

Chapter 4: Amur Domino



Savel'ev (left) and Popov (far-center) Islands under Chinese control
(Aug., 2001)

1 The Jewish Autonomous Oblast

From the Delta to the Sungari River

The Sino-Russian border on the Amur River is about 2,000 kilometers in length, almost half of the entire eastern border from its delta with the Ussuri River up to its origin — divided between the Shilka and the Argun Rivers. Most of the demarcated islands are concentrated on the Amur: the river has 1,680 of the 2,444 border islands — 902 belonging to China and 778 belonging to Russia.

The Amur River has a vast basin in its middle. The Zeia River and the Songhua (Sungari) River join the Amur River at Blagoveshchensk City and Tongjiang City respectively, and other small rivers pour into it at many points. The Amur's average width is more than double the width of the Ussuri. Therefore, trouble deriving from the border invasion which resulted in a number of conflicts over island ownership between Russia and China seemed less serious on the Amur than on the Ussuri. In contrast to those on the Ussuri, Chinese local records of the Amur River mention little about island disputes. In fact, islands on the Amur are much more numerous and larger than the islands on the Ussuri. Records vary according to region: they often depict islands not individually but as a group, and some refer little to the disputed islands. Chinese names of the islands do not necessarily correspond to their subsequent Russian names, and some islands do not even have names.

Nevertheless, this does not mean any issues relating to the island disputes were trivial. Some border talks were extremely tough, especially those talks concerning places where the river had meandered or had multiple river points and a junction with another river. Most military conflicts occurred in the 1960s. As seen in more detail later, Russia occupied most of the Amur islands by force after the defeat of the Japanese Army in 1945, and prohibited Chinese locals from entering and engaging in activities such as fishing and mowing grass around the surrounding area. Skirmishes between the Russian Border Guard and Chinese locals on the river increased from the early 1960s. China and Russia exchanged fire on Gol'dinskii Island (Bachadao) following the Damanskii Incident. It is said that photos of Mao Zedong could be seen and songs for Mao were played on the Chinese bank.

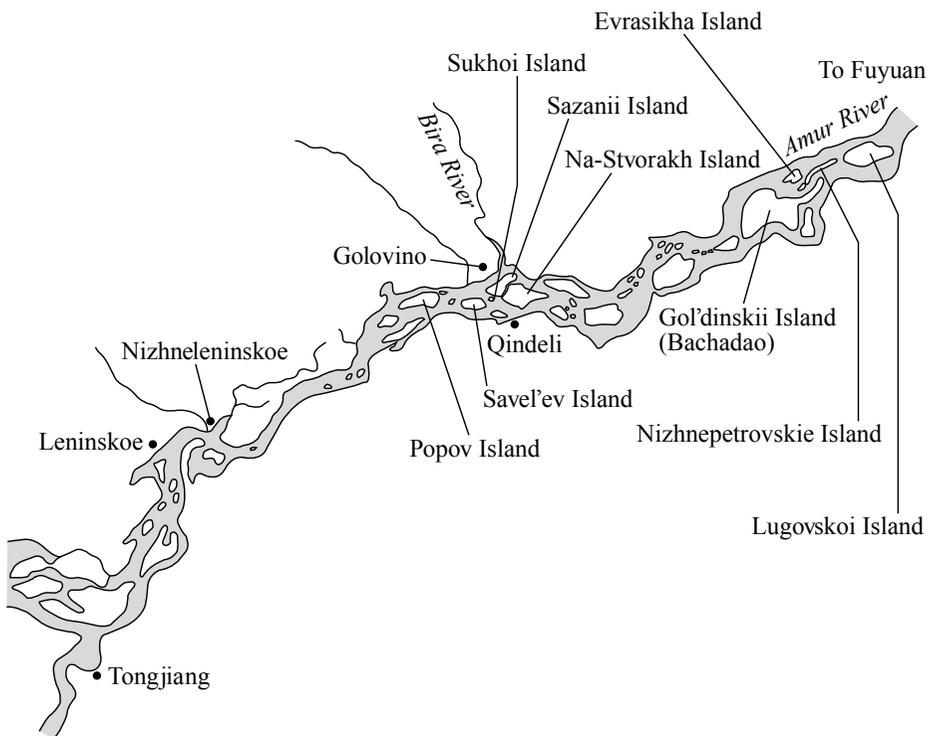
The Amur River varies in appearance. The basin from Fuyuan to Tongjiang, crossed by the Songhua River which terminates at Harbin, has a vast plain across the border; the plain called "Sanjiang Pingyuan" is China's territory, but spreads horizontally to the Russian Jewish Autonomous Oblast. The river is wide and has a slow water flow and consists of numerous groups of islands formed and eroded by the water flow from its smaller branch. The demarcation of these islands next to Tarabarov Island, the western edge of the delta with the Ussuri, was a cause of concern not only in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast but also in Khabarovsk Krai in the mid-1990s, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

The most hotly disputed islands on the 166 kilometer portion of the Amur River, from Tarabarov up to Tongjiang in China through Nizhneleninskoe in Russia, are Gol'dinskii, Lugovskoi, Nizhnepetrovskie, Evrasikha, Vinnyi, Na-stvorakh, Sazanii, Sukhoi, Savel'ev, Popov, Ul'shin, Pereboinyi, Pogranichnyi, Tatarskii and so on. At least eight islands — Lugovskoi, Nizhnepetrovskie, Evrasikha, Na-stvorakh, Sazanii, Sukhoi, Savel'ev, Popov — seem to be controlled de facto by Russia. Russia keeps Na-stvorakh, Sazanii and Sukhoi near the Russian Border Guard tower of Golovino Village on the Bira River south of Birobidzhan City, the capital of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. China acquired Popov and 4 other islands — 3,800 hectares in all — after the demarcation work, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The transfer of these islands shocked the Khabarovsk governor and the people of Khabarovsk, who are wary of any compromise involving the Amur delta with the Ussuri (Interfax Apr. 15, 1996).

Popov, Savel'ev and Other Unknown Disputed Islands

A mystery still remains from the negotiations on these islands. Tongjiang records, published in the early 1980s, only refer to Gol'dinskii, Pogranichnyi-Pereboinyi (Hayu), and Tatarskii (Dongkabaliangzi). Boris Vereshchagin's memoirs relates that the distribution of the eight islands was agreed upon during border negotiations prior to the 1991 agreement. It suggests that there were serious discussions over Evrasikha and Popov, which were particularly problematic (Vereshchagin 1999: 232-233). The discussion seems to have been

Jewish Autonomous Oblast and the Amur River Basin



aroused by China's sudden demand for a few unclaimed islands. Tongjiang records consider Evrasikha and Popov as Russian islands in an attached map. A similar pattern of negotiations was followed over the Ussuri (see page 69). It is, however, difficult to find any signs that islands were exchanged between China and Russia. A redrawn map of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast published in 2001 recognizes not only the eight islands but also all the disputed islands mentioned before as belonging to China now.

