

The Ukraine crisis: a multidimensional analysis in China

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Abstract

As one of the most serious geopolitical crisis since the end of the Cold War, the Ukraine Crisis has an impact not only on the reshaping of the Eurasian political architecture, but also on the reconstruction of the world order. This paper deploys content analysis of 45 academic papers on the “Ukraine Crisis” in Chinese core journals (CSSCI) from December 2013 to April 2015, which are further compared with 56 papers whose research subject is “Ukraine politics” in the same journal database from January 2004 to November 2013. Therefore, the current paper explores what the Chinese academia discussed about Ukraine, from a wider range of perspectives, including international political economy, politics, security and international relations over the past 10 years. The findings of the conducted research suggest that Chinese scholars offer a multidimensional analysis on the development of Ukraine Crisis. From an institutional transformation perspective, Ukraine is an important case of political failure leading to social disorders. From a geopolitical perspective, Russia, the United States and the European Union each have their specific objectives in Ukraine. From an imperial studies approach, although the “new Cold War” thesis has been overplayed, Russia seeks to double its efforts in order to look for alignment with anti-West forces, resulting in more complication among major countries. The impact of the crisis is yet to be felt globally and its warning lessons are to be learned by China.

Keywords: Ukraine crisis, EU, Russia, China, geopolitics

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis started directly with the announcement in November 2013 by former Ukrainian President Viktor

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Fedorovych Yanukovych that Ukraine decided to suspend the EU - Ukraine Association Agreement. As a core component of the EU's Eastern Partnership, the signing of the Agreement means closer political and economic ties between the EU and its partner countries. Because Ukraine is a geopolitical pivot in the Eurasian grand chess game, Russia deems it as the core belt in its rivalry with the US and Europe, and the crux to its rejuvenation, while the US and Europe view it as an important component in containing Russia. Because of this, after the Cold War, Ukraine has always been one of the key states prone to the geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia. Ukraine has been vacillating between the West and the East, struggling for a long time to live amid the fierce contest between Europe and the US on one side and the Russian Federation on the other. The impact of the geopolitical rivalry on Ukrainian domestic politics, coupled with economic, social and ethnic factors, has resulted in a sudden change in the Ukrainian political situation. The endorsement of the EU - Ukraine Association Agreement implies that the relationship between the two sides has returned to the state before the outbreak of the crisis. However it is inevitable for the relationships between the EU and Ukraine, EU and Russia, Russia and US, as well as Russia and China to be intensely affected by the Ukrainian crisis.

From the Chinese point of view, Ukraine has great strategic values. China and Ukraine have established diplomatic relations since January 4th, 1992. From this moment on, both countries extended the relationship to comprehensive friendly and cooperative relations in 2001 and jointly announced a strategic partnership in 2011. Regarding economic cooperation, Ukraine represents a huge market for China, considering that: its vast farmland helps safeguard China's food imports; Ukraine and China have both agreed a vast farmland leasing program; the Bank of China and Ukraine signed for a total of \$3 billion in an agricultural loan agreement in December 2012 (Ministry of Commerce of People's Republic of China, 2014). On bilateral military cooperation, both Departments of Defense in Ukraine and China signed a major military-technical cooperation agreement in 1995 (Gu, 2015). China and Ukraine have maintained close cooperation on science and technology (Embassy of Ukraine to the People's Republic of China, 2015). Ukraine is committed to help China with manufactured engines and fighters. In addition to bilateral cooperation based on strategic partnership, the agreement also covers other projects in various areas. For example, it is well known that China's first aircraft carrier came from Ukraine (Xi, 2012). Currently, Ukraine is China's fourth largest trading partner in the CIS region and China is Ukraine's second largest trading partner in the world, as well as the largest trading partner in Asia. Nevertheless, due to the Ukraine crisis, the bilateral trade between China and Ukraine has decreased by 22.7% (\$8.594 billion) in 2014. China's imports have increased by 6.5%, amounted to \$3.486 billion, although the exports dropped by 34.9 %, with a total of \$5.108 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2015).

