

Chapter 2: The Chinese Dream for the Tumen River



The Sino-Russian-Korean triangular border
(From Fangchuan to Khasan: Jul., 1999)

1 Chinese Watching the Sea of Japan

Marker "T" and Navigation on the Tumen River

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China are divided by the Tumen River, which originates on Mt. Changbai (Baekdo), famous as a symbol for Korea, and flows down to the Sea of Japan, stretching over five hundred kilometers. The narrow and shallow river turns into the Russo-Korean border just ten kilometers before the river merges with the Sea of Japan. The lower reaches of the river as well as the coastal area east of the Ussuri — Primor'e Krai — were incorporated into the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, effectively cutting off Chinese territory from the Sea of Japan.

The Beijing Treaty of 1860 between the Russian Empire and the Qing Dynasty delimited their territory by using markers "A" to "U" in the Russian alphabet on maps setting the border. Then, according to the Additional Protocol of the Treaty in 1861, the wooden marker "T" was to be put on a bank on the Tumen River. The Xingkai Agreement was signed on the basis of the third article of the Beijing Treaty (Gaimusho 1975: 67).

The marker "T" was originally planned to be eleven kilometers above the mouth of the Tumen River on the sea (Demarkatsiia: 10-13). It was first set 24 kilometers above the mouth but was later moved 15 to 16 kilometers through China's tenacious negotiation tactics with Russia (DV Uchenyi 1999, No.12). This offence and defense on the marker "T" — Russia's attempt to put it down the river and China's resistance and demand to put it further up the river — persisted in the era of socialism. At last, in 1964, just before the Sino-Russian border negotiations had broken off, both sides agreed to place the marker "T" about 17 kilometers above the river mouth, and later the 1991 agreement principally reconfirmed this (DV Uchenyi 1999, No.11). According to a diplomat from the Korean School of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Sino-Russian border on the Tumen River was finally set 18.2 kilometers above the river's mouth, and China accepted despite insisting the border should be 15 kilometers from the river's mouth.

The Chinese had one more demand: to keep their rights to navigate on the Tumen River to the sea, even though it was obliged to transfer its land stretching along the sea to Russia. From the start of negotiations to the signing of the Protocol in 1886 — the Hunchun Eastern Agreement — it was decided that three more markers, "M," "R," and "S" would be changed from previous wooden markers into stone markers. China tried to guarantee the rights of Chinese ships going on the river to the sea and to establish the river's mouth for Sino-Russian common use (Yang Zhaoquan 1993: 218). Article 4 of the Protocol only refers to the need to sign an agreement between Russia and China on navigation from marker "E" to the Tumen River's mouth (Tkachenko 1999: 32). Then, a letter that the Russian local authorities had sent approving China's rights of navigation on Russian waters on the Tumen River was recognized as part of the Protocol (Tong Dongzhu 1985: 292-293). Finally, the Chinese side acquired the rights for the river. The Chinese negotiator at the time, Wu Dacheng, was proclaimed a national hero and a memorial in his honor was built in Hunchun (Ishii 1993: 22-23).

The 1862 Agreement on Trade and Business between Russia and China permitted free trade in a 50 kilometer (Russian verst) zone on the border, and Hunchun enjoyed a boom as an international market. But it faced a crisis in 1909, when the Russian government unilaterally repealed the status of Vladivostok as a free port and abolished the agreement (Ling Xingguang 1995: 82-85). In 1910, China, in turn, built a port and customs in Hunchun and dredged the Tumen River to keep its benefit. Navigating the Tumen River was the only way for the Chinese to reach the sea. China guaranteed it until the late 1920s despite some challenges, including the Russian Revolution and Allied intervention in Siberia. According to statistics between 1929 and 1931, the number of ships clearing at Hunchun port was estimated to be between 1,300 and 1,400 per year (Ding Shisheng 1996: 19).

In the 1930s, after the Soviet Union and the Japanese Empire encountered each other on opposite sides of the border, the area around Hunchun and the Tumen River was heavily strained. In 1938, Soviet and Japanese forces exchanged fire near Lake Khasan, affecting the fate of the Tumen River. Japan heavily mined the river,

making it impossible to go down the river to the sea. Since then, reportedly only small survey or patrol ships go down the river. Navigation on the river has its difficulties with silt accumulated over fifty years at the bottom of the river and blockage from a bridge between Russia and North Korea near Khasan Village (Interviews: Chen Longshan 1999).

Closing the route on the Tumen River between the Soviet-Manchukuo (Sino-Russian) border was never meant to cut off the sea route from/to Hunchun. Hunchun, renewed as an open gate of Manchukuo, acquired a new route from Rajin, a northeastern port on the Korean Peninsula. Many Japanese immigrants reached Hunchun through this route. But after the defeat of the Japanese Empire, the Chinese Revolution and the Korean War blocked the new route. The openness of the Sino-Russian-Korean triangular border area was lost, remaining closed because of the Cold War in Northeast Asia. In the late 1960s, when Sino-Russian military clashes occurred, the Tumen River basin became more strained.

