

# Harbin

Hā'èrbīn 哈尔滨

9.87 million est. 2007 pop.

**Harbin is the capital city of Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China. The cosmopolitan city, known as Little Moscow, was once a haven for refugees from Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and is now famous worldwide for its winter Ice and Snow Festival.**

**H**arbin is the capital of Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China. Its administrative region covers eight districts and eleven counties with a total area of 53,000 square kilometers. Harbin is the political, economic, cultural, educational, and transportation center of the province and (as of 2007) is the eighth largest city in China.

Harbin's winter is as long as five months and overnight low temperatures can fall to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Although summer is hot and short, the cool evening breezes from the Songhua River make Harbin one of the most popular retreats in July and August.

Originally a quiet fishing village on the south bank of the Songhua, Harbin derives its name from *Alejin*, the Manchu word for "honor" and "fame." During the twentieth century this village with a population of only 2,300 grew into a metropolis of nearly 4 million people by 2001, before more than doubling in population over the next six years. The city's rapid expansion during the twentieth century was precipitated by construction of the China Eastern Railway through Manchuria by the Russians at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of

the twentieth century. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the city became a haven for refugees from Russia, many of them Jews. In fact, during the first half of the twentieth century Jews in Harbin numbered more than twenty thousand—one of the largest Jewish communities in China. By the 1930s, Harbin's Jews had begun to scatter across eastern Asia because of economic crises and persecution by the Soviet army. After World War II many Harbin Jews moved away, mostly to Israel, the United States, Europe, or Australia.

During the period of the Japanese-dominated state of Manchukou (1932–1945), Harbin was the site of a notorious Japanese biological warfare laboratory. Soviet troops occupied the city in 1945, and a year later Chinese Communist forces took it over. From 1946 to 1949 Harbin was





**The Zonoff Shop in Harbin, ca. 1929.**

used as military base by the Chinese Communist Party. The city played an important role in the Chinese Communist victory in northeastern China.

Since 1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China, Harbin has grown into an integrated city with industry as the principal part of its economy. Hosting large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises, Harbin had been an important industrial base of China from the 1950s to the 1980s. Hydroelectricity equipment, airplane engines, and linen textiles were the main products. Since the 1978 economic reform Harbin has diversified its economy by developing light industry and service industry.

One of the most beautiful cities in China, Harbin is known as "Little Moscow" and "Paris in the East" because of its European-style architecture and its people's daring way of dressing, the result of colonialism and cooperation with nearby Russia. Harbin, one of the few cities in China

that never had a city wall, is famed for its cosmopolitan and open attitude toward things that are new and foreign. The local language is considerably influenced by the Manchu and Russian languages.

**Di BAI**

### Further Reading

- China Handbook Editorial Committee. (1992). *Geography, China handbook series* (L. Liang, Trans.). Beijing: Foreign Language Press.
- Hsieh, C., & Lu, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Changing China: A geographical appraisal*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Retrieved from <http://www.harbin.gov.cn/hrbsh/csxcg/down.php> (in Chinese) and <http://english.cri.cn/725/2006/02/16/202@51651.htm> (in English).
- Kirk, M. (Ed.). (2009). *China by numbers 2009*. Hong Kong: China Economic Review Publishing.