

A Study on the Cultural Meanings of Qiang's Traditional Dress and Adornment^{*}

SU Yan-fei

Sichuan University of Arts and Science, Dazhou, China

Since 2008 when the Wenchuan earthquake occurred, media from different countries and regions across the world reported the earthquake so that a less well-known ethnic group of China, the Qiang ethnic minority, has attracted attention around the world. The Qiang ethnic minority could be dated back to the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600-1046BC). The long-standing Qiang culture is an important part of those brilliant Chinese cultures. The Qiang's traditional dress and adornment is an integral part of the Qiang culture, appreciating unique ethnic characteristics and cultural meanings. Being against the backdrop of promoting cultural diversity nowadays, this paper makes a brief introduction to the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment and gives an explanation of their rich unique cultural meanings so as to present the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment to the world, facilitate their going out to the world and communication with other cultures in the world, and enrich the world's ethnic cultures.

Keywords: The Qiang ethnic minority, the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment, cultural meanings

Introduction

The Qiang ethnic minority (hereinafter referred to as the Qiang, “羌”), with its history being tracked back to the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600-1046BC), is a long-standing ethnic group in the west China. The ancient Qiang people were well-known for shepherding. The Qiang people call themselves “Er Mie” (尔咩), which sounds like the sound that a sheep or a goat makes, and are called “ethnic group over the cloud”. According to historical records, the Qiang was once a general name for nomadic tribes in the west of China given by ancient Han Chinese. Later, the Qiang people were forced to experience mass migration. Finally, a clan made their homes in today's Sichuan province, China and developed into the distinctive ethnic group. Nowadays, the majority of Qiang people live in Maoxian, Wenchuan, Lixian, Songpan and Heishui, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan and in Beichuan Qiang Autonomous County, Mianyang, Sichuan, and others are scattered in Danba, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, Pingwu, Mianyang, Sichuan and Jiangkou and Shiqian, Tongren, Guizhou. Qiang people mostly dwell in mountainous areas crisscrossed by rivers and streams. The Qiang people do not have a written script of their own. With north dialect and south dialect, the Qiang language belongs to the Qiang language branch of the Tibetan-Myanmese language family of the Chinese-Tibetan system. With social and economic development and their contact with their neighbors, the

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SU Yan-fei, M.A., Lecturer, School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Arts and Science.

Han Chinese, many Qiang people nowadays speak Chinese. According to the statistics of the 2010 China Population Census, the Qiang ethnic minority had a population of 309,576.

During the long history, the Qiang people have created a unique and brilliant culture, which has been mysterious and less-known to the world. However, due to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, measuring at eight magnitudes and with a focal depth of 19 kilometers, the Qiang culture had been severely damaged. Media from different countries and regions reported the Wenchuan earthquake and the Qiang. At the same time, the Qiang culture has been known to the world and went abroad to present its unique charm to the world. The Qiang people since have been invited to show their unique culture in Russia, the People's Republic of Korea, Finland and Thailand and the like and to participate in the UN Chinese Language Day. Meanwhile, tourists from different countries and regions around the world traveled to Qiang villages to appreciate their scenery, culture, and food and so on. For example, supermodels from 40 countries participated in a beauty contest which was held in a Qiang village and journalists abroad went to Qiang villages to gain a deep understanding of the Qiang. Generally speaking, people across the world growingly know and are interested in the mysterious Chinese ethnic group.

The Qiang culture is one of the treasures of Chinese culture, being composed of lives of different sectors of Qiang people such as history, architecture, language, literature, music, dance, dress and adornment, food and customs, and so on, which have strong ethnic characteristics and cultural values. The Qiang's traditional dress and adornment are an integral part of Qiang culture, which have went out the Qiang villages and went abroad to communicate with other cultures. No matter it is the Qiang culture exhibition abroad or the travelling to the Qiang villages, the unique Qiang's traditional dress and adornment would come into view first when one encounters Qiang people.