As one of the most serious geopolitical crisis since the end of the Cold War, the Ukraine Crisis has impacts not only on the reshaping of the Eurasian political architecture, but also on the reconstruction of the world order. So far, the Ukraine crisis has experienced three stages, namely: the opposition took over the regime by street protests, the Crimea crisis, and the instability in the Southeast region. Chinese scholars also pay great attention to the breakout and development of the Ukraine Crisis. Substantial academic articles with research subjects on the "Ukraine Crisis" have been published in Chinese core journals (CSSCI). Several round table meetings and seminars were held for open discussion on the Ukrainian issue in Chinese think tanks and universities. Chinese mass media such as "People's Daily", "China Daily" and "Global Times" also opened columns that commented on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Chinese officials keep a cautious attitude towards the Ukraine Crisis. Chinese Prime-Minister Li Keqiang recently spoke at a press conference, after the conclusion of China's annual parliamentary session, stating that China respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and hopes the Ukrainian issues can be settled through dialogue. He also held the same speech when meeting the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Switzerland in January (Zhao, 2015). As Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said: "In consideration of the history and the current complexities of the Ukrainian issue, China has been just and objective on the Ukrainian issue. We will continue to promote peace talks and play a constructive role for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue. We have made our own suggestions, which focus on establishing as soon as possible an international coordination mechanism joined by all parties to explore a political approach to defusing the Ukrainian crisis (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Throughout the Chinese academic community, according to their research background, scholars offer different interpretations regarding the development of the Ukraine Crisis. More than 10 round table seminars were held for open discussion on the Ukrainian issue. For example, China Institute of International Studies held the "Ukrainian crisis, the European situation and China-EU relations" seminar on November 15, 2014. Officials and experts from the Chinese Ministry of European Affairs, the European Institute and Russian Central Asia, the Eastern Europe Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Institute of Contemporary International Relations, and the Diplomatic Academy participated and discussed the Ukraine crisis in the meeting. Although they did have different judgments on what is right and what is wrong, China had great interests in opposing any military move and advocated for moderation and political solutions, a stance that cuts both ways, applying to the actions of both the West and Russia.

Chinese perspectives cover a series of conceptual issues related to the Ukraine Crisis, such as the clash of civilisations, geopolitics, the legitimacy of

domestic and foreign affairs, regional processes and great power relations, military alliances during peacetime, the buffer areas among great powers, and even the long-term trend of international power shifts. This paper presents findings through a comparative study of Ukraine politics in the Chinese scholars' opinions before and after the outbreak of the Ukraine Crisis. Using datasets from papers selected in core journals by content analysis, this study explores the extent to which the Ukraine crisis has challenged the Eurasian political architecture in the eyes of Chinese national elites and considers the implications for the China-Ukraine strategic partnership.

2. Methodology

In order to answer the questions regarding how Chinese scholars interpret the development of the Ukraine Crisis, this study used as main method the content analysis. Therefore, the current research was based on a sample of 56 academic papers in Chinese core journals (CSSCI), which had "Ukraine politics" as their main research subject, from January 2004 to November 2013, as well as 45 academic papers" in Chinese core journals from December 2013 to April 2015, with the research topic revolving around the "Ukraine Crisis". In total, 101 papers written by Chinese scholars over the past 10 years were collected from Chinese core journals and were used as data sets. Each paper is a unit for analysis.

Code book development

The analysis in this study includes the following categories:

1. Basic information (including scholars' job area: Beijing, Shanghai or other location; working type: think tank or university).
2. Contents issues (including content topics and international relations theories used).
3. Narrative features (including assessment and forecast of the Ukraine crisis).

Three researchers (RS, SLL and ZAN) read through each paper independently and used single words to describe the thesis of each paper. Next, the team held a discussion to group them into 4 categories according to IR theories, including Realism, Institutionalism, Constructivism and Hybrid theory. Afterwards, the team grouped them into 4 sub-categories according to their topics: "traditional security" such as geopolitical conflicts, "non-traditional security" such as energy guarantee, "economic integration" and "cultural or ethnic identity". They were also categorised into 2 sub-categories according to the assessment on whether the Ukraine crisis is an event that challenges the international order or just a regional conflict. Meanwhile, the forecast of the Ukraine crisis in the future revolves around whether is an intermittent but long-term repeated crisis or only one that may last for a period of time but can be

resolved in the end. This study also calculated the attitude of each paper, measured the comments on the Ukraine crisis influence in the EU, US, Russia and China (from negative to neutral or positive position).

