



HARBIN CROSSROADS OF EAST ASIA

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Harbin (China) will be centre stage of a film coming out in September 2024. It is a Korean film about Ahn Jung-geun (안중근) the Korean independence fighter who killed Ito Hirobumi (伊藤 博文), prime minister of Japan in 1909. He was angry because of the Japanese occupation in 1905. It was to be annexed after the assassination of the prime minister.

Harbin has also had a long contact with Russia and there were many orthodox Christians who settled there, and the church of Church of the Intercession (哈尔滨圣母擘曩教) was built in 1930. It's original name was the Ukrainian church of Harbin (Церква Покрови Пресвятої Богородиці) given the sizeable community. The church was built by the China Eastern Railway. The company provided a short cut through China of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. It was a project which started in 1896 when the Chinese granted



permission for the construction of the new railroad. It goes through Harbin. Russia and China had signed their first alliance in 1896.

The same year the king of Korea, Gojong (1864-1907), took refuge in the Russian embassy in Seoul. He ruled Korea from that building from 11th February to 1896 to 20th February 1897. That marked the decline of Japanese and Chinese influence and growth of the Russian one.

The Japanese occupation of Korea was a direct result of the Russo-Japanese war which ended in the defeat of Russia in 1905 and beginning of Japanese expansion in Asia which ended in 1945.

Harbin in 1909 was the centre of Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Korean interests in that year. Two interests which have not been mentioned yet are the Mongolian and Manchurian. Harbin lies in between the regions of Inner Mongolia (capital Hohhot) and Jilin and Lianing. The last two together with Heilongjiang (capital Harbin) form Chinese Manchuria. Russian Manchuria is on the other side of the Amur River and includes the port of Vladivostok, the natural and closest port to Harbin (see [Chinese Vladivostok](#)). Beside the Chinese name (Simplified Chinese 哈尔滨; Traditional Chinese 哈爾濱) it also has a Manchu name (Harbin) as well as the Russian form (харбин). These forms reveal the ancient dispute between China and Mongolia over this area. Korea was also invaded by the Mongol Empire between 1231 and 1270.

All these territories have been disputed by China, Russia and Japan. Korea has a direct connection with them.

The film in September will remind us that Harbin, is not just the economic capital of Russia (see [Harbin the new capital of Russia](#)) but also the political centre of many political and cultural disputes of Asia. China has placed Harbin at the centre of East Asia by raising the status of Heilongjiang province a free trade zone (HLJFTZ China [Heilongjiang Pilot Free Trade Zone]).

In September we may remember that Harbin is one the key centres of East Asia by sitting in a cinema watching a film.