Literature Review

With the mysterious Qiang culture being continuously unveiled to the world, for the past few years, the long-standing Qiang culture has attracted a lot of interest from increasing Chinese scholars and experts. According to the study conducted by Lan & Chen (2017), it revealed that papers published concerning the Qiang culture had showed an growing trend since 2008 to 2016. Although the number of relevant papers was small, themes of paper published regarding the Qiang culture enjoyed a wide coverage such as Qiang's music, festival, religion, dress and adornment and the Shibi and others, among which there were studies about review of Qiang culture research (Deng, 2010; Han, 2018; Lan & Chen, 2017), study of ways to protect and inherit Qiang culture (Fan, 2014), study into the Qiang embroidery (Yuan, 2012), study of how to protect the Qiang language (Fan & Liu, 2017), study on the exploitation of Qiang's tourism resources (Yang, 2017), studies into the translation of Qiang culture such as the translation of Qiang's festival names (Chen, 2012), the translation of Gods' names in the oral texts of the Shibi in the Qiang ethnic minority (Chen, 2010), the translation of Qiang ballads (Li, Chen, & Jiang, 2009), and studies of Qiang's dress and adornment (Qiang, 2017; Luo, 2014).

As for studies on Qiang culture outside China, there are a few, which were published long time ago, for instance: Graham (1958) studied the customs and religion of the Qiang, and Torrance (1937) introduced the life and customs of the Qiang.

In general, compared with those studies of other major ethnic groups of China like the Tibetan ethnic minority, studies of Qiang culture are fewer and have a narrower coverage, but these studies have enriched studies on the Qiang culture, contributing to the protection and inheritance of Qiang culture. Moreover, as a

critical part of the Qiang culture, the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment culture have much room for further study. Being against the backdrop of promoting cultural diversity around the world nowadays, this paper aims to introduce the world the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment and their cultural meanings in order to facilitate the communication of the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment culture with other cultures across the world and help increasing people appreciate the unique and mysterious Qiang culture.

Introduction of the Qiang's Traditional Dress and Adornment

The Qiang's traditional dress and adornment are basic essentials of lives of Qiang people. They form unique ethnic and regional characteristics since they have been influenced by Qiang people's natural living environment, customs, religion, and other things. With the changes of times and social development, the Qiang's economy, society, and culture have also changed significantly and Qiang people are more civilized; meanwhile, they are influenced by their neighborhood such as Tibetans and Han Chinese. Consequently, their dress and adornment have changed significantly. A number of young Qiang people do not wear their traditional dress and adornment except on their traditional festivals or important occasions. However, certain traditional factors of the dress and adornment have still been obtained by Qiang people. They dress themselves simply but beautifully. Therefore, this paper revolves around their traditional dress and adornment.

Most Qiang people live in mountainous areas in the plateau of northwest Sichuan. Those regions are far away from Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province and have high mountains. Being at a high altitude, it is cold and even in certain regions, snow would not melt around the year so that the Qiang people know how to take advantage of their dress and adornment to keep them warm, which forms the unique characteristics of their dress and adornment. Qiang people like to wear gowns, wear "Yangpi Gua" (a kind of sleeveless jacket made of sheepskin or goatskin), and bind puttees to protect against the cold weather, which is a typical dress style. Meanwhile, they usually tie "Tou Pa" (a kind of cloth coverings for the head) around head, wear waistband, tie an apron around one's waist, and wear "Yunyun Shoe" (a sharp-pointed and embroidered shoes with typical Qiang characteristics). The dress, especially, women's dress, is trimmed with lace and their collars are decorated with silver ornaments. They also wear various types of silver or gold adornments. Of course, the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment slightly vary from village to village. Generally speaking, the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment are composed of Tou Pa, gown, Yangpi Gua, trouser, puttee, sock, shoe, insole, apron, waistband, "Guo Du" (a piece of cloth tied around one's abdomen), hairpin, earring, neck ring, and bracelet and so on so forth.



Figure 1. Men's traditional dress and adornment.



Figure 2. Women's traditional dress and adornment.

The color of Qiang's traditional dress and adornment vary from gender to gender, age to age, and region to region, in which three colors are dominant, namely, white, black, and red. The middle-aged people and the elderly like to wear single blue or black clothes, while the young girls like to wear bright-colored clothes. The dress and adornment are mainly made of three types of fabric, namely, fur, wool, and linen. They are usually embroidered with various patterns, which are inspired by animals, plants, and natural phenomena in Qiang people's living environment, which appreciate colorful cultural meanings covering their ideology, religion, custom, etiquette, moral, esthetics, and the like. Since the traditional dress and adornment usually are embroidered with varied and graceful patterns by Qiang women, the magical embroidery is the soul of Qiang's traditional dress and adornment.

