

*International
Boundary
Study*

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**CHINA -
KOREA BOUNDARY**



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The Geographer
Department of State

CHINA - KOREA BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The China - Korea boundary is approximately 880 miles in length*. For all but approximately 20 miles of the total, the Yalu and Tumen river and their tributaries are followed. Under normal circumstances, boundaries following rivers are considered to be demarcated. In this boundary, however, the lack of specific language in the various treaties concerning the location of the boundary within the rivers mitigates against such a classification. As a consequence, the boundary in the rivers should be classified as delimited. For the 20 miles between the headwaters, the boundary is considered to be in dispute.

II. BACKGROUND

Numerous but minor controversies concerning the China - Korea boundary have occurred in the past, most of which involved the portion of the boundary near the Pai-t'ou Shan (mountain) on the watershed between the Yalu and Tumen rivers. Much less dispute has been encountered where the boundary follows the courses of the rivers although, as a result of a lack of precise delimitation, difficulties concerning certain islands have marred relations.

One of the main reasons for the controversy over the Pai-t'ou Shan results from the fact that the area is relatively uninhabited and was, until recently, largely unexplored and unknown. The first attempt to define the boundary in this specific area took place about 1713, when a boundary monument was erected by the Chinese and the Koreans on the watershed of the Yalu and Tumen rivers near the peak of the Pai-t'ou Shan. Furthermore, a 1909 Chinese-Japanese agreement stipulated that the boundary was to run from this marker to the headwater streams of the Tumen River. This (1909) Peking Agreement forms the basis for current, differing opinions as to which of the many streams that radiate from the Pai-t'ou Shan were the true headwater streams. The marker is presumably still in use although recent maps indicate disagreement as to its precise location. As a result, mainland Chinese maps, in disagreement with Korean, U.S., Japanese, and most foreign maps, continue to show most of the Pai-t'ou Shan area as Chinese territory.

The Consulate General in Hong Kong reported in January 1962 that the dispute still continues, although in a minor key. According to the report "On the basis of recently acquired publications it appears that there are areas in the Ch'ang-pai mountain range still claimed both by Communist China and North Korea. Two prominent geographic features are involved. One is Pait'ou Shan: 41-59N; 128-04E and the other is Tien Ch'ih, the crater lake on that volcanic peak.

"The November 1961 issue of Jen-min Hua-pao (People's Pictorial) carried an illustrated article on the Ch'ang-pai mountain range (41-40N; 128-00E) on the Manchuria-Korean border. The text accompanying the photos contains the following statements: "The Chang-pai mountains are located in Kirin Province ... The main peak Pait'ou Shan rises over 2,700 meters above sea level. It is the highest mountain in Northeast China. On this peak there is a volcanic lake, approximately 14 kilometers in circumference, two or three hundred meters deep, with deep blue water, that is called T'ien Ch'ih." The November 1961 issue of China Pictorial, the English language counterpart of Jen-min Hua-pao, carries a similar article. The relevant

* Measured on the AMS 1:250,000 maps showing the boundary.

text reads as follows: 'The Changpai Mountains lie in Kirin Province. Mount Paitou, their main peak, rising 2,700 metres above the sea level, is the highest in China's northeast. It is crowned by a volcanic lake, known as the Pond of Heaven, about 14 kilometres in circumference, whose blue waters are some 200 to 300 metres deep.'

"In 1961 the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Pyongyang published two volumes, one in English called Facts About Korea and one in Chinese called Ch'ao-hsien Kai-k'uang ("General Facts About Korea"). In the English edition on page one the subsection on boundaries has the sentence 'The Dooman and Amrok Rivers and Mt. Baikdoo separate the country from its northern neighbors--the Maritime Provinces of the USSR and the northeastern region of the Chinese Peoples Republic.' The Chinese edition on page one in the subsection on territory says 'The Touman River in Northern Korea adjoins the Maritime Provinces of the Soviet Union. The Yalu River, the Touman River and Pait'ou Shan border the northeastern areas of the Chinese People's Republic.' In the subsection on topography on page one the English edition has the sentence 'There are a number of high mountains: Mt. Baikdoo (2,744 m) ...' The implication is that Mt. Baikdoo is in Korea. The Chinese edition is clearer. It says on page three in the subsection on topography 'In Korea there are Pait'ou Shan (2,740 meters), Mt. Kuanmao (2,541 meters) and many other mountains.' In the subsection on rivers on page four the English edition says 'There are only a few natural lakes in the country, Kwang-po and Chunji on Mt. Baikdoo being the main ones.' The Chinese edition on page five says essentially the same thing. In both editions the map facing page two which is on the scale of 1:4,500,000 shows clearly a boundary line drawn to the north and west of Pait'ou Shan and places Pait'ou Shan definitely within the boundaries of North Korea. In fact, all the maps in the book show Pait'ou Shan or at least the lake on the top of it as being within North Korea.

"According to the legend facing page 260 of the Chinese edition, it was published in August, 1961. Although there is no evidence to support it, there is a possibility that the article published by the Chinese Communists in November was in response to the book published by the North Koreans in August."

