

Chapter 6: Border Zone "Zero"



Menkeseli on the Argun River (Jul., 2000)

1 The First Pillar of the Sino-Russian Eastern Border

Nerchinsk and Kiakhta

The Sino-Russian eastern border starts from a hill on Tarbagan-Dakh, facing the Mongolian border, and stretches over a vast plain between Chita Oblast and the Inner Mongol Autonomous Region. This border area has a long common history between Russia and China.

Russia sent Cossacks and farmers to the Amur River basin and requested that trade be established. But the Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, not accepting the European concept of "sovereign equality" in international relations, was not tolerant of the Russian envoys, and refused to establish relations. He also complained about Russian immigration and advancement on the Amur River basin. At last, a Sino-Russian war began in 1683, and six years later Russia and China signed their first treaty in Nerchinsk (in present-day Chita Oblast). This treaty decided each country's "zone of influence" in the region and brought the beginning of trade. According to the treaty, Russia, looking forward to advance on the Amur River, was forced to stop its plan. The Sino-Russian border was seen as a line from the origin of the Argun River, the Gorbitsa River joining the Shilka River to Waixingan Mountains.

The next round of border negotiations concerned the Mongolian hills and plain that stretches west of the Argun River. During negotiations, the Qing Dynasty demanded that Russia recognize Jungalia as being under Qing control while Russia hoped to reopen and develop mutual trade between the two. Finally, in 1727, a land border between the Argun River and Kiakhta, a present-day Mongolian city, was agreed. Recognition of each other's "zone of influence" allowed Sino-Russian economic relations to develop, lasting until the time of Russia's penetration of the Amur River basin in the late nineteenth century; this period is affirmatively evaluated as the "Nerchinsk-Kiakhta regime." (Staro)Tsurukhaitui Village in the middle of the Argun River, facing Heishantou, 190 kilometers from Hailar, present-day Inner Mongolia, was also appointed as a trading point,¹⁶ besides Kiakhta in the treaty (Yoshida 1974).

The Abagaitui Plain Border

The Sino-Russian border was defined by the Kiakhta Treaty on the basis of the Bura Agreement and the Abagaitui Agreement which set the land border. The six points set the current 90 kilometer Sino-Russian land border between Tarbagan-Dakh (point 58) and Abagaitui (point 63) next to the Argun River.

