



Title	The Influence of Local Russian Initiatives on Relations with China : Border Demarcation and Regional Partnership
Author(s)	Iwashita, Akihiro
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 19, 1-18
Issue Date	2002
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/39380
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	ASI19_001.pdf



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**THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL¹ RUSSIAN INITIATIVES
ON RELATIONS WITH CHINA: BORDER DEMARCATION
AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

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INTRODUCTION: FOCUSING ON BORDER TERRITORIES

The borders between Russia and China amount to 4300 kilometers even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.² Few specialists would doubt that Russo-Chinese relations have been influenced, to a great extent, by the political and military situation in their border territories. Hiroshi Kimura argues that the key factor in Russo-Chinese relations is the quest for mutual security, in particular the security of their common borders.³ Unfortunately, the issue of Russo-Chinese borders has not been studied in as much depth as it deserves. Even those who are conscious of the significance of this issue have hardly followed the concrete contents of the disputes and the ways in which Russia and China have found compromises.⁴ One of the few attempts to focus on the history of Russo-Chinese border problems was made by the author.⁵

1 In this paper, the adjective “local” means not only subregional (city and raion) but also regional (oblast and krai).

2 The Soviet-Chinese borders amounted to more than 7400 kilometers.

3 Hiroshi Kimura, Shaojun Li and Il-Dong Koh, “‘Frontiers Are the Razor’s Edge’: Russia’s Borders with Its Eastern Neighbors,” in Gilbert Rozman, Mikhail G. Nosov and Koji Watanabe, eds., *Russia and East Asia: The 21st Century Security Environment* (Armonk, 1999), p. 155.

4 A collection edited by Sherman W. Garnett (*Rapprochement or Rivalry? Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia* (Washington D.C., 1999)) only provides a brief overview of the challenges in the Russo-Chinese negotiations to demarcate their eastern disputed territories. In contrast, the migration issue, although it is relatively new, has enjoyed more academic interest. See the following excellent works: M.A. Alexseev, “Chinese Migration in Primorskii Krai: An Assessment of Its Scale, Socioeconomic Impact and Opportunities for Corruption,” National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, Working Papers (1999); Sadayoshi Ohtsu, “Rosia kyokuto heno chugokujin rodoryoku no ryunyu ha kyoika? [Chinese Labor Migration into the Russian Far East, Is It a Menace?],” *Kokusai kyoryoku ronshu* [*Journal of International Cooperation Studies*] (Kobe University) 8:2 (2000), pp. 67-87; Перспективы Дальневосточного региона: китайский фактор. Москва, 1999.

5 Akihiro Iwashita, “Churo ‘senryakuteki patonashippu’ to kokkyo kousho [The Russo-Chinese ‘Strategic Partnership’ and Border Negotiations],” Takayuki Ito and Tadayuki Hayashi, eds., *Posuto reisen jidai no Roshia gaiko* [*Russian Diplomacy after the Cold War*] (Tokyo, 1999), pp. 141-190; Idem, “The Russo-Chinese ‘Strategic Partnership’ and Border

It is widely accepted that the issue of Russo-Chinese borders consists of two factors, i.e. migration and disputed territories.⁶ The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of local initiatives on these factors. I focus on local leaders in four regions in the Russian Far East (RFE) and Eastern Siberia, i.e. Primor'e, Khabarovsk, Amur and Chita.

It is obvious that state leaders alone cannot handle the problems of migration and contested territories, while ignoring local initiatives. We know examples in which local initiatives determined Russia's policies, such as reforms in the system of visa-control and police operations to deport illegal immigrants. Traditional diplomatic approaches with their emphasis on sovereign states need to be revised. Although center-local coordination concerning foreign affairs in Russia has barely been studied, we are able to analyze this process, to an extent, through local sources (oral and printed), which can be accessed more easily than their counterparts in Moscow or Beijing.

I understand local leaders as those who create regional policies and influence local public opinion, such as regional governors, officials of regional administrations, local officers of the military, intelligence, customs, local representatives of the foreign ministry, editors of local newspapers, and local scholars. In this paper I will neither attach importance to the distinction between federal, regional and municipal servants, nor focus on intra-regional differentiation of interests and opinions. I will highlight how regional communities reacted to similar post-communist trans-border environments. Therefore, in certain cases I will not even distinguish local elites from the wider population, relying upon such abstract categories as "Primor'e people" or "Primor'e locals." The first reason for this approach is that in CIS regions (in particular, border regions) leaders of different functions, such as administration, municipal, military, border guards, and customs, usually integrate themselves into a single elite community. Second, what is more important, I argue that Russian regions, at least analytically, can be personified. Vigorously developing Russian regionology tends to argue that in Russia regional identities, determined by common historical and spatial environments, do exist.⁷ Moreover, the post-communist politico-economic regimes have been consolidated predominantly

Negotiations: Then and Now," *Bulletin of the Graduate Schools Yamaguchi Prefecture University* 2 (2001), pp. 1-10.

6 This view is shared by a renowned Chinese specialist, Ni Xiaoquan, who predicts that the unsuccessful management of these problems might possibly cause future conflicts between Russia and China. He presented his view at the Symposium "Security Implications of Economic and Political Developments in the Russian Far East" organized by the National Bureau of Asian Research on May 8, 2000 in Washington D.C.

7 See, for example, Галина Люхтерхандт и др. (ред.). Политика и культура в российской провинции. Москва-С. Петербург, 2001. The contents of this book is summarized in Sergei Ryzhenkov, "The Golden Age of 'Provincial Humanity' and Patterns of Regional Development," Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World* (Sapporo, 2000), pp. 122-142.

region-wide; so have the post communist elites, structured, as a rule, around the regional governors. Last but not least, there are many “regional” newspapers sponsored by regional administrations, which testify to the existence of closed regional informational communities (it is often the case that regional intellectuals know little about the situation of their neighboring regions, even when they are interested in them).

