The central Chinese government put forward a strategy to invigorate the northeast of China in September 2003. The northeast region, including the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang and eastern Inner Mongolia, covers 1.45 million square kilometers and has a population of 120 million. China's efforts to rejuvenate its northeast rust belt have yielded positive results as Liaoning Province's gross domestic product (GDP) exceeded one trillion yuan in 2007.

China is arguably undergoing the most challenging phase of its economic reform: Revitalising the old and stagnant industrial bases in its northeastern region. The ultimate goal of the so-called northeast rejuvenation scheme is to transform the country’s “largest rust belt” to its “fourth economic engine,” after the Pearl River delta, the Yangtze River delta, and the Beijing-Tianjin corridor. This new phase of China’s economic development not only will be crucial for the credibility and legitimacy of the Hu-Wen administration, but will also shape China's future.

The Northeast was one of the earliest regions to industrialise in China during the era of Manchukuo. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Northeast China continued to be a major industrial base of the country. Recent years, however, have seen the stagnation of Northeast China's heavy-industry-based economy, as China's economy continues to liberalise and privatise; the government has initialised the Revitalise the Northeast campaign to counter this problem, and established the Northeast Summit to improve policy coordination and integration.

The region is, on the whole, more heavily urbanised than most parts of China, largely because it was the first part of the country to develop heavy industry owing to its abundant coal reserves. Major cities include Shenyang, Dalian, Harbin, Changchun and Anshan, all with several million inhabitants. Other cities include the steel making centres of Fushun and Anshan in Liaoning, Jilin City in Jilin, and Qiqihar and Mudanjiang in Heilongjiang. Harbin, more than any other city in China, possesses significant Russian influences: there are many Orthodox churches that have fallen out of use since the Cultural Revolution. Shenyang and Dalian, meanwhile, have sizable populations of Japanese and Koreans due to their traditional linkages.

The rural population of Manchuria is heavily concentrated in the warmer southern part of the area, where very warm to hot summer weather permits crops such as maize and millet to be grown with high yields. Soybeans and flax are also very important, as are wheat and barley. The region possesses large flocks of sheep, and pigs are abundant in the more densely settled southern part. The northern half of Heilongjiang is so cold and poorly drained that agriculture is almost impossible; however, the Amur River provides very rich fishing prospects, and sheep are even more abundant than in southern Heilongjiang.

Northeast China is the country's traditional industrial base, focusing mainly on equipment manufacturing. Major industries include the steel, automobile, shipbuilding, aircraft manufacturing, and petroleum refining industries. The gross regional product of the three northeast provinces totaled ¥1.63 trillion in 2002. In recent years, the Chinese government has initialised the "Revitalise the Northeast campaign" to turn this region into one of China's economic growth engines.

Although originally the Northeast was one of China’s major industrial centers, its competitive position has been challenged by natural resource depletion, shifting demand, and changing market structure. China's international trade has grown in importance and drastically changed regional comparative advantages. Other regions have shown a more dynamic adjustment to these changing opportunities, due perhaps to their initial specialisation and lower susceptibility to investment inertia, as well as to local government policies. In any case, the Northeast provinces now appear to be what has been called elsewhere a 'rust belt region', with ageing and less competitive industries. There is clearly a need for a major transition in order to recapture the strong economic performance that once characterised the region's industrial past.

An interesting article and short clip about the film industry in Shenyang can be found at:
http://english.cntv.cn/20140607/VIDE1402135446408616.shtml