

PANORAMIC CHINA

HUBEI

Land of the Phoenix



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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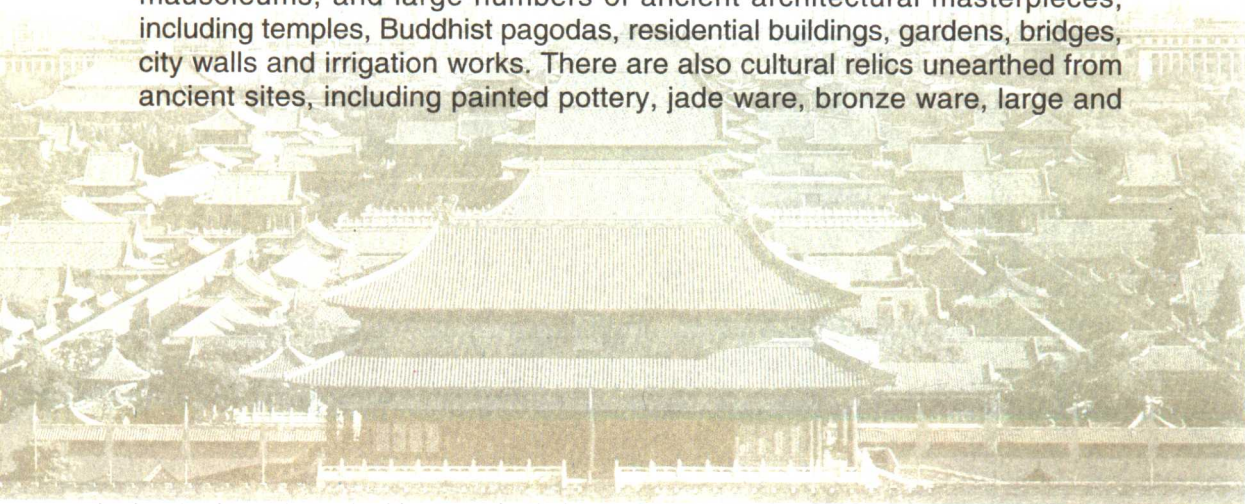
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Introduction

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.

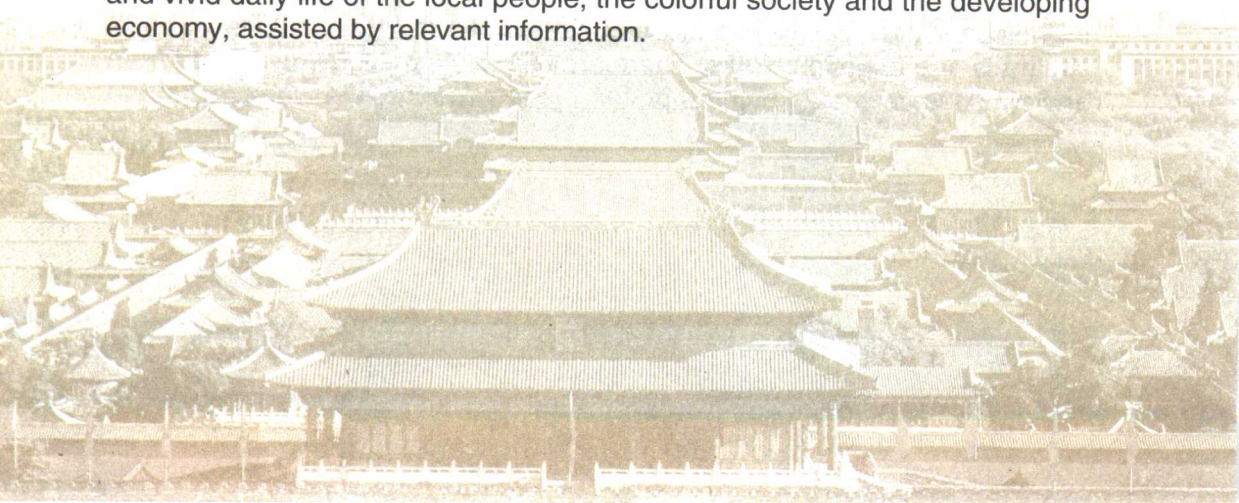
China boasts 5,000 years of recorded civilization and a brilliant culture. The country is home to such world-renowned cultural treasures as the Great Wall, terracotta warriors and horses of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, and Ming and Qing imperial palaces and mausoleums, 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 Hubei Province in China