Coding procedures and inter-coder reliability

Three trained coders independently reviewed and coded all papers. In order to develop and complete the codebook for content analysis of all the papers, a random sample of 10% of all posts (n=10) was selected. Each paper was classified into only one theme. In the case of disagreement between the two coders, a third coder was used to determine the final coding. The kappa score of 0.815 was calculated, which demonstrated that the inter-coder reliability was valid. If the content of the paper did not fit any of the themes, it was coded as 'other' and was not included in the final analysis of this study.

3. Results

The research found that among those 45 papers with subjects related to the "Ukraine Crisis" in Chinese core journals, from the December 2013 to April 2015, 30 papers were written by scholars from Beijing (66.8%), 10 papers by scholars from Shanghai, while the others are submitted from other regions in China. This is because internal information and academic resources are mainly concentrated in Beijing and the high level of research institutions and researchers are likely to be based in Beijing. There is no doubt that Beijing, being the capital, has more outputs of high quality academic achievements than other regions in China.

The sources of papers are split equally between think tanks and universities, considering that: 46.7% of papers come from scholars in think tanks, such as the top three important think tanks, Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS), China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) and China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), whereas 53.3% of papers come from scholars in universities, such as the Centre for Russian Research of East China Normal University and the Centre for Russian Research of Shanghai International Studies University that have traditional reputation on Russian and Central Europe research.

Regarding the word frequency analysis, it was found that some key words, such as "Geopolitics", "International Relation" and "Russia" (see table 1) reflected a strategic background of competition between the U.S. and Russia in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region after 2000s, as well as the impact of permanent power politics of the Ukraine crisis over the EU-Russia-U.S. triangle relationship.

In the 4 sub-categories, according to their research topics, traditional security such as geopolitical conflicts (53.3%) ranks the top among the four types

of the above-mentioned research topics. This result suggests that in Chinese perspective, the research conducted on the background of power politics of the Ukraine Crisis is the most heated topic, followed by Economic integration (24.50%) that occupies the second position in the analysed period. The EU's constant adjustment of its Eastern neighbourhood policy had finally led to Ukraine's choice of the European economic integration as its development path, which triggered the Ukraine Crisis.

Table 1. Top 10 key words in academic papers from two periods (rank according to mentioned times)

Most used words in 2004-2013 papers	Most used words in 2013-2015 papers
Ukraine	Ukraine crisis
Russia	Russia
Geopolitics	Geopolitics
Presidential election	Crimea
CIS countries	EU enlargement
Orange revolution	Association Agreement
Economic development	The major powers
History	United States
International Relation	Central and Eastern European Countries
Parliamentary election	International Relation

Source: own representation

The crisis has resulted in the big contraction of Ukrainian economy and slowdown in Russian economic growth, which further hit the weak European economy. The cultural or ethnic identity (17.80%) ranks the third and most Chinese scholars believe that it can also be observed from the perspective of ethno-national politics. Ethnic hatred and historical confrontations naturally represent some of the most important causes of the crisis. Non-traditional security (4.40%), such as energy guarantee can also be underlined. In spite of the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the overall European and international energy markets have not experienced any sharp rises and falls and the oil and gas prices remain steady with a slight decline, indicating a hidden energy game being played among Russia, the EU and the US, though, apparently, with Russia as one of the key energy producing countries and Ukraine as one of the major transit countries. The energy issue could be a very useful tool in promoting domestic and foreign policies for Russia, the US, or the EU.

Within the 4 sub-categories, according to IR theories perspective, Realism (55.6%) occupies the largest part, such as the comments that the Ukraine crisis is caused by interactions of the country's domestic political struggle and the geopolitical competition between the West and Russia. The crisis triggered a series of chain reactions. At the present stage, as Ukraine strategically leans towards the West, the U.S. and Russia drift into strategic rivalry, the

EU—Russia geopolitical competition intensifies, whereas China and Russia are on the way of becoming “quasi-allies” (Zhang, 2014, p.19). Ranked second, institutionalism (28.9%) suggests that the domestic causes of the Ukraine Crisis have been analysed through IPE methods. According to the findings, constructivism (16.6%) and hybrid theory (11.1%) were also used in analysing the Ukrainian crisis. Among Chinese scholars, a simplistic explanation of the Ukraine Crisis breakout from different angles mentioned that the crisis could not be interpreted as the result of regime competition between democracy and autocracy. Instead, a proper way to explain the crisis is to combine three different analytical angles: legitimacy, cultural identity and geopolitics.

