the region versus the potential of Japanese technologies. Furthermore, the immediate proximity of North Korea and its missile development is also in favor of the Tokyo-Moscow dialogue [Streltsov & Lukin 2017]. The abovementioned can serve as factors pushing neighbours to cooperate and merging the interests of Russia and Japan.

Moreover, Russian-Japanese cooperation can be explained through the neorealist logic taking into account the role of other countries, particularly USA and China. The potential of Sino-American rapprochement informed the motivation of the former USSR and Japan to cooperate and the same pushes contemporary Russia and Japan towards each other.

Some scholars point on the strengthening of a realistic trend in contemporary international relations, based on the cult of strength, on military power, on the values characteristic of the diplomacy of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is especially true in Asia, where the language of power works much better than the language of words. It is believed that the Cold War has always continued in Asia, and, after the end of the bipolar period, it continues now; there is an arms race, and power expresses true intentions more effectively than words and helps to achieve foreign policy goals [Gribkova 2016].

At the same time, despite the considerations stated above, both Japan and Russia prioritize their traditional partners, USA and China, over cooperation with each other. Moreover, the categorical approach of the neorealist school to the competitive and security-based character of international relations shapes the relations in rigid terms. It does not allow to accommodate the complexity of other factors influencing cooperation. The neoliberal approach gives room for more flexible considerations.

Neoliberalism

The proponents of the neoliberalist school of thought are congruent with the neorealist perception of the international system as anarchy [Jervis 1999]. At the same time, the adepts of the neoliberal school see countries not as enemies but as rivals, thus there being more room for cooperation. The potential for cooperation is based on the actors' interest in military prowess, economic power, and other strengths [Baldwin (ed.) 1993].

An important factor that can intensify cooperation is interdependence of countries. The depth of this interdependence can serve as a factor ensuring the potential of cooperation between states. Depending on it (the depth), neoliberals identify interdependence and interconnectedness [Barbieri 1996]. The interdependence occurs when international transactions between the states are extensive and frequent, covering various economic, political, and military fields and lead to high-cost effects for both parties. On the contrary, the interconnectedness occurs when the interstate transactions are less extensive and diverse and, more importantly, do not have substantive effects for the parties. Scholars refer to the low economic interdependence of Japan and Russia identifying it as a possibility to easily replace the economic cooperation with the counterpart state by that with any other state [Kireeva & Sushentsov 2017].

Neoliberalism has significant potential for explaining contemporary Russian-Japanese relations. Russia is interested in attracting Japanese investments and obtaining access to Japanese advanced technology, particularly for the development of the socio-economically deteriorated Russian Far East [Akaha 2016]. On the other hand, Japan is interested in accessing Russian military prowess, especially considering the logic of limiting the dependence on American military protection. It should be mentioned that, from the neoliberal perspective, the military interest is not a security issue, but another asset just like economic or political aspects.

The neoliberal prism draws a positive perspective on the development of Russian-Japanese relations. At the same time, the neoliberalist school fails to explain the reasons behind there being neither interdependent nor intense character of contemporary Russian-Japanese relations. One of the possible explanations might be the inability of the neoliberal theory to accommodate a complex character of the history of Russian-Japanese relations as well as the deeply rooted distrust and the role of adversarial relations in building national identity.

In other words, the Russian-Japanese relations cannot be fully explained either from a neorealist or a neoliberal perspective due to

the main criticism that was already formulated as being “not structural enough: that adopting the individualistic metaphors of micro-economics restricts the effects of structures to state behaviour, ignoring how they might also constitute state identities and interests” [Wendt 1995].

While the neoliberal-neorealist debate is an established debate in the realm of international relations (IR), the exploration of the dependence of the game theoretical prisoner’s dilemma and two-level games’ theory presents a relatively unexplored field of IR theorization.

Two-Level Games

The theory of two-level games emphasizes the connection between international relations and internal politics. According to the proponents of this approach, the negotiations of two countries are in fact not one but two games:

- 1) international negotiations themselves;
- 2) internal ratification of negotiated decisions.

“At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers...” [Putnam 1988].