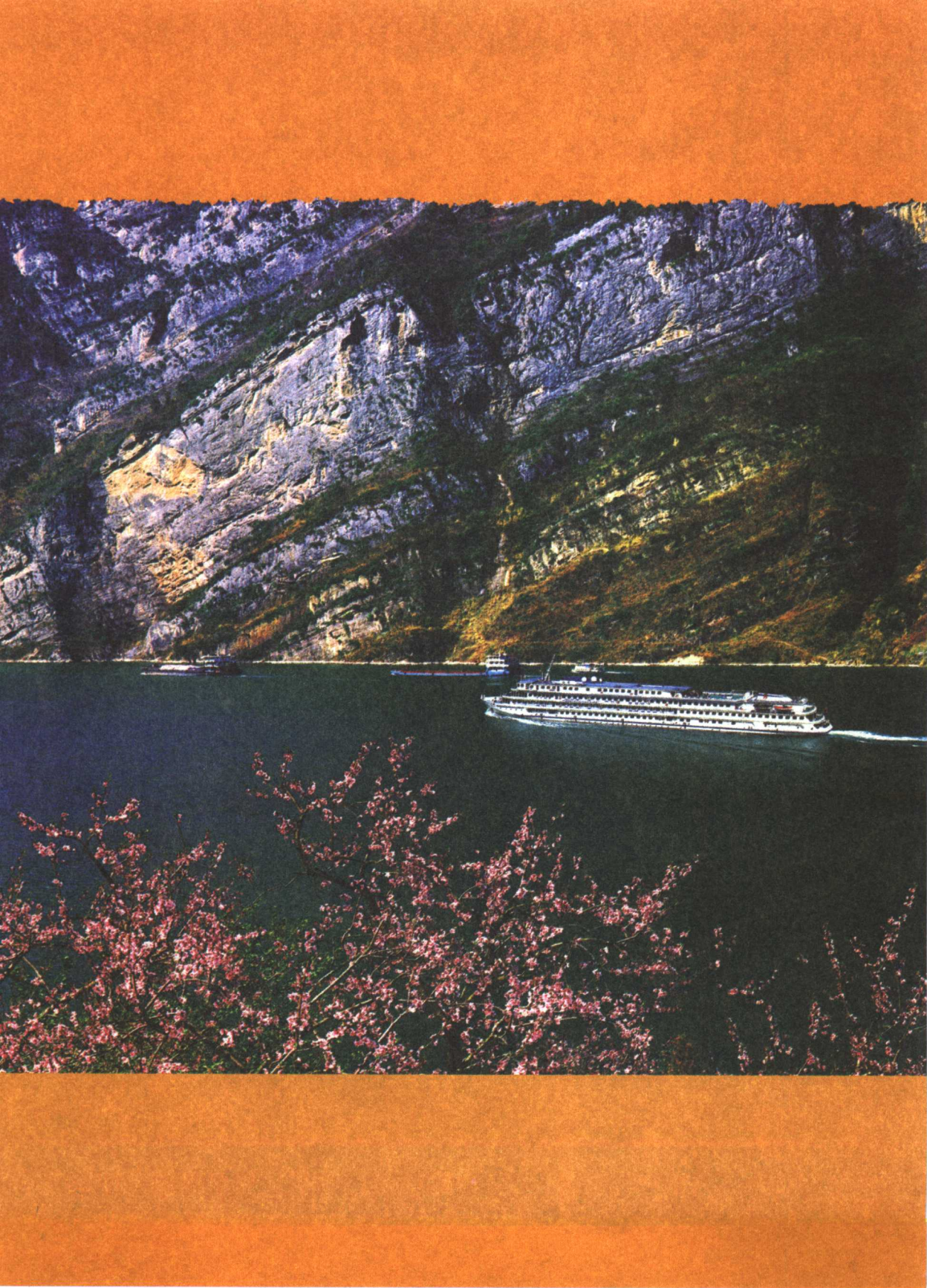


Map of Hubei Province



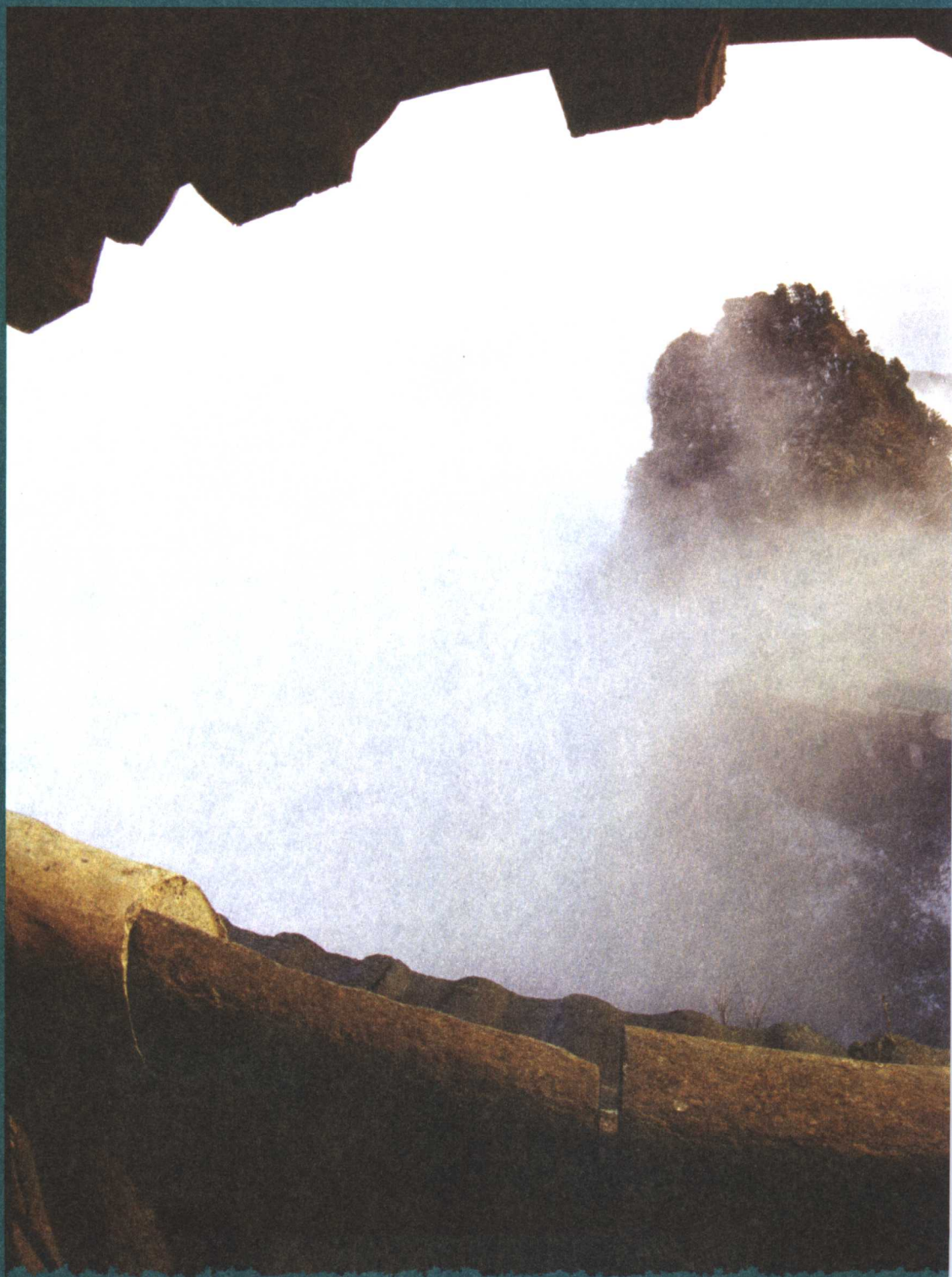


- |▲ The Xiling Gorge
- |▶ The Shennong Altar









Wudang Mountain, Taoist shrine
and world cultural heritage site



Foreword

Flying across south central China, look down and you cannot miss what looks like a silver belt meandering from west to east below. You are looking at the Yangtze River, the longest river in China. The Yangtze converges with the Hanjiang River on the wide Jiangnan Plain where it spawns a spreading network of streams and pools around the area. To the northwest, southwest and northeast of the plain lies a dozen ranges of craggy mountains and deep valleys, a land of mystery, while to the southeast are pleasant views of rolling landscapes. Those mighty rivers, lakes, plain, mountains and hilly areas have constituted a land of beauty and affluence. Higher in the east, west and north, and level in the center and south, this fertile and beautiful land resembles a pigeon with high-risen head. This is Hubei.