No matter women or men, the Qiang people usually tie Tou Pa around their heads, which is named “Da” in the Qiang language. The style of Tou Pa varies from region to region, age to age, and gender to gender. The elderly usually like to tie black Tou Pa around their head, which is about 3.3 meters long and has no adornment. Men often wear black or white Tou Pa, among whom young adults tie Tou Pa in a way of being higher in the front and lower in the back, looking dignified and handsome; while women also wear black or white ones, but their Tou Pa are usually embroidered with beautiful patterns and the way of tying Tou Pa among women varies from region to region so that the shape of Tou Pa varies. For example, there is mainly “Shizi Pa” (a white Tou Pa is tied into a shape of cross), “Yipiwa Pa” (a piece of cloth is folded up into a shape of tiles piling up which has a width of about 0.3 meter, and then plait or decorated colorful string is tied around head), “Wannianxiao Pa” (two pieces of white cloth are folded into a shape of tiger head with remaining cloth drooping at the back, which is to commemorate a general), and “Xique Pa” (black cloth is bound around women’s head, with a patch of white cloth coming out in the front.). With social development and being influenced by various factors, increasing Qiang people, young Qiangs in particular, do not wear Tou Pa.



Figure 3. Tou Pa (Yipiwa Pa).

The Qiang’s traditional dress and adornment had been influenced by those in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), which were characterized by wearing gowns with stand collar, its front buttoning on the right and its left lapel on the right lapel, wearing Yangpi Gua, wearing deep color trousers made of main fabrics of wool, cotton, and linen. Men’s gowns are usually below the knee with major colors of black and white; while women’s gowns are usually spreading to the instep with major colors of red and blue.

Apron is one of the Qiang women’s daily items and also is a kind of accessory for women to show their wisdoms and talents. With main colors of black and mazarine, the apron has two types, that is, half placket (a width of about 66 cm at the top, a width of about 73 cm at the bottom, and a length of about 70 cm) and full placket (a length of about 90 cm, a width of about 20 cm at the chest, a width of about 64 cm at the waist, and a width of about 74 cm at the bottom).

Waistband is usually tied by women and men around their waist in order to make gowns cling to their body so that they can move agilely and to make them look more attractive. Daily small items are usually hung on men’s waistband such as “Huo Lian” (a type of time-honored implement used to make fire, which is in the shape of sickle), flint and other things. Small items and silver accessories are usually hung on women’s waistbands such as sewing kit.



Figure 4. Waistband and Apron.



Figure 5. Huo Lian.

Guo Du is a piece of cloth which is tied by men around their abdomen to protect their abdomen, protect against the cold, and put money or small items in. It is also a kind of accessory.

The Qiang people are used to binding puttees which can not only protect against the cold and against being scratched by thorns, mosquitos, and insects bites, but also is an important accessory. Wrapping a puttee around legs from knee down, men look mighty and handsome and women look bright and brave. The puttee is usually made of linen or wool felt.

The Qiang's traditional shoes were straw sandals made of tree bark or other fiber products, and later are mainly embroidered shoes, with Yunyun Shoe as a typical one (detailed information about Yunyun Shoe will be given below).



Figure 6. Guo Du, Puttee, and Yunyun Shoe.

The Qiang women have always liked to wear jewelry like bracelets, earrings, hairpins. Women's clothes are sometimes decorated with silver flowers.

The Cultural Meanings of Qiang's Dress and Adornment

The typical main color of Qiang's traditional dress and adornment has rich ethnic characteristics and abundant cultural meaning, implying the Qiang people's nature worship, ethnic spirit, religious belief, and the thought of paying a debt of gratitude to their ancestors. The Qiang villages are mainly located at the eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, where peaks are rising one after another and it has a high altitude. In those mighty mountains, one can see clearly snow-capped mountains and appreciate spotless white cloud. Therefore, the Qiang is renowned as "an ethnic group over the cloud". The snow-capped mountains are white, clouds in clear sky are white, and sheep or goats which the Qiang has worshipped are white. What's more, the Qiang's legends and myths record that the fire had been hidden and stored in the white stone and then had been brought to the earth. Therefore, the Qiang people have worshipped white stone which are placed on roofs as the "Heavenly God". The holy stone is white. Another legend states that there once was a general named "Ge Lu Cong Bao" (his Chinese name was Yang Wenwu) living in a Qiang village, who was intelligent and brave and lead Qiang villagers in defeating enemies several times, but he was finally shot by poisoned arrows and died. The Qiang people consequently wear white Tou Pa, white clothes, and white shoes to commemorate their brave general. The color of white plays a predominant role in Qiang people's dress and adornment. All these white things have certain cultural meanings.