Regarding the question whether Ukraine crisis is the event that challenges the international order or just a regional conflict, only 28.9% of papers imply that Ukraine crisis has challenged the international order and consequently a new cold war is emerging (Feng, 2014, p.3). Nonetheless, most papers (71.1%) regarded it as a regional conflict. The most common opinion is that Russia’s annexation of Crimea has dramatically changed the European geopolitical fabric and the post-war European order, posing severe challenges to Europe’s security, the biggest challenge being how to further cope with Russia (Huang, 2014, p.2). Meanwhile, when referring to the future of the Ukraine crisis, most Chinese scholars (65.0%) regard it as an intermittent but long-term repeated crisis, while only 35.0% of scholars perceive it as one that may last for a period of time but can be solved in the end. This result can be explained by taking into account the complexity of the Ukraine crisis background, the development trend and the absence of a final outcome in the short term, as well as within the challenges it poses to European order which has been gradually revealed. It can be said that in the current situation, the risk of a direct military conflict between Russia and Ukraine has not been eliminated. Moreover, relations between Russia and the US will continue to cool down for a while, whereas Europe will not repeat the Cold War mistakes (Huang, 2014, p.22) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of Assessment and Forecast on the Ukraine crisis

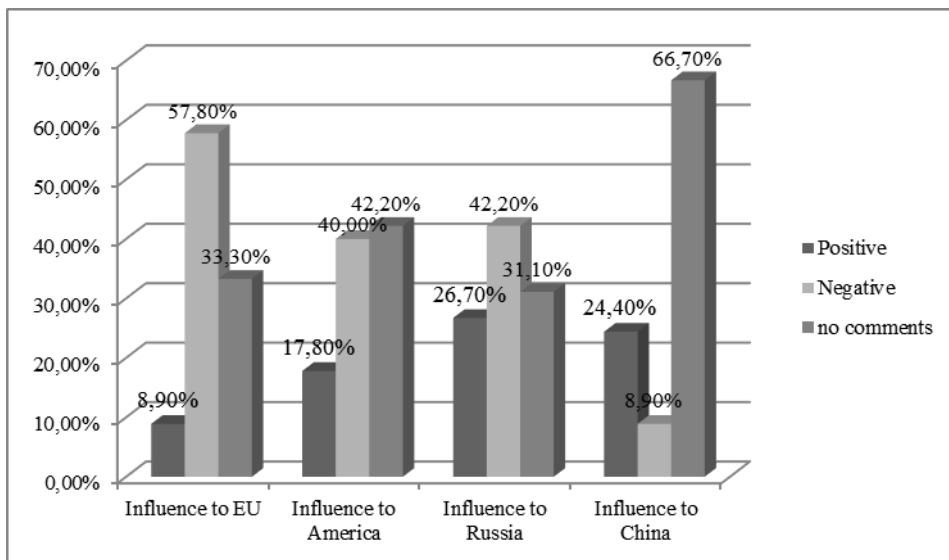
Assessment on the Ukraine crisis		Forecast of the Ukraine crisis	
Event challenges the international order	28.9%	Negative: intermittent but long-term repeated	57.8%
Regional conflict	71.1%	Positive: last a period of time but can be solved	31.1%
		No comments	11.1%