This paper relies upon the concept of “edge,” with the help of which we will categorize the aforementioned four regions. This concept implies not only that these regions are located on the “edge” in the spatial sense, i.e. Russia’s border with China, but also that these regions cannot but be *avant-garde*, facing the new situation created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and by the deepening reformist policies of China. Despite their patriotic and patriarchal political culture, these regions cannot remain risk-evaders (who fear predicaments in terms of security, immigration, and territorial issues), but inevitably become bold profit-seekers, possibly benefitting from growing economic cooperation with China. Moreover, the concept of “edge” implies chronological factors. The westernmost edge (Chita), which has a history of more than three hundred years of Russo-Chinese contacts since the Nerchinsk Treaty, and the easternmost edge (Primor’e), which has only one hundred years of the experience of contacts with China, cannot behave in the same manner, even though they face a similar post-communist trans-border situation.

The decisive turning point of Russo-Chinese relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the completion of the territorial demarcation in November 1997. Therefore, in this paper I will divide the discussion chronologically into the pre- and post November 1997 periods.

The collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and the escalation of China’s “Reform and Openness” policy in 1992 suddenly pushed the issue of Chinese immigration to the fore. Although the Soviet and Chinese governments began to allow non-visa trans-border migration of citizens as early as 1988, at that time both Socialist countries were powerful enough to control the migration process. After 1992, however, a huge number of Chinese traders exploited this non-visa regime to shuttle to the other side of the border and earn money. More than one and half million Russians and Chinese visited their neighboring countries in 1993.⁸ However, the psychological effects of this increase in contacts turned out to be asymmetrical. In view of the demographic imbalance between the Russian Far East (RFE) and the Chinese North East,⁹ we can easily imagine how uneasily the Far East Russians perceived the Chinese influx. Possibly, unhappy memories from the past influenced the Russian part more than the Chinese, especially because Russians were suffering from an identity crisis after the demise of the USSR.

8 Jennifer Anderson, *The Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership* (Adelphi Paper 315, 1997), p. 26.

9 The Chinese North East has a population of more than one hundred five million in contrast to RFE’s approximate seven million.

The local authorities in RFE and Siberia demanded that the Russian government abolish the regime of non-visa entries for Chinese citizens and as a result the Russian government limited the non-visa entries of Chinese to tourist groups (in other words, it abolished the system of individual non-visa entries) in January 1994. Moreover, the local authorities launched an operation called "Foreigner," aimed at deporting "illegal" Chinese residents. By 1995, the local authorities had limited Chinese bazaars to only a couple of special places in the cities in order to restore "decent order." Although the tightening policy against Chinese immigration stabilized to an extent the social and political situation in the border areas, it damaged economic connections between Russian and Chinese border regions: the trade volume, which rose dramatically in 1993-1994, declined quickly to the previous scale of 1992.¹⁰ A number of projects of trans-border economic cooperation, such as the Russian/Chinese/North Korean "economic zone" surrounding the Tiumen' Basin and the "international trade zone" on the territory of Manzhouli City and Zabaikal'sk Village, were shelved. In addition to Russian elites' fear of the Chinese influx, the local authorities could not find sufficient money to build and equip the facilities in these economic zones. However, the restrictive policy towards Chinese immigration and trans-border economic cooperation did not diffuse local Russians' frustration, because the "silent expansion" of Chinese, such as illegal immigration and employment, poaching, and smuggling, continued under any circumstances. The "Chinese expansion" remains a threatening phenomenon for local Russians in the border regions.

It was under the uneasy social situation created by the massive Chinese immigration in 1993 that the Russo-Chinese agreement on the eastern border demarcation was disclosed in newspapers. This agreement was signed by USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev and Chinese President Ziang Zemin on May 16, 1991. According to this agreement, 700 islands and 1500 hectares of land along the Russo-Chinese eastern border, which had been under the Soviet/Russian rule, were to be transferred to China.¹¹ Paradoxically as it seems in hindsight, the Russian Supreme Soviet ratified this agreement in February 1992 with an overwhelming majority. Then the Supreme Soviet set the deadline of the Russo-Chinese border demarcation as "within five years," i.e. by 1997.

The concrete contents of the 1991 Agreement (in particular, how much territory should be passed to China) had not been made known to the public. Therefore, the disclosure of the contents of the agreement created a sensation in RFE and Eastern Siberia. After the armed conflicts between the Soviet Union and China in the late 1960s, it seemed that China's desire to revenge upon its

10 For example, Heilongjiang Province's trade volume with Russia increased from 1992 to 1993 dramatically, from 1.58 to 1.95 billion US dollars, but fell down to 1.53 billion US dollars in 1995.

11 This agreement consists of ten articles; Art. 2 refers to 33 main marked points on the eastern part of the Russo-Chinese border.

territorial loss in the 19th century could only be checked by the Soviet military presence – a condition lost after the demise of the USSR. This is why the local Russians in the border areas became so emotional when the issue of disputed territories was raised. Conscious of the weakness of historical legitimacy over the territories that they ruled, Local Russians felt that their future existence in the Far East was at stake. Local leaders furiously criticized the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for compromising Russia's national interests with the 1991 Agreement. Anti-Chinese hysteria in several locales of RFE developed to such a degree that in 1995 the local people heard and fostered rumors about the start of a Russo-Chinese war in 1996, though the local military authorities repeatedly denied this.