The significant part of the two-level games’ theory is a winset category. The winset is the spectrum of possible agreements that are both accepted by negotiators² (level 1) and by their internal stakeholders (level 2). Considering internal stakeholders, or powerful interest groups, is important since whether a negotiated agreement is ratified or not depends on their approval. Thus, a potential of possible outcomes

² Usually, country leaders or other officials.

of negotiations is determined by the width of the winset spectrum: the wider it is the easier the negotiation process. The stronger negotiator here is that who has the narrowest width of the options that will be internally accepted. It is assumed that the parties engage in negotiations with the knowledge of their counterparts' level 2 positions.

Two-level games theory has significant potential in explaining the character of contemporary Russian-Japanese relations. On the one hand, the main negotiators, Putin and Abe, are perceived as strong leaders with significant electoral support. Thus, it is expected that they can push the ratification of negotiated agreements.

On the other hand, it is believed that high bureaucratic institutions in Japan are not favorable towards intensified cooperation with Russia [Streltsov & Lukin 2017]. Russian citizens, on the other hand, demonstrate uncompromising positions regarding the status of disputed territories, although the situation improved over the last years, with 74 percent of Russians being against giving two islands to Japan.³ At the same time, the power of public opinion in Russia should not be overestimated, and there are other factors influencing Russian-Japanese relations. While the two-level games theory provides explanation for the lack of success in bilateral relations despite the potential, it fails to explore the way to improve the relations. Moreover, akin to neorealism and neoliberalism, the explanatory potential of two-level theory is not enough for analyzing the complex picture of deep-rooted factors.

Constructivism

The approach best suited to understanding the complex dynamics of the diverse set of factors influencing Russian–Japanese relations and allowing to read between the lines is the constructivist approach to international relations.

³ <https://www.levada.ru/2018/11/30/17-rossiyan-skoree-podderzhali-by-ideyu-peredat-yaponii-neskolko-ostrovov-kurilskoj-gryady/>

As opposed to neorealism and neoliberalism, constructivists claim that anarchy is what states make of it [Wendt 1992]. The outcome of the world order in such anarchies lies in practices and decisions made by states. History, as a set of rooted practices, is a significant factor shaping these decisions and the emergence of new practices, with the first interaction between two parties being of particular importance.

The constructivist school focuses on “a concern with how world politics is ‘socially constructed’, which involves two basic claims: that the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material..., and that these structures shape actors’ identities and interests, rather than just their behaviour...” [Wendt 1995, p. 71]. It should be mentioned that these structures exist only as a process and are constantly reaffirmed based on the interaction with other actors. “To analyse the social construction of international politics is to analyse how processes of interaction produce and reproduce the social structures – cooperative or conflictual – that shape actors’ identities and interests and the significance of their material contexts” [Wendt 1995, p. 86]. Constructivism has strong explanatory power [Streltsov & Lukin 2017] in analyzing Russian-Japanese relations. The historical events and agreements are interpreted differently by two countries and their interpretation is deeply rooted in time and its challenges.

Moreover, the first Russian-Japanese interaction left a bad perception of Russians as dangerous barbarians and the following interactions were not positive either [Streltsov & Lukin 2017]; later this image transformed into a relatively stable concept. “The first social act creates expectations on both sides about each other’s future behaviour: potentially mistaken and certainly tentative, but expectations nonetheless... The mechanism here is reinforcement; interaction rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other and discourages them from holding others. If repeated long enough, these “reciprocal typifications” will create relatively stable concepts of self and other regarding the issue at stake in the interaction” [Wendt 1992, p. 405]. This concept then influences the perception and all the following interactions between the states. The actors’ decisions here are informed by culture, which is a subset of social

structures. It “confronts actors as an objective social fact that constrains and enables action in systematic ways, and as such should generate distinct patterns” [Wendt 1999, p. 184].

Furthermore, the perplexed history and Japan’s othering of Russia [Bukh 2009] and the USSR for the purpose of shaping its national identity is another factor. On the other hand, the attempts of contemporary Russian government to construct its identity as a victorious nation [Streltsov 2016a, Streltsov 2016b] and the course towards unification complicate cooperation with Japan.

The biggest criticism against constructivism, however, is its inability to suggest solutions to social problems and the ways of escaping such adversarial relations. Moreover, “the analysis from the constructivist perspective ignores the possibility that economic cooperation can construct a political system among nations [...] and the need for technological cooperation among states, sometimes affects politics significantly” [Watanabe 2016].

