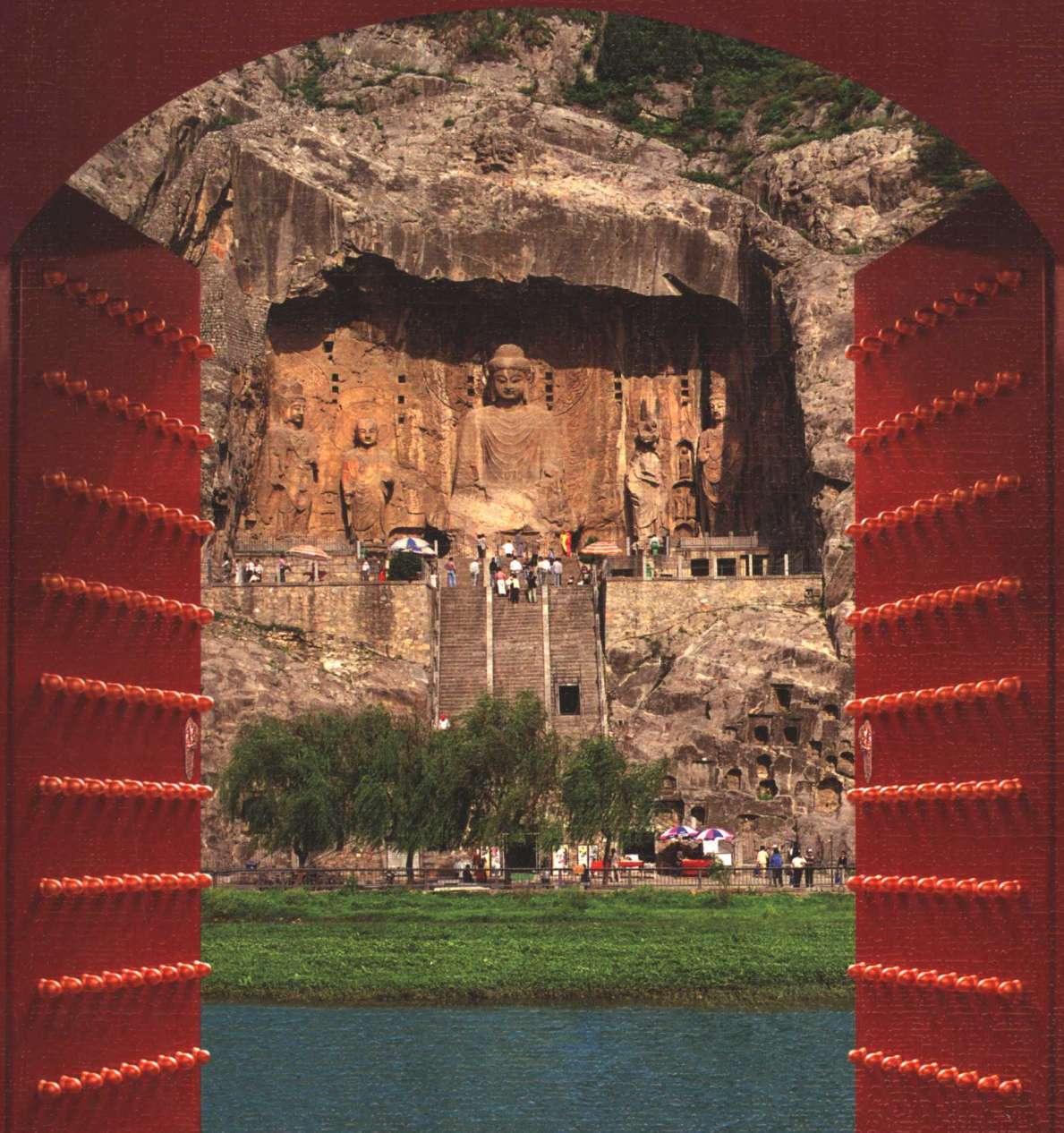


PANORAMIC CHINA

# HENAN

## The Central Plains of Chinese Culture



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS



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# Introduction

China has 23 provinces, four municipalities directly under the Central Government, five autonomous regions and two special administrative regions. Due to geographical and topographical differences and climatic variations, each area has its own unique natural scenery. The mountains in the north of the country are rugged and magnificent, the waters in the south are clear and turbulent, the Gobi in the northwest shines brilliantly in the sunlight, the hills in the southeast are often shrouded in floating fog, green waves of sorghum and soybean crops undulate over the vast fields of the northeast, and the mountains in the southwest, with sequestered villages and terraced fields, look tranquil and picturesque.

There are 56 ethnic groups in China. The Han, making up the overwhelming majority of the population, mainly live in the eastern and central parts of the country, while many ethnic groups with smaller