Chinese Dreams for a Tumen Renaissance

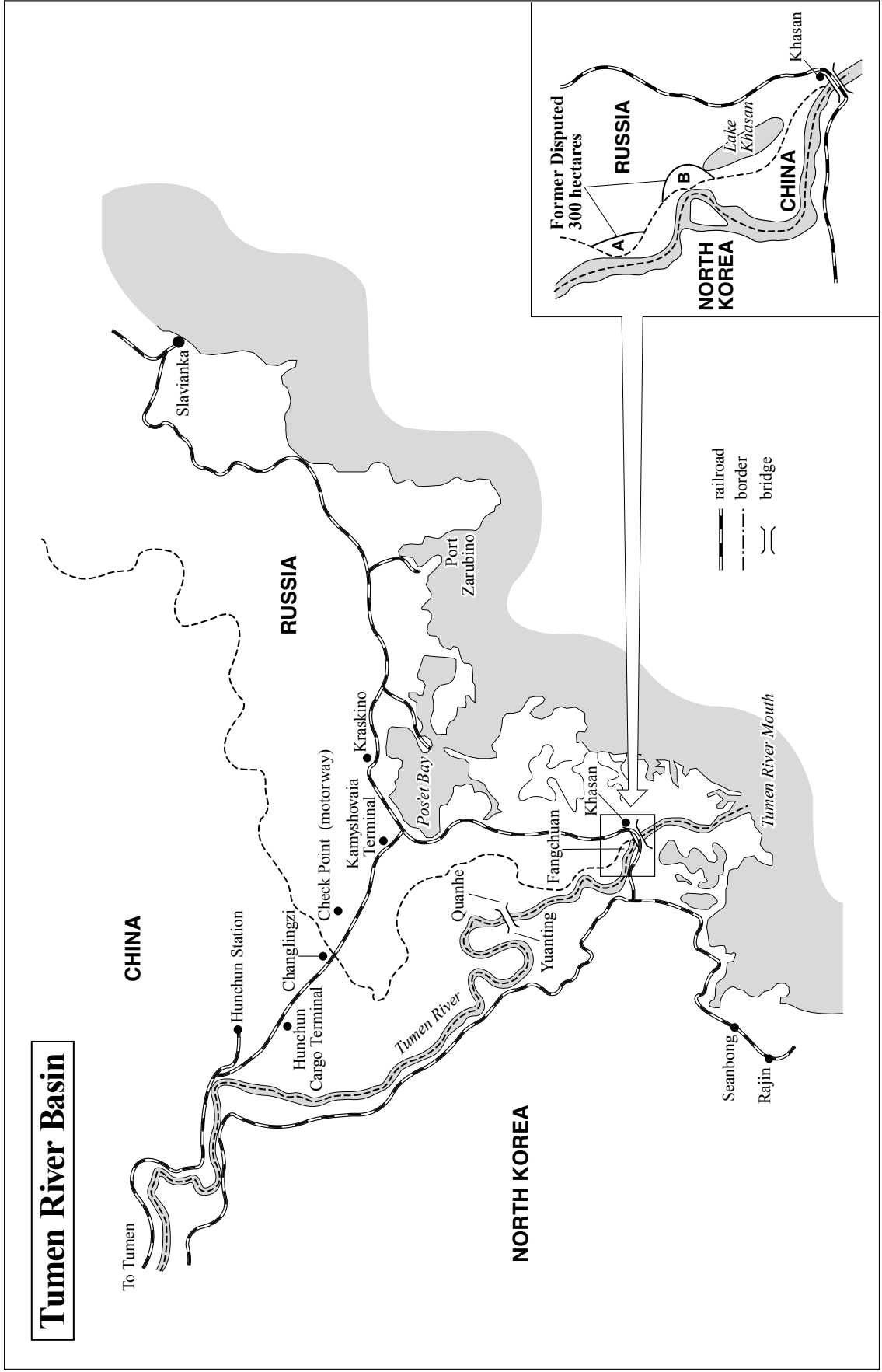
In the mid-1980s, when Gorbachev began Perestroika for Russian foreign policy and "reform and openness" in China was on track, tensions in the Tumen River basin appeared to thaw. The U.S., Japan and South Korea also expressed the possibility of a revival of the Tumen River basin and Northeast Asian regional cooperation in the area. The authorities of Jilin Province in China, who control the Tumen River, strongly hoped Russia would confirm Chinese rights to navigate on the river to the mouth. Beijing accepted local requests in 1988 and discussed the issue with the Soviet side through diplomatic channels (Ling Xingguang 1995: 88-89). Article 9 of the 1991 agreement, as mentioned in Chapter 1, made clear China's rights to navigate its ships on the Tumen River down to the mouth of the Sea of Japan.

Jilin Province staked its future on the development of the Tumen River basin. In comparison with Heilongjiang Province, which has a more than 3,000 kilometer border with Russia, and Liaoning, which has a few gates such as Dalian to the Bohai Sea and the Yellow Sea, Jilin is a land-locked region. The Tumen River is its only possible gate to the outside world.

If we consider the historic background, Jilin Province has three exits to the sea: 1) through Russian ports including Pos'et and Zarubino; 2) through North Korean ports like Rajin and Seanbong; and 3) through the Tumen River from its own port to the Sea of Japan. The best route for Jilin may be the last, because the former two would pass through a land border; the high cost of using the foreign ports could be unprofitable. If the last route were realized, it would mean the restoration of the international port of Hunchun of the 1930s.