Challenger State – Target State Approach

As has been described above, the aforementioned theories fail to investigate and suggest how to improve the character of Russian-Japanese relations. At the same time, Russia and Japan do not present a unique case of a pair of countries with disputed territories. Therefore, it is important to investigate the approaches to bilateral cooperation of states facing similar problem. For this one can refer to the challenger state – target state theoretical considerations [Wiegand & Powell 2011b].

It is argued that states intentionally link activities in the economic field to political actions through the choice of timing [Wiegand & Powell 2011b]. Research addresses the cooperation of countries with territorial disputes demonstrating that “conclusive settlement of a territorial dispute is not necessary for bilateral cooperation to occur” [Wiegand & Powell 2011b, p. 211]. Many countries cooperate while having contested

territories, such as Argentina and the UK, Guatemala and Belize, Bahrain and Qatar, and others.

The challenger state – target state theory is used to describe the dyad relationships of countries with contested territories cooperating on other issues. The authors identify the roles of two states in territorial dispute resolution: a challenger state and a target state. A challenger state is a state that makes territorial claims, while the target state is a state currently possessing the territory, from which the challenger state is attempting to take territory [Wiegand & Powell 2011b]. By referring to the vocabulary of challenger states and target states it is demonstrated how challenger states are making territorial claims, willing to cooperate with target states, i.e., the states from which they are attempting to take territory. Challenger states promote cooperation with target states in areas seemingly unrelated to the territorial dispute and use this cooperation to decrease mutual distrust and improve dyadic relationships.

In such case, rival states start cooperation on issues seemingly unrelated to the territorial issue and further use improved economic relations to push for the resolution of territorial disputes. By analyzing the territorial dispute and the cooperation of Argentina and the UK, scholars present “a theory that portrays bilateral cooperation on other issues as a form of CBMs, which challenger states use in order to influence planned settlement attempts regarding the sovereignty of the disputed territory” [Wiegand & Powell 2011b].

Baking up their findings with an empirical analysis of the Argentina-UK cooperation connected to Malvinas/Falklands islands for over 20 years, they demonstrate how “cooperation on other bilateral issues is not only feasible but also likely for states involved in a dispute over such a salient issue like territory” [Wiegand & Powell 2011a,]. The logic of bilateral cooperation of the states with contested territories and the way it can be applied to Russia and Japan is schematized below.

Table 1

Factors determining bilateral cooperation
of states with contested territories⁴

	Target state	Challenger state
Territory	UK (Russia) Currently possesses	Argentina (Japan) Claims the right to
Strategy choice	States choose previously successful strategies of dispute resolution expecting subsequent success	
Timing choice	N/A	Challenger states link the timing of various economic incentives to the date of the official meetings where territorial issues are discussed
Confidence building measures	The need is highlighted	N/A
Foreign direct investments	N/A	Challenger states can threaten to withdraw or withhold foreign direct investments as a bargaining tool

As can be observed from the table above, the approach developed by Wiegand and Powell [Wiegand and Powell 2011b] enriched with the analysis of the cooperation of countries with unresolved territorial disputes can serve as a theoretical framework for the research if further developed.

This is applicable to the certain extent to the Japanese-Russian case with the Japanese Eight-Point Cooperation plan linked to the territorial dispute resolution. At the same time, this kind of research would require quantitative analysis of the massive data focusing on the number of meetings of the two countries, the timing of meetings, the number and very basic description of the agreements concluding. All of this could become an interesting research direction. However, while being

⁴ Sources: Wiegand & Powell 2011a,b; Asada 1988; Lee & Mitchell 2012.

promising quantitatively, such research does not have enough potential to explain the complex set of factors determining the nations' decisions. More importantly, the abovementioned approach does not provide any solutions on how to promote the relationship, focusing on describing only the timing considerations.

Functionalist Approach to Interstate Cooperation

There is general agreement in the literature discussing Russian and Japanese relations that any bilateral cooperation is contingent on the resolution of the territorial dispute unless there is excessive economic interdependence of the countries as, for instance, is the case between Japan and China. At the same time, there are many examples of bilateral cooperation of countries with disputed territories having no such intense economic interdependency.