populations live in the west. In China, all ethnic groups, regardless of size, are equal and respect each other. Each ethnic group has its own folk customs, religious beliefs and cultural traditions, and most use their own language and script. Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities. All the ethnic groups call themselves "Chinese." They are courteous and friendly. In the ethnic-minority areas, the quiet environment, quaint buildings, exquisite fashions, unsophisticated folk customs and hospitality of the local people hold a great appeal to visitors from afar.

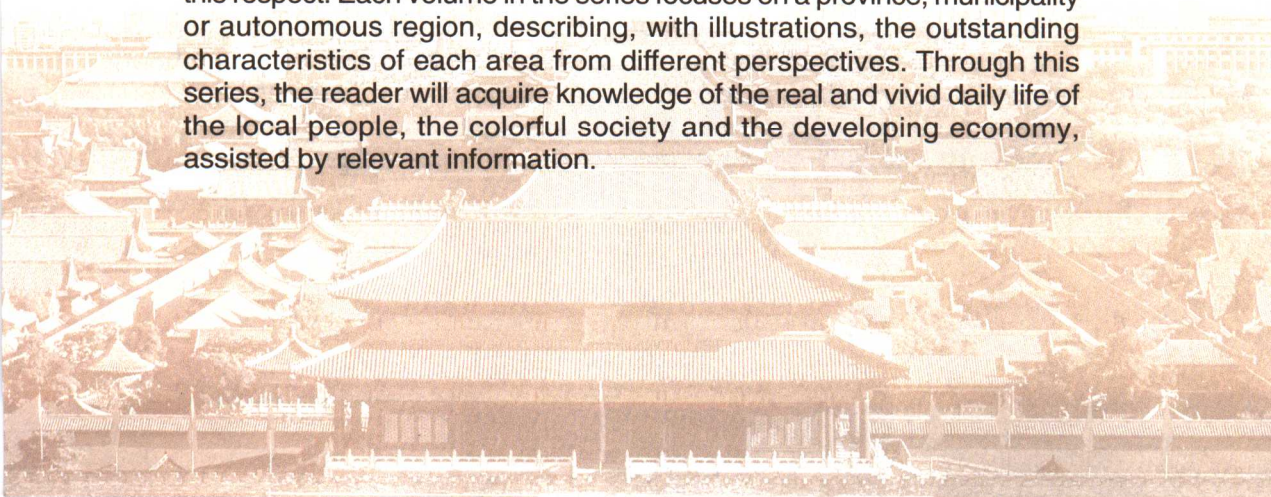
China boasts 5,000 years of recorded civilization and a brilliant culture. The country is home to such world-renowned cultural treasures as the Great Wall, terracotta warriors and horses of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, and Ming and Qing imperial palaces and mausoleums, and large numbers of ancient architectural masterpieces, including temples, Buddhist pagodas, residential buildings, gardens, bridges, city walls and irrigation works. There are also cultural relics unearthed from ancient sites, including