Whilst the opinion of RFE locals about China worsened, the Russian government began to use the “China card” in its foreign policies as a counterbalance to the expanding West. After the pro-West Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, was removed at the beginning of 1996, this tendency was strengthened, with the result that China was now regarded as Russia's “strategic partner.” This attempt was followed by a series of measures to ease tensions in the border areas and also accelerate the demarcation process. On November 9, 1997, Russian President Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang declared in Beijing that the territorial demarcation had been completed on the basis of the 1991 Agreement. Thus, the significance of the territorial issues in Russo-Chinese relations diminished drastically, and RFE and Siberia were released from the source of old and deeply-rooted antagonisms with China. Actually, the four governors of the regions analyzed here (Primor'e, Khabarovsk,¹² Amur, and Chita) took part in this Russo-Chinese summit and signed documents aimed at developing cooperation between Russian and Chinese border regions. In other words, trans-border regional cooperation was resumed in order to confirm the Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership.” From then on, the slogan of “regional” strategic partnership began to be raised by RFE and Eastern Siberian local leaders.¹³

12 The Jewish Autonomous Oblast (JAO) also shares borders with China, and some islands of the Amur River under JAO's jurisdiction were amongst the disputed territories between Russia and China. Unfortunately, we could not include JAO in this paper due to the lack of access to the regional newspaper «Биробиджанская звезда». In my view, however, it does not damage the purpose of this paper since JAO is a very small region (its population was only about 210,000 in 1996, with 84,000 in its capital Birobidzhan; and its territory, 36,000 square kilometers, is only one-twentieth of Khabarovsk Krai or one-tenth of Amur Oblast). In addition, JAO's political life appears to be heavily influenced by Khabarovsk.

13 «Утро России», 29 ноября 1997. For more details on the demarcation process, see my “The Russo-Chinese ‘Strategic Partnership’,”; also Iwashita, *Cong yuandong Eluosi kan Zhongguo: 1992-1996* [*The Russian Far East's Views on China, 1992-1996*], Occasional Papers on Changes in the Slavic-Eurasian World 53 (Sapporo, 1998); Iwashita, “Cong yuandong Eluosi kan Zhongguo: 1996-1997 [*The Russian Far East's Views on China, 1996-1997*],” *Yamaguchi kenritsu daigaku kokusai bunka gakubu kiyo* [*Bulletin of the Faculty of International Studies, Yamaguchi Prefecture University*] 5 (1999).

1. LOCAL INITIATIVES BEFORE THE TERRITORIAL DEMARCATION

The Last Edge before the Sea: Primor'e

Primor'e is the region among the four, in which local people's reaction to both the 1991 Agreement and "Chinese expansion" was most aggressive. In 1995, the then governor, Evgenii Nazdratenko, actively organized anti-Chinese campaigns in an effort to disrupt the demarcation process with the help of local newspapers such as "Vladivostok," exploiting as well his parliamentary seat in the Russian Federal Council. It was due to Nazdratenko's campaigns that Primor'e's disputed territories, which were to be passed to China after the demarcation (about 300 hectares in Khasan, about 900 hectares in Ussuriisk, and about 300 hectares near Lake Khanka), became famous worldwide. Moreover, Nazdratenko tried to persuade President Yeltsin to reconsider the 1991 Agreement and accused the Russian foreign ministry of "one-man diplomacy," whilst cautiously avoiding blunt accusations addressed to China.

The dispute around Khasan near the Tiumen' River became most heated. Primor'e leaders argued that if Khasan was passed to China, the Chinese would surely build a river port to gain access to the Japanese Sea, since the 1991 Agreement gave Chinese ships the right of free navigation down to the Sea of Japan through Russian territorial waters along the Russo-Korean border of the Tiumen' River. According to their view, Chinese access to the Japanese Sea would damage not only local but also Russian national interests. Major General Valerii Rozov, the chief of the Russian team for finishing the demarcation of the eastern part of the Russo-Chinese border, resigned from the demarcation committee in April 1996, declaring his disagreement with this concession to China. Before long, Rozov joined the Primor'e elites' camp and even became an adviser to Nazdratenko. At that time, most Primor'e leaders appeared to support Nazdratenko's opposition to the territorial demarcation.¹⁴

It is noteworthy that Nazdratenko advocated the need to promote economic cooperation with China even during the pre-1997 period, but this was only lip service. The project for the development of Khasan and its surrounding territories, which had been supported by the United Nations and Northeast Asian countries, was practically shelved, since the construction of a Russo-Chinese international railway between Hunchun and Kraskino was frozen and the communication and transportation infrastructures in this area, including Zurbino and Pos'et, were in great need of improvement.¹⁵

14 An exception was Viktor Larin, director of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East, the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who criticized Nazdratenko's initiative as a "populist act." Pro-governor newspapers in Primor'e accused Larin of his "pro-Chinese" position. See: «Завтра России из Владивостока», 7 мая 1999.

15 Akihiro Iwashita, "Tomanko no 'yume' no kanata: taijisuru Chugoku to Roshia [The Reality of the Chinese Dream for Tiumen' River Development: The Eastern Border in Sino-Russian Relations]," *Yamaguchi kenritsu daigaku kokusai bunka gakubu kiyo* 6 (2000), pp. 109-113.

The extraordinary, negative impact of Chinese immigration on Primor'e's public opinion is shown by the fact that passport control and customs in this region were and continue to be more strict than in other RFE regions.¹⁶

Why was the attitude of the Primor'e elite and population towards China before 1997 so antagonistic? An overview of the region's history and geography will help us to understand the reasons. First, Primor'e was integrated into the Russian Empire later than the other RFE regions. Therefore, while the local Russians are not convinced of their own legitimacy to rule the territory, the Chinese have potential territorial claims. Second, about half of Primor'e's borders with China run on land or along two small rivers, Sungacha and Granitnaia, while the other RFE regions are separated from China by large rivers. Therefore, Primor'e leaders cannot but be more watchful against Chinese illegal immigration. Third, Primor'e is located between China and the Sea of Japan. This implies that Primor'e is a blockade against China's access to the sea on the one hand, and on the other, the Primor'e population has no retreat in case of China's advance to the sea. In contrast, other RFE and Siberian regions have vast hinterlands beyond the reach of China.