For the first time China demanded Popov and Evrasikha during border negotiations of the late 1980s, though it did not do so previously in the 1960s, similar to what Vereshchagin wrote about in a similar case concerning Bol'shoi Island on the Argun River (Vereshchagin 1999: 230-231; see Chapter 6). Therefore, Russia felt a strong revulsion against China's claim on these islands. One reason for Khabarovsk's overreaction to the transfer of the islands in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast is seemingly a geographic one: the islands are close to Tarabarov. In addition, Khabarovsk might be disturbed by a major concession during island talks because the Russian central government decided to hand some islands over that China had not previously demanded. If Popov and others were very important to Sino-Russian border negotiations up to the 1991 agreement, it could be further evaluated that Russia agreed to transfer the islands to China just before Yel'tsin's visit to China in the spring of 1996 (see page 21).

At present, around Popov Island and Savel'ev Island on the Amur River, Chinese fishermen live and work peacefully in and around Qindeli Village. My own research indicates that Chinese entry into Popov was permitted on a provisional basis by the authorities in 2000. Local residents have freely used the island since 2001. Here there are few Russians on the river.

Suibin

At its junction with the Songhua River, the Amur River's width and water flow decrease in half. Here we find Tongjiang and Mingshan port in Luobei Region on China's bank and Amurzet and Ekaterino-Nikol'skoe on Russia's bank. Suibin Region has no noticeable village except Zhongxing, but the Suibin report mentions that 34 groups of islands exist on 84 kilometers of Chinese water of the Amur River. According to this report, the Soviet forces occasionally intervened in the fishing activities of local residents on the river. Particularly, they were hardly permitted to use the islands that were available during the Manchukuo period because the Soviet side controlled the area of water around the islands after the surrender of Japan. Many cases of shooting and capturing of Chinese residents by Russians were recorded, and seventeen islands seem to have been under Russian control at the time. Among them are: a battle-field in the Sino-Russian conflict, Bidzhanskii (Shijialiangzi) Island, consisting of seven islets, 23 square kilometers in all; Orlinyi (Yushutong) Island, 3 square kilometers and 2 kilometers from the Russian bank and 1.3 kilometers from the Chinese bank; and Zhangzhutongdao (Russian name is unknown), only 200 meters from the Chinese bank but stretching to Srednii and other islands now under Chinese control.

The conflict came to a halt on December 23, 1969, the date of the Border Guard meeting between Russia and China. Both sides discussed the border situation on the Amur near Tongjiang. The situation had grown worse since the Damanskii Incident in Zhaoxing Village in Luobei Region, next to Suibin Region. Then, they discussed issues relating to the fishing activities of Chinese locals. The Soviet Border Guard representatives recognized one (Diaosiguitongdao) of the disputed seventeen islands as China's and agreed to allow fishing and other local activities on ten more islands, including Bidzhanskii, Orlinyi, and Zhangzhutongdao. Thereby, the records conclude that eleven islands could be factually controlled by China following the Damanskii Incident, though the Soviets occasionally intervened (Suibin xianzhi: 74-79; 457-464). The new map of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast identifies all disputed islands as belonging to China now.

Luobei

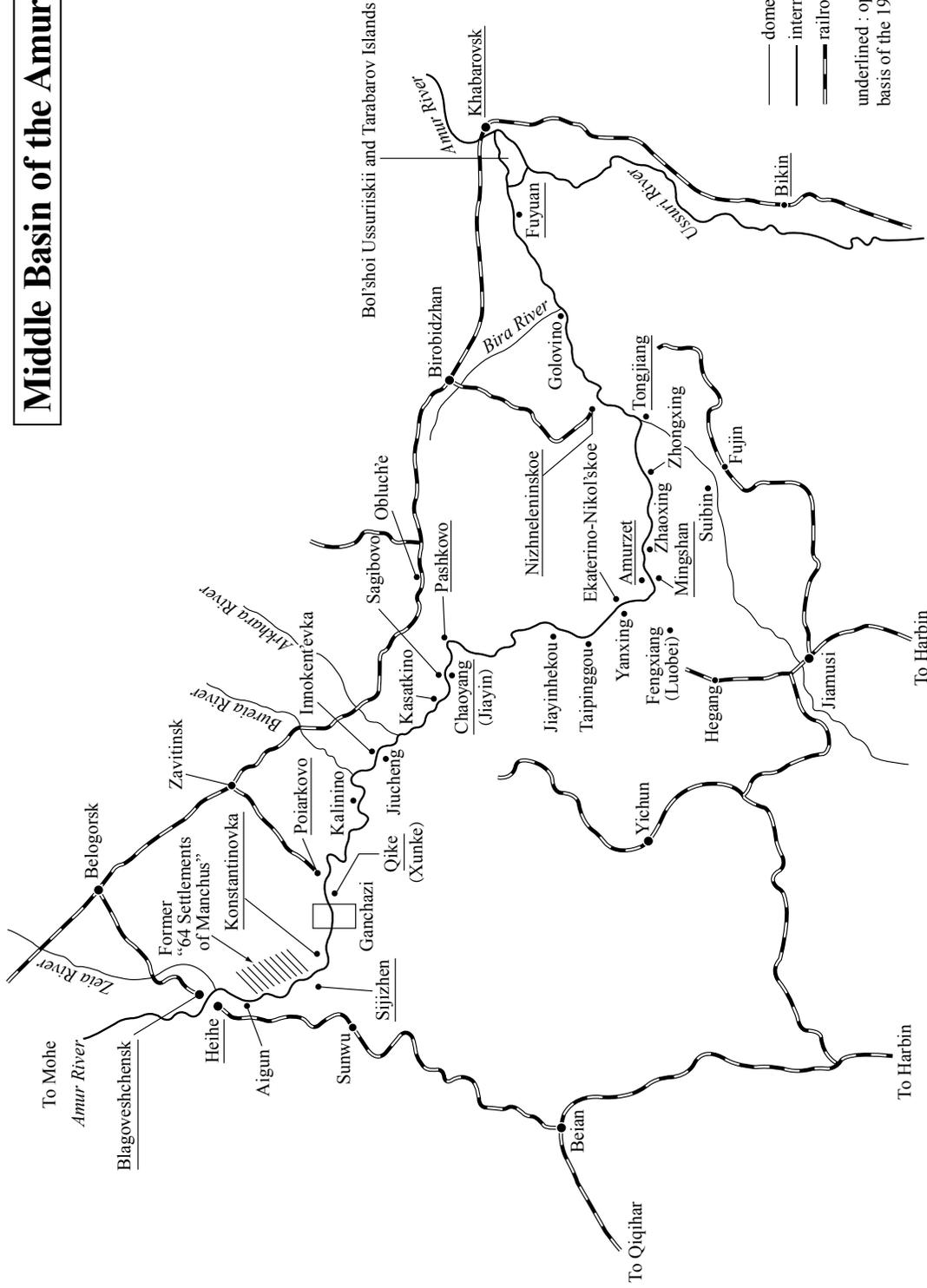
The Amur River runs through Fengxiang City, the center of Luobei Region, toward a mountainous zone. The Amur River is three kilometers in width and narrows to about six hundred meters at a minimum (Luobei xianzhi: 113). Towns and villages in Luobei as well as Zhongxing in Suibin were blockaded by Soviet forces during the Chinese Eastern Railway incidents. After the period of Japanese occupation, they were "liberated" by Soviet forces (Luobei xianzhi: 655-663).