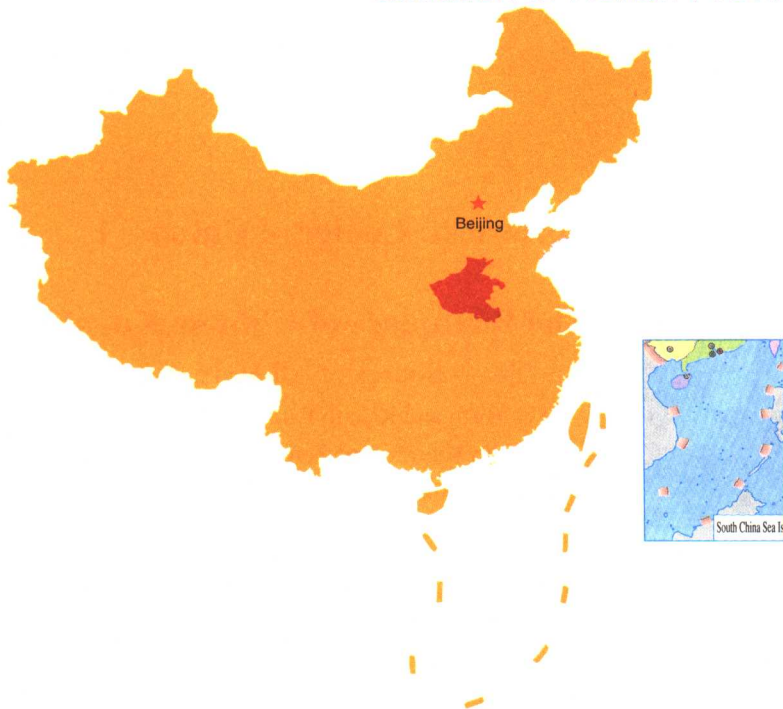
painted pottery, jade ware, bronze ware, large and ornate tombs and foundations of historical buildings, and many more as yet undiscovered. The museums of China's various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions house thousands of cultural relics and works of art, among which are treasures rare in the world, displaying the long history of China and the splendid Chinese culture from different aspects. The strong, deep-rooted Chinese culture has always influenced the mentality and moral standards of the Chinese people, having developed continually in pace with the civilization. A careful study of today's Peking opera, kunqu opera, shadow plays, calligraphy, painting, paper-cutting, and even the flower-shaped steamed buns on the kitchen range of farmers will reveal elements of traditional Chinese culture as well as replications of the art of the past.

Like other countries of venerable age, China has suffered grievous calamities. During the century and more before the 1950s, the Chinese people made unrelenting struggles for the prosperity of the country, and national independence and liberation. A large number of insightful people and revolutionaries, cherishing all kinds of dreams for a strong China, studied the ways of the West in a quest for prosperity and strength, and borrowed the revolutionary experience of foreign countries. At last, the Communist Party of China, proceeding from the reality of China, and relying on the working people, founded a brand-new country, the People's Republic of China, in 1949. Since then, the Chinese people have made persistent efforts and explorations for the grand revitalization of the Chinese nation. The Chinese people's efforts in the past two decades and more have resulted in outstanding achievements, with rapid social progress, a well-developed economy, and a modern civilization and traditional culture enhancing each other.

It is easy to have a quick look at China's past and present, but it takes time to gain a panoramic knowledge of China. The "Panoramic China" series is meant to assist readers, especially those overseas, in this respect. Each volume in the series focuses on a province, municipality or autonomous region, describing, with illustrations, the outstanding characteristics of each area from different perspectives. Through this series, the reader will acquire knowledge of the real and vivid daily life of the local people, the colorful society and the developing economy, assisted by relevant information.



## Location of Henan Province in China



## Henan Province





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## Foreword

# Center of China

If you want to understand China, its culture and civilization, you must get to know Henan.

