

## Understanding **CHINA**

transportation and fishery; indeed the southeastern part of China has always been known as "The Land of Fish and Rice". Crisscrossed by many rivers, it has, throughout history, been more affluent than the north. People in this region enjoy a comfortable life, despite the threat of floods, and the consequence is a large population with densely peopled towns and cities. People here are noted for their mild and temperate disposition, combined with qualities of diligence and goodness, thus forming the distinguishing cultural feature of the inhabitants south of the Yangtze River.

The north and west of China, by contrast, is characterized by numerous mountain ranges and high plateaus. The climate is typically continental, being significantly colder than that of south China, the natural environment much harsher. Historically, the people here had always lived primarily on animal husbandry, combining this with growing wheat, corn and *kaoliang* (Chinese sorghum) in the places which were suitable for crop cultivation. Many rivers in north China are seasonal: in the summers, some of them become so shallow that only paddle boats can navigate them and most are never suitable for heavier shipping. In ancient times, animals were the only practical conveyance for passengers or freight throughout the entire region. Although the northwestern part of China boasts a vast area, it has a small population. Due to the tough natural conditions, famine was a constant danger in the past and, as a consequence, the people of this region are noted for their hardiness and courage in the face of adversity.



*Hulun Buir Grassland in the Inner Mongolia  
Autonomous Region.*

The differences inherent in the character of the people of north and south China finds full expression in the ancient literature of China. Consider, for example, this traditional folk song dating from the Southern Dynasties (420-589):