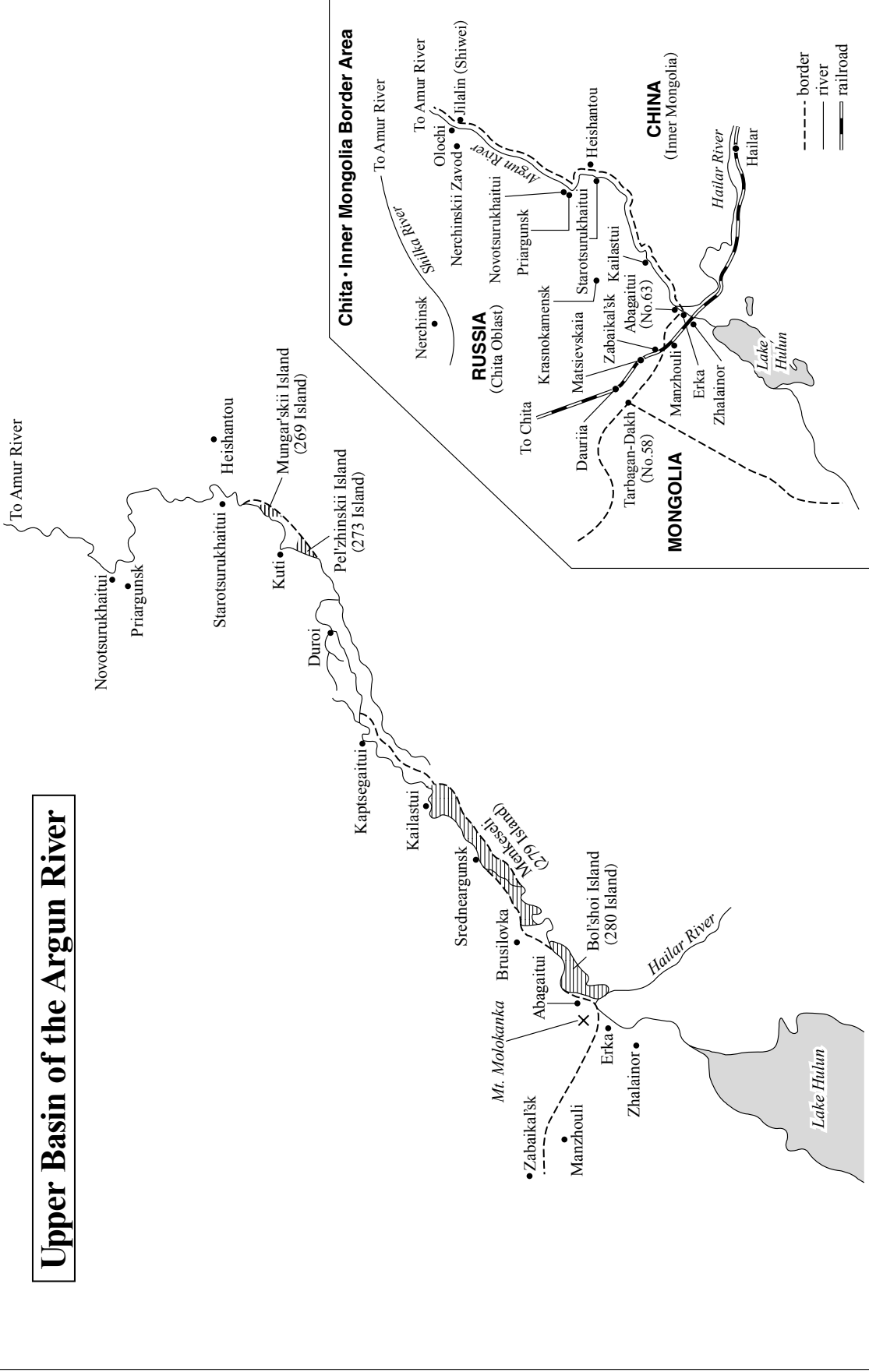
As mentioned in some detail in the previous chapters, Russia had gradually eroded the former Chinese "sphere of influence" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Russia justified its actions by claiming that the Nerchinsk Treaty was forced upon them, and that the Amur basin never belonged to China. Owing to the Aigun and Beijing Treaties, Russia successfully expanded its territory eastward and built Vladivostok City. On the other hand, Russia did not easily touch the western land border stretching from Abagaitui and Tarbagan-Dakh, clearly influenced by Chinese control. In 1896, when Russia built a station for the Chinese Eastern Railway on its western edge, it was named "Manzhouli."

Russians hoped to use "Manzhouli" from a strategic point of view to begin full-scale operations in the area. The Kiakhta Treaty was said to identify only the name of the border place. Some border points seemed not to be clarified, and small skirmishes occurred in the area. A new agreement was completed. This was the Qiqihar Agreement of 1911. Owing to this agreement, some six border points between Tarbagan-Dakh and Abagaitui were more clearly defined with locations and kilometers being accurately established.

However, results of the negotiations brought a loss for China. 1911 was the year of Revolution. Russia reportedly took advantage of this during the demarcation process. According to the Chinese explanation, the names of the six points remained, but the actual demarcated points were moved 4 to 21 kilometers south of the previous points. It says that China lost 1,400 square kilometers and, then, a 600 meter mountain named Abagaitui, present day Mt. Molokanka in Russian (Xu Zhanjiang 1992: 26-27; 39). The Chinese side argued that point 63 was originally set on the top of Mt. Abagaitui (Manzhouli bao Nov. 1, 1999). The land border, which was defined by

16 Starotsurukhaitui - Heishantou was decided as a customs partner as well as Olochi - Shiwei in the 1994 agreement, as mentioned on page 112.

Upper Basin of the Argun River



the Qiqihar Agreement, became the de facto Sino-Russian border after the Soviet Union and Manchukuo had recognized the status quo. The Chinese side, under Japanese control, used a map that included the Russian village Matsievskaja and its surroundings (Manshu Teikoku Bunsho Chizu 1942: map no.22). Therefore, because of the Qiqihar Agreement the 1,400 square kilometer land was recognized as a loss by China, and seemed to remain a potential claim against Russia in later negotiations.