More importantly, theories traditionally applied to Russian-Japanese relations' analysis are insufficient to address the frustration and move the focus away from Kurilian knot. Although these theories have a lot of explanatory potential to analyze Russian-Japanese relations, they are unable to contribute to the understanding of how to improve adversarial relations of these two countries.

On the other hand, functionalism is one of the most prominent theories describing the trajectories of bilateral and multilateral relations of countries in conflict and proposing a new model of peace. Developed during WWII by David Mitrany as a response to an inefficient static model of peace, a new social view of peace was proposed. Addressing common social problems was supposed to bring nations actively together [Mitrany 1994]. Further developed, the interest towards functionalism revived and developed into neo-functionalism by scholars like Haas and Schmitter. The heyday of neo-functionalism was in the 1970s and later the application of this theory to international relations decreased again. However, despite the fact that "functionalism is a largely forgotten approach to international relations" [Steffek 2011] it remains relevant

and provides significant insights for the present research and the investigation of the possibilities for cooperation of a large number of countries with disputed territories.

Functionalism also has strong liberating potential since “functional neutrality is possible, where political neutrality is not” [Mitrany 1948, p. 358]. Moreover, the level of engagement can be rather flexible: “countries could take part in some schemes [of cooperation, for example, transport, etc.] and perhaps not in others, whereas in any political arrangement such divided choice would obviously not be tolerable” [Mitrany 1948, p. 358].

Compared to much contemporary research, proponents of functionalism move the relations of disputing countries away from the bargaining realm towards search for cooperation opportunities and propose a solution for otherwise unsolvable claims of conflicting states. Functionalists invite us to explore the potential of shifting the “cooperation among specialists in particular policy fields [that] would delegitimize the diplomatic practice of political horse-trading and shift the negotiation mode from ‘bargaining’ to ‘arguing’” [Steffek 2011, p. 17]. “Questions would become discussed ‘on their merits’ rather than in the framework of a *quid pro quo*” [Steffek 2011, p. 17]. This is possible through addressing the issues separately and disconnecting high politics from technical issues.

Functionalists claim that “human affairs can be sliced into layers, that the concerns of man are so stratified that economic and social problems can, in a preliminary fashion, be separated from political problems and each other” [Nicholas 1965, p. 98]. The present article claims that Russian-Japanese relations under the Putin and Abe administrations are framed in functionalist terms: the new approach to Russian-Japanese relationships is proposed, 8PCP oriented to the provision of welfare to Russian citizens is launched and the problem-solving orientation is highlighted.

Functionalism works from the perspective of a particular problem and the relations to it, promoting functional cooperation among countries unrelated to political areas. There is the least number

of disagreements among nations, and these areas include but are not limited to economic, social, and other technical areas [Groom 1974]. Once non-political problems are separated from political issues, the need for the concentration on very limited, technical issues urges cooperation.

“Functionalist arguments also stress that joint problem solving gives rise to an increase in mutual dependence transnationally and a related tendency of technical self-determination of cooperation – as noted: ‘form follows function’” [Kiatpongsan 2011, p. 78]. It seems to be a strategy used to move Russian-Japanese relations away from the deadlock by cooperation, first, on issues unrelated to high politics and through establishing “beneficial relations in various senses, without affecting the problem areas and politics through a functional approach” [Nelson & Stubb 1994, p. 312]. There is a need to put “maximum emphasis on active forces and opportunities for cooperation, while at the same time attempt to avoid controversial issues that may cause disagreement” [Nelson & Stubb 1994, p. 312].

According to functionalists, cooperation is required to solve non-political problems in the areas where and since “a government cannot meet the demand of providing welfare for its citizens by remaining in isolation” [Mishra 2015, p. 3] and “institutions based on function, not territory, would be appropriate for solving basic social and economic problems” [Mitrany 1994, p. 37]. There is an indication of two major themes, as follows: the welfare-enhancing output of governance and the organizational form that brings it about, and they can be interlinked [Steffek 2011]. Therefore, the establishment of international agencies with limited jurisdiction, set of functions, and specific powers is the key approach of functionalism. Functional international organizations operate in a narrowly defined field, they perform organized international activities related directly to economic, social, technical, and humanitarian matters – in other words, ‘non-political’⁵ problems.