Last but not least, Primor'e is the last edge of Russia's eastern stretch and, therefore, has experienced a number of serious military conflicts with not only China but also Japan and Korea. These reasons explain why the Primor'e people are psychologically more attached to the border issues than other regional populations. Damanskii Island of the Ussuri River, on which the Soviet-Chinese military conflicts in the 1960s culminated and which symbolizes the nadir of their relations, belonged to Primor'e. The Soviet army battled with the Japanese army in Khasan in 1938, when the present Russo-Chinese border was the Soviet-Japanese border. Having a number of tombs and monuments of Soviet soldiers who fought and died in this battle in the territory, Khasan has done much to commemorate the heroic defense of the fatherland. Remarkably, one reason which disturbed the Russo-Chinese territorial demarcation around Khasan was that these soldiers' tombs would be passed to China, if the 1991 Agreement was realized.

Borders in the "Middle": Khabarovsk and Amur

Both Khabarovsk and Amur are separated from China mainly by rivers. This characteristic is salient in regard to Amur Oblast, whereas Khabarovsk shares border with China only near the place where the Amur and Ussuri Rivers run together. Since one of the most difficult problems in Soviet-Chinese border negotiation before the 1991 Agreement was how to distribute river islands to the both countries,¹⁷ one might suppose that Amur Oblast was more antagonistic to China than Khabarovsk. This was not the case, though: Khabarovsk was only second to Primor'e in its opposition to the territorial conces-

16 See: Ларин В.Л. Китай и Дальний Восток России. Владивосток, 1998. С. 77-78, 159-162.

17 Верещагин Б.Н. В старом и новом Китае: из воспоминаний дипломата. Москва, 1999. С. 218-251.

sion to China. This can be attributed to the location of the two large islands in dispute, Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov, which split the Amur River into larger and smaller channels at a place extremely close to Khabarovsk City,¹⁸ the "capital" of RFE. Most of Khabarovsk's local elites, in particular military, considered these islands of strategic importance since they fenced off Khabarovsk from China. If the border was drawn, relying upon the "main channel principle" prevalent in international law, the two islands would have passed to China. This is why the Soviet Union insisted on the legal exceptionality of the two islands in its negotiations with China during the late 1980s, while strengthening its *de facto* control of these islands.¹⁹ Because China did not agree with this Soviet position, the 1991 Agreement did not determine the future status of the two islands and left the issue to further bilateral negotiations, which were to be based on the principles of "justice and rationality."²⁰

On the other hand, the 1991 Agreement prescribed the principle of free navigation for Chinese ships (including military ones) in the main channel near Khabarovsk City. Unsurprisingly, Viktor Ishaev, Khabarovsk governor, criticized this principle and lobbied the government to introduce a system that would oblige Chinese ships to notify the Russian authorities of their sailing routes in advance.²¹ Khabarovsk leaders supported Governor Ishaev's initiative.

The political situation in Khabarovsk worsened when bilateral negotiations about the two disputed islands resumed in 1993. It was rumored that the then Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev suggested to divide these islands with China or rule them jointly with China²² though it is difficult to confirm the existence of such an conciliatory plan within diplomatic circles. Khabarovsk citizens were influenced by the rising campaign against the 1991 Agreement in neighboring Primor'e, and were offended by the news that several islands in JAO, located close to the disputed Bol'shoi Ussuriisk and Tarabarov, had been passed to China. Prudent as ever, Governor Ishaev chose an approach different from Nazdratenko's to secure regional interests. Instead of populist campaigns, Ishaev used bureaucratic channels to dissuade Moscow from the concession to China. Ishaev's cautious policy provided Moscow with a chance to "divide and rule" Primor'e and Khabarovsk. In April 1996, Yeltsin demonstratively landed in Khabarovsk, but not Vladivostok, on his way to China and signed the power-sharing treaty with Khabarovsk Krai. Moreover, Yeltsin declared that Russia would not give up Bol'shoi Ussuriisk and Tarabarov.²³

Despite the contrast in the handling of the territorial issue, the Khabarovsk regional administration barely differed from its Primor'e counterpart in its atti-

18 This is also the place where the Amur and Ussuri rivers meet.

19 *Верецагин*. В старом и новом Китае. С. 218-251.

20 Сборник российско-китайских договоров 1949-1999. Москва, 1999. С. 117, 124.

21 Там же. С. 278-280.

22 «Независимая газета», 28 января 1994.

23 «Приамурские ведомости», 26 апреля 1996.

tude towards Chinese immigration. The operation “Foreigner” to deport illegal Chinese immigrants was conducted in Khabarovsk as well. As in Vladivostok, the place for the Chinese bazaar was limited in Khabarovsk City. However, as was the case with the territorial dispute, Khabarovsk elites did not try to popularize this issue. Local newspapers almost dismissed the problem of illegal Chinese immigration.²⁴ Apparently, Khabarovsk citizens cared about Chinese immigration less than their neighbors (Vladivostok citizens) probably because Khabarovsk Krai shares with China only a short border with a couple of entry points. This is why the local elites concentrated on territorial problems after recovering “decent order” in Khabarovsk City and establishing strict migration control.

In contrast to Khabarovsk Krai, territorial problems between Amur Oblast and China were insignificant. Although Amur experienced certain tensions in regard to Ol’ginskii and other small islands,²⁵ in this region the territorial issue was not politicized even during the pre-1997 period. This contrasts sharply with the cases of Primor’e and Khabarovsk. Economic concerns, which made Amur elites inevitably amicable to China, continued to be preponderant.²⁶ Blagoveshchensk, Amur’s capital city, faces a growing Chinese city, Heihe, across the Amur River. Even after the decline of Russo-Chinese trans-border trade in 1994 Amur did not have other foreign partners, except for China, while Primor’e and Khabarovsk can count upon Japan, South Korea, and other Pacific Rim countries. Blagoveshchensk is remote from the Siberian Railway and thus exclusively depends on the influx of Chinese goods and labor force. Amur’s indifferent attitude towards territorial issues remained constant despite the frequent reshufflings of governors (Vladimir D’iachenko, Vladimir Polevanov, Iurii Lishako, and Anatolii Belonogov), and irrespective of their political affinities, be they communist or reformist.