The Triangular Border: China-Russia-Mongolia

The Tarbagan-Dakh border point acquired special meaning after "Outer Mongolia" acquired independence. China reluctantly accepted the existence of the People's Republic of Mongolia after World War II. Tarbagan-Dakh turned into a triangular border junction, including Russia, China and Mongolia. And it was also recognized as a starting point of the Sino-Soviet eastern border. The Sino-Mongolian border agreement in 1962, the Soviet-Mongolian border agreement in 1976, and the Sino-Soviet eastern border agreement in 1991 resulted in the demarcation of the triangular junction point in Tarbagan-Dakh. Three state technical teams conducted the demarcation work there in the autumn of 1993. Work on the border, where land can turn into a mud field the day after heavy rain, is said to have been accompanied with great difficulties; they constructed a provisional road, consisting of patchy wood, to the border point.

Russia raised an objection to the present three state joint border point. Boris Tkachenko, a strong opponent of the 1991 agreement, claimed that Russia had lost 97 square kilometers of land because of the 1991 agreement. The Qiqihar Agreement decided that the location of Tarbagan-Dakh would not be on top of a hill, the current border point, but seven kilometers south of the top. Therefore, Russia gave up territory between the true point 59 of the Qiqihar Agreement and point 63 (Tkachenko 1999: 62-63). Such claims might add fuel to Chinese claims to Mt. Molokanka, Matsievskaja and others. At last, China and Russia seemed to recognize the present border line de jure during negotiations for the 1991 agreement.

On January 27, 1994, a three-state delegation gathered in Ulan Bator to sign the border agreement. A pillar on a hill in Tarbagan-

Dakh, the first one for the Sino-Russian border, was marked "zero" (Sbornik 1999: 206-208). The land border toward Abagaitui as well as the three state border junction was demarcated smoothly, and Mt. Molokanka remains in Russian hands. On the pillars placed in these areas was written the year 1993. Nevertheless, all the demarcation works between Chita and Inner Mongolia were not necessarily conducted smoothly.

2 The Origin of the Argun River

The Eighteen Island Exception

The border negotiations over the Argun River east of Abagaitui were much tougher than the negotiations over the land borders. It is particularly difficult to identify a main channel on a non-navigable upper flow of the river because it sharply meanders and consists of multi-channels that change direction often. When a plain and hill turn into a mud field, islands on the Argun are strongly eroded. There is a river valley with lower river coasts on both sides, stretching five to ten kilometers in width between Abagaitui and Heishantou. The Argun River, flowing down from Heishantou, collects small channels, and turns into a river after passing Silwei Village in Inner Mongolia, with its valley a kilometer wide and the river's width two to three hundred meters, as an upper flow of the Amur River (Chen-ba'erhu qizhi: 39).

The Kiakhta Treaty generally refers to the Argun River as a Sino-Russian border; a concrete decision over the islands on the river was needed soon. Negotiations leading up to the Qiqihar Agreement, as mentioned before, were also concluded: on 800 kilometers of the Argun River between Abagaitui, the point 63 and its end, where it joins the Shilka River and turns into the Amur, 280 islands were allotted. Ownership of all 280 islands was negotiated, but border talks were hard and tough. This is because the upper flow of the Argun had changed from south to north by as much as six kilometers in the past two centuries after the Kiakhta Treaty. The southern flow was apparently strong, particularly between Abagaitui and Novotsurukhaitui near present-day Priargunsk. According to a clause of the Kiakhta Treaty, a "new route" of the Argun River

would allow China to receive islands that Russia had factually controlled before.

At last, Russia agreed to the "new route" as the Sino-Russian border, but obliged China to recognize some exceptional cases: eighteen islands, including No.111, 112, 115, 117, 120, 211, 226, 227, 267-274, 279 and 280, were to be kept under Russian control, regardless of the changed border line. The division of the islands on the river was 160 for Russia and 120 for China. China argued that the Russian deal was unfair because these 18 islands, in terms of total square kilometers, represented 84 percent of the total land mass of all 280 islands put together (Tkachenko 1998: 126-138; Xu Zhan-jiang 1992: 39).

