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## Sino-Russian Border Dynamics in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Era: A Chinese Perspective<sup>1</sup>

Border issues have always been a major problem in Sino-Russian relations. During the history of more than 300 years' turbulent and magnificent exchanges, there have been many border disputes and conflicts between China and Russia. It is a sensitive factor which will influence the bilateral relations in the long-term, and also, a serious political and historical issue.

The exchanges between China and Russia in modern era are basically a one-way and non-symmetrical "zero-sum" relationship. After the historic expansion, Russia became an empire which spanned Europe and Asia. This expansion is based on the annexation of the small countries of Central and Western Asia, as well as plundering a vast territory of China in the Pacific region in East Asia. This led to the dissolution of the "tribute" type of regional international relationship with China as the center of East Asia. In particular, it should be pointed out that Russia encroached on the northeast and northwest China at least one hundred years earlier than other European powers' aggressive "entering" China.

In the early period of the P.R.C., both China and Russia were in the "socialist camp". Border and territorial issues between the two countries, although intractable, were temporarily covered and shelved because of the broadly consistent national interests of the two countries.<sup>2</sup> However, the historic border issue was still unresolved, and this was foreshadowing the hidden trouble of border conflict in the relationship between China and Russia. From the second half of 1950s, the ideological differences between the two parties gradually expanded to the conflict of interests between the two countries. The territorial boundary issue which had been left over by history was at that time highlighted. The Sino-Soviet border conflict was emerging constantly. As a crucial element of state sovereignty, territorial boundaries of the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were blurred but had not caused problems during the first few years after the establishment of PRC. That was because at that time China and the Soviet Union both belonged to the socialist camp, their

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<sup>2</sup> According to data from Archive of Jilin Province, at that time, the Central Committee of the Communist Party remains the aim of prudent, lenient and modest all the time, as well as the peaceful negotiation policy. While Soviet Union was also behaved friendly and cooperatively. See Jilin Archives 1/19-1/243, pp.68-81.

national interests were more or less the same, therefore for the moment the border issues were not so urgent as to trigger disputes. However, the unequal treaties between China and Imperial Russia were still looming. The border issues were still unsolved, which would become a time bomb in the future. Since the second half of the 1950s, China and the Soviet Union had disagreed with each other from party ideologies to national interests. The border issues walked out of history and became heatedly disputed. Conflicts occurred on the Sino-Soviet borders.<sup>3</sup>

### Tortuous Sino-Soviet Border Negotiations

In the summer of 1960, Soviet frontier guards bound, beat and drove away Chinese herdsmen who were peacefully shepherding at Bozaiger mountain pass (博孜艾格爾山口) in Xinjiang.<sup>4</sup>This was the first border conflict between China and the Soviet Union after the establishment of PRC, being stirred up by the Soviet side, which had two-fold symbolic meanings. First, the Soviet authority for the first time extended the differences in party ideologies with China to international relations. Second, the border issues looming in history of Sino-Soviet Union relations had been put on the agenda.<sup>5</sup>In April and May in 1962 Soviet Union had agitated six million Chinese citizens living on the border areas to flee to the Soviet Union at Yili and Tacheng in Xinjiang.<sup>6</sup>A peaceful border area no longer existed.

Under such circumstances, the border disputes could not be ignored or delayed. A solution had to be found. From August 1960 China had suggested negotiations concerning the Sino-Soviet border issues for several times to the Soviet side, and in August 1963 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China proposed solutions to avoid

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<sup>3</sup> With regard to the origin of the Sino-Soviet border issues and China's relative policy, please see Li Danhui, "Comrades Plus Brothers: Sino-Soviet Border Relations in the 1950s—A Historical Review of Sino-Soviet Border Issues (Part I)", *Cold War International History Studies*, Issue 1, pp.71-102.

<sup>4</sup> Shen Zhihua, LiDanhui (eds.), *A Collection of Copies of the Original Russian Archives: on the Sino-Soviet Relationship*.Volume16, Collected by Center for Cold War International History Studies, ECNU, pp.4019-4050.

<sup>5</sup> Li Fenglin, "Personal Experience on the Sino-Soviet border negotiations—the Preface to Prof. Jiang Changbin's new book", in Jiang Changbin, *The Evolution of the Eastern Section of Sino-Russian boundary*,\_Beijing: The Central Literature Publishing House, 2007, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Yili Archives,11/1/114, pp.108-132.

conflicts and maintain the status quo on the borders.<sup>7</sup> Starting from 1964, China and the Soviet Union had three rounds of negotiations to decide the territorial boundaries<sup>8</sup>.

