



International Boundary Study

No. 59 – December 5, 1965

Korea – U.S.S.R. Boundary

(Country Codes: KN-UR)

**The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

No. 59

KOREA – U.S.S.R. BOUNDARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Boundary Brief.....	2
II. Geographic Background.....	2
A. Physical.....	2
B. Historical.....	3
III. Analysis of Boundary Alignment	4
IV. Treaties and Other Acts	4
Peking Additional Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Limits	4
Treaty of Hun ch'un.....	4
Regulations between Russia and Corea, respecting the Frontier Trade on the River Tumen.....	4
V. Summary	5

KOREA – U.S.S.R. BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Korea–U.S.S.R. boundary extends for 10.4 miles along the lower course of the Tumen River. While no Korean–Russian treaty of delimitation has ever been negotiated, no dispute is known to exist concerning the precise alignment of the boundary. This situation is in contrast to differences of opinion which prevail in unpublicized fashion over 20 miles of the China–Korea border lying between the headwaters of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers (see International Boundary Study No. 17, June 29, 1962).

II. GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

A. Physical

The lower course of the Tumen River is situated in a generally flat and swampy region abounding in numerous small lakes and lagoons. On the Korean side, a low ridge with a maximum elevation of 185 meters extends for 7.8 miles parallel to the river bank. At its closest point, the ridge is one-tenth of a mile from the river while at the widest, it is 1.5 miles to the west.

Away from the immediate frontier area a region of hills and low mountains extends to the north, west, and south. The Tumen and its numerous tributaries have cut entrenched and meandering valleys in the hill land. Transportation in northern Korea, as a result, tends to parallel the Tumen Valley. The formal opening in June 1965 of a 50-mile stretch of railroad between the principal city of Ch'ongjin and Najin should facilitate rail shipments across the Korea–U.S.S.R. border. At the Chinese tripoint, where the Tumen leaves the main hill region, the river is approximately one-third of a mile wide. It broadens rapidly, however, to more than a mile at its mouth. The silt-laden river has built up many small islands and sand bars in its lower course. The precise configuration and position of the islands and bars fluctuate with periods of high and low water. Floods tend to occur primarily in spring and early summer. The Tumen, in general, has not been an effective artery of communications although during the summer months the rafting of logs is quite common.

Climatically, the valley of the lower Tumen enjoys mild summers with a frost-free season in excess of 150 days. This duration permits the growing and harvesting of quick-maturing rice and other grains. The length of the frost-free season results from the ameliorating influence of the Sea of Japan; consequently, the length of the growing season declines rapidly inland. Winter temperatures, in contrast, can be quite severe although again the warming influence of the Sea is considerable. Reportedly, the middle Tumen freezes over for approximately three months of the year. The boundary region, most probably, has a shorter period of hard freezing. Annual precipitation ranges between 20 and 30 inches. The seasonal maxima occur in late summer and

early autumn with the minima in the period January through March. The amount and the distribution are sufficient for agriculture.

B. Historical

Korea has for centuries been a distinct and well-defined political-cultural region. The Yalu in the west and the Tumen in the east have generally served to mark the northern limits of Korean settlement. Only in the center, in the valley of the upper Tumen, have Korean peoples settled beyond these natural frontiers of the Yalu-Tumen line.

Between the 5th and 10th centuries, the Yalu-Tumen line became the frontier between Korea and the peoples of Manchuria subject to Han China. On the Chinese side of the rivers, a true march, or zone of limited or restricted occupation, had been created by the Chinese Emperors. The lack of administration in the march, however, attracted lawless elements and the zone soon became a source of friction to both China and Korea. While the Koreans wished to continue the march, the military administrator of Manchu China began to assume control over the region by the middle of the 18th century.