From 1990 to 1991, Jilin Province promoted its dream of the revival of the Tumen River basin as a project for the "golden delta of Vladivostok — the mouth of the Tumen River — Chengjin." Then, Primor'e Krai, preparing for the opening of the city of Vladivostok, also envisioned a "large Vladivostok Free Trade Zone" planned by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). If this Sino-Russian project involved North Korea, the internationalized project for the Tumen River basin would be promising for Northeast Asia in a post-Cold War era. In fact, North Korea reacted in favor of these plans and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) officially adopted a plan for the development of the Tumen River basin as its fifth big project from 1992. The UNDP organized a working group consisting of China, Russia, North Korea and Mongolia, requesting the cooperation of Japan and South Korea, and conducted research missions on the basin (Sakata 1995: 300-301). As well as a "large delta zone" over a ten-thousand square kilometer area connecting Vladivostok, Yanji and Chengjin, a "small delta zone" over a thousand square kilometer area between Rajin, Hunchun and Pos'et was proposed (Hokuto Ajia Kenkyukai 1995: 147-148).

Chinese planners of the Tumen River project, who had conducted a river survey by ship on the lower reaches of the river from 1990 to 1991, advanced eleven ideas for it by 1993. While most of them were proposed on the premise of building a Chinese port on its own territory, some were assertive: not only use of a Russian or North Korean port but also the lease of the river mouth and the surrounding Russian territory. The boldest proposal was that the marker "U" in the former border agreement between Russia and China be set on the seacoast, and that three kilometers of this line would be returned to China (Ding Shisheng 1996: 38-43).



In 1991, China and Russia seemed to be sharing a time of peace and stability. A romance had even blossomed in Northeast Asia during the post-Cold War. The Chinese Government declared its four border cities — Manzhouli, Heihe, Suifenhe and Hunchun — open to Russia in March 1992. A plan to link Hunchun to the Russian ports via car and railway was started. It was the perfect time for the realization of Chinese dreams for the revival of the Tumen River basin.

2 Russian Response

Indifference of Japan and North Korea, and Wariness from Russia

The rosy project for the Tumen River hit a realist wall, however, first from Japan. At that time, Japan welcomed a diffusion of the tensions of the Cold War in Northeast Asia. It was also a time of boom for ideas about "the Japanese Rim," and one "internationalized" local policy starting in 1985 that required, according to the Plaza Agreement of 1985, "the cheap yen - the high dollar." In short, local bodies were obliged to back small local enterprises that had transferred their production line overseas to cut their costs and mitigate local conflicts between local residents and "imported cheap labor forces" from Asian countries. They accelerated their "international exchange and cooperation" with foreign local bodies under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Home Affairs (Iwashita 1998: 264-268). Among the gate cities were: Fukuoka to the Yellow Sea Rim and Southeast Asia, Sapporo to Sakhalin and the "Northern Area," and Niigata to the Sea of Japan Rim. Particularly, a new institute, the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA), established by Niigata City, keenly watches the Sea of Japan Rim of the Russian Far East, the Chinese North East and North Korea, and naturally considers the importance of the Tumen River basin.

The Japanese government and big enterprises did not pay much attention to "the Japanese Rim," however. In terms of "local diplomacy," the foreign ministry kept a cool attitude and maintained its cautious position in forging ties with North Korea because of non-diplomatic relations, and with Russia because of territorial disputes.

Business circles were very interested in the dramatically developing area of South China and Southeast Asia. Building relations with countries belonging to the Sea of Japan Rim was not strongly promoted since the government was not in a position to provide assistance, owing to the lack of a substantial basis either in politics or economics, though Niigata, a city with a population of a half million, strongly hoped to build stronger ties with these countries. In December 1995, when China, Russia and North Korea signed an agreement for developing the Tumen River basin and set up a coordinating committee and an advisory committee including these countries plus South Korea and Mongolia, Japan never joined as a full-fledged member. Some concerned countries displayed their disappointment over Japan's passive position in keeping its observer status during talks (ERINA No.15: 1; No.21: 12-13).

More resistance was encountered from North Korea. Concerned with the "negative effects" of making Rajin and Seanbong a special economic zone for its own isolated and peculiar "socialist regime," the central government persisted in limiting the Tumen project only to the special zone and was wary of the influx of foreign capital and joint ventures with foreign companies even in the zone. In addition, economic devastation in North Korea disturbed the infrastructure of the border region, which fell much behind the Chinese and Russian counterparts (ERINA No.30: 26-27).

Russia proved to be a more important actor, who directly blockaded Tumen River development. The Russian side expressed a passive stance toward it even at the beginning of 1992: they were dissatisfied with the scenario of separating Vladivostok and Nakhodka from the Tumen River project, disliked the growth of rivals to Russian cities, and resisted even concentrating only on the small delta — Hunchun, Pos'et and Rajin — for development (Sakata 1995: 305-306; ERINA No.6: 23). This was the opposite of the North Korean position.

A more serious factor was brought about in 1992: a regime change and economic liberalization in Russia owing to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the acceleration of "reform and openness" in China owing to Deng Xiaoping's "southern speech" in the spring of 1992. Many Chinese rushed to the Russian border to take advantage of

get-rich-quick business chances through the non-visa regime for both citizens. Then Primor'e governor Vladimír Kuznetsov, who initiated the idea for the "large Vladivostok Free Trade Zone," suddenly resigned. His successor, Evgenii Nazdratenko emphasized the negative aspects of the Tumen River project for Russian interests and vigilantly watched China for any moves to fulfill its dream of "acquiring" a route to the sea.