Records in Luobei tell little of the disputed islands in spite of the intensive relations China had with Russia on the 146 kilometer water border. This is because the river in the region is narrow and flows through hills and valleys and seemingly does not form many islands. According to geographic surveys, Luobei has only 13 islands which it can legally claim (Luobei xianzhi: 96-100). But here a seven square kilometer island is the biggest in Luobei, Samarkon (Dajiangtong), and is ten kilometers from Zhaoxing. In August 1963, Soviet forces recognized the importance of this island for its military and strategic value and subsequently tried to expel the Chinese. In Luobei, it is now called the Dajiangtong Incident (Luobei xianzhi: 607).



Mingshan and Amurzet (opposite bank) (May, 2002)

Middle Basin of the Amur River



The Soviets occupied all thirteen islands after the defeat of Japan. The mayor of Luobei criticized the Soviets for their "non-socialist" action in May 1947. Russia barely recognized the rights of Chinese to engage in productive activities on the islands including Samarkon. In 1963, Russia landed on Samarkon but their efforts were quickly repelled by Chinese resistance. Even after the Damanskii Incident, Soviet military ships continued to intervene in the activities of Chinese civil ships on the river. In the 1980s, Russia maintained its claims on Samarkon and Dopyniak (Yanxing), 30 kilometers north of Fengxiang City. The new map of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast recognizes the two islands as China's.

2 Amur Oblast

Jiayin

Only a few small islands can be seen, e.g. Peschanye (Jiayinhe) and Khchin (Yonganshangtao), more or less one square kilometer islands, in the valley. These islands were disputed before, like the others, and are depicted as China's on the new map.

The Russian bank suddenly changes into a plain, going through Pashkovo and into Amur Oblast. Amur Oblast is 360,000 square kilometers but only has a population of a million with Blagoveshchensk as its capital. Up to Blagoveshchensk, a vast plain spreads over Russian territory. The width of the river widens to four kilometers at the most. Many island groups can be seen again in this area.

A Jiayin report mentions 28 island groups on 250 kilometers of river as China's, and Russia's intervention on twelve islands after the retraction of Japanese forces (Jiayin xianzhi: 74-80; 87; 470-474). It also refers to the Soviet invasion by aircraft and ship on Chinese waters. In particular, an emphasis was placed on the aircraft interventions that occurred in 1969 after the Damanskii Incident. Particularly, eleven were concentrated from August 16 to September 1 of that year and most of them were conducted on Drovianoi and Sennoi (Shuanghe) Islands (Jiayin xianzhi: 474-476). The reason for these interventions is unclear, however.

Disputed islands are identified from south to north on the river: Griazninskii (Xinfataozi), Kadachinskii (Taipingtaozi), Aianskii

(Liuguanglitaози), Vinogradnyi (Laochengtoutaozi), Dlinnyi (Jieliehe), Margochinskii and others (Fenshui), Jiuchengyaotandao (Russian name unknown), Tugarich (Putao), Baimaodao (Russian name unknown), Luoguodao (Russian name unknown), Burkhan (Bulahan and Liushuzhentaози) and others. These are now identified as China's on a new Amur map published in 2000.

Ganchazi and Xunke

Xunke Region on the Chinese bank begins on the river near Kalinino Village of Amur Oblast in Russia. As reported in a local report, 32 island groups are claimed as China's, 75 islands over 140 kilometers of river in Xunke (Xunke xianzhi: 81). Among them, 18 islands, on the south side of the river, were reportedly incorporated in Russia's control after 1945: Sereidysh (Sunguan), Kamenushka (Cheluwanzi), Chermushkiny (Menggutun), Krasnye-kusty, Malenskii, Utiug (Gaotanxibeitaozi), Sychevskii (Ganchazi), Beloberezovyi (Gabanhudongtaози), Zubrinyi, Veselyi (Gabanhuxitaozi and others), Konstantinovskii (Wangamuhe), and so on. The report does not give much detail on the individual history and situation of Russia's de facto control. Kamenushka, where Russians had reportedly landed and burned all the grass and trees, could be counted as an island controlled by Russia de facto (Xunke xianzhi: 433-436).

The report pays particular attention to Sychevskii Island (Ganchazidao). This is the famous battlefield of the Ganchazi Incident, where Soviet and Japanese forces exchanged fire on June 19, 1937. On June 30, the Soviet forces, going south around the island, effectively cutting off the channel between the island and the Chinese bank on the river, aggressively attacked the Japanese army. But the Soviet forces retreated after Japan's compensation for a small Russian battery ship sunk by a Japanese counterattack after the then Japanese Ambassador to Russia, Mamoru Shigemitsu, protested the Soviet attack on July 1 (Xunke xianzhi: 458). According to a Japanese source, the Soviet side recognized Manchukuo's de facto control of the island and left the island on July 5, though discussions over compensation were hardly conducted (Gaimusho 1969: 371-373). This meant that the island would remain in Manchukuo's control following the incident.

According to a Xunke report, the Soviets occupied the northern part of the island in 1947, and then expelled all Chinese trying to enter the zone controlled by Russia. One of the reasons for the Soviet occupation seems to have been to keep gold sources concentrated in the area during a "gold rush" that occurred from 1946 to 1948. The Russian Border Guard did not permit any Chinese from entering the island and repeatedly abused the Chinese people trying to extract resources from the island. Tensions over the river were heightened between 1963 and 1968. The island has remained under Chinese control since 1969 (Xunke xianzhi: 108; 434).

According to the new map of the Amur Oblast, most of the disputed islands mentioned above clearly belong to China. It is, however, interesting that a few islands, which China had been demanding, remain under Russian control. However, there are three exceptions: Cheremushkiny Island (Menggutandao), Konstantinovskii Island (some part of which belongs not to Xunke but to Sunwu) — another battlefield of the Ganchazi Incident — and Perekatnyi Island (Huangtuaizidao in Sunwu). The northern part of these groups of islands is now in Russia. These islands, which spread over the river, could not be distributed as a whole to one side or the other, Russia or China. Besides, the water flow seemed to have made the problem more complex. According to an old map made by the Guandong Army in 1939, the Perekatnyi was connected to the Chinese bank and the main stream of the river was much closer to Russia (Chizu Shusei 1991: 43). It is debatable whether these islets can be technically divided in the middle of navigable streams on a river according to Thalweg. China must have resisted recognizing Russia's claims on the northern islands because it had previously called the islands as one group in their Chinese names. A sort of deal based on a "win-win" compromise for dividing these islands on a "fifty-fifty" basis might have been done on the spot.