In contrast to their calm attitude toward the territorial issue, Amur elites become uncompromising when the problem of Chinese immigration is discussed. Amur Oblast has the longest common border with China, but on the other hand, the smallest population among the four regions analyzed here. Blagoveshchensk citizens, who are suffering a serious economic depression, cannot but witness the rapid development of Heihe on the other side of the river day and night. Actually, the Chinese attitude towards Amur Oblast is ambivalent. It is symbolic that two monuments were built in Heihe almost

24 An exceptional story emphasized the importance of the Chinese labor force in construction and agriculture. See: «Тихоокеанская звезда», 1 июня 1995; «Приамурская ведомости», 23 июня 1995.

25 Interviews with Vladimir Landyrev, Head of Department, International and external economic relations committee, The Amur oblast administration, 28 August 1997, Blagoveshchensk.

26 Akihiro Iwashita, “Russo-Chinese Relations in the Post-Cold War Period,” Tetsuo Mochizuki, ed., *Socio-Cultural Dimensions of the Changes in the Slavic-Eurasian World* (Sapporo, 1997), pp. 197-235 (here, pp. 204-206).

simultaneously: the “monument of gratitude” to Soviet veteran soldiers, who fought together with Chinese to liberate China from Japanese militarism, and the “monument of national humiliation” dedicated to the Aigun Treaty of 1858. It was this treaty that forced China to give up the northern side of the Amur river, including the territory in which Blagoveshchensk is located, to Russia. The armed conflict between Russia and China caused by the Boxers’ Rebellion in 1900 remains fresh in the memory of the Chinese people. This conflict resulted in the massacre of thousands of Chinese people in Blagoveshchensk, although these people lived in Russia legally according to the Aigun Treaty.²⁷

In contrast to the strange indifference of the Khabarovsk press to Chinese immigration, in Blagoveshchensk local newspapers have repeatedly requested that Chinese immigration be controlled more strictly and that the place for Chinese bazaars be limited. Trans-border migration is allowed mainly through Blagoveshchensk City, and other riverbanks are strictly guarded. In March 1995, General Aleksandr Gol’bakh, who was in charge of border guards in Amur and Khabarovsk as parts of the Far East Military District, said that the Chinese massive immigration to Russia was tacitly organized by the Chinese government.²⁸

The First Edge: Chita

Chita Oblast appears to differ significantly from the other three regions analyzed here. Incorporated into the Russian Empire as a result of the Nerchinsk Treaty of 1689, Chita did not share history with the RFE regions. In addition, China admits the legitimacy of the Nerchinsk Treaty, while the same treaty has been regarded by many Russians as a compromise forced by the Chinese military preponderance in the 17th century. Therefore, in sharp contrast with the RFE regions, China does not have even potential territorial pretensions toward Chita, while the Chita elite and population, convinced of the legitimacy of their territorial rule, do not need to fear the alleged Chinese expansion.

It is true that Chita also had disputed territories. In particular, several islands in the rise of the Argun River became the focus of international politics at the beginning of the 20th century. The Qiqihar Agreement of 1911 between Russia and China under the Ching Dynasty admitted that eighteen islands belonged to Russia though the river channel had by then changed to China’s advantage.²⁹ One of these islands, named Bol’shoi and located in Abagaitu where the Hailar and Hulun Rivers run together into the Argun River, became famous because Bol’shoi turned out to be the most heated topic in the Soviet-Chinese border negotiations in the late 1980s; therefore its legal status could not be determined by the 1991 Agreement, similarly to the two islands near

27 See, George A. Lensen, *The Russo-Chinese War* (Tallahassee: FL, 1967).

28 «Московские новости», 19-26 февраля 1995. №13.

29 *Ткаченко Б.И.* Восточная граница между Россией и Китаем в договорах и соглашениях XVII-XX веков. Владивосток, 1998. С. 134-135.

Khabarovsk.³⁰ Another famous disputed territory, located close to Bol'shoi, is a sort of sandbank, rather than island, of the Argun River in Menkeseli, which was to be under China's jurisdiction by the 1991 Agreement according to the "main channel principle." Thus we find a divergence in the legal status of disputed territories between 1991 and 1997: the status of Bol'shoi and the two islands near Khabarovsk was not determined in 1991, while Menkeseli and Khasan were to be passed to China.

What was symptomatic was not this diversification but the fact that the Chita's elite did not dramatize either of the two types of solutions. In local sources we find almost no references to Bol'shoi and very few references to Menkeseli. As for the latter, a discussion occurred simply because villagers living near Menkeseli used the place as a pasturage for their livestock. This complaint was resolved quickly when the Chita regional administration and the Zabaikal'sk Military District jointly proposed a compromise decision: Menkeseli would be passed to China but the Russian villagers would be allowed to use Menkeseli as their pasturage. Thus, the so-called "joint use" option was proposed.

Noticeably, Chita's realistic initiatives have always been combined with its economic concern. As early as 1991-93, when the eastern parts of the Russo-Chinese border were being demarcated, the Chita regional administration and the Inner Mongolian government of China worked out a project of a joint economic zone at the point where this border and the former "East Chinese Railway" crossed, although this project would soon be shelved mainly for economic reasons.³¹

Chita's attitude towards Chinese immigration also differed significantly from those of the other regions analyzed here. Chita's people, as a rule, do not feel a threat from China, although many Chinese shuttles, full of traders, are coming across the river. Although police operations against illegal Chinese residents were conducted in the region, these operations were aimed at restoring the calm daily lives of the population: there was hardly a pseudo-geopolitical intention to interrupt the alleged "Chinese expansion," in contrast to Vladivostok.³² There are many Chinese bazaars in the center of Chita City. Apparently, the administrative control over these bazaars is looser than in the other

30 *Верещагин*. В старом и новом Китае. С. 223-224.