Russia occupied the Maritime Province east of the Manchuria and Korea following the Treaty of Peking in 1860. This Treaty delimited the Sino-Russian boundary as far south as the left bank of the Tumen River, 20 versts (13.2 miles) above its mouth. By inference, the Tumen for these 20 versts to the sea became the Korea-Russia boundary. The Chinese and Russians demarcated their common boundary placing the final pillar "T," on the Tumen left bank. By 1886, the original wooden pillars erected under the terms of the 1860 Treaty had rotted away and a new Russo-Manchu agreement was negotiated to replace these with more permanent pillars. Pillar "T" on the Tumen was also moved from its original position to a new location 30 li (about 10.4 miles) from the sea.

No Korean-Russian boundary treaty has ever been negotiated to delimit precisely the Tumen River line, but on August 20, 1888, Russia and Korea signed an agreement providing for freedom of navigation on the Tumen for coasting-vessels of both nationalities. The Treaty also spoke of the river as "their common frontier." However, in 1910 Japan annexed Korea and thus terminated its independence and direct relationship with China. The next year, the Czarist Government notified Japan that the status of their common boundary was not clear. In 1914, Japan submitted a plan for the delimitation of the boundary by utilizing the thalweg, or main navigation channel, but the outbreak of World War I and the Russian Revolution which followed prevented any action.

Nothing is known of any post-World War II agreement on a boundary delimitation and the current status of the boundary remains unchanged. During the Korean conflict a number of bridges were built across the Tumen but most of them have been destroyed. One jointly-operated bridge now spans the river, but no agreement concerning the boundary on the bridge has been reported.

III. ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The boundary is considered to follow the main navigation channel of the Tumen for the 10.4 miles from the Chinese tripoint to the Sea of Japan. Neither country has made a claim for additional territory.

IV. TREATIES AND OTHER ACTS

No treaty delimits the boundary between Korea and the U.S.S.R. However, the following three international acts bear on the location of the border.

Peking Additional Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Limits, signed by China and Russia on November 2 (14), 1860 in Peking with ratification on December 20, 1860, in St. Petersburg. (Hertslet, Godfrey E.P., Hertslet's China Treaties, Vol. I, p. 461, ff., (Great Britain) Foreign Office, London, 1908.)

The southern terminus of the Manchu–Russian boundary was the Tumen River, 20 versts (13.2 miles) from its mouth. By inference, the remainder of the river to the east formed the Russo–Korean boundary.

Treaty of Hun ch'un, signed in 1886

(No text has been found in primary sources but the treaty has been cited in several secondary sources.)

The treaty led to the replacement of the original wooden demarcation pillars with more permanent markers and moved to the Sino–Russian terminus on the Tumen about 3 miles downstream.

Regulations between Russian and Corea, respecting the Frontier Trade on the River Tumen, signed at Seoul on August 8 (20), 1888. (British and Foreign State Papers, Vol. 79, 1887–88, pp. 634–664, (British) Foreign Office, London.)

The preamble stated the purpose of the agreement to be the "strengthening of mutual friendship between Russia and Corea, and of developing the commercial intercourse on their common frontier." Article VII continued that "Russian and Corean coasting-vessels shall be free to navigate the River Tumen at pleasure. For the control of intercourse between the two shores and of shipping on the river, the competent authorities of the two countries shall hereafter draw up special Regulations for navigation and river police."

The Regulations, while not explicit, imply strongly that the two states considered the Tumen to be the mutual or common frontier.

V. SUMMARY

The Korea–U.S.S.R. boundary should be represented on official United States maps as recognized international boundary.

On large-scale maps, the thalweg of the river, which follows close to the U.S.S.R. shore, should be utilized. Chinese, Russian, Korean, and Japanese maps all show the boundary in relatively the same position. Furthermore, neither state has made a claim for additional territory. However, since there is no official treaty to sanction the traditional position of the boundary, the standard disclaimer note that the boundary is not necessarily authoritative should be printed on the map.

The best available large-scale source for compilation is the Army Map Service series L 751, sheets 7340 IV and 7341 III. The AMS 1:250,000, series L 542, sheet NK 52-6, is judged a good source for medium and small-scale compilation.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Research in Economics and Science, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington, D.C. (Telephone: Code 182, Extension 4508).