An island north of Konstantinovskii near the Russian village of Konstantinovka — considered to be only one island of the "Wangamuhe" in Chinese but named independently as "Verkhne-Konstantinovskii" in Russian — was delegated for "joint use" for the Chinese under Russian competence (Amurskaia pravda Jan. 22, 2002). This exchange for Menkeseli (Chapter 6) and Ol'ginskii (next section of

the Chapter) was for Russian use under China's control (Tikhookeanskaia zvezda Dec. 11, 1999). It confirms Chinese ownership of the island.

Heihe and Surroundings

Along the Chinese bank of the river is a spreading plain like the one on the Russian bank from Sunwu Region to Heihe City. When one stands on the Chinese plain, the Russian plain over the river can be seen without any disturbance. From Baoyuan Village on a clear day, a large wheat silo at Poiarkovo port can be seen. The islands in the area are now under Chinese jurisdiction. On the river there are former disputed islands: Tatun, Datongdao (Russian name unknown), Srednii, Bol'shoi, Dolgii, Murav'eva, Kochubei, Strelka and so on, close to Blagoveshchensk and Heihe. Among them, Datongdao had been strongly claimed by China, where the Soviets repeatedly landed since the late 1940s and restricted Chinese locals from any fishing activities (Heihe diquzhi: 784). Russian specialists also depicted Chinese aggressive reaction to Soviet pressure during Sino-Russian negotiations over the Damanskii Incident in June 1970 (Galenovich 2001: 242).

Xunke Region, Sunwu Region and Heihe City, as well as four other regions not facing the Amur River, are now included together in the Heihe district. According to a Heihe district report, 42 groups of China's islands were claimed by Russia, but Chinese activities on 23 of the islands were recognized in February 1970 (Heihe diquzhi: 784). Heihe and Sunwu had 24 disputed islands before (42 islands of the district minus 18 of Xunke Region).

3 The Mystery of the Amur Islands

Up to the Origin of the Amur

The Amur shrinks in half again through Blagoveshchensk. This is because the wider Zeia divides into an inland river. The narrow Amur naturally decreases in the number of islands. Sailing up from Heihe City, however, a number of disputed islands can be seen: Faber, Bol'shoi Sakhalin, Tatarskii, Bol'shoi, Osinovyi, and Sukhotinskii, all now belong to China. Both banks gradually turn into hills and

Upper Basin of the Amur River



valley in appearance. Fifty-five islands on the 377 kilometers of river in Huma (Huma xianzhi: 15-18), 37 on the 171 kilometers in Tahe (Tahe xianzhi: 661-662) and 28 on the 245 kilometers of river were considered as China's respectively in each local report (Mohe xianzhi: 663). In Mohe Region, 14 islands were disputed, but one of the islands was given to China and permission was given for the use of seven islands from the Chinese government during a period from 1970 to 1981. The latter depiction suggests that Sino-Russian talks over local activities were conducted and led, to a certain extent, to agreements during this period (Mohe xianzhi: 663).

In Tahe we should pay particular attention to Ol'ginskii Island (Longzhandao). This island remained a touchy issue until the latter stages of border negotiations. Finally, it was transferred over to China on the condition that Russian locals would have use of Ol'ginskii Island under Chinese jurisdiction. It was finally decided in the autumn of 1997 just before resolving the Khasan problem, as seen in Chapter 1. The new map of Amur Oblast does not adequately cover the border in its northern part, but the island is clearly within Chinese territory. Concerning Huma Region, former disputed islands cannot be identified because of a lack of information. According to some maps, about twenty islands were disputed and most of them are now under Chinese control.

This is a geohistoric overview of the disputed islands on the 2,000 kilometer Amur River as a border between Russia and China. Owing to the fact that the exact number of islands in some Chinese regional reports varies, no precise totals are known. Nevertheless, approximately 139 island groups have been disputed (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of Groups of Islands on the Amur River

	Tongjiang	Suibin	Luobei	Jiayin	Xunke	Sunwu/Heihe	Huma	Tahe	Mohe
Total	46*	34	13	28	32	32*	55	37	28
Disputed	13	17	2*	12	18	24	20*	19	14

*Tongjiang, including islands on the Songhua River. Luobei has only two disputed islands: Dopyniak and Samarkon. Estimated figures on Heihe and Huma.

By the mid-1980s, China had conducted surveys of the Amur, as was done on the Ussuri. The figures may consist of small and numerous islets. "One island" is sometimes factually a group of eight or nine islets, while another consists of one big island. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the sum of the small disputed islets, individually separated from the group. According to descriptions provided in Chinese reports and from maps, a rough estimation of the disputed islets seems to be between 400 and 500. As the total number of islands on the Amur is 1,680, one third of the Amur islands have been disputed at one time or another. This percentage is similar to the Ussuri River. The proportion of the disputed islands under de facto control is unclear, but China had been strongly pressed by Russia on the Amur; Russia had formerly claimed and demanded approximately 139 of the 305 island groups that China had considered its own (see Table 3).

The Truth of the Negotiations Over the Amur

The problems discussed so far are only the tip of the iceberg. Specialists on Sino-Russian relations have produced many conjectures and fantastic explanations concerning the border issue by flashing a strong light on some famous disputed territories such as Khasan, Ussuriisk, Damanskii, and Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii, and by showing how fragments of information are often widened into a misleading story. Even these famous disputed territories have not been adequately explained, as indicated in the previous chapters. Much less is known about episodes on the other islands on the river.

I pointed to the mysterious "exchange" of islands on the Ussuri River between Russia and China in Chapter 3. Another mystery can be found on the Amur River. It is the treatment of Popov and Evrasikha in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast/Tongjiang Region, Cheremushkiny, Konstantinovskii, Perekatnyi in Amur Oblast/Xunke and Sunwu Regions. Talks over these islands have been mostly behind the scenes. We easily suppose even Vereshchagin's interesting memoirs only offers a brief insight into the problems related to the disputed islands during negotiations of the 1991 agreement. It is obvious from the observation of a few slips of the tongue, e.g. references to Datongdao, and my data in Chapter 2 and 3, that all of the disputed areas were discussed during negotiations.