Bol'shoi Island

Negotiations on the Sino-Soviet eastern border resumed in 1987 and reconsidered the Qiqihar Agreement. It adopted the principle of setting a border line on the main channel or at the center of the river if the river were non-navigable. If the principle were strictly applied to the Argun River, the "eighteen islands" should have been transferred to China. Russia tried to protect its interests by claiming "an exceptional case." According to the memoirs of Boris Vereshchagin, Russia stood firm on Bol'shoi Island, facing Abagaitui Villa on the origin of the Argun River. Vereshchagin criticized the Chinese for suddenly changing their attitude in the negotiations and for demanding an island that had never been claimed before (Vereshchagin 1999: 218-251).

On a map, the strategic meaning of Bol'shoi Island is as clear as that of Heixiazi at the junction of the Amur and the Ussuri in Khabarovsk. Bol'shoi Island is in a knot between the land border at Abagaitui and a starting point of the river border, and at a junction of the Hailar and the Hulun Rivers.

Abagaitui has a significant place in the history of Sino-Russian relations. In 1900, Russia crossed the Argun River and occupied Hailar and other cities; at the time of the Chinese Eastern Railway incidents of 1929, the Soviet army, from Abagaitui, attacked the town of Zhalainor, a coal base and the Chinese Eastern Railway crossing the Hulun River, and suppressed Chinese demonstrations



Abagaitui on the Argun River (Jul., 2000)

there. A milestone in memory of the Chinese resistance during the incidents can be seen on the road on the way to Abagaitui from Zhalainor (Xu Zhanjiang 1992: 31; 48-52). Under Japanese control in the 1930s, a route from Abagaitui to the Argun River became necessary for Chinese communists communicating with the Soviet Union (Xu Zhanxin 1999: 13-14; 49-50). Bol'shoi Island is only 50 square kilometers, but the Russian Trans-Baikal Army resisted its transfer to China because of its strategic importance.

Prolonged Negotiations

Russian residents of Chita Oblast also have concern over water pollution on the Argun River, caused by the rapidly developing Chinese cities such as Hailar on the Hailar River, on an upper flow area of the Argun. Some residents living in villages next to the river are also wary of Chinese advancement to the river, particularly after the escalation of China's "reform and openness." A local newspaper, "Chitinskaia Rabochii," seldom sensationalizes the "Chinese threat," but pointed to a number of "side-effects" of the opened Sino-Russian border because of some Chinese "illegal" intrusions and smuggling on the river (Zabaikal'skii rabochii May 16, 1995). For the Russians, Abagaitui seemed not only a strategic point but also a "buffer," which could stop Chinese advancement on the river. In the end, the Chi-

nese never retracted their claims to Bol'shoi Island in the border negotiations, and the case was shelved in the 1991 agreement.

Coincidentally, January 27, 1994, the day of the agreement on the Sino-Russian-Mongolian joint border in Ulan Bator, was the same day of the agreement on opening more Sino-Russian customs points, signed by Andrei Kozyrev and Qian Qichen in Beijing. The third customs point, also mentioned in the agreement, would be established in Abagaitui, Russia, and Erka, China, both cities lie across the river from Bol'shoi Island (Sbornik 1999: 212). Russia accepted the idea, and a cargo customs point was first planned to open in 1993 (Zhong'E maoyi xinxiabao Jan. 19; Jul. 16, 1993), but the equipment on the Chinese side was in ruins and it remained under construction for several years. Some Russians were dissatisfied that the 1991 agreement decided to make Abagaitui the origin of the Argun River. Tkachenko suggests that the Treaty of Nerchinsk places the border at the uppermost point of the Argun River, the present origin of the Hulun River belonging to China. According to his opinion, territories around the Hulun should be under Russian sovereignty (Tkachenko 1999: 9-10).

3 The Menkeseli Model

Chita: The Summer of 1995

In the summer of 1995, when Nazdratenko, Primor'e's governor, campaigned for "not transferring Russian territory to China," a rumor of a possible "Sino-Russian war" spread all over the Russian Far East. As a result, a Sino-Russian border demarcation committee was assembled in Chita. This was the first meeting held outside of Moscow and Beijing. Genrikh Kireev, the plenipotentiary for the Russian demarcation committee, said at a press release together with a deputy governor of Chita, "The reason for holding the border committee in Chita is that it is the most suitable place for demarcation work. This is the only region for maintaining good cooperation with the local army and regional administration in this work. The region never permits any political agitation against the demarcation work. I deeply appreciate the Chita administration" (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Jul. 21, 1995).

