

## The Qiang Ethnic Group

The Qiang people are nomadic and worship sheep as the totem. The Qiang flute is their traditional music instrument. The design composed of a sheep horn and a Qiang flute reflects the long history of the Qiangs and embodies the Qiangs' art and culture as well.



### **The environment and the population—Rosy dawn on the top of Jiuding Mountain and the Dayu's hometown**

The Qiangs call themselves “Erma” which means local people. The Qiang ethnic group has a population of 306 072 who mostly distribute in Maoxian, Wenchuan, Lixian, Beichuang and Mianyang City Pingwu in Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. A small number of Qiangs dwell in Ganzi-Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province and Guangzhou Prvince.

The Qiangs area is at the east edge of Qinghai-Xizang Plateau where there are many mountains and deep canyons. The Jiuding Mountain is 4982 meters high above the sea level and the landscape named “the rosy dawn on the top of Jiuding Mountain” is widely well known and it's one of the symbols of the Qiangs area as well. The Mingjiang River is the mother river of the Qiangs, which is rich in water resources for electricity. The area abounds in Chinese prickly ashes, walnuts, tea trees, lacquer trees as well as Chinese caterpillar fungus, bulb of fritillary, antlers and musk, which are used as medicine. In the Wolong nature preservation zone there are such rare animals as giant pandas, gold monkeys, etc. In addition, the beautiful scenery attracts lots of visitors from around the world.

Moreover, the place is the birthplace of Dayu where there are such famous historical remains as the Yu Cave and the Yu Temple. Dayu was the hero in regulating rivers and watercourses. According to the legends, he was also do selfless that he hadn't gone home for thirteen years because of work even if he had passed by home for three times. In addition, he built up the first dynasty of Xia.

### **The long history—The ancient ethnic group with its name unchanged for 3 000 years**

“Qiang” was a name given by the ancient Hans to the nomadic people in west Chian. Over 3 000 years ago, inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells in the Shang Dynasty recorded the Qiang people. Some Qiangs were merged in the course of the forming of the Huaxia people, the ancestors of the Hans today. Since the Zhou Dynasty the Hans have assimilated some ancient Qiangs, who gradually came to the Central Plains. And some Qiangs, migrating southeast from the Hehuang River valley, lived together with the local

people and developed into the ethnic groups of Tibetan-Myamnese language family.

More than 2,000 years ago, some of the Qiang tribes, such as Maoniu, Baima, Canlang, Ranlong. ect, which were differentiated from each other through totems, lived in the southeast area. Among these, the Ranlong tribe, which distributed in the upper reaches of the Minjiang River and the northeast of Sichuan Province, gradually mixed together with immigrating Qiangs of different times and a few of Tufans and Hans, and developed into the Qiangs today.

### **The language and the religious belief**

The Qiang language, which has two types of dialects, the south dialect and the north dialect, belongs to the Qiang language branch of the Tibetan-Myanmese language family of the Chinese-Tibetan system. Formerly, the Qiangs had no written script of their own and Chinese become the written form of the Qiang language. In 1958, alphabetic writing was created and tried out in the Qiangs area. And now, 70% of Qiangs use the Qiang language and 30%, Chinese.

The Qiangs believe in primitive religion and parts of them believe in the Tibetan Buddhism and the Taoism. There are no professional clergymen, and the amateur wizards are called “Shibi”.



### **The stone house—The watchtower and the blockhouse**

Generally speaking, a Qiang village consists of tens of households. These castle-like villages are mostly located on the semi-mountain. Watchtowers, some thirteen or fourteen stories, penetrating into the cloud, are well laid out and magnificent.

Watchtowers appeared over 2 000 years ago. Every floor is divided with plank and people go up and down through single wood stairs. In walls are there small holes. According to The Later Han Dynasty, the Ranlong Qiangs “all lived at the foot of mountains and made stone house, with high of over ten meters.” And this style of building has never changed since the Han Dynasty up till now. What a miracle in the history of architecture!

Generally, the local-style dwelling houses are blockhouses made of piled up stones. These houses are two or three stories high, square-shaped, with flat housetop and walls made of flagstones. The first floor is for livestock and poultry, the second retained as bedrooms and the third for grain storage. The flat roof can be used for sunning ground for drying grains and playground for elderly people and children as well. The Qiangs are so

good at building that they can build walls without drafting and plumbing line. And these walls are of perfect structure, flat and angular. Solid, practical, warm in winter and cool in summer, these houses embody the wisdom of the Qiangs.