Article 2 of the 1991 agreement gives a short definition of the river border, but ownership of most of the disputed islands was only plausibly agreed at the time, as Vereshchagin openly notes for Popov Island. If this is true, the decision to transfer most of the disputed islands to China was not brought about by the demarcation work conducted in the mid-1990s, but by realizing concrete work on the basis of the details of an unknown agreement on the islands attached to the 1991 agreement. Of course, some revisions of the agreement were decided on during the latter stages of negotiations in the demarcation process, e.g. land in Khasan Region that challenged Sino-Russian relations. Added to this may be the Sheremet'evskii deal in Chapter 3 and the Konstantinovskii or Ol'ginskii deals in Chapter 4. It could hardly be identified by discerning the latter stages of the deal from the basic decision of the agreement. The truth can be found in the archives in Russia and China. When an unpublished map, showing the division of the islands on the border river with red lines, is made available, all of these mysteries are resolved.

The Myth of Ganchazi

It is also interesting to look at the circumstances surrounding the border before the 1960s. As mentioned earlier, the reports in Suibin, Luobei and Xunke unanimously depict Russia's occupation of the islands on the river as simply due to the so-called "liberation" of China from Japan. On the contrary, the Russian side began its control of the disputed islands mainly in the 1930s without providing any persuasive explanation (see the words of Vereshchagin on page 73 in Chapter 3). Parts of China were taken based on the explanations and decisions of the Central Committee of CPSU at the beginning of the 1930s or were taken mainly in the mid-1930s for defensive reasons (Tkachenko 1996: 109-110). For the most part, the explanations are inconsistent, but they do show some consistency in suggesting that the tumultuous 1930s and Manchukuo were reasons enough for Soviet action. Vladimir Miasnikov, a renowned historian of the Sino-Russian border, writes that there were many claims and aggressive invasions of the islands on the border in "Soviet territory" by Manchukuo (Miasnikov 2001: 193-194). Is it advisable to depend too heavily on Russia's assertion?

Ganchazi • Poiarkovo

RUSSIA



CHINA

Here we come back to the Ganchazi Incident of the mid-1930s. Most Russian specialists have kept silent on the incident, which was supposed to be the first attack on the island by Soviet forces. In fact, it is unknown why the Soviet side struck first. The border was then deteriorating: some conflicts occurred on Poludennyi Island opposite Poiarkovo City, 40 kilometers down from Ganchazi on the river. Japan demanded that it be able to navigate the Poiarkovskaia Channel between the island and Poiarkovo City in 1936, but Russia refused and unilaterally blocked it with a defensive barrier. Japan protested (Gaimusho 1969: 385-386) and on May 21, 1937, sent Manchukuo military ships to pass through the channel. Russia criticized Japan's actions and blocked the channel again through force, though Japan reiterated its rights for free navigation (Gaimusho 1969: 374-375). Two weeks later, Russia attacked Ganchazi; if we consider the timing of the incident, it seems to have been a reaction to Japan's attitude towards the Poiarkovskaia Channel. The Russians did not provide any details on the incident and only mentioned Japanese aggression on the border (Galenovich 2001: 23-24). Recent material on Sino-Russian relations published in Moscow show a piece of documentation concerning the Ganchazi Incident, which only notes that Japan attacked Russian military ships around Ganchazi Island (*Russko-kitaiskie otnosheniia v XX veke* 2000: 57). It does not provide any reason for the ships remaining on stand-by and the islands remaining under Japanese control after the battle.

Why did Russia mention little about the border situation of the 1930s? First, it seems Russia did not want to admit openly the fact that some islands, such as Ganchazi, were controlled *de facto* by the opposition. If Chinese local records are true, Russia must have acquired many islands on the river not in the 1930s but just after World War II. In this context, one aim of the Soviet occupation was for security from the Japanese (Manchukuo) threat, but beyond this the occupation of Chinese land was never "justified" even for its own citizens. This aim was further criticized by the Chinese as serving only the self-interest of the Soviets.

With the exception of defense, what interests can be supposed from the occupation of Chinese land? A second reason for hiding the fact behind the border situation at the time seems to be closely

connected with this question. It is a good idea to consider the fact that Imperial Russia invaded China and occupied the Guanyinshan Golden Mountain in Luobei Taipinggou at the end of July 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion (Luobei xianzhi: 655). If Soviet intervention on the islands including Ganchazi were connected to economic interest in gold, China's claim of "imperialism" by the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century must be taken seriously. Russia's accountability and blame for occupation of Chinese land have been overlooked. Compounding this, responsibility and blame were primarily diverted to Japan. Careful and detailed historic research is needed, but some documents suggest that Soviet "liberation" from Japanese control on the border area meant the former Russian "invader" would return.

The Damanskii Myth

Another interesting fact discovered is the similarities in Russia's concessions toward some disputed islands. After Russia had acquired some islands, it recognized them as China's (see the Luobei case on page 97), or permitted Chinese to enter them even if they were considered "disputed" (in the Mohe case on page 105). These Russian concessions were particularly notable such as in Heihe and Suibin after the Damanskii Incident in 1969. Control of Ganchazi was also established by China in 1969.

The Damanskii Incident appears to have been the key to the whole process. To what extent did the fact that China had taken Damanskii by force shock Russia? Despite Russia's military superiority over China, the Russian Army failed to recapture the island. The reason is unclear, but Soviet hesitation to use force against Chinese, the exception being Damanskii Island, was seen in most places along the border (Vereshchagin 1999: 179). The Damanskii Incident was not only a shock to the surrounding area, but was a shock to the whole border.

We find a clue that helps explain the matter in the extraordinary meeting between Aleksei Kosygin and Zhou Enlai at Beijing Airport on September 11, 1969, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Mikhail Kapitsa gave details of the negotiations over the status quo of the disputed island: the Russian side was obliged to permit Chinese locals to engage in activities on the disputed islands. When Kosygin

proposed to keep the status quo on the islands, Zhou asked him if that included Chinese rights for using the islands. Kosygin tried to avoid discussing this issue and answered that it would depend on local talks between the Border Guard of Russia and China. Zhou was persistent in his requests and, at last, Kosygin recognized the rights of Chinese activities on the islands, regardless of their disputes. Moreover, Zhou added that even if Chinese activities were conducted with Russia's permission, it would not mean official recognition by China that these islands belong to Russia (Kapitsa 1996: 87-89).

Local talks concerning Chinese activities on the border river, as mentioned before, were apparently organized on the basis of the agreement between Zhou and Kosygin. This was a breakthrough for China's attempts at regaining the disputed islands gradually, but successfully. Historians should reconsider not only the Damanskii Incident itself but also the impact that followed the incident on further border negotiations between Russia and China.