A Campaign of Chinese "Immigration"

Viktor Larin, Director of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East in Vladivostok, notes that 751,000 Chinese entered Russia in 1993; of that total, 410,000 entered the country as laborers, 237,000 as sightseers, and 33,000 were privately invited (Larin 2001: 81). All over Russia widespread information was disseminated concerning the number of Chinese visitors to Russian territory, reaching 1.5 million (total of entering and leaving) in 1993. Russians in the Far East were shocked to see the Chinese presence increasing day by day in their own backyard. Groundless figures of illegal Chinese immigrants — from 40,000 to 150,000 in the Primor'e and from 400,000 to 2,000,000 in the Far East — were announced in the mass media in 1993 and 1994. As with the "yellow peril" syndrome of the nineteenth century, the people of Russia suddenly became filled with anti-Chinese sentiment (Larin 1998: 74-75).

In 1994, the Russian government discontinued the non-visa agreement for normal Chinese passport holders, responding to requests made by local bodies in the border region. As the non-visa regime for public business passport holders was kept, non-Russian speaking interpreters and non-licensed drivers tried to enter into Russia on forged passports. Besides using forged passports, illegal Chinese immigrants were seen successfully crossing the border over the mountains, bypassing customs (Honda 1996: 55-60; 72-78).

Most of the trouble occurred from non-visa tour groups. After the discontinuation of non-visa entry for normal passport holders, most Chinese began to use tour groups to visit Russia, which had been continued since 1994 without halt. It was very easy for any Chinese to join a non-visa tour group, get intentionally "lost," and

then stay in Russian territory. According to the Primor'e newspapers, three fourths of the Chinese in the Primor'e were staying there illegally (Vladivostok May 19; Jul. 8, 1994).

Administrative bodies in the Far East were determined to stamp out "illegally staying" Chinese and to register all foreigners. Since 1994, operation "Foreigner," has been in effect. It was conducted not only in Primor'e but all over the Far East. A good illustration of this comes from Blagoveshchensk in Amur Oblast: A local newspaper reported that local police attacked a number of Chinese who were staying at the famous Far East Hotel doing their daily business in rented rooms. They also reported that some escaped from their rooms through the windows like "cockroaches," while one Chinese woman sat on a toilet for three hours and another offered to have sex with a policeman in exchange for her freedom (Amurskaia pravda Nov. 24, 1994). At the beginning of 1995, China protested against the brutality of operation "Foreigner" and demanded that Russians consider the rights of Chinese staying in Russia. Some Chinese complained of Russians portraying them as criminals for overstaying their visa and neglecting to register with the local authorities. The Chinese presence gradually decreased owing to operation "Foreigner" (Tikhookeanskaia zvezda Jan. 28, 1995). A few Chinese markets were also permitted in designated places, e.g. Baliaeva in Vladivostok and Veshchevoi in Khabarovsk.

How many Chinese were actually in Russia "illegally"? According to Honda Ryoichi, then a correspondent of the "Hokkaido Shimbun" in Khabarovsk, more than a hundred Chinese in 1993 and 254 from January to September 1994 were deported from Khabarovsk City. As for the figures for the Primor'e Krai, 4,572 in 1994 and 6,099 in 1995 were reported (Honda 1996: 60-61). Operation "Foreigner" in the Primor'e seemed harsher than other regions. Vitalii Sedykh, a commander of the Pacific Border Service based in Vladivostok, mentioned that 630 groups and 17,845 Chinese entered into Primor'e but only 10,587 individuals exited, while the remaining stayed "illegally." He added that 827 groups and 16,346 Chinese entered, but only 9,131 returned in 1995 (Vladivostok Jul. 14, 1995).

Table 1. Number of PRC Citizens Visiting Primor'e Krai

Year	PRC Visitors to Primor'e			Sanctions against Violators		
	Total	Without Visa	Failed to Return	Administrative Penalties	Deportation Orders	Forced Deportation
1994	40,000	18,500	14,400	9,500	2,700	1,500
1995	35,000	18,500	11,200	12,300	6,600	4,500
1996	35,000	21,000	1,065	8,250	3,700	1,900
1997	52,000	39,000	468	8,250	4,000	2,100
1998	73,000	61,000	292	8,250	3,200	1,190
1/4/99	12,000		105			

(Alexseev 2000:124)

From what source did the "hundred thousand" illegal Chinese entering the Far East come? It seems that some figures on "illegal" Chinese in the Far East were fabricated in the early 1990s. As Mikhail Alexseev's elaborate data show, only 40,000 Chinese arrived and 14,400 remained in Primor'e in 1994 (Alexseev 2000: 124). Still more, since 1996 after the conclusion of operation "Foreigner," the figure rapidly dropped.

3 The Khasan Problem

A Linkage of "Migration" to "Territory"

When articles concerning "illegal" Chinese in Russia appeared in the media, the Russian side watched doubtfully as the Chinese government developed its policy on migration. Russians believed that China would try to restore the "territory" adjoining the Sea of Japan through the migration of its citizens. They were wary of Chinese spies infiltrating Russia, sponsored by the Chinese government, entering Russian territory in secret as ordinary businesspersons.

Russian alarm over the "Chinese threat" peaked in 1995, corresponding to Nazdratenko's campaign against "territorial transfer" to China. Gol'bakh, chief commander of the Far East Branch of the Border Guard, who supervises 2,400 kilometers of the Sino-Russian border, was said to be wary that the Chinese authorities would organize a massive immigration of Chinese residents to Russia at the beginning of the year (Moscow News 1995, No.13). On April 12, when a



Chinese bazaar on Baliaeva (Vladivostok: Sept., 1996)

few illegal Chinese passengers shot and killed Captain Sergei Dashuk, the border guard who tried to capture and detain them, public "hysteria" against Chinese in the Far East followed. In the spring, a mystic, Tamara Globa, predicted that a Sino-Russian war would break out in 1996, causing widespread panic (Vladivostok Apr. 19, 1995); local citizens repeatedly inquired at the Pacific Fleet head-quartered in Vladivostok of the possibility of war or of the deployment of the Chinese army along the border (Honda 1996: 137).