### *I. Sino-Soviet Union Territorial Boundaries Negotiations Round One*

Upon the insistence on the Chinese side, the first round of Sino-Soviet Union Territorial Boundaries Negotiations was held from February to August in 1964. The Soviet delegation was headed by commander of frontier guards Colonel-General Pavel Ivanovich Zyryanov, with several specialists on border issues. The Chinese delegation was headed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Zeng Yongquan. Besides, the head of the Department of Soviet and East European Affairs Yu Zhan, deputy head of Department of Treaty and Law Shao Tianren, participated. Other delegates included representatives from the General Staff Department of People's Liberation Army, headquarters of the public security troops, Heilongjiang and Xinjiang military regions and local governments. Three directors of the Office of China Border Issues, namely Li Guanru, Zhang Zifan and Ma Xusheng, served as consultants of the delegation. During this round of negotiations, both sides involved held eight plenary sessions, dozens of head meetings, 22 working group meetings and 18 specialist meetings.<sup>9</sup>

During this round of negotiations, the focus point centered on whether the previous border treaties signed between China and Imperial Russia were unequal treaties. China insisted on recognizing the treaties as unequal, even though it had no pretensions to the lost territory.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet side believed that if the negotiations went according to Chinese logic, the new treaties signed on the basis of unequal treaties were still unequal. Particularly important for the Soviet Union, accepting the Chinese position may imply that China had got the right to require reopen the case of border issues. In this way, once the relationship between the two countries

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<sup>7</sup> Zhou Wenqi, Chu Liangru (eds.), *A Special and complicated issue— the Chronicles of Comintern, Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China, 1919-1991*, Wuhan: Hubei People's Press, 1993, p.539.

<sup>8</sup> Mjasnikov V. S., Stepanov E. D. *Granicy Kitaja: istorija formirovanija*. M., 2001. Galenovich V. S. *Rossija i Kitaj v XX veke: granica*. M., 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Ma Xusheng, "Exploration and Negotiations on Border Issues—Retrieve the Lost National Boundaries (part 2)", *World Affairs*, 2001, Vol.12, pp 43. Galenovich V. S. *Rossija i Kitaj v XX veke: granica*. M., 2001. p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> In line with the interview between Shen Zhihua, Li Danhui and the former Chinese ambassador to Russia Li Fenglin, Mao Zedong set the bottom line for Chinese delegation about the first round of the Sino-Soviet negotiations. Mao said, as long as Soviet admitted that the historical Sino-Russian border treaties were unequal, China could give up the 35,000 sq.km disputed territory. See Shen Zhihua, *An Outline of the History of Sino-Soviet relations: A Reexamination of Questions Concerning Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991*, Revised Edition, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011, p.390.

deteriorated, it would become an exhibit for China to take the ceded territory back.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Soviet Union insisted that the territorial boundaries should be drawn according to three different lines: the lines assigned by the Sino-Soviet treaties, the line formed during the course of history, and the line which was guarded in reality.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, China insisted on settling the problem based on the line assigned by the treaties.

Ever since the early stages of the border conflicts, China had made it clear that the dispute should be solved through negotiations, before which the status quo should be maintained so that armed conflicts on the borders could be avoided.<sup>13</sup> During the negotiations, China stated that: firstly, history should be respected; that the treaties between China and Imperial Russia were unequal, and this was a historical fact which should not be altered. Secondly, China cherished the friendship between China and the Soviet Union, and therefore China was willing to solve border disputes completely according to the unequal treaties. China did not require the Soviet Union to return the lost territory of over 15 million square kilometers which Imperial Russia acquired through these unequal treaties. But China did insist on the return of lost territory acquired beyond these treaties. In principle these territories should be returned unconditionally, but with regard to the interests of local residents, on principles of equal negotiations and mutual understanding, there could be some special arrangements. During the negotiations, China did not accuse the Soviet Union of the unequal treaties, but the Soviet Union not only denied that the treaties were unequal, but also refused to settle the border issues based on these treaties. They even wanted to make legal the territory illegally occupied beyond the unequal treaties after the establishment of the Soviet Union. The Soviet side had avoided naming this negotiation as concerning on border issues. Instead, they called this meeting a consultation on some specific border areas of Soviet Union and China. This indeed reflected the Soviet stand on the issue: there were no border disputes between the Soviet Union and China, but just some old blurred border landmarks which needed fixing. It was obvious that the Soviet authority then had no intention of solving the border disputes. Strategically they intended to constrain China by using border disputes. Meanwhile by supporting China's neighbors like Vietnam and India, the Soviet Union had encircled China.

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<sup>11</sup> Shen Zhihua, *An Outline of the History of Sino-Soviet relations: A Reexamination of Questions Concerning Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917–1991*, (Revised Edition) ,Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011, pp.390-391.

<sup>12</sup> Mjasnikov V. S. *Dogovornymi stat'jami utverdili: diplomaticheskaja istorija rusko-kitajskoj granicy XVII-XX vv.*Habarovsk, 1997, pp.350-351.