4 A Two-Thousand Kilometer Belt on the Amur River

After Demarcation

It would be one-sided to place heavy emphasis on border problems of the Amur River and its many islands. Unlike the Ussuri, the Amur basin consists of ten pairs of villages on opposite sides of the river bank, particularly from the junction with the Songhua River. Some twin villages, e.g. Poiarkovo and Baoyuan (Xunke), Novopetrovka and Ganchazi (Xunke), Markovo and Zhangdiyingsi (Heihe), cannot see each other because islands obstruct their view, while the closeness of some pairs can be felt; e.g. Amurzet and Mingshan (Luobei), Ekaterino-Nikol'skoe and Yanxing (Luobei), Sagibovo and Chaoyang (Jiayin), Innokent'evka and Jiucheng (Jiayin), Petropavlovka and Yanjiang (Huma), Kumara and Hutong (Huma), and Dzhalinda and Lianyin (Mohe). The Amur belt's twin villages have a common history on the river. Relations of the famous pairs, in particular Blagoveshchensk and Heihe City, are symbols of the belt.



Hutong and Kumara (opposite bank) (May, 2002)

Even though there were a few conflicts that had already occurred over the disputed islands, local activities and interactions were intensive during a period of "friendship" in the 1950s between Russia and China. Nevertheless, interruptions occurred in the mid-1960s when a number of disputes flared up around the Amur River. In the late 1980s, interactions between the two countries were resumed. As mentioned in Chapter 1, what followed was a "boom on the border." Russia and China signed an agreement for the opening of customs on the river in January 1994: on the Amur River, Tongjiang and Nizhneleninskoe, Mingshan and Amurzet in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Chaoyang and Pashkovo, Qike (Xunke) and Poiarkovo, Sijizhen (Sunwu) and Konstantinovka, Huma and Ushakovo and Lianyin and Dzhalinda in Amur Oblast, as well as Heihe and Blagoveshchensk (Chapter 5) and Fuyuan and Khabarovsk (Chapter 3). These islands are considered, according to the agreement, as international customs for cargo and passengers, which a person belonging to a third country could go through.

This agreement means that every Chinese region in the Amur, with the exception of Tahe, would have its own customs: Tongjiang, Luobei, Jiayin, Xunke, Sunwu, Huma and Mohe. It is interesting that this plan would result in the consideration of new customs at

short distances, e.g. only 100 kilometers between Sunwu and Xunke. This is the result of all the regions along the river under Heilongjiang Province's jurisdiction demanding that their own international port be constructed under the "reform and openness" of the "border boom" in the early 1990s.

However, trade on the Sino-Russian border declined considerably after 1994 (explained in Chapter 5), and the Russian side hardened its position on the opening of gateways to China, owing to an increase in the anti-Chinese feeling prevalent in the Far East. Yin Jianping, an economic specialist on border trade in the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, reported that the customs in Huma and Sunwu had not even been built. Yin suggests that since the supposed cargo for the customs was less than 50,000 tons, the Russian side had just given up on building a counterpart on the opposite side of the bank mainly because of a lack of financial funds.

Now we go up the river and visit the following points mainly based on local Chinese materials and documents. Here are Tongjiang, Luobei, Jiayin, Xunke and Mohe, the five border points already open to Russia. We will come back to Heihe and Suifenhe in Chapter 5.

Sanjiangkou

A port of Tongjiang called "Sanjiangkou" (the mouth of three rivers), the Amur junction with the Songhua River, has a long history. In 1909, beans and wheat were already exported to Russia from Tongjiang. With an increase in population, Tongjiang developed from an inland village into a city, importing salt, oils, horses and furs from Russia. But trade was stopped following the Chinese Eastern Railways incidents in 1929. In 1958, the Chinese government ratified the establishment of a Tongjiang customs; food and commodity imports were organized. Documents from this period report that about 4,500 tons of beans and 130 tons of fish were exported and 2,500 cubic meters of wood and 2,000 tons of steel were imported during a brief period between 1959 and 1961. Foreign trade was estimated at about 72,000 Chinese yuan in 1979, increasing to two million yuan in 1984 under the new policy of "reform and openness" (Tongjiang xianzhi: 239-240).

In 1986, Tongjiang was recognized as an official open city for Russia by the central government. In winter, the city is connected to Leninskoe City by a frozen road on the river, close to Tongjiang over the river and the center of a big region of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. It was founded in 1854 and named after Lenin in 1939 (Gurevich 1997: 57; 191). The Russian side exported bulldozers, agricultural machinery and steel to China while the Chinese side exported clothing and food commodities to Russia. About 55,000 tons of cargo in the winter of 1991 and 75,000 tons in the summer of 1992 passed between these two ports (Hokkaido Shimbun Feb. 2, 1993).

According to the 1994 agreement, the Tongjiang port was equipped as an international customs port for cargo and passengers. The figures from 1986 to 1998 — 800,000 tons of cargo and 110,000 passengers respectively — were smaller than expected (Heilongjiang jingjibao May 20, 1999). Despite Tongjiang's historic and geographic advantages, these figures also stagnated for a time before rising from almost \$49 million dollars in 1998 to \$56 million dollars in 1999, and \$73 million dollars (124,000 tons) in 2000 (Heilongjiang jingjibao Jan. 10, 2001; Yuandong jingmao daobao Jan. 8, 2001). Tongjiang emphasized its slogan of "Big Customs, Big Road, Big Trade" and proposed a number of programs such as the development of a special economic zone with Russia on Hayu Island (Heilongjiang jingjibao Feb. 19, 2000; Jan. 10, 2001). After introducing the "Mishan style," e.g. around-the-clock open regime, Tongjiang hit a record high of 119,600 tons of cargo in a period from January to July 2001. This amount almost matched the total of 2000 (Heilongjiang jingjibao Sept. 5, 2001). Regardless of the intensive interactions with Nizhneleninskoe, the port of Leninskoe City, 120 kilometers away on a branch of the Siberian Railway from Birobidzhan, the center of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Tongjiang has had some difficulties. Running ships from Tongjiang to Harbin on the Songhua River can on occasions be difficult, as the river's water level tends to be lower than in previous years. Fuyuan, a dramatically developing region, has presented a challenge to Tongjiang by cutting off the flow of people from Khabarovsk to Tongjiang, effectively blocking the steady progress of Tongjiang City.

Mingshan and Amurzet

Mingshan, a port in Luobei Region, was founded in 1921 and was first named "Xiaoshan," but was renamed in 1929. This village has a short history. When the center of the region was Fengxiang, twenty kilometers east of Mingshan, Chinese conducted trade privately with Russian merchants from Blagoslovennoe, its twin village on the opposite side of the river during the Qing Dynasty (Luobei xianzhi: 74; 387). Zhaoxing developed its economy by directly exporting beans to Khabarovsk from 1956 to 1960 (Luobei xianzhi: 388). But it has since become obsolete as Mingshan has been used as a meeting point to conduct border negotiations by China and Russia since 1982 (Luobei xianzhi: 74).