31 The Russo-Chinese border demarcation began from its eastern extreme. In 1993, the demarcation was completed in regard to the land border, which stretches about 90 kilometers between Tarbagan-Dakh (where Russia, China, and Mongolia meets) and Abagaitu close to Bol'shoi Island (where the Russo-Chinese river border starts). This land border crosses the "East Chinese Railway" at the point between Manzhouli City and Zabaikal'sk Village. As for this abortive joint economic zone, see, Akihiro Iwashita, "Churo kokkyo zero chitai: Chita to Uchi-Mongoru [The Initialization of Russo-Chinese Border Relations: The Russian Chita Region and Chinese Inner Mongolia]," *Yamaguchi kenritsu daigaku kokusai bunka gakubu kiyō* 7 (2001).

32 «Забайкальский рабочий», 8 апреля 1995; 27 мая 1995; 25 июня 1996; 28 мая 1998.

regions analyzed here. It is very rare that Chita Governor Ravil Geniatulin and his aids refer to the Chinese presence in their region, and if they mention it at all, it is exclusively in the context of the immigration issue, and neither as a territorial or security problem.³³

Do Local Initiatives Matter?

We observed a diversification among the four regions analyzed here: the aggressive, outspoken and populist anti-China attitude of the “Last Edge,” i.e. Primor’e; the calm and pro-China Chita, the “First Edge,” which was restrained in both territorial and immigration issues; and the “Middle,” Khabarovsk and Amur, whose attitudes towards China lay between the two extremes. Among the middle regions, Amur was relatively modest concerning the territorial issue, but as aggressive as Primor’e regarding Chinese immigration. In contrast, Khabarovsk is moderate in regard to Chinese immigration, but aggressive in territorial disputes. The historical and geographical conditions, as well as the strength or weakness of their economic ties with China, have basically created the diversification among the regions.

It was not by chance that Chita produced the Menkeseli Model, or the joint use option, which had colossal significance in the last stage of the territorial demarcation. The demarcation work was in a critical situation at the beginning of 1997: only 2500 of 4200 kilometers of the Russo-Chinese border had been determined. Even in April 1997, when the deadline for completing the demarcation, set by the Russian Supreme Soviet five years before, was approaching, the demarcated border amounted to only 3000 kilometers.³⁴ If the Menkeseli Model had not accelerated the demarcation process, the deadline for the realization of the 1991 Agreement would have been violated and a dangerous legal vacuum in Russo-Chinese relations would have emerged. It is not difficult to imagine the result, if the anti-Chinese model proposed by Primor’e had prevailed.

The triangular relations between Moscow, Beijing and Vladivostok remind us of quintessentially international relations: Moscow needed to negotiate not only with China but also with Primor’e leaders, patiently exploiting “divide and rule” tactics and PR technology to isolate Nazdratenko and his clan from other RFE elites. In their turn, Primor’e leaders eventually agreed to compromise with China and Moscow. They gave up the 900 hectares in Ussuriisk and began to consider China’s claim over the Khasan territory. The solution concerning Khasan was antipodal to zero-sum approaches. China received about

33 «Забайкальский рабочий», 22 декабря 1999; Interview with Oleg Kos’ianenko, Head of the committee of external economic relations, Chita City Hall, 25 July 2000, Chita City.

34 The status of Ol’ginskii and other isles in the Amur Region, as well as small islands along the Ussuri River within 200 kilometers south of Khabarovsk, remained undetermined. *Ивасита А.* Москва - Пекин: “стратегическое партнерство” и пограничные переговоры // *Мировая экономика и международные отношения.* 2000. №11. С. 95.

half of the disputed territory but gave up on building a river port in the near future. Russia continues to rule the other half of Khasan, where the Russian soldiers were buried. On November 9, 1997, in Beijing Russian President Yel'tsin declared the successful completion of the demarcation of the Russo-Chinese eastern borders and celebrated this "historical achievement" with Chinese President Ziang Zemin.³⁵

2. LOCAL INITIATIVES AFTER THE TERRITORIAL DEMARCATION: A NEW DIVERSIFICATION

The Beijing Summit in 1997 opened a new stage in Russo-Chinese relations in general and of local initiatives in particular. On November 10, Russian and Chinese deputy prime ministers, Boris Nemtsov and Li Lantsin, signed an agreement to promote cooperation between Russian and Chinese border regions.³⁶ As mentioned earlier, the four governors of the regions analyzed here participated in this summit, and before long they came to advocate the "strategic partnership" at the regional level. After the completion of the demarcation, Russian border regions focused on the remaining border issues (which concern mainly Khabarovsk), continuing immigration, and economic cooperation. Among them, local leaders' quest for economic gains became the driving force for trans-border regional cooperation, although the four regions responded to this economic drive in different ways.

The Stagnating "Middle"

The strange stagnation of the middle regions' initiatives after 1997 was typically exemplified by Khabarovsk. It is true that, in 1998, Governor Ishaev made public the concept of a "Chinese version [*Kitaiskii variant*]" in his academic book focused on the Far East economy. Although this book became the basis of his future doctoral dissertation, the concept was a result of a collective elaboration over which Ishaev had presided personally.³⁷ The core of this new concept was to promote the legal presence and employment of Chinese in order to exploit their intellectual resources and labor power to develop the Khabarovsk economy. To the disappointment of his Chinese colleagues, before long Ishaev abandoned the idea of a "Chinese version" and began to emphasize the danger of "Chinese expansion" again.³⁸

Khabarovsk is the only region that continues to articulate its territorial claims to China in regard to Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov, which were

35 *Ивасита*. Москва - Пекин. С. 95-97.

36 Сборник российско-китайских договоров. С.417-419.

37 *Ишаев В.И. и Минакир П.А.* Дальний Восток России: реальности и возможности экономического развития. Хабаровск, 1998. С. 127-130.