<sup>13</sup> In 1960, Premier Zhou Enlai emphasized at the State Council meeting that, "If everyone began to count the distant historical accounts, then the world would be messed up." See *People's Daily*, October 9th, 1960.

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet delegation suggested moving the meeting place from Beijing to Moscow. The delegation returned to the Soviet Union in mid-August. But later on October 15<sup>th</sup>, Khrushchev stepped down from office. 1966 saw the start of the Cultural Revolution in China. Therefore this round of negotiations did not go on as planned, and no one called for the resumption of negotiations until 1969.

During this round of negotiations, both sides had settled the following practical and meaningful issues. Firstly, maps were exchanged between China and Soviet Union on which different border lines were drawn according to the claims of the respective state.<sup>14</sup> Comparison of the two maps showed a disputable area of 30 to 40 thousand square kilometers. Before the map exchange, it was only the opinion of the Chinese side that there existed a disputed area. But now this had become a reality that both sides had to face on the negotiation table. Secondly, during the first round of negotiations, on a working level both sides had agreed to decide border lines according to the centre line of main channel<sup>15</sup>. If this could have been done, not only the negotiations would have been successful much earlier, but also the Zhenbao (Damanski) Island Battle in 1969 could have been avoided. Looking at the Sino-Russia Border Agreement signed in 1991, the new agreement was based on the old working consensus of 1964. Thirdly, on a working level the position of both eastern and western border lines were discussed, but agreements were made on the former but not the later, because both sides had just stated their own opinion on the western part of border lines without further discussion.

One thing worth noting is that after this round of negotiations, the Soviet authority instructed four times that Soviet science, publications, and media institutions should revise the ‘wrong’ understanding on Sino-Russia historical boundaries, borders and relations. A special team of sinologists were called to revise the history of Sino-Russia relations, hoping to find new evidence to prove the Soviet stance at that time. This had a great impact on Russian education, and by now most Russians see history as in the revised version.

## II. *Sino-Soviet Territorial Boundaries Negotiations Round Two*

After the March 2 Zhenbao (Damanski) Island Battle in 1969, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated sharply. But China never ceased its efforts to find a peaceful solution to the border issues. Suggested by the Premier of the Soviet Union Alexei Kosygin,

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<sup>14</sup> Li Fenglin “Personal Experience on the Sino-Soviet border negotiations—the Preface to Prof. Jiang Changbin’s new book”, in Jiang Changbin, *The Evolution of the Eastern Section of Sino-Russian boundary*, Beijing: The Central Literature Publishing House, 2007, p.5.5.

<sup>15</sup> Kireev G. “Strategicheskoe partnerstvo I stabil'naja granica”, *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka*. 1997. №4.

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai met Kosygin at Beijing Airport on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Kosygin was on his way back from the funeral of Hồ Chí Minh and specially stopped in Beijing. Consensus was made during this meeting. First, an agreement was needed to maintain the peaceful status quo on the borders. Moreover, negotiations were needed to solve the border issues. Both sides agreed that Zhou should present a note to Kosygin a week later, upon whose approval formal documents would be exchanged to confirm the consensus. On September 18<sup>th</sup> Zhou presented a note to Kosygin and concluded the five provisional measures discussed in the meeting: (1) both sides agree to maintain the status quo before further solutions; (2) both sides agree to avoid armed conflicts; (3) armed military forces in both states have to be separated from each other in disputable areas on the borders; (4) both sides agree that once conflicts break out on the borders, they must be solved reasonably by the frontier defense of both states through mutual respect and equal negotiations. If the problems cannot be solved at the frontier level, the incident should be reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of both states respectively to solve the conflicts on the diplomatic level; (5) both sides agree that the above provisional measures do not affect the claims of the two states on border disputes. Zhou wrote to Kosygin that these provisional measures "will be enforced immediately as the agreement between the government of China and the Soviet Union upon your approval through official letters."<sup>16</sup> On September 26<sup>th</sup> Kosygin wrote back and approved. After several rounds of correspondence, both sides agreed that the negotiations should be held in Beijing on October 20<sup>th</sup>.

Headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union Vassily V. Kuznetsov, the Soviet delegation arrived in Beijing on October 19<sup>th</sup> and was greeted by the Chinese delegation headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of China Qiao Guanhua at the airport. This was the second round of negotiations on border issues, which lasted from October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969 to June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1978, with 15 rounds of negotiations, 40 plenary sections, and 156 head meetings. After August 1970, the head of Soviet delegation was replaced by Deputy Minister Leonid Fedrovich Il'ichev. After November 1971 the head of Chinese delegation was changed to Deputy Minister Han Nianlong, and after May 1972, Deputy Minister Yu Zhan.

