

**“We Are on the Brink of Disaster”:  
Revolution, War and Imperial Conflict in Blagoveshchensk-Heihe**  
Yuexin Rachel Lin

When Russian imperial power extended to the Amur in the mid-19th Century, Blagoveshchensk-Heihe became one of the foremost sites of imperial competition. The proximity of the Chinese and Russian cities, within sight of each other across the Amur River, engendered both connection and conflict, while the strategic waterway attracted Japanese trade. Some of the starkest manifestations of Sino-Russian conflict had erupted there, including the 1858 Treaty of Aigun and the 1900 massacre of Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion. Control over Chinese migration became a perennial problem - which led to the deeply-resented river-crossing permit regime - and Japanese interest in commerce and shipping challenged both Russian and Chinese interests.

Historical memories of such conflict persisted even as the Qing and tsarist regimes collapsed. They were brought to the fore by the arrival of the 1917 Russian Revolution, when the collapse of Russian state power offered the opportunity to recover past losses. This paper examines the violence of the revolutionary and Civil War period in Blagoveshchensk-Heihe from the perspective of the Chinese community in both cities. It focuses on key economic and political actors — diaspora leaders and border officials — who formed self-defence organisations, appealed for greater military and diplomatic presence in Russian territory, and warned of Japanese opportunism on the Amur. In so doing, they appealed to emotive “moments” in Sino-Russian historical memory, particularly the Aigun Treaty and the Blagoveshchensk massacre. Therefore, this paper argues that the revolutionary upheavals in Russia fed into long-term discourses of Sino-Russian conflict, and that shared historical memories enabled disparate groups to take part in revisionist activism. The case of Blagoveshchensk-Heihe thus prompts further reflection about historical memory as a force for mobilisation in a contested frontier.