Chita's progressive meaning for administrations in the Russian Far East was not only because Chita had finished the land border demarcation the earliest, but also because of Chita's initiatives for proceeding on demarcation work along some trouble spots of the Argun River.

The Transfer of Menkeseli

Bol'shoi Island, excluded from the 1991 agreement, will be discussed later, but demarcation work on other islands on the Argun River, which Russia promised to transfer over to China according to the agreement, should have been conducted. Some islands, next to Bol'shoi Island, were, however, claimed to be under Russian control by some local residents and the army. This includes island 279, so-called "Menkeseli" that has a large, 175 square kilometer sandbar on the Argun River, near Sredneargunsk and Russian dochos. Russian residents had used this place for cattle pasture and grass collection. The northern flow of the Argun around Menkeseli seems to have vanished around Bol'shoi Island. A 1:200,000 Soviet map, issued in 1980, shows the weakness of the northern flow from Menkeseli. Point Eight mentioned in the 1991 agreement is set on the edge of Menkeseli. This meant that Russia promised to transfer Menkeseli over to China during negotiations of the late 1980s.

In the period between 1994 and 1996, when some demarcation work on other rivers was considered suspicious, Menkeseli's transfer to China was discussed in Chita Oblast. A local newspaper that rarely referred to the trouble of Bol'shoi Island mentioned the Menkeseli problem. The local authorities reacted rapidly and handled it differently from other administrations of the Far East. The local Border Guard consulted the Chita administration, and they proposed a compromise that would allow Russian local residents to use Menkeseli in exchange for Russian recognition of the islands transferred to China (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Sept. 20, 1994; Aug. 1, 1995; May 28, 1996). The Chinese side agreed with this idea at an early stage of the negotiations, though the official deal was concluded at the beginning of 1997. Finally, Russia and China signed a basic agreement on the "joint use" of an island after its ownership had been confirmed in November 1997, and further discussions on the details of

"joint use" continued (Sbornik 1999: 420-422). It was reported that the Menkeseli method had a great impact on advancing the negotiations on some of the disputed islands in the Amur and the Ussuri Rivers. As mentioned in previous chapters, it was decided that Ol'ginskii Island and others would be transferred to China on the premise of "joint use." In the end, the key to success for finishing the river border negotiations was the Chita proposal on transferring disputed islands that guaranteed the rights of former users on the islands. The idea appeased the Russians who were concerned over the loss of territory.

How, then, were the islands on the Argun River divided between Russia and China? According to a deputy mayor of Krasnokamensk City, a uranium base established in 1968, some islands near Brusilovka Village remain under Russian control. Considering the city's location between Bol'shoi Island and Menkeseli and the complex geographic situation around the river border, it is assumed that China and Russia discussed other islands and islets as well as islands 279 and 280. The changing flow of the river again is easily assumed 80 years after the Qiqihar Agreement.

According to Chinese data, the Argun River consists of 413 islands; 204 islands belong to Russia while 209 islands belong to China. Considering the existence of 280 islands counted in the Qiqihar Agreement, disappearing or reforming islands on the river have been remarkable in these past 80 years, including some small isles that were once counted in the island group, as occurred on the Amur. If "eighteen islands" in the Qiqihar Agreement were to remain as they once had been, most of them would have been transferred to China. The current situation of the narrow flow of the Argun can hardly be identified on new maps sold in Chita Oblast.

"Joint Use" of the Disputed Island

Here we focus on the realities of "joint use." "Joint use" is limited to some exceptional cases, as seen in Chapters 3 and 4. We also remember the context of "joint use," which was politically introduced to mitigate the reaction aroused by Russian opponents of transferring the islands. This "joint use" solution was a far cry from the kind of romantic images of local Russians and Chinese living in symbiotic peace in the border areas.