However, since the Luobei customs was officially opened in 1993, this port has not received much attention, even by the local newspapers in Heilongjiang Province. The matter changed rapidly only after Hegang City, in Luobei's southern region, established formal relations of cooperation with the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the summer of 1999. Hegang, a big city with over 600,000 residents, not only promoted and encouraged economic relations and friendly interactions with its Russian counterpart but also proposed a blueprint for building a bridge on the Amur River and the establishment of a Sino-Russian special economic zone (Heilongjiang jingjibao Aug. 2, 1999). In 2000, Hegang invested 800,000 Chinese yuan for setting its representative office in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, over five million yuan to make improvements on the Mingshan port and gate way to Hegang, and to organize special tours, which continue to this day, to Amurzet, Mingshan's twin village on the Amur, and to Birobidzhan over three days and Moscow over ten days. With Hegang's support, 7,588 tons of cargo for Russia in a period from January to October of 2001 (a 58 percent increase from the same period of the previous year) and over ten thousand passengers (a 142 percent increase) went through the Mingshan customs (Heilongjiang jingjibao Dec. 13, 2000).

Tongjiang's potential at the western edge of the Sanjiang Plain was higher than Tongjiang's in the point of road transportation within China. Mingshan has excellent access through Luobei's Hegang to Jiamusi, one of the largest cities in Heilongjiang, with a highway.

This is the only place that has a well-arranged road along the river border. In 2001, Mingshan customs increased international cargo up ten times more than the previous year. They have plans to send cargo directly to Khabarovsk from there (Heilongjiang jingjibao Sept. 28, 2001).

Mingshan faces Amurzet and is about 1.2 kilometers away. The city was founded by the Amur Agricultural Association (Amurskoe Zemel'noe Tovarishchestvo) in 1934 and named by combining the three head letters (Gurevich 1997: 191). The closeness between the two ports not only helped the flow of cargo over the river but also the sightseeing business. A secretariat of Luobei Region appealed for the construction of a big park along the river side to attract more tourists from Jiamusi and Harbin (Heilongjiang jingjibao May 21, 2001).

There is one weak point on the Russian side, however. Amurzet itself is a good port, but there are no big cities behind it and access to it is poor. Amurzet is about 120 kilometers from the nearest station on the Siberian Railway and about 245 kilometers from Birobidzhan by road. The authorities of the Oblast seem to prefer the shorter and more accessible route to China. In comparison with Amurzet and Mingshan, Nizhneleninskoe has the advantage of having a more direct road and railway to the capital, Birobidzhan. The Jewish Autonomous Oblast does have plans to develop and use these three routes — the two routes mentioned above plus Pashkovo and Jiayin, as will be discussed later — in the future (Gurevich 1997: 20; 22).

Here is the asymmetry between Russia and China. Nizhneleninskoe's real partner is not Mingshan but Tongjiang, far from other developed cities like Jiamusi. Then, Amurzet - Mingshan and Nizhneleninskoe - Tongjiang are in competition because of geographic reasons. Directors in Amurzet of Oktiabr'skii Region and in Nizhneleninskoe of Leninskii Region announced their hopes for further cooperation with China (Birobidzhanskaia zvezda Nov. 15, 2001; Apr. 9, 2002).

At present, Tongjiang's performance undoubtedly has surpassed Mingshan's because of its long history and because of the geographic advantages of its river junction. Tongjiang is a bit uneasy because of Mingshan's position concerning the development of new infrastructure and the backing of big cities that are in close

proximity. According to my research in June, 2002, the Mingshan port and Luobei City are livelier than Tongjiang. Hegang's initiative provided a good chance for Mingshan's progress: it offered to assist in the construction of a major road in Russian territory and in the construction of a bridge accessible to wheeled vehicles at its own expense (Birobidzhanskaia zvezda Aug. 9, 2001; Jul. 18, 2002). Heihe and Blagoveshchensk did plan to build an international bridge ten years ago, but little progress has been made because of financial problems (the latter is referred to in Chapter 5).

Jiayin, Qike and Poiarkovo

Private trade has been conducted since the Qing Dynasty in Jiayin Region. The Soviet government prohibited any such trade in 1922, and Sino-Russian interaction between villages on the Amur effectively came to a halt in 1929. Direct trade on the river banks was not reestablished until 1985 (Jiayin xianzhi: 349-350). Jiayin customs was established according to the 1994 agreement, but remains in bad condition mainly because of geographic factors. A road from Qike (center of the southwest neighboring region) to Chaoyang (center of Jiayin) is 200 kilometers long, but takes four and half hours by car even in summer. Access from Luobei, 200 kilometers southeast, is mountainous, with its road frozen in winter. Yichun, a railway terminal, is close to Jiayin but is blocked by the Xiaoxingan Mountains. The customs is isolated on the bank, ten kilometers down river from the city with bad access. Except for a few carriers of small cargo of wood and steel, normal passengers can hardly be seen.

Pashkovo, more than 20 kilometers down river, the Russian partner with Jiayin, is on the western edge of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast facing Amur Oblast, though it is 42 kilometers from Obluch'e Station on the Siberian Railway (159 kilometers from Birobidzhan) (Gurevich 1997: 20). This pair has a common geographic weakness with each being at the periphery of an administrative body. News from this area is rarely reported, even by the local newspapers in Russia and China.

Customs in Qike, the center of Xunke Region, was focused at the time on the "border boom" in the early 1990s. A local newspa-

per sometimes reported Xunke's good activities in 1992 just after the newspaper's establishment (Yuandong jingmao daobao Jan. 1; May 18; Jun. 22, 1992; Sept. 20, 1993), but it has made little reference to it since the end of 1993 — its background was a rapid drop of trade volume, which was well over \$21 million in the first half of 1993 but fell to \$4 million in 1994 (Yuandong jingmao daobao Nov. 14, 1993). The trade volume supposedly recovered recently, but it has received sparse attention within Heilongjiang Province.

There is, however, a clue for developing Xunke's ties with Russia. Qike customs has a regular ship for exchanging local residents between Xunke and Poiarkovo, 18 kilometers down the river. Poiarkovo, founded in 1859, is the center of Mikhailovskii Region with over 8,500 residents. A train for cargo and passengers runs four times a week but is usually much slower than trains running on the main line of the Siberian Railway. Poiarkovo, named after a local Russian explorer of the Amur basin as well as Khabarov, seems richer than other small towns in the Amur Oblast, with a military base, schools, factories and other basic commodities for daily life. The port is also well-arranged with a large wheat silo (that could be seen from China) and facilities for direct coal reloading between ship and train. Ships carried over 12,000 tons of cargo to China in 2001. Leaders from the village have an open mind: the Russian Border Guard usually checks visitors at an entry point to the village facing the border, but they are free to come there as they please. As will be mentioned later, permission from the local administration is required for entry into Dzhalinda.

Poiarkovo's weak point is that most of the cargo and passengers near the area go through Heihe and Blagoveshchensk, owing to its close proximity — passengers can reach Blagoveshchensk, the main gate for China in Amur Oblast, in two and a half hours (160 kilometers) by car.