Source: own representation

The research found that the comments on the implications of the Ukraine crisis on the EU, US, Russia and China (from negative to positive or neutral position) in each paper vary greatly. Chinese scholars insisted on the bad influence

on EU, which is highly nominated (57.8%) as compared with positive perceptions (8.90%) regarding the promotion of European integration through the Association Agreement with Ukraine. Meanwhile, negative comments on America (40.0%) focus on what happened on the European continent and distract the attention from the American pivot strategy, which benefits America (17.8%), taking into account that it provides it with another opportunity to continue to infer European security affairs and thus strengthen European members' dependence on America, especially of those who joined the EU after 2004. It is worth paying attention to the fact that Russia plays the good cards in this geopolitical game (26.7%). Russia has forfeit Crimea and become the largest geopolitical winner (Yue, 2014, p.106), even with the cost of declining its reputation on the world stage (42.2%). When referring to the most sensitive topic, whether China gets benefits or losses from the Ukraine crisis, from the point of reapproaching China and Russia energy cooperation, China did a real bargain according to its own political and economic advantages in reaping diplomatic benefits (24.4%). Nevertheless, some scholars also stress the negative aspects (8.90%) from a geopolitical point of view: confusions within Eurasia brought about great damages to China's 'Silk Road Economic Belt' project, especially because Ukraine holds a central position on the "silk road". The instability of Ukraine will really obstruct the interconnection of Eurasia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of Attitudes: Ukraine crisis influence on the EU, America, Russia and China



Source: own representation

4. Discussions

The Ukrainian crisis, which started in late 2013, soon escalated from a domestic constitutional crisis to an international political conflict. Some scholars interpret the resulting confrontation between major powers as the beginning of a new “Cold War”. Behind this extremely complicated situation, different stakeholders have proposed very different interpretations of the causes and nature of this crisis. Overall, the Chinese experts pay high attention to and discuss the implications of the Ukraine crisis from a wide range of perspectives, including economics, politics, security and international relations. The empirical findings indicate that two important aspects are worth special focus in the following discussion. On the one hand, what are the main causes behind the Ukraine Crisis? On the other hand, what is the impact of the Ukraine crisis over more complicated competitions and alignments among major actors?

The root causes of the Ukraine crisis

First of all, a considerable number of Chinese scholars think that in the sense of Ukraine’s choice of its economic and social development path, the EU’s soft power has gained upper hand over Russia’s hard power (Huang, 2014, p.1). The comparative analysis has shown that the most key words in the past 10 years of analysing Ukraine politics did not change too much. The figures deliver the message that the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis was rather inevitable than accidental. The reason slowly fermented even more than 10 years ago. As regards to Ukraine, keeping a geopolitical balance of power is the most favorable path to its development. However, the economic setbacks and the delayed CIS economic integration forced Ukraine to put an emphasis on its external economic relations with the EU. The EU’s constant adjustment of its Eastern neighbourhood policy had finally led to Ukraine’s choice of the European economic integration as its development path, which finally triggered the Ukraine Crisis.

Furthermore, from its formal independence in 1991 until now, along with some changes of the constitution, there have been reversals of the Ukrainian regime. The reason lies in the fact that the constitution could not reflect the balance of power among the President, the Prime Minister, the parliament and the legal system, on the one hand, whereas the separation between pro-Russian and pro-European forces within Ukraine, which makes none of the constitutions a stable public foundation, on the other hand. Analysing different regimes within different constitutional frameworks in Ukraine (especially the theoretical and practical ones, when Ukraine resumed its premier-presidential system under the 2004 constitutional framework, in February 2014) will help us understand further institutional factors of the Ukrainian domestic conflicts and will enable

us to have a reasonable assessment regarding the future trends of Ukrainian constitution and regime changes.

The reason behind the Ukraine Crisis can also be observed from the perspective of ethno-national politics. The issue of identity is a common challenge for various former Soviet countries and areas in transition (Wang, 2014, p.45). Firstly, ethnic hatred and confrontations throughout history are naturally an important cause of the Ukraine crisis. However, how they are kept and revived in memory is key to our perception of the cause. Ukraine's ultra-nationalism was prevailing in the elite class, which became a great part of the Poroshenko government. Secondly, the growing tensions and conflicts between the state-led view on national development and the view held by the dominant ethnic groups over the past twenty years have been the primary domestic cause of the Ukraine crisis. Furthermore, President Poroshenko promulgated the Act of Political Cleanup and National Strategy against Corruption after he assumed power, which affected more than one million public employees. Thus, this action increased the political and economic instability and risks in Ukraine. Thirdly, Ukraine's political system and cultural tradition, the integration of modern party politics and traditional ethno-national politics in Ukraine's democratic practice, which are signs of immature transformation, have substantially contributed to the internal conflicts which led to the Ukrainian crisis. Fourthly, the abuse of national self-determination turned the Ukraine crisis into an international one. Fifthly, given that the Ukraine crisis is largely related to the failures in national development, any efforts in terms of ethno-national politics should be more focused thereon than otherwise. With slim chance in sight for immediate improvement of the situation, the country is still faced with possible escalation of the crisis and challenges in post-crisis conflict management. Moreover, as far as it can be seen, the negative effects of ethno-national politics will remain a tough problem in the Ukrainian future political life.