This round of negotiations was held in extremely complicated international circumstances, during which Sino-Soviet relations were in the most serious confrontation and antagonism. China's claims on the border issues were made clear in the statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs before the negotiations on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Five crucial points were included, namely (1) the Soviet side should recognize that border treaties made between China and Imperial Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are unequal; (2) with regard to the status quo, China does not demand the

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<sup>16</sup> Galenovich V. S. *Rossija i Kitaj v XX veke: granica. M.*, 2001, pp.141-143,143-145,193-194.

return of the lost land which has been occupied de facto, but insists new border lines to be drawn according to the treaties at hand; (3) land occupied beyond the treaties has to be returned unconditionally, with reasonably rearrangement based on mutual respect; (4) new border treaties should be signed; (5) military forces of both states should be separated from each other at the disputable areas and withdraw<sup>17</sup>.

At the very beginning China and Soviet Union agreed on the explanation of the note between both Premiers. Chinese delegates believed that the negotiations should first reach an agreement on maintaining the status quo on the borders, before moving onto discussing the actual line of the borders. But the Soviet delegates insisted on first settling the actual border lines and refused to discuss on a possible status-quo-protecting agreement. Therefore the negotiations reached a deadlock.

The second round of negotiations lasted for nine years. China hoped to see a successful round of negotiations and the final resolution of the dangerous border issues. But the Soviet side abandoned the agreement reached at the Beijing airport between the two Premiers on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1969. The Soviet side was against an agreement to maintain the peaceful status quo in the border areas. Though forced to face the problem in the end, they challenged the notion of 'disputable areas', regarding this notion as China's strategy to occupy Soviet territory.

Even though the second round of negotiations failed to bear fruits of important agreements or official documents, it was of great relevance for the following two reasons. Firstly, it ensured necessary contact between China and the Soviet Union under confrontational circumstances. It controlled the conflict in border areas to some extent. No agreement was reached on the main topics of the negotiations, the maintaining of the status quo on the borders, the provisional measures or the actual position of the border line. But some solutions were indeed found during the negotiations on the issues which would greatly affect the life of the residents on the border. Secondly, the negotiations between China and the Soviet Union enhanced the Sino-US relations. Ambassadorial talks between China and the United States which had been cancelled for several years were started again shortly after the start of this round of negotiations between China and the Soviet Union.

### *III. Sino-Soviet Territorial Boundaries Negotiations Round Three*

After Deng Xiaoping's trip to the United States in January 1979, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China felt that while enhancing Sino-US relations, it was also necessary to adjust the relations with the Soviet Union so that China could gain a more favorable international environment. After all, China, the US

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<sup>17</sup> Xie Yixian (ed.), *History of Diplomacy of PRC*, Kaifeng: Henan Renmin Press, 1998, p.376.



and the Soviet Union interacted with one another in a triangular way. Furthermore, the *Sino-Soviet Friendship Union Treaty* was about to expire. Out of these considerations, China and the Soviet Union decided to negotiate on bilateral relations in 1979.

Headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Youping, the 13 Chinese delegates for bilateral relations negotiation flew from Beijing to Moscow on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1979. I was the consultant of the delegation. This was the first high-class delegation of government representatives China had sent to the Soviet Union since 1964. The negotiations started on October 17<sup>th</sup> and ended on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, hosted at the villa of Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prior to the formal meeting, both sides decided on the agenda, including the form of the plenary sections, the rotation of the chairman, sending out own technicians to translate and record the meeting respectively. But the negotiations came into a deadlock once again when discussing about the focus point of the negotiations. Because of sharp oppositions, no result was achieved at the negotiations. Both sides barely agreed that next round of negotiations would be held in Beijing.

After the first round of negotiations on bilateral relations ended, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, which stirred international disapproval. The second round of bilateral relations negotiations was postponed because of the invasion. Meanwhile, negotiations on border disputes had not proceeded since June 1978.

March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1982, then Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made a speech in Tashkent. Though in the speech he condemned China as usual, he also showed explicitly that Soviet Union wanted to improve the bilateral relations through negotiations and practical measures accepted by both sides. Deng Xiaoping believed this was a positive sign and instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take advantage of this opportunity.

After some compromises, the negotiations on normalization of Sino-Soviet Union relations were attended by governmental special envoys Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of China and his counterpart in the Soviet Union. The first round of negotiations was held in Beijing on October 5<sup>th</sup> 1982, attended by Chinese envoy Deputy Minister Qian Qichen and Soviet envoy Deputy Minister Llychev and lasted for half a month. China emphasized the importance of dispersing the obstacles between China and the Soviet Union before normalization. But the Soviet Union avoided discussing these obstacles by saying the interests of third parties could be sacrificed. 12 rounds of political negotiations of this kind were held from 1982 to 1988.