38 *Ишаев В.И.* Дальний Восток России: долговременные перспективы сотрудничества в Северо-Восточной Азии. Хабаровск, 2000. С. 29-30; «Тихоокеанская звезда», 9 июля 1999; 14 сентября 1999.

excluded from the 1991 Agreement and the status of which, consequently, was not determined in 1997. Moreover, if the Menkeseli Model softened even Primor'e's attitude and facilitated the solution of the territorial dispute around Khasan, this model only made Khabarovsk leaders more cautious against "Chinese expansion." If the Menkeseli model is adopted for the two islands, Russia's "victory" in regard to the legal status of the islands should be compensated by allowing the "joint use" of the islands by Chinese. This solution is absolutely unacceptable to Khabarovsk leaders, since it means nothing but the latest stage of the Chinese creeping towards Khabarovsk.³⁹

Khabarovsk leaders suspect that China is dissatisfied with the possible "joint use" solution and trying to reclaim possession of the sandbanks in the channel on the Chinese side of the river for the eventual purpose of claiming Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov. On the other hand, China rejected Russia's proposal for joint construction work to widen the channel on the Chinese side of the river and simultaneously protect the Chinese riverbanks. A number of Russian geographers predict that the future natural erosion of the riverbanks will benefit China's territorial claims.⁴⁰ This means that the longer the status of Bol'shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov is suspended, the more benefit China will gain in the future territorial dispute.

As was the case in the pre-1997 period, the main concern for Amur leaders is Chinese immigration, and not territorial problems.⁴¹ By the same token, Amur leaders continue to be strongly interested in economic cooperation with China, evading the politicization of Russo-Chinese disputes. However, the issue of immigration may possibly turn into a serious stumbling block, when this issue is combined with the present asymmetrical economic relations between Russia and China. The tight control over Chinese immigration in Amur Oblast was not relaxed even after 1997. Chinese merchants, therefore, hire Russians as contractors in charge of shuttling trade, since it is much easier for Russians to cross the river to buy goods wholesale in the special economic zone in Heihe than for Chinese to cross the river to sell goods to Russian consumers (China's immigration control is more loose than Russia's). Suffering from poverty, many Russians serve the "rich" Chinese merchants, who already own respectable residents in Blagoveshchensk,⁴² and this situation imprints on the Russians a

39 The hysteric atmosphere in Khabarovsk caused by the disputes around the two islands immediately before the completion of the demarcation was reported by «Амурская правда», 2 июля 1997.

40 «Тихоокеанская звезда», 25 июля 1998; 10 октября 1998; 19 февраля 1999; «Приамурские ведомости», 22 июля 1998; 2 марта 1999; Перспективы Дальневосточного региона: китайский фактор. С. 61-66, 69-77.

41 «Амурская правда», 5 августа 1998; 25 августа 1998.

42 «Kyokuto koekino kawa Amur [Amur – a River for Trade in the Far East],” NHK documentary program, 23 November 1997; «Амурская правда», 23 марта 2000; 12 апреля 2000. Even a new local jargon emerged – “bricks” («кирпич») for those who serve Chinese merchants, in contrast to the previous, independent “shuttle traders” («челнок»).

sense of inferiority. Thus there is a real danger that the historical hatred mentioned earlier may be reproduced by the present glaring gap of wealth between the Chinese and Russians. Perhaps, this is why Amur leaders cannot but be watchful against “Chinese expansion.” On the other hand, however, the “Amur path” to regional prosperity cannot dispense with Chinese capital and human resources. This is the dilemma of the Amur initiatives.⁴³

To sum up, after 1997, Khabarovsk’s initiatives have been limited because of the instable status of Bol’shoi Ussuriiskii and Tarabarov, whereas Amur cannot devote itself entirely to economic cooperation with China for fear of China’s penetration. These “middle” regions have become “slackers” in Russo-Chinese relations.

Advancing “Edges”

Chita continues to play the initiating and innovative role among the eastern border regions as it had played before 1997. Chita leaders are developing ties with their Chinese partner region, namely Inner Mongolia. They do not regard immigration as a serious issue, and the undetermined status of Bol’shoi does not interest them. Unsurprisingly, they are not ready to give up the island but, on the other hand, are convinced that the territorial issue should not and will not disturb their trans-border cooperation with China.⁴⁴ The feasibility of this conviction is exemplified by the project of the “Manzhouli-Zabaikal’sk trade zone” and the construction of a trans-border oil pipeline.

The idea of the trans-border “Manzhouli-Zabaikal’sk trade zone” was proposed by Manzhouli City at the end of the 1980s. The Chita regional administration had agreed to build first the Chinese part of the “zone,” which began to work in 1996. In 1998, the large customs office building was finished.⁴⁵ Russian deputy prime minister, Boris Nemtsov, attended the opening ceremony of the new customs office and proposed that the cooperation of Manzhouli and Zabaikal’sk should become a model for a new Russo-Chinese regional partnership.⁴⁶ Before long, Zabaikal’sk and Chita gained the central ministries’ legal support to open the Russian part of the “trade zone.” Now Russian citizens were allowed to leave Russia for Manzhouli without obtaining Chinese visa. The only problem left to be solved for the first viable Russo-Chinese joint economic zone is how to find the necessary sum of money to complete and equip the Russian part of the zone.⁴⁷

43 A newspaper correspondent in Blagoveshchensk remarks that the Amur population regard the Chinese presence as a lesser evil. He summarizes the local population’s feelings as to prefer “bad peace, which is better than a good quarrel” («Амурская правда», 6 апреля 1999).

44 Interviews with Galina Katanova, Deputy chief of the Zabaikal’sk village administration, 26 July 2000, Zabaikal’sk Village; with Aleksandr Kanoplev, First vice mayor of Krasnokamensk City, 27 July 2000, Krasnokamensk City.

45 «Manzhouli bao», 19 November 1996; 4 March 1998.

46 «Забайкальский рабочий», 4 марта 1998; «Manzhouli bao», 4 March 1998.

47 Interview with Valerii Bandanov, Deputy chief of the Zabaikal’sk village administration, 26 July 2000, Zabaikal’sk Village.

The construction of an oil pipeline is another example of the Manzhouli-Zabaikal'sk model. The Russian and Chinese foreign ministries agreed to establish a visa exemption regime for construction workers. The pipeline, which has been almost finished, is a small one connecting Zabaikal'sk with Manzhouli. Beyond these cities the oil will need to be carried by tankers. However, this is a pilot project for future large-scale pipeline construction projects, such as the Kovykta Gas Field (Irkutsk) – Inner Mongolia.⁴⁸ As was the case with the Menkeseli Model, it is quite possible that the Manzhouli-Zabaikal'sk model will accelerate Russo-Chinese trans-border regional cooperation.