The implications of the Ukraine crisis on the EU, the U.S., Russia and China

It should be noted that the majority of Chinese scholars mentioned in their papers the influence of the Ukraine crisis on the EU, US, Russia and China with contrasting views. Chinese papers also provided predictions of what this crisis implies for future world order and interstate relations. Thus, the Westphalia system is under serious pressure and the world system may switch back to great power coalition and key features of the early 20th century.

1) Is Russia experiencing great suffering or a real gain?

Ukraine divorced from Russia completely, through its own European choice between Europe and Russia, between the European common market and CIS integration. Ukraine was developing substantive cooperation with NATO. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said that Ukrainian membership of NATO

will be decided by a nationwide referendum. Meanwhile, Russia not only lost Ukraine but also suffered economically and diplomatically. On the one hand, Russian domestic capital outflow has increased dramatically. It was estimated that the amount could top 150 billion dollars in 2014. But on the other hand, the West discontinued the provision of capital and technology which, in turn, heavily disrupted Russian oil and gas production in new energy areas such as Siberia and the North Pole (Bu, 2015, p.129). In addition, Russia has faced unprecedented diplomatic isolation. The latest long round of negotiations over Russian accession to the OECD in recent years has been shelved.

Nevertheless, some Chinese scholars comment that Russia has absorbed the entire Crimean peninsula and has thus become the largest geopolitical winner. The Ukraine crisis and the return of Crimea to Russia has reaffirmed the limit and boundary of the Eastward expansion of the Europe-dominated “New Versailles system”. Instead of settling the border issue by military force as it has always been done, Russia managed, peacefully, to retain its borders, the bottom line of its existence and the very foundation and prerequisite of its future revival, and consequently rendered it almost impossible for the EU to step up its Eastward expansion in the foreseeable future. Crimea is vital for Russia and yet, registers only as “important” to the European interest. Thus, Russia would mobilise all its resources in the case of the Ukraine crisis, but the West would not. Given the history of Russia in Ukraine, the Ukraine crisis marks only the beginning of Russia’s strike back against the EU expansion (Zhang, 2014, p.3).

2) What does the EU do to cope with its relations with Russia?

Although the Ukraine crisis continues to ferment, the EU’s confidence to deal with this problem is rather strengthened than weakened. The EU future position focuses on three areas: first, closely observe developments in the Eastern region to monitor the implementation of the Minsk agreement to strengthen the OSCE’s support and continue to condemn Russia’s “illegal annexation” of Crimea and Sevastopol as a violation of the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine. Second, implement the agreement of the associated countries, especially the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement already signed with Ukraine, and to provide strong political support and technical and economic assistance to the Government of Ukraine (in particular, to invite Ukraine to join the Europe 2020 Agenda to strengthen bilateral technical cooperation and personnel exchanges) (Council of the European Union, 2014). Third, at the same time, maintain a dialogue between the EU and Russia, in order to show that the enhanced relations between the EU and its Eastern partner countries are not at the expense of Russian interests.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine crisis has also made the EU more divided internally and more difficult to coordinate. The Central and Eastern European countries have been split into two camps: Poland, three Baltic countries and the

Czech Republic belong to the hardline camp when facing the challenging of European security order, whereas Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria were swinging due to their close economic ties to Russia. From a geopolitical perspective, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia are the direct neighbours of Ukraine. Poland and Ukraine belong to the Eastern side of Korba footpath, so that the security threat faced by Poland is very urgent. Being on the West side of Korba footpath, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania do not feel that an imminent threat exists (Zhu, 2014, p.30). As the crisis in Ukraine escalated, the EU has imposed a series of sanctions on Russia, leading to a de-facto confrontation between the EU and Russia. However, in the long run, in order to maintain stability in Europe, the EU should promote the building of a European security framework with Russia as its equal partner. In addition, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy is still far from being materialised, which can be seen from the different attitudes of the Central and Eastern European countries towards Russia after the Ukraine crisis broke out.