Khasan and the Sino-Russian-Korean Border

When the contents of the 1991 agreement on the Sino-Russian border were published, the hottest issue was the 300 hectares in Khasan Region near the Tumen River, which would be transferred to China according to the agreement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a planned transfer of the territory of Khasan that was linked to Article 9 of the agreement — Chinese rights to navigate ships down the river to the sea — irritated the Primor'e administrative body. The Russian transfer of the Khasan territory would connect a Chinese enclave, which was

caused by a change in the water flow of the Tumen River, with China's mainland. Then, if China built its harbor facilities and freely sailed ships, cargo and passengers to the Sea of Japan, this would be done under Chinese rather than Russian control. It could greatly damage the economic interests of Vladivostok and Nakhodka. As mentioned before, it is a fact that Jilin Province had planned to build a port in the Fangchuan region near the border to develop the Tumen River basin.

The Russian Foreign Ministry was annoyed with the Primor'e administration, only a small local body, for demanding it to reconsider the 1991 agreement ratified by both central governments. From a realist point of view, the Russian Foreign Ministry refused to recognize Primor'e's concerns over a would-be Chinese presence on the sea because of the shallowness of the Tumen River and because of North Korea's negative attitude toward the navigation of Chinese ships on the lower reaches of the river between Russia and North Korea. Besides that, they explained that the transfer of the 300 hectares was only a small territorial adjustment, and was not giving in to Chinese pressure, and never intended to give away Russian territory. In opposition, Primor'e officials made contacts with cadres in the parliament and army, and criticized the territorial transfer to China as not only serving economic reasons but also for causing military harm to Russia: it would let Chinese military vessels navigate down to the sea and cause an imbalance in Northeast Asian security as a whole (Larin 1998: 215).

Nazdratenko and his aides eagerly attempted to stop the territorial transfer by all arguments (e.g. would-be environmental damage: water pollution of Lake Khasan near the disputed territory) caused by the Chinese, and a loss of sacred Russian burial grounds (a cemetery commemorating the Khasan Incident of 1938 near the lake). Boris Tkachenko, a hardliner on the Sino-Russian border demarcation belonging to the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East in Vladivostok, insisted that China should transfer territory to Russia on the grounds that the first location of the marker "T" was set 24 kilometers above the mouth of the Tumen River (DV Uchenyi 1999, No.12). It was shown in Chapter 1 that Nazdratenko had attracted support from the Security Council,

the premier, the military sectors and others, and had criticized the Foreign Ministry for observing the 1991 agreement as an international agreement.

In the period of prolonged border demarcation work, Nazdratenko did not conceal his passive stance toward the Tumen River project. At the economic conference for Northeast Asia in Niigata, Nazdratenko, while recognizing the meaning of developing the Zarubino-Hunchun route, expressed his view that the main objective of the project would be to construct a port like the ones in Vladivostok, Vostochnyi and Nakhodka (ERINA No.10: 10). In concert with the delay of the border negotiations over the disputed territory in Khasan Region, a feasible Chinese plan to use a Russian port near the Tumen River to send vessels abroad was not realized. An international railway from Hunchun to Zarubino did not under go a test run and its rail connections through the border were postponed until October 1996, despite Russian and Chinese agreement in December 1992 to accomplish this project in one and a half years after the start of construction.

As analyzed in Chapter 1, the Russian side drafted a resolution and proposed dividing the disputed territory in half in June 1997. China accepted the terms of the resolution the following September, allowing the demarcation work of Khasan Region to progress more quickly. In November of that same year, President Yel'tsin and Jiang Zemin declared the demarcation work over the border finished, and by the end of the year, it was announced that 160 hectares of the Khasan area would be transferred to China and 140 would remain with Russia (Moiseev 1997: 5). According to Vladimir Rakhmanin, Deputy Head of the First Asian Bureau of the Foreign Ministry, half of the border in the disputed Khasan territory would be kept along the present line and the cemetery commemorating the Khasan Incident would remain in Russia (Rakhmanin 1997: 21). This presupposed that Russia would keep the lower half near Lake Khasan and China would acquire the upper half. The Chinese side seemed to have promised not to build its own port on the territory during behind-the-scenes negotiations (Larin 1998: 219). The last hurdle plaguing Sino-Russian border cooperation was finally cleared.



A former disputed place in Khasan

It is notable in Yel'tsin's visit to Beijing in November that a cooperation agreement among regions belonging to the Sino-Russian border was signed as well as a declaration for finishing the border demarcation. According to this agreement, Chinese provinces or autonomous regions and Russian krai or oblast could sign individual agreements with each other, without competing with the central government. All of the Russian administrative bodies in the Sino-Russian border welcomed local cooperation with their Chinese counterparts, and even the Primor'e showed its good will to do likewise. Deputy governor of Primor'e, Vladimir Stegnii, highly valued China's decision to change its policy from shipping (down from Khasan) on the river to shipping by train (from Hunchun to Pos'et) to the sea and declared it "strategic cooperation between Primor'e and the Chinese Northeast" (Utro Rossii Nov. 29, 1997).