The history of Hubei started before the Shang Dynasty (21-11th century B.C.), when southern

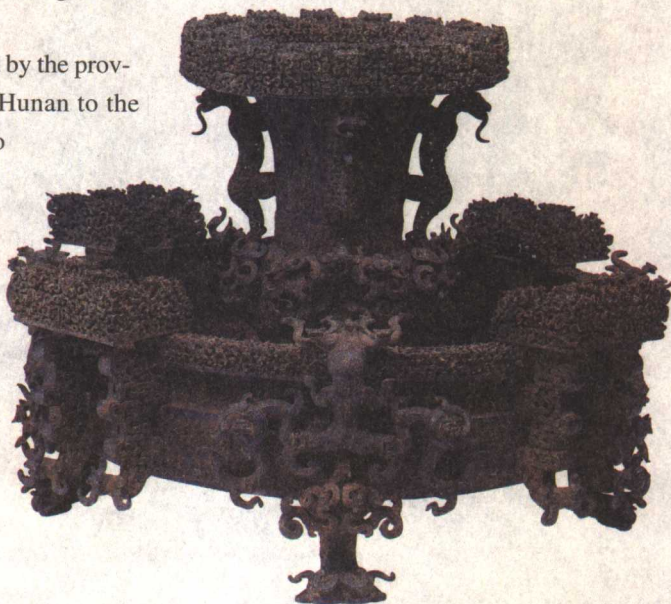




ethnic groups lived and toiled in the region. In the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), the State of Chu, which straddled today's Hubei and Hunan provinces, was the strongest of the southern kingdoms and went on to unify the south during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) before being annihilated by the State of Qin in 221 B.C. In 221 B.C. the Qin Dynasty divided the now united territories of China into 40 prefectures, most of Hubei lying in the Southern Prefecture. In the Western Han Dynasty (206-25 B.C.), China was divided into 13 states. The land of Hubei west of the Hanjiang River became Nanjun, and that east of the river was Jiangxia,

both under the jurisdiction of Jingzhou State. Hubei largely remained part of Jingzhou throughout the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280) and Western and Eastern Jin dynasties (265-420). After the Sui Dynasty reunified China in the 6th century, the name Jingzhou was preserved, but another name Erzhou was also used for a time. This is why Hubei province is often referred to as Er. In the 6th year of the reign of Qing Emperor Kangxi (1667) the province was renamed Hubei, after its position north of Dongting Lake, and that has remained its name ever since. A place of strategic importance, Hubei was fought over by all the warlords in China's history.

Hubei is an inland province, bordered by the provinces of Anhui to the east, Jiangxi and Hunan to the south, Shaanxi to the northwest, Henan to the north, and Chongqing Municipality to the west. In terms of geography, it occupies a transitional zone between the second and third elevational levels of the China's landmass and



- ◀ The 60-kilometer long Shennong Brook is a branch of the Yangtze River.
- ▲ Drum stand in the form of phoenixes standing on tigers
- ▶ Bronze vessel from the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng



therefore shows a mixture of hills, mountains and plains. It also sits between eastern China with its concentration of technological industries and the west, where China's natural resources are most concentrated.

The province rules 16 cities and prefectures and a forest region — Shennongjia. Its population of 60 million consists of more than 50 ethnic groups, including the Han, Tujia, Miao, Hui and Dong. Wuhan, the provincial capital, is a central

◀ The white-flag dolphin, found only in the Yangtze, is the most endangered cetacean.

▶ Dragon boat race



hub in China's transportation network, lying about 1,100 kilometers from Beijing and Tianjin to the north, Guangzhou and Shenzhen to the south, Shanghai and Hangzhou to the east and Chengdu and Xi'an to the west, just one overnight train journey, more or less.

Say the name Hubei and it brings up associations with many famous ancestors — among them the forefather Shennong, the patriotic poet Qu Yuan and the Sage of Tea Lu Yu. It was in Hubei that the Chime Bells of Marquis Yi of Zen, “the 8th wonder of the ancient world,” were unearthed, where the first shot of the 1911 Revolution was fired (in Wuchang), and the amazing Three Gorges Project built. The mentioning of Hubei also brings to mind the Yellow Crane Tower, one of China's best known towers, the old saying that “harvests in Hunan and Hubei can feed the whole nation,” and perhaps the buzzy shopping district of Wuhan's Hanzheng Street. A luxuriant land of long history, rich culture and abundant resources, Hubei is inviting people to come and learn more of its many charms.