3) Is there a “Re-adjustment” of America’s pivot strategy in considering the Ukraine Crisis?

America and Europe were by no means monolithic during the Ukraine crisis; rather they maintained a relationship of “selective alliance”. America paid more attention to power shifts and international patterns in Eurasia, while Europe focused on energy security issues and encountered a dilemma. The Ukraine crisis had negative impacts on Russia’s traditional weight on Europe’s energy market, which led to a shift of balance within the bargaining power between Russia and the EU. America not only strengthened its dominance in the trans-Atlantic alliance, but also improved its status as the sole superpower in the international system.

Due to the economic globalisation and the comparative strategic edge of the West over Russia, the crisis does not lead to a new cold war between the U.S. and Russia and a revival of China-Russia alliance. Neither does it dramatically change the U.S. rebalancing strategy to Asia-Pacific (Zhang, 2014, p.19). Obama focused on consolidating domestic economy followed by a foreign strategic overall contraction. The U.S. still needs Russian cooperation on the Asia-Pacific, the Iranian nuclear issue, Afghanistan, Syria and so on. The crisis is likely to cool off in the near future, but if it cannot be resolved in the long run, the U.S may adjust its military strategy in response to its domestic pressure to stand firm towards Russia, which may have consequential effects on international politics.

4) Will Russia and China make an alliance under the Ukraine Crisis background or not?

Due to geopolitical reasons, it is difficult for China to take a tough stance on Russia. China and Russia have a long common border and managed to solve their disputes in 2000s. Both sides depend on each other as major trading and strategic partners. The two countries have committed themselves to developing a powerful pipeline network worth hundreds of billions of dollars to support a new gas deal contract of \$400 billion. For China, Russia is the main source of advanced military hardware. The two countries both face the impact of the United States containment, with a deep strategic mistrust towards the United States.

Nevertheless, in the Ukraine issue, China will not completely take refuge in Russia. First, by using the tricks of a referendum, Russia took Crimea from Ukraine, which stroked up a discordant tune of the Chinese diplomacy's core principles, namely mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, and non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of another country. Considering religious extremism, ethnic separatists and international terrorist forces of violence in Xinjiang and Tibet, China does not support the referendum and does not appeal to separate organisation seeking independence. Second, while Russia seeks to strengthen its relations with Beijing, in order to avoid isolation, Beijing will make a cautious response to the so-called "strategic alliance" (Yan, 2012, p.112). If the relations between China and the United States deteriorate, maybe China will further strengthen its alliances with Russia, but at the moment, it does not look likely. Xi Jinping stressed out the importance of seeking to establish new relations between great powers, namely with the United States, calling for mutual respect, non-confrontation and cooperation. Moreover, with China's sustained economic development, China hopes to work with the United States and maintain good relations with the international community. Both the EU and the United States are China's largest trading partners. Strengthening and deepening the cooperation between China and Russia does not necessarily mean an alliance between the two countries. Because geopolitical relations, economic factors, historical and cultural factors still cause internal conflicts between the two countries, neither side wants to form an alliance and bear disproportionate and unnecessary obligations (Cheng, 2014, p.141). Finally, China and Ukraine have traditional links in trade, agriculture and military aspects, China still hopes to continue maintaining these contacts with Ukraine's new government. In other words, although China offers some understanding and support to Russia in the Ukrainian problem, it is difficult to go much further.

5) Does China "win out" from the Ukraine crisis?