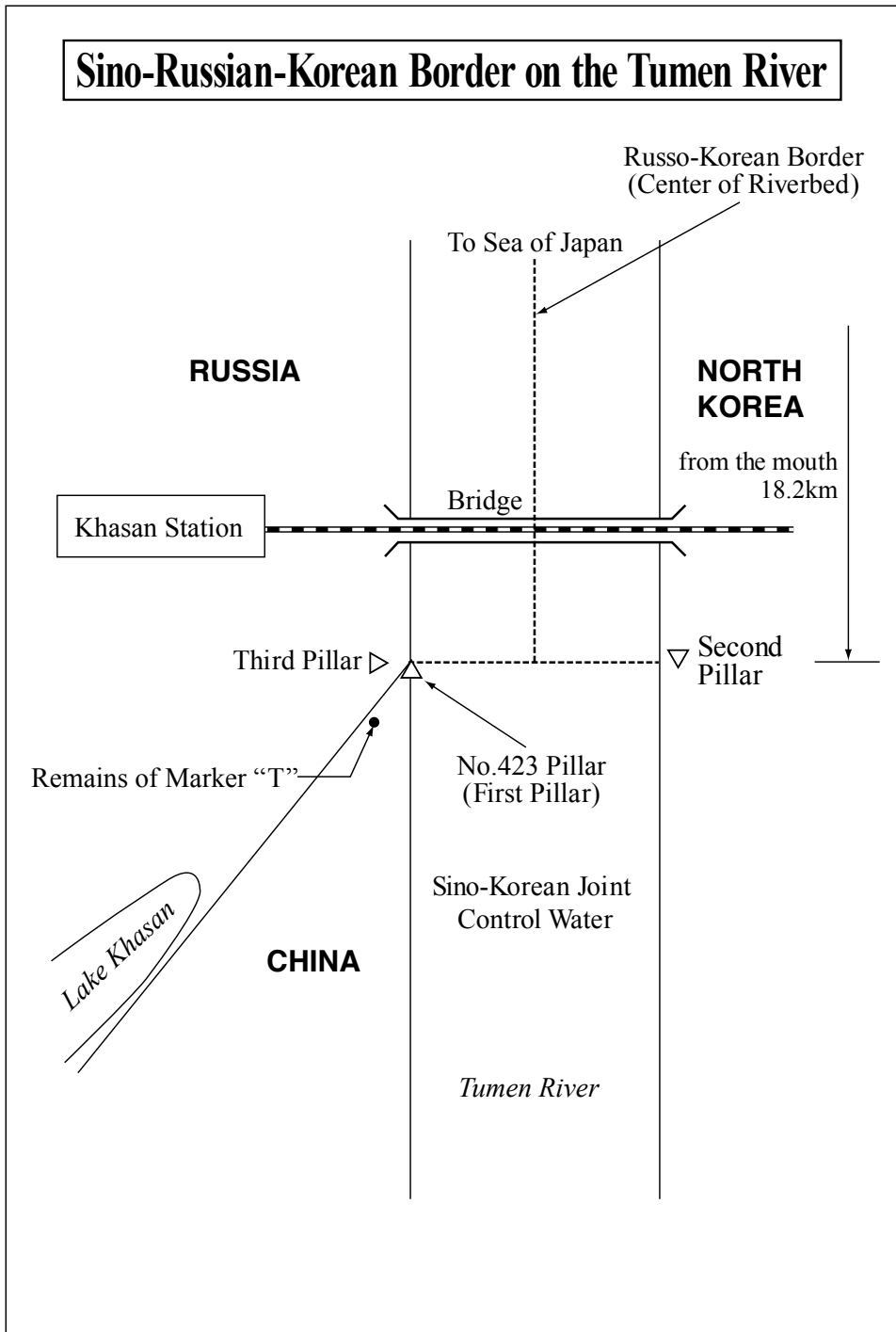
Chinese Premier Li Peng, during an official visit on an economic mission to Russia in February 1998, exchanged a memorandum for opening the railway to passengers and traffic between Makhhalino (Kraskino) and Hunchun, which had been frozen since the 1990s, as well as the Sino-Russian agreement to simplify border transfers in Manzhouli, Heihe and Suifenhe (Sbornik 1999: 210-

442). Legal preparations for operating an international railway on the Tumen River basin were completed. Then, the Sino-Russian border cooperation that had been prolonged, owing to the territorial issue, was restarted.

On November 3, 1998, small but important news was made public: the Sino-Russian-North Korean triangular border point on the Tumen River had successfully been demarcated. Negotiations had reportedly been hard because the three state border point should have been set at the Sino-Korean joint control border and the Sino-Russian divided water border. This was because the Sino-Russian border negotiations had been in deadlock for a long time and North Korea also passively touched on it. Finishing the Sino-Russian border demarcation, particularly resolving the Khasan problem, was a turning point, allowing the trilateral negotiations on the border junction to proceed. At last, the Russian side, which had hoped to put the point 100 meters up river, conceded that the three-state border junction was to start from the last pillar of No. 423 between Russia and China on the basis of the 1991 agreement (Sbornik: 449-452).