Therefore, it is natural that the users, place and period of "joint use" were limited in negotiations that followed the 1997 agreement on "joint use." "Joint use" is only a "temporary" solution (Sbornik 1999: 421), and the user was specified as a former user with permission given by the other government, and its period, which was first ten years, was decided to be only five years. The agreement for "joint use," signed in December 1999, added only two places to Menkeseli for Russian local use: Ol'ginskii Island for Russia and Verkhne-konstantinovskii Island for China.

Though the Menkeseli method of "joint use" had, without a doubt, a positive effect on pushing border negotiations along during its latter stages, Russia and China maintained a cautious stance in broadening it to include other disputed areas. The method employed was an "emergency exit" to break the deadlock. The islands, users, and period of use are strictly limited so as not to allow for a broadening of its application.

One reason for this limitation was a concern over the "side-effects" caused by the "joint use" solution. It is apparent that the method caused a sensation for the "three island" issue. In the first part of 1997, when the Menkeseli method was made popular as applicable to the Amur or the Ussuri, Khabarovsk residents panicked. Remember some islands' final fate on the Amur River, like Popov, Savell'ev and others next to Tarabarov. Many were afraid that the central government would concede on Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov, even if the two islands were excluded from the 1991 agreement (Tikhookeanskaia zvezda Sept. 20, 1994). In case Russia successfully persuaded China to keep the two under Russian jurisdiction, they could be used jointly between Russians and Chinese. "At last, the two would be under de facto Chinese control in the foreseeable future," Khabarovsk local newspapers eccentrically reported and made public the worst possible scenario.

This was definitely the case with Bol'shoi Island, though Chita's newspaper made little reference to it. Chita's governor, Ravil Geniatulin, who had visited China many times with President Yel'tsin and paid much attention to the deepening cooperation with Inner Mongolia since his inauguration in April, 1996, considered a plan for establishing a customs point in Starotsurukhaitui, 100 kilo-

meters down the river but north on the map, south of Menkeseli on the Argun River, and in Pokrovka on the Amur River, close to the junction of the Argun and the Shilka, but omitted in a plan for Abagaitui - Erka customs (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Dec. 22, 1999; Gorizonty 1998: 7). This was in direct contrast to the Manzhouli administration's endeavor to attract investments to open Erka customs (Neimenggu, 1992: 4-5).

Despite some negative aspects, the results of the "joint use" solution seem to have played a great role in resolving some of the problems in the latter stages of Sino-Russian border negotiations. Thanks to the Menkeseli method, Russia could separate its river border problems from its biggest problem, the land border problem, e.g. the 300 hectares in Khasan Region of Primor'e. The method is clearly one of the main factors that helped bring about some of the achievements of the 1997 declaration on finalizing the Sino-Russian border problem. Geiniatulín as well as other governors in the Far East attended the Beijing meeting in November 1997.

4 The Bridge to Eurasia

Manzhouli's Special Economic Zone

In China, Manzhouli and the surrounding area are often called the "Eurasian bridge" (Yang Dongliang 1994). It is certainly the main road between Asia and Europe: Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi and Kim Il-Sung all went across the border into Russia, and such famous Chinese leaders as Ye Jianying, Hu Yaobang, Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji visited Manzhouli City. This border area serves and will continue to serve as a kind of bridge for Sino-Russian relations.

In contrast to Manzhouli's reputation, Zabaikal'sk, remains a small, shabby village with a population of only 10,000 (in spite of its location at a train junction). While Manzhouli has a glorious history, being developed after the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway with both Soviet and Japanese consulates, Zabaikal'sk did not even have a village name. The village, was simply referred to as "small station eighty-six" and, then, called "Otpor" in the 1930s, and was only given its present name in 1958 (Xu Zhanxin 1999: 83-84).



Sino-Russian railway gates on the border (Jul., 2000)

The station does not seem to be strategic, because Russia had itself controlled Manzhouli. The development of the village began as a train junction after the Russian transfer of the Chinese Eastern Railway over to China in the 1950s, but was again halted because of the Sino-Russian conflict in the 1960s.