Lying at the center of China, Henan Province covers an area of 167,000 sq km, 55.7 percent of which is plain. The Yellow River, mother river of Chinese civilization, winds for over 700 km through northern Henan. The province is rich in wheat, sesame and cotton, and is a big agricultural province and major grain-producing region. It is in China's front ranks for output of unprocessed coal and crude oil, is first for molybdenum and second for aluminium. Its manufacturing industry, encompassing agricultural and mining machinery and bearings, is quite developed. It has a population of nearly 100 million, the majority of whom are from the Han ethnic group, and also Hui, Mongol and Manchu minorities. In ancient times, Henan people, simple and honest, bright and diligent, created an advanced civilization. Over generations, with the migrations and movements of people, this civilization spread throughout China, especially in the provinces of the southeast.

Henan is located in China's central belt; Mount Songshan, the Central Sacred Mountain, rises here and there are ancient observatories for watching astronomical phenomena and measuring constellations. Henan was traditionally thought of as the "center of all China" and it was referred to as the Central Plains or Zhongzhou (Middle China). Henan is the boundary of the two different climates of south and north China, being situated in the transitional area between warm-temperate zone and subtropical zone. Its climate is therefore mild. Southern Henan has diverse crops while the north produces mainly wheat. The province is high in the west and low in the east and is the transitional zone of traditional Chinese houses. In the east, people construct wooden houses, and villages and farmhouses are scattered about; in the west, people still have the tradition of living in caves. Although every place in Henan has its own dialect, one thing common to all is that they all use the word *zhong* ("center" or "middle") to express "yes." This may have something to do with Henan's location at the "center of China." The culture born here is also at the core of Chinese civilization, and if you wish to explore the age-old and mysterious oriental civilization, Henan can provide the entrance and the key.



Legends of the Chinese people have it that Henan was the birthplace of man, and there are still many customs and relics preserved on the vast land of the Central Plains. The Chinese call themselves “descendants of Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang.” Emperor Huang (the Yellow Emperor), who is generally acknowledged as the ancestor of the Chinese nation, lived in the Central Plains. He led his tribe to struggle against natural disasters and finally brought into being the Chinese people. Since the Central Plains is the cradle of the Chinese people, the roots of Chinese surnames lie in Henan. Statistics show that as many as 1,834 of the 4,820 Han Chinese surnames with a textual source originated in Henan. People with the 100 most common surnames account for 87 percent of China’s Han population, and over half of these names originated in Henan.

Henan is closely linked with the emergence and development of Chinese characters. Legend has it that Cang Jie, the creator of Chinese pictographs, was born in Henan; the ancient Chinese characters carved on tortoise shells or animal bones discovered more than 100 years ago at the Yin ruins in Anyang, are considered China’s earliest character system. Among the 100,000-odd pieces of tortoise shell and animal bones that have been excavated and sorted, we can make out 4,500 characters, 1,700 of them legible, unfolding the complete picture of ancient Chinese characters. Henan also has a distinguished scholar who made critical contributions to the development of Chinese characters. This was Xu Shen, a Confucian classicist in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), who wrote the *Explanation and Study of Principles of Composition of Characters*, the first wordbook systematically analyzing script style and investigating the origin, laying a foundation for the later study of Chinese characters. It is in Henan that the thread of emergence and development of Chinese characters — this important vehicle of civilization — can be perceived most clearly.

Right up to the 12th century and the demise of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), Henan was always a political, economic and cultural center of the Chinese people. In the long river of history, the Xia (c.2070-1600 BC), Shang (1600-1046 BC), Eastern Zhou (770-256 BC), Eastern Han, Wei (220-265), Western Jin (265-317), Northern Wei (386-534), Sui (581-618), Tang (618-907), Five Dynasties (907-960), Northern Song and Jin (1115-1234) had built their capital or secondary capital in Henan. Here, feudal rulers established institutions and rites, expanded their territory, and spread politics and culture. What was produced here is the mainstream culture of a people; with the passage of time, that culture gradually spread to become a rich and profound cultural treasury of the Chinese people.