The most drastic change after 1997 occurred in Primor'e Krai, the former outspoken enemy of pro-China policies. In November 1998, Vladimir Stegnii, a deputy governor of Primor'e, proposed that Primor'e should promote "strategic cooperation" at the regional level.⁴⁹ After the completion of the demarcation, Primor'e de jure does not have disputed territories with China. The attitude of the local elite and population towards Chinese immigration would seem to have changed to some extent because of intensifying economic ties with China. This can be exemplified by the conflict between the Primor'e regional administration and the Ussuriisk City Hall. When the regional administration tried to adopt harsh measures against Chinese shuttle traders, the Ussuriisk City leaders protested decisively. Ussuriisk is located near the Chinese border and has strong economic ties with Chinese cities on the other side of the border, such as Dongning and Suifunhe. Though the Chinese bazaar at Ussuriisk is not located in the center of the city, the city leaders realize the vital importance of the bazaar and protect it. Actually, Ussuriisk citizens cannot dispense with Chinese vegetables and consumer goods. Mikhail Alexseev, an important specialist on migration, remarks that intensive trans-border economic relations with Chinese regions tend to change the local Russians' cautious attitude towards the Chinese.⁵⁰

Suifunhe, the former Chinese terminal of the East Chinese Railway, played a significant role in "placating" stubborn Primor'e. Suifunhe has become China's bridgehead to influencing Primor'e, because it is a sort of "gate" for Russian shuttle traders. Most Russian traders from Vladivostok go to this city to buy goods wholesale or through this city go further to Harbin or other Chinese cities. In contrast to agrarian Amur Oblast, Primor'e is a developed industrial and trade region and the regional population are adroit in commercial deals. In contrast to the Blagoveshchensk shuttling traders hired by Chinese, Vladivostok and Ussuriisk businessmen appear to be the equal partners of Chinese merchants. The Suifunhe authorities opened a "free zone," which Russian citizens are allowed to visit without obtaining Chinese visa, at the center of the city, in

48 Interview with Ren Yujing, Vice-secretary of Manzhouli city administration, 28 July 2000, Manzhouli City.

49 «Утро России», 29 ноября 1997.

50 He presented this idea at the symposium "Security Implications..." mentioned in fn. 6

contrast to similar “free zones” in RFE, often located in the suburbs.⁵¹ Thus the Manzhouli-Zabaikal’sk model was studied and adopted here.

We should not underestimate anti-Chinese sentiment in Primor’e. An expert, patronized by General Rozov, continues to criticize the 1991 Agreement for allowing Chinese expansion towards the sea.⁵² Nevertheless, Primor’e’s metamorphosis from what it was before 1997 is impressive. In his speech celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People’s Republic, Governor Nazdratenko emphasized that Primor’e is able to play a progressive role in the Russo-Chinese regional partnership. Nazdratenko argued that Primor’e is the “most open region to China” on the grounds that it has as many as seven entry points from China. Actually, Primor’e has begun to play a no less important role than Chita. Overall, the future of Russo-Chinese trans-border cooperation will be determined by the two vigorous “edges” and their influence on the stagnating “middle.”

CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVE

This paper analyzed four Russian regions’ policies towards China, relying upon the concept of “edge.” The completion of the border demarcation in 1997 opened a new epoch for RFE and East Siberian regions for trans-border cooperation with China. While Amur continues to be “afflicted” by Chinese immigration and Khabarovsk remains strongly attached to the remaining undetermined territories, Primor’e and Chita began to play a vigorous role in Russia’s relations with China. In particular, Chita’s experiences will provide the three RFE regions with useful lessons.

The Russian government has begun to pay attention to the border Edges’ initiatives: Chita as a model for policy-making and Primor’e as a test case for this policy. These two regions are also important for the federal government because Chita and Primor’e face Mongolia and North Korea respectively. It is difficult to deny that President Putin’s visits to North Korea in July and to Mongolia in November 2000 were stimulated by the Edge’s initiatives, such as Nazdratenko’s invitation to North Korean Leader, Kim Jong Il.⁵³ Likewise, Moscow cannot ignore Chita’s initiatives in regard to Mongolia.⁵⁴ Historically, Korea and Mongolia were always the battlefields where Russia and China com-

51 «Восточный мост», №7 (ноября 2000).

52 *Ткаченко Б.И.* Россия - Китай: восточная граница в документах и фактах. Владивосток, 1999.

53 См., «Красное знамя Приморья», 19 июля 2000.

54 When Russian President Putin visited Mongolia in November 2000, he suggested the possibility of building a pipeline from Irkutsk to China through Mongolia, not directly to China. The reason for this proposal was that Mongolia imposes lower fees to transport oil and lower transportation cost. Beijing seemed to be offended by this proposal («Независимая газета», 15 ноября 2000). If Russia decides to build a direct pipeline to China, the cooperation between Inner Mongolia and Chita will attract much more public interest.

peted for influence. This competition seems to be reemerging under the post-Cold War situation in North East Asia. This implies that the Russo-Chinese border Edges (in particular, Primor'e) have become strategic points for both Moscow and Beijing. Beijing strives to improve the relations with Primor'e and even plans to open a Chinese consulate in Vladivostok. When Li Peng, Chairman of the National People's Congress, made a epoch-making visit to Vladivostok in September 2000, Nazdratenko personally met him at the airport, exactly as Kim Jong Il did with Putin. Surprisingly, the governor stated that he alone had been "the unchangeable and best friend of the Chinese people in the Far East."⁵⁵ It is worth following the Edges' initiatives carefully to forecast the future of the Russo-Chinese relations.

55 «Красное знамя Приморья», 21 сентября 2000; «Восточный мост», №6 (сентября 2000).