Along the Yalu and Tumen rivers, agreement as to delineation of the boundary is more in accord. However, even here disputes over certain rights could develop. Although the Yalu has been accepted as the boundary since at least 1875 and the Tumen since 1909, apparently no detailed demarcation of the boundary in the two rivers has ever been made. As a result, no formal allocation of the islands in the river to one country or the other has been effected. For one bridge across the Yalu and one across the Tumen, however, agreements have been made dividing the jurisdiction at the middle of each structure. The purpose of the agreements appears to be for through train service and such divisions do not apply to the boundary in the rivers themselves.

Neither country has ever claimed all of either or both rivers and there has been, in fact, a considerable degree of cooperation between them regarding navigation. This action is particularly effective in the twin ports of Antung and Sinuiju. When Korea was under Japanese control, the boundary in the Yalu was generally considered to follow the main channel (thalweg) and hence was closer to the Chinese side than to the Korean side of the river. As a result, most islands in the river were under Korean jurisdiction. However, no treaty or convention has been found to sanction this placement although in several other agreements between China and Japan the main channel was specified as the boundary, e.g., Shimonoseki Treaty of 1895 - "The mid-channel of the River Liao shall be taken as the line of demarcation ...".

A possible source of dispute between China and Korea is the Sup'ung Dam on the lower Yalu. This dam provides power for large areas of Korea and China but no convention has been signed, as was done with the bridges, dividing responsibility and jurisdiction over the dam. In 1948-49, for example, Korea insisted on performing repairs on the entire structure. Nevertheless, a serious dispute is not likely to arise between the two because of the present close political association. In view of mainland China's efforts to settle outstanding boundary issues with its neighbors, a more comprehensive treaty is a possibility.

III. TREATIES

Listed below are the modern treaties which affect the boundary or change the status of sovereignty along the boundary. In two cases, the treaties merely divide the authority over river bridges between the two states involved.

A. Treaty between China and Japan signed at Shimonoseki on April 17, 1895 with ratifications exchanged at Chefoo on May 8, 1895.

Article I recognizes the independence of "Corea" from China. Indirectly, Article II defines in part the limits of Korea by delimiting the boundary of the Feng-tien area to be ceded to Japan. According to the treaty "The line of demarcation begins at the mouth of the River Yalu, and ascends that stream to the mouth of the River An-ping; ..."

The provisions of the treaty involving cession of Feng-tien were nullified by the Japanese Proclamation of May 10, 1895 and the Convention between Japan and China for the Retrocession by Japan of the southern portion of the Province of Feng Tien signed at Peking on November 8, 1895 with ratifications exchanged at Peking on November 29, 1895.

B. Treaty of Peace between Japan and Russia signed at Portsmouth (N. H.) on August 23 and September 5, 1905 to come into force on October 15, 1905. Article II of the Portsmouth Treaty placed Korea under Japanese protection.

C. Agreement between China and Japan recognizing the River Tumen as the Boundary between China and Corea ... signed at Peking on September 4, 1909.

According to Article I, "The Governments of Japan and China declare that the River Tumen is recognized as forming the boundary between China and Korea, and that in the region of the source of that river, the boundary line shall start from the Boundary Monument and thence follow the course of the Stream Shihyishwei." Note: Chinese, Shih-i-shui; Korean, Sōgūl; Japanese, Seklotsusui.

Basically, the terms of this treaty form the basis for the current differences in opinion concerning the common boundary (see Map No. 36189).

D. Treaty between Japan and Korea arranging the Annexation of Korea to Japan signed at Seoul on August 22, 1910 with promulgation effected on August 29, 1910.

Article I authorizes the annexation of Korea to Japan as a virtual colony. This status continued until the end of World War II when Korea was again recognized as an independent state.

E. Agreement between China and Japan regarding through Railway Traffic at the Frontier (Antung-Mukden line and Korean system) signed at Mukden on November 2, 1911.

For the purposes of through rail traffic, Article 2 states "... the centre of the Yalu Bridge shall be regarded as the frontier between the two countries, west of this being regarded as Chinese, east as Japanese, territory." The Agreement, however, does not specify that the boundary line should be carried into the same relationship within the river. Rather, the normal boundary appears to be unaffected.