Henan produced sages, men of virtue and accomplished masters in large numbers; outstanding personages from Henan can be found in every field of Chinese civilization. Lao Zi (c. 571-471 BC) and Zhuang Zi (c. 369-286 BC) established Taoism, one of the mainstream ideologies of traditional Chinese culture; Zhang Heng and Zhang Zhongjing made productive explorations in the fields of astronomy and medicine; Du Fu, Han Yu and Wu Daozi shine



through the ages with their attainments in poetry, letters and painting; Monk Xuan Zang went west from here and brought back to China the essence of Indian Buddhism; Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi created a new Confucian ideological system; the famous prime ministers Yi Yin and Bi Gan and the renowned general Yue Fei became popular role models.... These distinguished sons of Henan have lent splendor to the culture of China.

Just like the mighty Yellow River that passes through the province, many millennia of civilization have left abundant historical relics and a rich cultural heritage here. It has China's second largest number of above-ground relics and highest number of underground relics. There are nearly 30,000 sites of valuable ancient relics, 100 of which are key units under national-level protection. Henan is also the birthplace of Chinese kungfu: Shaolin Kungfu emerged at the Shaolin Monastery in Dengfeng, while taijiquan (shadow boxing) originated in Chenjiagou in Wenxian County. In short, Chinese culture has bred a host of splendid gems upon the Central Plains.

Today, the economic and social development of Henan displays a fine momentum. Its economic rate is quickening, its industrial structure improving, economic returns rising year on year, its comprehensive strength and development stamina increasing. Henan's overall agricultural capability has increased remarkably, and its rural economy is developing in an all-round way. For many years, for output of major agricultural and livestock products such as cotton, oil and meat Henan has been among the top three. Industry has gradually established a

Wheat harvest





leadership position in Henan's economic growth, building a large and complete system with machinery, electronics, petroleum, chemicals, metallurgy, construction materials, coal and electricity as the mainstay. Zhengzhou East Railway Station and Zhengzhou Airport have become national first-category ports. With greater opening-up, Henan has made new achievements in implementing the project "Introducing from the East and Advancing Towards the West" has made much headway; fields using foreign capital have expanded non-stop, utilization of such capital has further improved, and 24 of Top 500 multinational corporations have established branches in Henan. The export structure has been further adjusted. Food wheat was exported for the first time in China. Electrical, mechanical, together with new- and high-tech products have become new sources of export growth. Henan province has trading relationships with 160 countries and regions across the world.

Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, is one of China's biggest transport hubs. The north-south Beijing-Guangzhou Railway and the east-west Longhai Railway meet at Zhengzhou, as do the north-south Beijing-Zhuhai Highway and the Lianyungang-Korgas Highway from

The Yellow River Bridge at Zhengzhou was opened to traffic in late 2004, forming the final link in the Beijing-Zhuhai Expressway.







A "pit" or "light well" courtyard in Sanmenxia City, which has over 100 such below-ground villages. A square pit is dug about six or seven meters deep and eight or 12 caves hollowed out in the four sides. It is a unique form of dwelling.

Lianyungang in Jiangsu Province to Korgas in Xinjiang. The railway covers more than 3,700 km within the "Three South-to-North and Four East-to-West" network; the highways form a mesh of expressways, national highways and provincial highways. Within Henan are Zhengzhou's Xinzheng, Luoyang and Nanyang airports, with over 500 flights a week to over 50 cities in China. Zhengzhou's Xinzheng Airport has opened to international flights, making it easy for Chinese and overseas visitors to come to Henan.

Over the past 20 years, Henan has made notable achievements on all fronts, and stands proud with a new outlook in central China. In terms of cultural development, Henan has come up with the slogan "turning cultural resources into a cultural industry," exploring and exploiting its rich traditional culture while developing a modern cultural industry. Beyond any shadow of doubt, Henan's wealth of cultural resources can fully demonstrate the magic of Chinese civilization. They can also help the province's economic growth take wing.



Xiaolangdi Reservoir on the Yellow River