The dream of a "Eurasian Bridge" was revived after the "Sino-Russian reconciliation" in the late 1980s. Manzhouli, poised to be an "experimental open district" by the central government, has a large gate over 30 meters high and 40 meters in width across from the international railway. On the gate, near the border, a sign reads "the People's Republic of China." From there heading east, the Sino-Russian "joint economic zone" stretches outward. When Manzhouli was officially declared an open city as well as Hunchun, Heihe and Suifenhe in 1992, the authorities planned to create a 0.2 square kilometer zone in a field over the border right next to Zabaikal'sk Village, where Russians and Chinese could freely interact, conduct trade, and do business using the ruble, yuan, and dollar (Manzhouli 1992: 96-113). The Russian side also accepted this idea with the expectation of foreign openness and transition toward a market economy (Gorizonty 1998: 62).

Chita's Attitude

However, dark clouds blotted out the plan. Economic and political confusion began on the Russian side. While the Chinese side started work on the land readjustment of the planned zone and soon finished it in May 1992, Russia had not even started by 1995. The following is a list of some of the reasons for the delay on the Russian side: problems collecting funds for construction; institutional problems relating to the "free trade zone;" and the negative attitude of the local authorities against Chinese shuttle traders and others (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Nov 22, 1996; Gorizonty 1998: 62-69). The planned field for the Russian "zone" still remains desolate and has turned into a dump. Near the fence around the planned field is a small Chinese bazaar with a barracks for Chinese. This place is called "Little Shanghai" by Zabaikal'sk residents. A developed city with a population of over 160,000 (in 1998), Manzhouli, can be seen through a fence from Zabaikal'sk Village. If the city's residents were from Khabarovsk or Primor'e, they would be afraid of this "Chinese expansion" toward the village. But the reactions of local residents are completely different. People in Chita do not worry much about the "Chinese threat," despite a lingering territorial issue with China.

In sharp contrast to the problem in Khabarovsk, the problem related to Bol'shoi Island has not been politicized in the Chita Oblast. The Chita authorities, 500 kilometers from the Argun River, do not consider the problem serious, nor do they have much interest in it. The administrations in Zabaikal'sk and Krasnokamensk also show the same attitude. They commented that there was no need to transfer the island over to China, but also that any barriers impeding the developing cooperation with China should be removed, even if the territorial issue remained (Interviews in Chita Oblast 2000).

Generally, I think that the difference of local feelings toward China in Chita and the Far East should be emphasized. In my field research on Chita Oblast in the summer of 2000, I asked bureaucrats, militants, journalists, tour guides and ordinary people in the region the same question: "Do you feel there is a Chinese threat?" Nobody answered affirmatively. It is true that some Russians feel a little disgusted about some daily troubles with Chinese, yet they do not

believe that the Chinese come to occupy Russian territory. Others clearly point out that Chinese "migrants" do their own business only to make a living and a better life for themselves. This is interesting, when we remember that a professor from Far Eastern National University in Vladivostok had some serious concerns over Chinese occupation of the "exit" to the sea, or that a journalist from a Khabarovsk newspaper expressed his worries about the Chinese acquisition of Tarabarov and Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii.

Manzhouli-Zabaikal'sk Relations

Chita's sentiment toward China seems to have influenced the Sino-Russian regional partnership. In 1996, when political trouble over the issue of territory deepened between Moscow and the Far East, relations between Zabaikal'sk and Manzhouli moved in the opposite direction. In May 1996, it was decided that a small automobile customs point next to the railway would be transferred to the eastern edge of the planned "joint economic zone" for renovations. In November of that same year, Chita Oblast agreed with the Chinese side's unilateral opening of the "zone," which had provisionally been operated only by China (Manzhouli bao Nov. 19, 1996; Zabaikal'skii rabochii Nov. 23, 1996).

The joint statement for finishing demarcation work and the agreement on regional partnership in the border area pushed the move forward. Geniatulin visited Manzhouli on his way back from Beijing to Chita, and affirmed President Yel'tsin's backing of the "joint zone." He added that he would try his best with Vice-Premier Boris Nemtsov (Manzhouli bao Nov. 18, 1997). Russia decided on a program to develop Zabaikal'sk Village in January 1998, and signed an agreement on the simplification of procedures for Russians needing to enter the Chinese side of the "joint zone" in February (Gorizonty 1998: 33-34; Sbornik 1999: 440-441). In March, Nemtsov attended the opening ceremony for the new automobile customs that would be able to handle some 3 million tons of cargo and 3.5 million passengers per year (Manzhouli bao Mar. 4, 1998). Financial problems continue to plague the Russian side of the "joint zone," but Zabaikal'sk planners think that it could be a base with the advantages of railway transportation for the exportation of goods, inviting for-