On July 28<sup>th</sup> 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev made a speech at Vladivostok, announcing that the Soviet Union would withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Mongolia, the Soviet Union was willing to decide the border line with China according to the centre line of main channel and negotiate with China on bilateral relations at any level. China paid attention to this speech and made a formal response through diplomatic channels. Since both sides had the wish and ability to improve bilateral relations, things moved quickly. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two states agreed to restart border negotiations when they met in New York in September 1986. After being interrupted for 9 years, the border dispute negotiations were restored in February 1987. The Chinese delegation was headed by Deputy Minister Qian Qichen, and then by Tian Zengpei after Qian was promoted to be the Minister. The Soviet delegation was headed by Deputy Minister Igor Alekseevich Rogachev.

Unlike the previous two rounds of negotiations, this round of negotiations had been fruitful because of two advantageous prerequisites. First, the stance of the Soviet side had changed and they started to admit the disputable areas. This enabled both sides of the negotiations to have the same standards to solve the border disputes, namely the existing treaties and widely respected international laws. Equal status and mutual understanding pushed for a fair and reasonable resolution of border disputes. Second, Sino-Soviet relations also improved in other domains like foreign trade, science and technology, education and culture. This ensured a steady pace of normalization. By 1989 most of the obstacles between China and Soviet Union had disappeared. In May 1989, Sino-Soviet Union relations were back to normal. Border negotiations proceeded in a friendly atmosphere.

Both sides agreed to solve the border disputes fair and reasonably with regards to the existing treaties and international laws, on principles of equal negotiations and mutual understanding. In May 1991, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Supreme Military Commander of the People's Republic of China Jiang Zemin paid a state visit to Soviet Union, during which the Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed the *Agreement on Sino-Soviet Union Border Eastern Part*. This agreement was approved by the Supreme Council of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1992, and approved by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China on February 24<sup>th</sup>. After the two ministers exchanged the agreement approval in Beijing on March 16<sup>th</sup>, the agreement was put into effect officially.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan maintained the old policies of dealing with border disputes with China, therefore there were no problems of signing agreements.

The *Agreement of Sino-Kazakhstan Border* was signed on April 26, 1994. The unsolved problems in this agreement were solved in the supplementary agreements signed on September 24 1997 and July 4 1998.

The *Agreement of Sino-Kyrgyz Border* was signed on July 4 1996, all five disputes were solved except one, which was solved on August 26 1999.

The border between China and Tajikistan was quite complicated and was not solved until the *Agreement of Sino-Tajikistan Border* on August 13 1999 and supplementary agreements on May 17 2002.

By this time the original border disputes between China and the Soviet Union had been solved completely.

#### IV. *The final settlement of Sino-Russia border*<sup>18</sup>

The Soviet Union declared its disintegration six months later after the signing of the agreement on the Sino-Soviet border (eastern section). Its successor, the Russian Federation, in accordance with international law, carried on the policies made by the Soviet Union in its later period, negotiating the unsettled issues with a positive attitude with China.

##### (1) The demarcation of the western section of Sino-Russia border

Relatively speaking, the western section of the Sino-Russia border was delimited in a more smooth way. Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the western section of the Sino-Soviet border had been mentioned in the previous negotiations. In Oct. 1989, a working group dealing with the western section of Sino-Soviet border was set up during the third round of border talks, holding two working group panels later in 1988 and started the joint aerial photography. However, the Soviet Union could not reach a consensus with China on the western section of Sino-Soviet border finally. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the former western section of Sino-Soviet border was separated into four sections, involving the Sino-Russia section, Sino-Kazakhstan section, Sino-Kyrgyz section and Sino-Tajikistan section, among which the western section of Sino-Russia border is more than 50 kilometers, the Sino-Kazakh border more than 1700 kilometers, the Sino-Kyrgyz border 1100 kilometers and the Sino-Tajik border more than 400 kilometers.

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<sup>18</sup> See *Nekotorye problemy demarkacii rossijsko-kitajskoj granicy. 1991-1997 gg. Sbornik statej i dokumentov*. M., 1997. Kireev G. V. *Strategicheskoe partnerstvo i stabil'naja granica// Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka*. 1997. Akihiro Ivasita. *4000 kilometrov problem. Rossijsko-kitajskaja granica*. Kireev G. V. *Rossija—Kitaj. Neizvestnye stranicy pogranichnyh peregovorov*. M., 2006.

At first, Kazakhstan and the other two countries denied to have border disputes with China and refused to talk with China. Under the mediation of Russia, the representatives of the four nations: Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the agreement of forming a joint delegation towards border issues with China in Minsk, the capital of the Republic of Belarus in Sep. 8, 1992. On Oct. 8 of the same year, delegations of the four governments, led by G. Kunadze, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, held negotiations with Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister, Tian Zengpei's delegation of Chinese government. The two parties confirmed the principles on border solutions and boundary alignment agreements settled by previous Sino-Soviet talks, and agreed to further negotiate on remaining border issues. They also agreed to draft the related border agreements from the beginning of 1993 as well as further discussed the unified border sections.