F. Agreement on Railway Bridge Construction over the River Tumen, dated June 9, 1915.

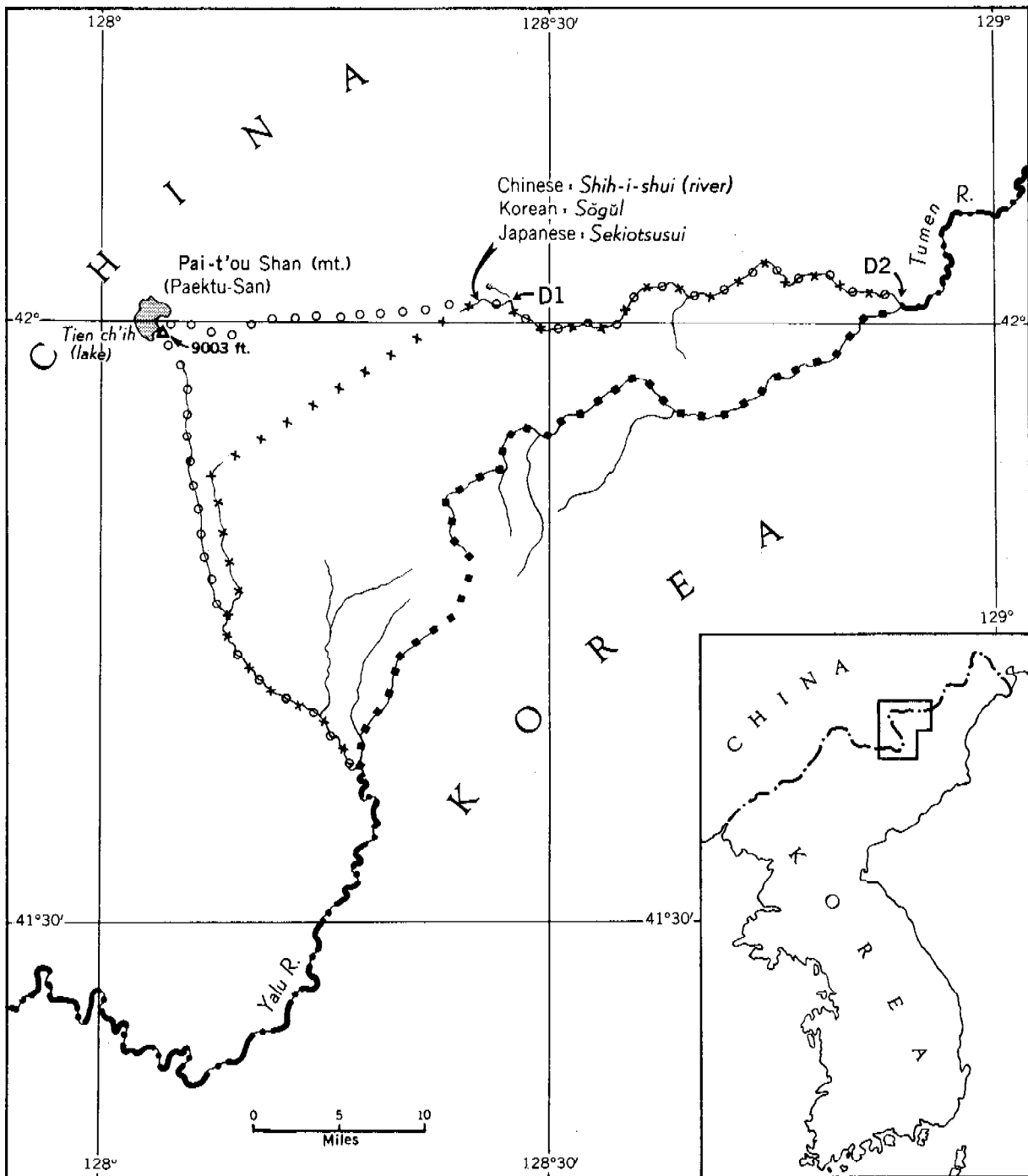
Article I of this Agreement follows the same general principle as with the Yalu bridge: "The Tumen River Bridge shall be owned jointly by the Governments of China and Japan, each of which shall control and maintain the respective halves of the span divided by the boundary fixed at the mid-river point of the bridge."

IV. SUMMARY

In small scale maps, no problem exists in the representation of the boundary along the Yalu and Tumen rivers. However, in the Pai-t'ou Shan area the differences in Chinese and Korean claims* are appreciable and the boundary should be shown as being in dispute. Nevertheless, in view of the mentioning of the Shih-i-shui stream in the Treaty of Peking (1909), the boundary line to the Pai-t'ou Shan should be continued on official maps pending a solution of the dispute. In addition, the normal disclaimer of U.S. recognition should be used.

On larger-scale maps, the problem of the alignment in the rivers and the allocation of islands becomes relatively acute. It is recommended that the representation on the AMS series 542 and 552 (1:250,000) be followed with the use of the standard disclaimer note pending, as mentioned before, a solution to the dispute.

* Approximately 600 square miles.



CHINA-KOREA BOUNDARY, LOCATION SKETCH

- International boundary where Chinese, Japanese and Korean maps agree.
 - (A) Boundary generally used on Japanese maps and on most maps published in the United States. It follows the stream Shih-i-shui (Shihyishwei) (石乙水) mentioned in the treaty of Sept. 4, 1909 between Japan and China.
 - (B) Boundary shown in the Ting atlas, 1934 (also follows the Shih-i-shui but connection with Yalu differs from Japanese interpretation).
 - (C) Approximate alignment shown on Manchuria 1:300,000 and other Chinese maps.
- (D) On some maps the name "Tumen" is used between points D1 and D2; other maps apply Shih-i-shui to this stream.