⁵ <https://www.crcpress.com/The-Prospects-for-a-Regional-Human-Rights-Mechanism-in-East-Asia/Hashimoto/p/book/9781138901469>

The activities that should be covered within such functional cooperation are to be chosen specifically and should be organized when there is the greatest need for them at a particular moment. These features can give all the freedom for practical changes in the organization of several functions [Nelson & Stubb 1994, p. 312]. This cooperative problem-solving approach by function-specific organizations allows to switch from power-oriented goals to welfare-oriented goals. Cooperation in governmental and non-governmental setups is expected to promote welfare and technological advancement.

Another important element of functionalism is the role of experts in performing functional activities. According to Ernst B. Haas [Haas & Schmitter 1964], the maximum authority should be exercised by technicians and administrators dedicated to the commonwealth. The cooperation is the most promising in organizations authorized to perform highly specialized, technical tasks where the technical competence of the staff and membership is prioritized over political ambitions.

Therefore, the “building blocks of what one may call a ‘functional legitimation’ are a focus on problem-solving as a task of international governance; the creation of functionally designed international organizations; the paramount role of administrators and experts; the possibility, and absolute necessity, of centralized planning” [Steffek 2011, p. 18].

There is a strong focus on the creation of “specialized international institutions with technical administrative structures and procedures to which certain functional missions would be transferred from national governments” [Mishra 2015, p. 4]. These institutions are expected to evolve their distinctive structural patterns, procedural system, and areas of competence following the inherent requirements of their functional missions.

Within the process of the implementation of the 8PCP, the set of working groups to deal with each of the eight points were established. Overseen by respective ministries and companies in Russia and Japan, these working groups serve as such expert organizations.

According to proponents of the functionalist school of thought, the way they (institutions) perform their activities will change the attitude of the recipient groups and will be followed by spill-over effect – improvement of overall international relations following effective problem-solving. In other words, cooperation that began from solving technical problems can create a positive experience which then can be transferred from one functional area to another.

The Spill-over Effect

The spill-over effect is an important concept and it is necessary to address it in more detail since, in the end, it can be seen as a goal of any functional cooperation. Suggested by Mitrany, it was, however, only partly described in his work and a deeper reflection and further study of the spill-over effect and the conditions of its occurrence were done by neo-functionalists. According to them, “spill-over amounts to a (positive) feedback mechanism stressing the possibility of self-supporting social processes that start modestly, gain dynamics and may over time produce dramatic outcomes” [Gehring 1996, p. 44].

Moreover, it is not only limited to positive feedback but also, “spill-over refers [...] to the process whereby members of an integration scheme – agreed on some collective goals for a variety of motives but unequally satisfied with their attainment of these goals – attempt to resolve their dissatisfaction either by resorting to collaboration in another, related sector [...] or by intensifying their commitment to the original sector [...] or both” [Schmitter 1969, p. 162].

This is relevant since it removes the automaticity of the spillover effect and points to the active role of participants of the cooperation. In fact, “neo-functionalism also draws attention to the relevance of subnational actors for this process, be they citizens or interest groups” [Gehring 1996, p. 44]. This is largely forgotten in the present literature applying a functionalist approach to international relations where the automaticity of the spill-over effect is presupposed, and it is presented

as something vague and unmeasurable. This may be partly because most of the contemporary scholarship is applying functionalism in the European realm to discuss European integration.

The spillover process consists of two key elements: “the sectoral (functional) spill-over, which involves the expansion of integrative activities from one sector to another” [Moga 2009, p. 798] and the political spill-over, “which implies increasing politicization of sectoral activity” [Moga 2009, p. 798]. Following this logic, cooperation will extend to more and more functions to the point that a “web of international activities and agencies” will “overplay political divisions” [Mitrany 1994]. This kind of expectations of the spill-over effect are equally applicable to international relations of states and not only integration processes.

Thus, two factors are contributing to the expansiveness of the spill-over process: “the underlying interdependence of functional tasks and issue arenas, latent or ignored in the original convergence, but capable of being mobilized by aroused pressure groups, parties, or governmental agencies whose interests become affected; the creative talents of political elites, especially the administrators of regional institutions, who seize upon frustrations and crises in order to redefine and expand central organizational tasks” [Mitrany 1994].