In April 1993, the second round of talks between China and the border agreement drafting group of the governments' joint delegation of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were held in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The two parties discussed on some clauses in the agreement, and finished the written description part regarding to the western section of Sino-Russia border and part of the Sino-Kazakhstan boundary alignment. Later in June, China and the border agreement drafting group of the four nations' joint delegation held a meeting in Beijing, making an agreement on the description of the alignment towards the western section of Sino-Russia border and finished drafting the border agreement. On Sept. 3, 1994, the Foreign Ministers of China and Russia signed the *Treaty of Western Section of the Sino-Russia Border* during Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Russia. The agreement ratification was later passed by the National People's Congress Standing Committee on Dec. 29, 1994, by Russia's lower house of parliament (the Duma) on June 23, 1995 and by Russia's upper house of parliament (the Federation Council) on July 5, 1995. Zhang Deguang, Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister, and Igor Rogachev, former ambassador of Russia to China, exchanged the ratification of the Sino-Russian border agreements (western section) in Beijing on Oct. 17, 1995. With this, the Agreement on Western Section of Sino-Russian Border came into effect officially.

After they came across resistance, in July 1993, the Russian delegation said that they would explain to the local citizens. At the beginning of October, the director of the First Asia Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Logvinov, said that the Russian Central Government would take full responsibility for the border issues. On Jan. 11, 1994, Alexander Nikolayevich Panov, Russian Vice Foreign Minister, made his first speech after taking office, pointing out that the remarks in newspapers made by some people, especially the people from the Far East, were untenable. The concessions should be made by both parties instead of

one. In late January, the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, pointed out that it was unreasonable to request a review on 1991's *Treaty of Western Section of Sino-Russian Border* when he gave interviews in Moscow before his visit to China. He attended the regional meeting held by Russian Far East administrators in Blagoveshchensk halfway to China, and made important announcements there. He emphasized the importance of developing a friendly relationship with China, and pointed out that it was not valid to say that Russia would give up some of its land to China.

In May 1994, the officer from the Russian Foreign Ministry said to the journalists that they felt disturbed by the news related to the abolishment of *Treaty of Western Section of Sino-Russian Border* made by the administrators of Khabarovsk Krai. He pointed out that the 1991 Treaty was just and based on recognized international law, involving the principles of settling boundaries by axis of the main channel for navigable rivers, by axis of rivers or axis of main tributaries for non-navigable rivers. The officer especially emphasized that the Amur River and islands along the Ussuri River had never been carved up between Russia and China in history. The ownership of some specific islands would be further ascertained in the on-going demarcation process. He also said that the officers from the Russian Foreign Ministry could not agree with the administrators of Khabarovsk Krai's indignation in any case when seeing Chinese ships go through Khabarovsk Krai and regarded it as normal conditions.

## (2) The Final Resolution of Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island and Abagaitu Islet Issues

Heads of China and Russia announced on November 10, 1997, that problems concerning boundary refinement of the eastern border between the two countries under the agreement on May 16, 1991 had all been solved. The two sides would continue to deal with the remaining border issues equitably so as to set down all the mutual boundaries. The two countries concluded the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation on July 16, 2001. Article 6 of the treaty stipulated that the two sides should negotiate the boundaries of unsettled sectors on the basis of the Agreement on Eastern Border between China and USSR signed on May 26, 1991. The undefined area should maintain the status quo before the issues were to be solved. Here the so-called "remaining border issues" and "undefined sectors" refer to the unsolved boundaries issues of Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island and Abagaitu Islet at the eastern part of China-Russia national boundaries. The two

regions mainly consist of three islands: Abagaitu Islet<sup>19</sup> (Большой остров in Russian) on the Erguna River, Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island (остров Большой Уссурийский in Russian) next to the Far East Khabarovsk, and Silver Dragon Island<sup>20</sup> (остров Тарабаров in Russian).

Abagaitu Islet has an area of about 62 km<sup>2</sup>. Its river diversion problem caused by the natural environment mainly led to the dispute. The geographic feature of the area made the Erguna River come around the Abagaitu Isle by two branches from north and south. According to China, the southern branch is a riverway of Hailar River, which flows out of China and enters the Erguna River by two branches. Therefore, China maintained that the boundary should pass through the northern branch. According to this, the Abagaitu Islet should belong to China.<sup>21</sup>

The disputes around Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island were also related to the complexity of tributary and island. According to the Beijing Treaty of 1860, Russia insisted that national boundaries pass through Amur River (Heilongjiang in Chinese), then go through Qaddafi yanukovich waterway (Fuyuan waterway in Chinese) and bypass the Tara Island and Big Wu Su gate island from south. China agreed to define boundary lines under this treaty. Meanwhile, China held that the boundary line should pass through the main channel of the river by invoking modern legal provisions. Since the Qaddafi yanukovich waterway was not open to navigation, the main channel should be in the north of the island (Amur River). Under the circumstances, they also should turn to the jurisdiction of China.