### **The peculiar bridges—bamboo-chain bridges, rising bridges, slant-bridges, and stone bridges**

In order to get over cliffs and precipices the Qiangs created various bridges. Take the chain bridge for example, the Qiangs link up the two sides of a river with a thick bamboo rope and people hang themselves to the bamboo rope with a hemp rope on their waists and fly from one side of a river to the other side. And the rising bridge is also called wood bridge with suspended arms. Logs are paved layer upon layer on both sides of a river and reach to the center of a river layer by layer and join together at last. The bridge is paved with planks so that it is convenient for people and animals to cross. And the slant-bridge is the same as a plank roadway built along perpendicular rock-faces by means of wooden brackets fixed into the cliff, keeping close to the cliff. The most remains are stone bridges. Among them many stone bridges, which the Qiangs take pride in, were made in the Tang and Ming Dynasties.

### **The costume and ornament—The woolen outer coat and Yunyun shoes**

The Qiangs today mostly wear traditional clothes. Men generally wear long blue gowns with buttons down the front right, which are made of gunny clothes. With sleeveless and collarless woolen jackets out, the Qiang men have their heads covered by black scarves and legs banded with puttees and waists bound by cotton-hemp belts. What's more, they have a big pocket hanging in front of their chest, which are made of embroidered silk fabric and are used to contain money, tobacco, and gunpowder, etc. The Qiang women's costume is bright-colored. They wear embroidered long garments and embroidered aprons and ribbons. They generally wear black scarves and some women in certain areas prefer white. The Qiang women are fond of ornaments such as silver badges, ornaments for collar, rings, eardrops, bracelets and so on.



The Qiang women do well in crossing stitch and embroidering that are mainly used to ornament aprons, scarves, vamps, collars, sleeves, etc. They embroider a wide range of things and those designs are all lifelike. Among these, the Yunyun shoes, a kind of fabric shoes, are the most unique things and the Qiangs wear them on days of jubilation. Tips warped, the Yunyun shoes are ship-shaped and unique with the uppers of shoes embroidered designs of colorful clouds.



### **The dietetic customs—The “the gold wrapped silver”, “the plump pork” and “Zaju”**

The Qiangs' staple food includes maize, wheat, highland barley, potatoes and buckwheat and they eat several kinds of vegetables such as rape, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, ect. The Qiangs steam maize flour into pellet-shaped “Yumizhengzheng”. Mix rice and maize flour, and then get the “silver wrapped by gold”. The Qiangs are used to hanging pork on roof beams in order to air-dry the pork and make “plump pork”. The plump pork, having been preserved for a long time, is very delicious, the fat bright and transparent and the thin of fine color and luster.

Unique in style, the Zaju wine is a kind of traditional drink, with a history of over 1 000 years, which are made of buckwheat, wheat, barley or maize fermented. Zaju wine is necessary to happy event and there is a fixed ceremony of drinking: a toastmaster, who is of noble character and high prestige, makes a speech for the wine and spaying a little wine to offer a sacrifice to Heaven, Earth, and spirits. Then, he sticks the staff into the wine jug and people suck the wine in age order, singing and dancing and enjoying themselves.

### **The festivals and the pastimes—The Qiang's New Year, the Shalang Dance and the Qiang flute**

The New Year of Qiangs, on October 1<sup>st</sup> of lunar calendar, is the most important festival for Qiang people. The main activities for the festival are offering sacrifices to the spirit, dancing the Shalang Dance and other traditional entertainment. Other traditional festivals include the “meeting of offering sacrifices to the mountains” and “women's day”.

The Shalang Dance, also called the Qiangs Guozhuang, is a kind of ancient dance for pleasing oneself. When dancing Shalang Dance, men and women with rich dress dance around a fire, arm in arm, singing and dancing, going against a clock. While taking a break, people cheer and drink Zaju wine. The sheepskin drum dance is another kind of well-known dance of the Qiangs, which Shibi, the wizard of the Qiangs, dances while offering sacrifices to the Heaven and ancestors. The dance is bold and unconstrained and enthusiastic, which embodies the bold and generous disposition of the Qiangs.

Qiangs flute is the most well-known instrument. The poem of Out of the Great Wall written by Wangzhuhuan in the Tang Dynasty goes as follows: “The Yellow River reaches as high as the top of the white cloud; the lonely town lies amid the mountains proud. Why should the Qiang flute complain that no willow grows? Beyond the Gate of Jade no vernal wind will blow.” And the Qiang flute mentioned in the poem is still being used by the Qiangs.

The thin bamboo tubes standing side by side are made of oil bamboo peculiar to Minjiang area and the bamboo oboes are put in the top of the flute. The flute is played in a special way named "blowing cheek and exchanging air". While playing the flute, the player breathes in as he breathes out in order to make continuous, beautiful melody.