Most Chinese scholars stand by the above comment. Besides the obvious disruption in cooperation between China and Ukraine, there are also positive impacts on China. First, China benefits from the Ukraine crisis mostly because

of the distraction of the American “pivot to Asia” strategy. Washington needs to focus on the security needs of its European allies. Most US strategic experts trust that it is China, not Russia that poses the most significant 21st century geopolitical challenge to the United States, hoping that Russia should be a counterweight to rising China. Nevertheless, Russia contributes to fueling China’s rise due to the adversarial relationship between the United States, together with the European Union, and Russia (Zhang et al., 2014). Second, Russia made some concessions to China. Russia has changed its doubtful attitudes to “one belt, one road” strategy, which is regarded to provide central Asian states with alternative export markets, reducing their dependence on Russia. Russia has declared its desire to combine the Eurasian Union plan with China’s ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ project. Third, the promotion of the RMB internationalisation, US and European financial sanctions affect the transactions in dollars or euro with third countries by Russian companies. Therefore, the number of China-Russia trades in RMB will certainly be growing, especially when Russia accepts RMB as an investment currency (Ding Y.F, 2014, p.18).

The most controversial opinion is that the Ukraine crisis causes great damage to China’s ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ project, especially since The Silk Road has also been extended to Western Europe. The best example was the Chongqing-Xinjiang-Duisburg cargo rail route, opened in 2011, which is now seen as a part of the Silk Road. During his trip to Germany, in the early 2015, Xi Jinping visited Duisburg where he witnessed the arrival of a cargo train at the city’s railway station from Chongqing. The vision of the New Silk Road has since become a cornerstone of the relations between China and the EU. From a logistics perspective, while China is hoping to pass the “Iron Silk Road” to expand exports through international railway, Ukraine represents a solid link between Western Europe and China. In this respect, the Ukraine crisis causes a great damage to China’s ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ project, especially because Ukraine is in a central position within the Silk Road. The instability of Ukraine will really obstruct the interconnection of Eurasia. Even Chinese scholars arguing that China should be more actively involved in the mediation of the Ukraine crisis, offer constructive criticism by suggesting an initiative to mediate relations between the EU and Russia. China is not an involved party, so it has certain advantages in keeping its neutral position (Ding Y.H., 2014, p.18). Thus, China needs to integrate and develop the relations of many coastal countries within the Silk Road Economic Belt, while mediation of the Ukraine crisis can become a touchstone for further integration of countries alongside the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’.

5. Conclusions

The current Ukraine Crisis resulted from the comprehensive interaction among manifold factors in domestic and international domains. Historical grievances, divisions between Eastern and Western regions of the nation,

political corruption and economic recessions from the domestic field have constituted its internal factors. The interventions of big powers like Russia, the EU and USA from the international field have become its external factors, which added fuel to the fire and aggravated the situation. The Ukraine Crisis, in essence, embodies competition and mutual confrontation between the EU and the Eurasian Union. So far, the Ukraine crisis has experienced three stages. Namely, the opposition took power by street protests, the Crimean crisis, and the instability in the Southeastern region of Ukraine. The current crisis in Ukraine brought to light a series of critical issues of the current world affairs, including conceptual issues such as the clash of civilisations, geopolitics, the legitimacy of domestic and foreign affairs, regional processes and great power relations, military alliances during peacetime, the buffer area among great powers, and even the long-term trend of international power shifts. Each of these issues is sufficient to stir changes in the international system for quite a long time and to enhance international disputes at all levels.

Furthermore, in the Ukraine Crisis, the importance of Sino-Russian relations is particularly underlined. The two sides are taking a series of measures to expand their economic and trade cooperation. From a Chinese perspective, the most favorable solution is under the mediation of: Russia, the United States and the European Union, because the political powers represented the benefits and views of the Midwest and Eastern regions, as well as by Ukraine and Russia, through dialogue and negotiations, which may reach a feasible, effective mediation in the Ukraine crisis. The mediation content may include the Ukrainian state system, and the power division between the central and local governments, as well as Russia's status.

This study based on 101 papers written by Chinese scholars over the past 10 years and collected from Chinese core journals took into account authors who are all experts focusing their research on Russia, the EU and CIS. In addition to academic articles, they also provided public comments to guide public opinions in mass media channels, such as: "People's Daily", "China Daily" and "Global times". Further studies can trace Chinese public comments on the Ukraine Crisis on social media (e.g.: "Wexin" -Weichat, blogs and "Weibo" - micro-blogs). Nevertheless, considering the geographical distance between China and Ukraine, the Chinese public is less familiar with this hot topic and consequently, it hardly submits valuable suggestions that could have a tangible impact on the government decision-making process.

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