During the negotiations, Russia attempted to deal with the two controversial issues by linking the areas together. That is to say, the border problem of Ergun River would be solved by China's method; in exchange, the border direction near Khabarovsk would be defined based on Russia's suggestion.

In fact, the reason why the two controversial areas had not been solved for a long time was the opposition and obstruction of local forces in Russia. From Russia's perspective, the two regions had significant strategic positions. An article in *News Hour of Far East* in July 9, 2001, said that "As for Khabarovsk, stretching along the

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<sup>19</sup> Abagaitu Islet had been under the jurisdiction of China until early 20th century. Then tsarist Russia changed the attitude toward this issue, saying that the boundary in the original Treaty of Beijing was not on Amur River and Wusuli River, but on the Amur waterway in the south. So Abagaitu Islet should be owned by Russia "naturally". During the war in the Dong Qing railway in August, 1929, Soviet army occupied Abagaitu Islet. Later, with the normalization of Sino-Soviet Relations, Deng Xiaoping specially spoke of Abagaitu Islet as an example that Soviet damaged the interest of China in the historic conversation Mikhail Gorbachev. See Jiang Yi, *China-Russia Relations in the New Century*, p.105.

<sup>20</sup> Filonov A. "Pogranichnye ostrova: Bol'shoj Ussurijskij i Tarabarov", *Sibir' i Vostok Rossii*, 2001, №7.

<sup>21</sup> *Nezavisimaja gazeta*. 4 fevralja 2002.

Amur River for 40 km, the two islands have strategic significance. Deploy a specific garrison area on Big WuSu Gate Island so that we can restrain the enemy from Khabarovsk in 45 seconds when China attacks us. Air routes of the air force of Khabarovsk and the 11th army of air defense forces traverse Tara Island. Civil airplanes taking off from Khabarovsk Novy Airport, the biggest airport in the Far East, will also fly over the island. If the island turns to China's possession, we have to ask for China's permission for all the flights and pay for using the neighbor's airspace. In addition, there are many villas on Tara Island, some of which are owned by the social and political celebrities in Khabarovsk."<sup>22</sup>

Driven directly by the heads of two countries, the remaining border issues finally came to an end after hard negotiations in 2004. China and Russia agreed to divide the two controversial islands equally. During Putin's visit to China in October 14, 2004, the two sides signed the *Supplementary Agreement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on the Eastern Part of Sino-Russian Border*. The National People's Congress Standing Committee of China approved the agreement on April 27, 2005. Both houses of parliament approved the deal in Russia on May 20 and May 25, marking the end of solving the national boundary issues completely. In this way, China and Russia defined the entire length of the boundary line for the first time in over 300 years of contacts.

### (3) Historical Significance of Solving Border Issues to Sino-Russian Relations

The biggest problem in the development of Sino-Russian relations has always been the territorial issue. How to solve them determines the basic direction of the relations between the two countries. Border disputes between the two countries started from the early 17th century, and ended with the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689. Since then, the Sino-Russian border had been stable for about 150 years, and so had the bilateral relations. Since the two sides signed unequal territory treaties in 1860s, there were an increasing number of border disputes, and the bilateral relations got into trouble as well. Now that the territory issues have all been solved, the biggest obstacle in the development of Sino-Russian relations has been eliminated. Henceforth, the bilateral relations will usher in a new round of long-term peace, stability and development. Therefore, the defined border line of China and Russia was a breakthrough in the development of bilateral relations. The significance of solving the disputes in a peaceful, reasonable and compromising way cannot be estimated too much. To be specific, its impact on the bilateral relations manifests in the following aspects.

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<sup>22</sup> Luan Jinghe (eds.), *The History and Reality of China-Russia Relations*. Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004, p.661.

Firstly, as for the bilateral relations of China and Russia, the two countries had put much effort into the border disputes, and border confrontation had been a heavy burden on the political, economical and social development of both countries. The resolution of border disputes eliminated a big obstacle in the bilateral relations. It also removed a potential conflict point in the long term, and further consolidated the peaceful and stable situation at the national borders. Besides, it laid a solid foundation to further promote the development of bilateral relations, and cooperation of equality and mutual benefit.

Secondly, the resolution of border disputes injected new momentum to the further development of bilateral economic cooperation. Economic and trade cooperation of the two countries did not match that of the political collaboration. To change the situation, the two sides must promote cooperation on large projects. At present, the cooperation potential focuses on the strategic interaction on the large-scale development of Eastern Russia and the revitalization of Northeast Old Industrial Base in China.

Thirdly, it creates new condition for cooperation in many specific fields along the border area, such as economic and trade exchanges, environmental protection, rational use of resources, shipping business development, crime fighting and so on. The border is not only the symbol of defining national boundaries, but also the bond and bridge of two countries. It can provide opportunities for the people in these two countries. We can believe that by taking the opportunity of resolving the border issues, the border area of the two countries will create a more relaxing and peaceful atmosphere for the economic, trade and personnel exchanges. The infrastructure construction of these areas will speed up and cooperation in all aspects will be broadened, thus the economical level and people's living standard will be improved.