Chinese also like to visit Heihe or Blagoveshchensk more than Qike or Poiarkovo because the latter have fewer bazaars and recreation spots. If their destination is not Poiarkovo, many Chinese prefer to go to Heihe, then to Russia. Nevertheless, Russia and China should develop Qike and Poiarkovo relations not in an economic but a strategic sense. As will be shown in the next chapter, Russian resi-

dents have complex feelings toward the Chinese, therefore the regionally independent pipes between both banks on the river should be multivectorized. It might be true that Qike and Poiarkovo have some economic difficulties owing to their geographic closeness to Heihe and Blagoveshchensk, but the border with its well-arranged infrastructure could be an alternative.

China's North Pole and Albazino

When passing Heihe, the bank of the Chinese border turns suddenly into a rural, unpopulated area. We can reach Huma City from Heihe by car in four hours. The Huma Region is over 14,000 square kilometers and has a population of over 50,000. It takes about five hours by car from Huma City to the neighboring region, Tahe. Huma City is expected to cooperate with Ushakovo, its twin village on the opposite bank, but its geographic position is a kind of "isolated island," which cannot organize cargo and the flow of people on its own initiative. It would be difficult to refute Russia's position that the Heihe route is adequate enough to handle the flow of cargo and people.

The regions of Tahe and Mohe, in the northern part of the Chinese Amur basin are, for the most part, unpopulated, having a vast area of land (about 33,000 square kilometers) for about 200,000 people. A few trains run north through Tahe to Xilinji Station, the center of Mohe Region. The roads on the river side in these regions are more often than not too narrow and uneven to traverse, while the road heading south from Huma is a dirt road. However, this dirt road can be crossed at high speeds. Access to the river bank in Mohe is the worst in the Heilongjiang Province but conversely there can be no place more beautiful in terms of natural scenery on either the Russian or Chinese side of the river. Despite a good portion of Chinese forest in Mohe being lost in the catastrophic fire of 1987, it has remained a place rich in natural beauty.

In addition to the 1994 agreement, a new border point in China was opened in 1998. This is Luoguhe in Mohe Region and Pokrovka in Chita Oblast, near the origin of the Amur River, where the Argun and Shilka join. This point is used on a provisional basis only in winter to promote the importation of Chinese wood from Russia through a frozen road on the river. Luoguhe, with only two hundred residents,

established an ad hoc customs every November, under the leadership of Suifenhe personnel, and it is in operation until spring. Wood imported from Russia amounted to over 30,000 cubic meters in the winter of 1998, 50,000 cubic meters in 1999 and 80,000 cubic meters in 2000; more than four hundred Chinese laborers work as loggers cutting down forests in Russia (Heilongjiang jingjibao Apr. 11, 2001). There are some difficulties transporting such a big labor force; it takes as much as three hours to make the over 100 kilometer commute on the desolate road from Luoguhe to Xilinji. Pokrovka has the same problem: it is only about 150 kilometers to Mogochoa (about 12,000 residents), a base for the forest industry, but access and road conditions are appalling. If cargo were delivered by ship on the Shilka River, it would directly reach a bigger port for customs in the Russian port city of Dzhalinda and the Chinese port city of Lianyin. Therefore, the opening of customs in Luoguhe and Pokrovka seem to be limited only in winter when the river is frozen. Pokrovka, with rich resources of gold, is famous for Anton Chekhov's stopover in 1890 on the way down the Amur River.

From Lianyin, there is a wide dirt road which stretches 80 kilometers south to Changying Station. This trip takes about two hours by car. Besides that, Lianyin has a partner on the Russian bank of the river, Dzhalinda (1,500 residents). Dzhalinda has a good railway and a road stretching 70 kilometers north to Skovorodino, a key station on the Siberian Railway with over 14,000 residents. Both Lianyin and Dzhalinda have good equipment and customs without any serious competition in the surrounding area, though they have yet to be used intensively. In addition, Dzhalinda, founded in 1858, has a historic link with China: Albazino, 16 kilometers down the river, is famous for its Albazin Fortress, which was a Sino-Russian battlefield in the seventeenth century. Dzhalinda and its surrounding areas appear to be among the poorest in Amur Oblast. Dzhalinda could be, however, developed into the best route for exporting wood and steel to China. Lianyin is an isolated port with only a few residents, but it does have Xingan Village, 15 kilometers down the river opposite Albazino on the Russian side of the bank. The area, including Dzhalinda, Albazino, Lianyin and Xingan, should be more closely united. If Japan's plans to construct an



Dzhalinda and Lianyin customs (opposite bank) (Jul., 2002)



A scene on Dzhalinda from Lianyin (May, 2002)

oil pipeline from Angarsk were realized, it could go through this point below Skovorodino. This would definitely change the future of the surrounding areas.

When I visited the area in July 2001, the residents there did not have any strong or uneasy feelings toward the Chinese like the residents in Chita Oblast. A historic episode is also mentioned: Guchengdao, an island Russia recognized as China's in an earlier period, is next to Albazin Fortress in Albazino Village. In 1960, when some Chinese were isolated on the island because of a supposed water disease, Russia quickly saved them and returned them through Dzhalinda to a Chinese village (Mohe xianzhi: 671). Now we can see Chinese fishermen near the island from Albazin Fortress.

There are rumors that an airport will be built soon in Mohe Village on the river bank. It is not an open village for foreigners but it is still an excellent place where we can see wonderful and beautiful rivers similar to the Ussuri around Raohe Village. Mohe Village is well-known for its aurora and White Nights as the most northern village in China. Luoguhe is a lonely but calm villa with potential as a sightseeing destination. You can eat fresh fish and trek to the origin of the Amur, the junction of the Argun and Shilka, by boat (it takes about one and half hours up the river to this point, and about half an hour back down to Luoguhe). A plan to build a bridge over the Amur River is also proceeding in Luoguhe. In September 2001, a specialist group organized under an initiative of Heihe City administration conducted a survey "round trip to the origin of the river," spending over two weeks in a chartered research ship. A trip to Mohe and Luoguhe for viewing the origin of the Amur River should be the highlight of future sightseeing trips in northern Heilongjiang Province.

Let us return to the history of Albazin Fortress. Here is the main battlefield of the first Sino-Russian war during 1683 to 1689. At the time, China and Russia had conducted a war to maintain their own "sphere of influence" on the Amur basin. The Albazin Fortress, which was once used by Khabarov as a base to explore the Amur River, was colonized by Russian Cossacks and founded as a Russian village in the 1680s as a strategic place for supplying Nerchinsk (Yoshida 1974: 42).

Albazin is memorialized as a symbol of Russia's eastward expansion. But after its "six year war" with China, Russia retracted its forces and discarded the fortress in accordance with the Nerchinsk Treaty of 1689. From there to the Argun basin and the vast plains to Mongolia, is the place where the Russians and Chinese first met.



Origin of the Amur River
(the Argun on the left, the Shilka on the right) (May, 2002)