Developing functionalist theory, Schmitter comes up with three other phenomena apart from spill-over. These are spill-back, self-encapsulation, and spill-around. Spill-back is the process “whereby the new central organizations lose previously acquired capacity to act in determined areas”. Self-encapsulation is a syndrome when regional actors confine themselves to their originally assigned tasks and stop reacting to perturbing external forces. Spill-around is a hybrid of spill-over and self-encapsulation syndromes. It is characterized by a proliferation of independent efforts at regional coordination in distinct functional spheres – an expansion of the scope of regional tasks without the establishment of a collective body, without an increase in the level of regional decision-making or wider sense of community loyalty.

In the existing body of literature, the functionalist approach is mostly used for the description of multilateral international relations through already established international organizations based on a regional basis, mostly for European cooperation [Assetto 1988] but also for regional cooperation in other areas [Tripathi 2012; Melegoda & Padmakumara 2018]. There are still few analyses using the functionalist approach for bilateral cooperation. Therefore, the present article contributes to the development of functionalist theory and revitalizes the widely forgotten approach.

Addressing Criticism for Using Functionalism for Bilateral Relations

An important consideration to make regarding the applicability of the functionalism theory to the description of bilateral relations is the traditional perception of functionalism as an integration theory. This perception was established and is relatively stable due to the traditional application of the functionalism theory to the description of the European Union establishment and the reasoning behind other multilateral institutions. Indeed, one can see that the number of scholarly articles applying functionalism to other fields is very limited.

At the same time, although integration potential of the functionalism was acknowledged by Mitrany and later Haas, their discourse was never limited to integration only. On the contrary, early functionalists highlighted the advantage of functionalism over competitive nationalism, bringing the comparison “between full-fledged and comprehensive government and equally full-fledged but specific and separate functional agencies” [Mitrany 1948, p. 360]. In other words, it is not an ultimate choice between anarchic versus international world government systems but a much larger range of opportunities.

Moreover, the integrative potential of functionalism was much more emphasized by the neo-functionalism development of the theory. However, even in this case, the perception of integration was never that

rigid. In fact, Haas was distinguishing between two levels of integration depending on their intensity, the built-in (1) and negotiated (2) integration.

“Built-in integration takes place on the basis of a firm schedule for the rate and amount of dismantling of obstacles to factor movements. Exemptions from the schedule are administered by the central authority, not national governments... The opposite mode of integration (negotiated integration) features a much looser institutional structure which avoids the notion of supranationality in explicit intent as well as in fact. The timetable for dismantling is flexible; each step must be negotiated anew; exemptions and escape clauses flourish, and their administration is decentralized” [Haas 1964, p. 713]. Such approach allows certain room for much more flexible cooperation.

In other words, the potential of the functionalist approach is not limited to integration, but, more importantly, can provide a wider contribution to the establishment of, if not friendly, at least stable and unrivalled relations.

Moreover, one should remember that functionalism is different from a neoliberal approach. The latter puts great importance on the interdependence of actors, including economic interdependence. However, here, again, the stance of functionalism is different: “what is important here is not the absolute military power or industrial capacity of the participants but relative weight of these features in the specific functional context of the union” [Haas 1964, p. 714]. Thus, a relatively low level of economic interdependence between Russia and Japan does not make functional cooperation between these two states impossible.

Conclusion

The present article made an attempt to theorize Russian-Japanese relations under the Putin and Abe administrations in the period between 2016 and 2019. It has demonstrated that the theories traditionally

used to describe Russian-Japanese relations do not manage to suggest a path for improving the dynamics of contemporary Russian-Japanese relations. More importantly, Russian-Japanese relations remain stuck in the deadlock of the territorial dispute, *quid pro quo* logic, and insufficient economic interdependence. There is a need for an alternative theoretic approach that has potential and suggests a path for developing bilateral cooperation for countries with contested territories and other internal and external factors, including deep rooted distrust and other socio-psychological parameters hampering the cooperation.

It has claimed that Russian-Japanese relations under Putin and Abe administrations were framed in functionalist terms, where 8PCP served as the roadmap to tackle specific problems of Russia with the help of Japanese technology and know-how.

At the same time, it is too early to talk about the spill-over effect in Russian-Japanese cooperation. Rather, one can observe the spill-around with a proliferation of independent efforts at regional coordination in distinct functional spheres in Russia, with the 8PCP initiatives, although claimed as systematic and comprehensive, in fact focusing on specific fields and lacking a wider sense of community loyalty.

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