It was unclear what position North Korea had been taking to the last moment. It is natural that North Korea would support China, due to its desire for a wider Sino-Korean common border. This would be more advantageous for North Korea concerning common use. However, Chinese rights to navigate their ships under Article 9 of the 1991 agreement could also damage the economic interests of Rajin and Seanbong. Therefore, North Korea seemed to keep its passive attitude towards resolving the issue and adopted wait-and-see tactics for the prolonged Sino-Russian border negotiations in order to take more benefits from both sides. According to a Russian diplomat handling the issue, Pyongyang softened its position at the trilateral Moscow meeting in April 1998 when all parties agreed to find a solution to the problem by the end of the year. The trilateral agreement would come into effect by June 1999. Nevertheless, there were many obstacles to overcome before China can realize its rights to navigate down the river to sea. For the time being, China had to rely on a route via Russia or North Korea to reach the sea.

Sino-Russian-Korean Border on the Tumen River



4 After the Dispute

A Multi-vector Game

In July 1999, a Russian newspaper reported on the openness of the Sino-Russian international railway in the Tumen River basin (Segodnia, Jul. 2, 1999). The Chinese railway has an exit to the sea through the Russian port of Zarubino. It is rare even today to hear of traffic running on this railway.

One of the reasons is that the Primor'e does not use the Hunchun-Zarubino route actively in spite of the Vice Governor's positive remarks. The Primor'e basic priority is to develop a port in Nakhodka and Vostochnyi, and does not hasten to establish infrastructure in Khasan Region. Hisako Tsuji, a senior researcher at ERINA, who attended the committee for transportation in the Tumen River basin under the auspice of the UNDP in Changchun in October 2000, criticized the Russian delegation for their passive reaction to the "no-money" arrangement of "soft infrastructure," such as simplified transfers through the border under the excuse of possible increases in "illegal" Chinese immigrants (ERINA No.38: 36).

China is realizing economic benefits from developing the Rajin - Seanbong route in North Korea, which has become a growing rival to the Russian route (ERINA No.15: 1; No.21: 12-13). The construction of tunnels and the widening of roads in places where driving was difficult from Hunchun to Yuanting Bridge, an entry point to North Korea, was initiated at the end of the 1990s. Chinese tactics were partly successful. In April 2000, when an international ferry from Sokcho began to operate, Korean travelers who could not enter North Korea joined a sightseeing tour headed for Mt. Baekdoo (Changbai) from the Chinese border. At the Zarubino port a small building was built for customs. In 2000, passing through the Yuanting Bridge, vessels of a hundred thousand tons to Kraskino, up to thirty-thousand tons, were larger than those in 1998 (ERINA No.38: 23).

Russia appears to want to develop Khasan Region only at a slower pace corresponding to the extent of arranging the route in North Korea. A key for success to the pragmatic tactics adopted by Jilin Province depends on whether promoting the North Korean route

could be developed as a counterweight to the Russian route. Since 2002, North Korea has been actively introducing a "market economy" and the Jilin administration now directs all eyes toward North Korea. On the other hand, information concerning President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jung Il's proposed plan to connect Siberia with the Seoul-Wonsan eastern railway on the Korean Peninsula, effectively bypassing Chinese territory, had made China anxious (Roshia Kyokuto Nyusu Feb. 17; Sept. 14, 2001). Though feasible in the foreseeable future, the devastating conditions in North Korea and the fact that Khasan Region of Russia is ill-equipped, make such an undertaking difficult to realize at the current time.

Competition within the Chinese administration is also a challenge for the future of the Tumen River basin. It is difficult to say that neighboring provinces, such as Heilongjiang that has serious rivals, Suifenhe and Dongning, to the Tumen River project, have maintained a warm attitude. In addition to that, rivalry within Jilin Province was notable: Hunchun lost a chance to have a new airport planned in the first blueprint. The existing small airport in Yanji, the capital of Yanbian Autonomous Region, about 115 kilometers from Hunchun, was renovated in 1997. The domestic railway that was connected from Tumen to Hunchun in September 1993 is not as widely used as before. It is reportedly not easy to operate a train for passengers in this area because of the dangerous curves and tunnels through the mountains. The station building in Hunchun is sadly abandoned and only cargo trains operate in the terminal a few times per week. It is said that not only financial problems but also some resistance from Tumen City, a train stop and gateway for Namyang in North Korea, did not offer assistance to improve the railway infrastructure to Hunchun, fearing its own development would suffer.

Therefore, even if the international railways between Hunchun and Kraskino had been well organized, they would not have been worth using because of the conditions of the Chinese domestic railways. Besides that, it is necessary to switch train wheels or wagons on the border point because of the difference in wheel size between Russia and China. It was more effective to unload cargo in Tumen, and then send it by truck directly to Zarubino port. A highway from Changchun to Hunchun should be completed by 2004 (Hokuto Ajia

Yuso Kairo Bijon 2002: 12-13). It is true that accomplishing the construction of a highway route to the sea over the border does have its specific merit on the border area. However, in the Zarubino port there still remain some tasks for improving container cranes and road access from Kraskino to the port, regardless of any Chinese endeavors. It is, even now, reasonable to move most of the Chinese traffic not through Hunchun-Zarubino but through Suifenhe-Nakhodka and Vostochnyi, or directly through Dalian.

The road from Hunchun to Kraskino to Vladivostok presents a more complicated situation. From Tumen to Hunchun or Changlingzi, the border point on the Chinese road is well-equipped, as mentioned before, but the Russian road, particularly from Kraskino to the north, is apparently in a dilapidated condition. It is said to be improving at a very slow pace.