Fourthly, the resolution of border issues made it possible to improve the external environment of the two countries and safeguard the security of countries. Creating a good neighborly environment is the precondition of China's peaceful development. Therefore, the Chinese government put forward some policy guidelines such as "be friends with neighbors and be kind to neighbors", "be in harmony with neighbors, cooperate with neighbors, and reassure the neighbors". It's no doubt that Russia, which shares the longest border with China, is one of the most important factors when China considers its security. The complete resolution of border issues eliminated the largest worry of China's territorial security over 100 years and long-term peace and order of China's northern frontier are expected to be maintained.

Fifthly, the final resolution of Sino-Russia border issues contributed to the peace and stability of the regions as well as the world. It set an example for other places in the world to solve similar problems. It also verified the universal significance of the



principles that the two countries have promoted: maintain peace and mutual benefit, solve problems by looking at the big picture. The two countries' experience to solve border issues verifies that no matter how long the history is, how complicated the problem is, and how serious the dispute is, as long as we observe the principle and regard building friendly and harmonious relations as our goal, it is possible that we can solve all the conflicts.

Looking back the historical changes of Sino-Russia frontier issues in the past 300 years, we can come to the following conclusions:

Firstly, national strength is the fundamental guarantee to safeguard territory and sovereignty issues. The equal Treaty of Nerchinsk China and Russia signed in the 17th century was based on early the Qing Dynasty's powerful national strength. One and a half century later, it was exactly the Qing Dynasty's weakness and corruption that resulted in more than one million square kilometers in the northeast China being occupied forcibly by Russia. It was also the disintegration of China in the Republican era that made China get nothing from the border issues between China and the Soviet Union. In contrast, because of new China's strength and prosperity, China could take back our due territory, rights and interests after achieving a fair and reasonable border agreement with Russia.

Secondly, we should deal with territorial issues with a realistic attitude. Since the border issues between countries were formed from long-term historical evolution, defining the boundaries in the modern era according to the border lines in some certain historical period is unrealistic. When China solved border issues left over by history with neighboring countries, we always advocated defining boundaries mainly under the present situation of the borders on the basis of respect for history. When China dealt with the Sino-Russian border issues, we always proposed to acknowledge the inequality of the treaties signed by Qing government and Russia in 19th century, and meanwhile solve the problems reasonably according to the practical situation. Even if Russia violated the treaty to occupy territory, under the premise of Russia's returning territory, China was willing to make appropriate adjustments considering the local residents' interests. It narrowed the controversy of Sino-Russia border issues down to a small range and guaranteed that the issues got solved in a short time. In fact, if we insisted on the boundaries hundreds years ago, it would have been unrealistic and unwise. And it could only damage peace and stability of northeast China and weaken our ability to solve other problems.

In this sense, Chinese and Russians should learn more about how to cultivate and form a mature national mentality and patriotic concept. We need to realize that the resolution of border issues is not the result of one side giving up to the other one, nor the outcome of one side accepting the opinion of the other. Instead, it is the result of

mutual understanding, forgiveness and compromise considering the practical situation on the basis on international law and convention. To understand and explain the border problems, we should start from the big picture of bilateral relations and strategic height to build a long-term friendship between two countries, rather than from a narrow and biased so-called national patriotism perspective. We should start from the history, legal principle and objective fact, rather than venting irrationally and guessing groundlessly. We should start from searching for win-win and creating mutual safety in cooperation, rather than defending an outdated security-dilemma model tenaciously and attempting to seek one-sided absolute security.

Thirdly, handle the relations between territorial problems and political issues properly. Territorial problems and political issues have a close connection, but the connection can't be enlarged unlimitedly. It should be limited to a certain range. After summarizing the Sino-Russian relations since the People's Republic of China was established, we can clearly see that although the border issues were problems left over by history, they were not the whole content of the two countries' relations, not even the main part. In the 1950s, when the relations of China and Russia were well-developed, the remaining border issues didn't become the obstacle of people's interaction and did not bring trouble into the cooperation of the two sides. Similarly, the complete resolution of border problems based on the principle of fairness and mutual benefit also depended on the healthy and stable development of the two countries' relations since the 1990s and the deepening of mutual cooperation. On the contrary, when the two countries' relations deteriorated in 1960s, the border issues became the frontier of the confrontation and opposition. Therefore, the main task of the two countries is to deepen cooperation in all fields, strengthen mutual understanding and trust, and maintain the general atmosphere of good relations. As long as we focus on this, we can make sure that the resolved border issues will not become new problems and make the border an unshakable bond for friendship and good-neighborliness.