A scene on Sino-Russian "joint economic zone" (planned) from Zabaikal'sk (Jul., 2000)



Manzhouli customs (Jul., 2000)

eign investments (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Mar. 13, 1997; Aug. 17, 1999). After opening the fence that divided the Russian side from the Chinese side on the "joint zone" over the border, dreams of turning this small village into a Pudong of Shanghai soon emerged.

Another illustration of border cooperation is the pipeline. On November 22, 1997, Chita and Inner Mongolia decided to establish an oil pipeline over the border at a local administrative level. In March 1998, Chita and Manzhouli authorities agreed to set a pipeline route west of the railway with a condition that Russia would design it and that China would construct it (Manzhouli bao Mar. 11, 1998). Moscow and Beijing signed an agreement on the simplification of procedures for border crossings, and construction began in June 1998 (Sbornik 1999: 443-444). When the project is realized, oil could be transported by truck from Chita to the base of Zabaikal'sk, and then it could be passed on through the pipeline to Manzhouli. Quite frequently, expectations for accomplishing the pipeline are expressed (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Oct. 27, 1998; Dec. 22, 1999).

Chita-Inner Mongolian relations provide a few clues for creating a future regional relationship between Russia and China on the border area. As the relations were a key for resolving the Sino-Russian territorial issue in the 1990s, the Zabaikal'sk-Manzhouli solution might be again a test for future border cooperation.

A key for the success seems also to be connected to local residents' attitudes — in other words, their belief that China does not represents a "threat." Chita City was founded in 1653 and later laid out by an exiled Decembrist, and its history spans over three centuries. Even the small Zabaikal'sk Village has confidence in keeping railway communication with China. For example, they were even able to maintain communications during some of the worst periods of the late 1960s. In Chita City, Chinese bazaars are easily seen in many parts of the city, even in the center of the city. The tourist hotel on Babshkin Street, called "Little Manzhouli," is always crowded with Chinese merchants. At the center bazaar of Zabaikal'sk Village in front of a statue of Lenin on a small square in front of the administrative house, Chinese sell their goods together with Russians. The people of Chita are hardly wary of an emerging "China Town."



International bazaar in Chita City (Jul., 2000)

The Chinese there do not have any suspicions of Russian attitudes toward China. In the summer of 1999, a Chinese scholar in Harbin did not join a symposium in Vladivostok for commemorating the birth of the city, while the deputy mayor of Manzhouli, Jin Zhao, willingly went to Chita and joined the ceremony celebrating the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Zabaikal Railway in the summer of 2000 (though it aroused a few "gloomy" memories of the Chinese Eastern Railway on the Chinese side).

In 1991, some 126,000 passengers went through Manzhouli's automobile customs. This figure increased to 339,000 passengers in 1992 and 566,000 passengers in 1993. Irrespective of other customs vis-à-vis Russia, even in 1994 and 1995, passengers had not decreased much: to 441,000 and 370,000 respectively. Since then, they have increased again: some 600,000 in 1997, 939,000 in 2000, and 1.1 million in 2001. Cargo volume transported by truck has also dramatically developed: from 44,000 tons in 1991 to 270,000 tons in 2000. Cargo volume transported by train reached 7.3 million tons in 2001 (ERINA No.46: 64-65). Even Suifenhe's rapid progress in Heilongjiang Province is exceeded here.

On October 16, 2001, a bridge, one kilometer in length over the Argun River, was completed, connecting Olochi and Shiwei (Zabaikal'skii rabochii Oct. 24, 2001). The Sino-Russian border area stretching over Chita and Inner Mongolia is the historic site of the first encounter between these two great cultures, and now seems to serve as a compass for future relations.

* When we discuss Chita-Inner Mongolia relations, it is difficult to overlook the factor of Buriat Mongols in Russia and Mongols in China and Mongolia. This could influence Chita-Inner Mongolia relations. Mongolia is also a factor for the development of Sino-Russian border areas. This point should be discussed in another publication.