To illustrate this point, when a Chinese tourist group is carried by bus directly to Vladivostok, it takes seven or eight hours to make the 250 kilometer trip from Kraskino. Therefore, many tourists are taken to the port of Slavianka that takes two hours and switch there to a high-speed passenger ship to the port in Vladivostok, which takes another hour. But this ship is often cancelled due to heavy mist. In fact, passengers from Jilin, Changchun and other cities in Jilin Province prefer to travel via Suifenhe either by rail or by road to Ussuriisk or Vladivostok. A few local investors intend to invite limited foreign capital into this area and build a new "route" between Russia and China in the near future.

Khasan since 1999

On June 25 1999, when I visited Khasan Region, I tried to find the international terminal to Hunchun. Kraskino was a small village with only one small hotel. Finding a restaurant there was a hard task. The driver asked some residents where the new terminal — Kamyshovaia — was located, but nobody knew either the place or the fact it was being built. I finally met a person working in customs in Khasan Village who knew where it was. He took me to the place, 15 kilometers from the center of Kraskino and far from the main road between Kraskino and Khasan. It stands on a lonely and ruined flatland with an isolated infrastructure. It is in stark contrast to the Chinese



Kamyshovaia Terminal (Jun., 1999)

terminal located in the center of the economic cooperation zone of Hunchun City and near the main road to Changlingzi, the border checkpoint. The Hunchun city administration hopes to use the terminal as a sign of its growth, while Primor'e hopes to hide any proof of Sino-Russian regional cooperation from local residents.

On July 27, I researched the Sino-Russian-Korean border point from Hunchun, on the Chinese side. I found a mountainous area covering the Sino-Russian border. From Hunchun to Fangchuan on the 80 kilometer old road it is hard and mountainous. The Chinese territory ranges through the mountainous road along the Tumen River with its North Korean bank on the right and suddenly ends at a high place where, on a sunny day, the sea is just visible over the river and plain belonging to Russia. From the Hunchun hills, Khasan Village, the station and the bridge between Russia and North Korea over the river can be seen. Every Chinese visiting there is bound to retain consciousness of the existence of Russia that disturbs the road to the sea. An observation platform next to the Chinese Border Guard tower on the hill can be freely entered and is controlled by the Hunchun sightseeing company, owing to a progressive Chinese policy of "reform and openness."

The Chinese customs in Changlingzi near the border is open to travelers. The officers guide them to the border if they pay a sight-seeing fee. This is in direct contrast to the Russian border guard that expels them from the border area. Since May 1998, the border of

Changlingzi has been open not only to Russian or Chinese citizens but also to any person who has a passport from a third country (ERINA No.26: 51-53). At the gate of the Chinese customs is a board that reads "Welcome Sightseers." Many Chinese like to visit and see the border: Manzhouli, Heihe, Suifenhe and Tumen and Dandong vis-à-vis North Korea. Hunchun and the border points should be popular spots thanks to the resolution of the border problem.

In the meanwhile, what do Russian border guards think about watching a flood of Chinese coming to the border? They do not understand Chinese eagerness to go and enjoy border trips. The Russian control over the border has softened a little but is still strict. When NHK crews from Japan took live video of the station and the bridge in Khasan Region on a morning in November 1997, some of them were detained in spite of the fact that they had permission from the Border Guard. A commander of the border guard that conducted the detainment guided me to a Russian tomb in memory of the Khasan Incident of 1938 and a famous house where Leonid Brezhnev and Kim Il Sung had met and where Kim Jung Il stayed during his travels on the Siberian Railway to Moscow in 2001. The commander, taking me to the bridge, did not permit me to take photos of it, nor the North Korean border on the river, however. I discovered that the bridge was surrounded by small electronic lines as a warning, and that they are only removed when trains are running. The Russian cautious attitude along border has not yet changed.

Distrust and fear of China in Primor'e Krai, where the Damanskii Incident occurred in 1969, remained more acute than other border regions. I met with many people there who reiterated the "Chinese threat" despite the border demarcation in the Primor'e being finished. A famous scholar in sinology at Far Eastern National University explains the reasons with a geopolitical fact: unlike other regions, the Primor'e, situated next to the sea, lacks vast space behind the border. Some Russians seem to feel threatened as they imagine and find a prolonged Chinese "dream" to the sea and a sharp increase in Chinese travelers and sightseers in Vladivostok.

The Tumen River basin has been in deep trouble as well as having economic problems for some time now. Nevertheless, the hardtimes of the colonial era, wartime, and the strict blockade

caused by the Cold War are in the past. Finishing the border demarcation has a definite impact on the improvement of the Primor'e attitude toward China, as will be shown in the next chapter. Larin, seen as a proponent of the "Chinese threat" by some Chinese specialists in the early 1990s, considers it important to normalize relations between Russia and China. He conducts frequent academic exchanges with neighboring Chinese scholars, like Bu Ping, Vice President of the Heilongjiang Science Academy in Harbin. The Chinese side also reacts and reflects on its previous economic aggression against Russia in the early 1990s. The head of Russian Studies of Heilongjiang University honestly reported that most Chinese were too engaged only in business and chasing profits in Russia, and that they should pay greater attention to humane and cultural relations with Russia and do more to deepen their mutual understanding (Interviews: Li Chuanxun Jul. 20, 2000).

Accompanying this change of mood in Primor'e, even the Tumen River basin was slowly being transformed. I saw a lonely worker repairing a bad road on the back way to Slavianska from Khasan Village. He was tackling a never-ending task. It symbolizes the condition of Sino-Russian relations there. Although a paradox, because of the deep mutual distrust, the building of relationships should move at a slower pace.



Sino-Russian Local Joint Conference (Harbin, Jun., 2002)