Inspiration of patterns on Qiang's traditional dress and adornment grows directly out of Qiang people's lives and their living environment, having a wide coverage and implying colorful cultural meanings. For instance, the Qiang people practice Animism, worshipping the nature, which could be reflected in their worshipping of cloud. Such kind of worshipping is vividly embodied in their shoes, namely, the Yunyun Shoe, which is one of the most typical ethnic shoes. Furthermore, Qiang people's dress and adornment are usually embroidered with cloud patterns.

The shape of Yunyun Shoe seems like a boat with their toes bended upwards, their soles are thick, and their uppers are embroidered with patterns such as colorful cloud, azalea and tiger head and the like, which signifies a harmony among Heaven, Earth, and Man, a harmonious coexistence between Man and Nature, happiness and auspiciousness. Before a man gets married, his Yunyun Shoes are made by his mother and later after he gets married, his wife will make shoes for him. Yunyun Shoe is regarded as a love token. A girl would make a pair of Yunyun Shoes and give them to the boy she loves. It originated with a legend which recorded that deep in the mountains, there was once a poor teenage shepherd living in a Qiang village, whose parents were beaten to death by the village leader because they could not turn over highland barley to the leader. Being barefoot, the ragged shepherd herded sheep or goat on mountains all day long and skipped meals usually. The poor teenager later happened to catch a carp in a sacred lake and the carp suddenly turned into a beautiful girl who begged him to take her in. She said she could do housework for him such as doing laundry, cooking, making clothes and shoes, and other things. Suddenly, the girl took white clouds to make a pair of Yunyun Shoe for him. Later on, the kind girl and the shepherd got married, having a happy life by hardworking. Therefore, a pair of Yunyun Shoes has implied cultural meaning.

Another typical ethnic dress is Yangpi Gua, which is made of sheepskin, goatskin, or bharal-skin and is a kind of jacket having no sleeves, no collar, and no buttons. It has long wools drooping all round the jacket. On

clear days, the side having wools would be turned inside; while on rainy days, it would be turned outside in order to protect against the rain. Having many functions, it could be used to protect against the cold and the rain, as a mat to sit on and as a cushion to lean on, and to pack up things.

Differing from other traditional dress and adornment, the Yangpi Gua is usually made by an adult man, who soaks raw sheepskin, goatskin, or bharal-skin in a mixture of plant ash and water for three to five days in order to make it fermented and become soft, then dehydrates the skin, cleans the skin, spreads lard over the skin, rubs the skin till it becomes dry and soft, and finally cuts into certain shapes and sews them. An adult's Yangpi Gua usually needs at least two pieces of skin.

Sheep or goat became a totem worshipped by the Qiang people. One of the reasons is that it is closely bound up with their nomadic lives. Sheep or goat is the main source of their foods and dress materials. Therefore, sheep or goat is regarded as an auspicious animal which brings them ample food and clothing and helps them avoid troubles and seek good luck. The sheep or goat worship is embodied in their dress and adornment by embroidering their dress and adornment with patterns of sheep or goat head or horn. These patterns have a dominant role in Qiang's traditional dress and adornment. There are many legends about sheep or goat, one of which has a strong religious tone and goes that a sheep ate the holy books while the Shibi (like a sorcerer) fell asleep, and then the Shibi used the sheepskin to make a drumhead, believing scriptures would come out while playing the drum.

Another typical ethnic adornment has strong religious meaning, that is, Houpi Hat (a hat made of golden monkey's skin with three cones), which is only worn by Shibi (like a sorcerer or a shaman). The Houpi Hat is brimless, round at the bottom and flat at the top. The three cones are shaped into “山” (a Chinese character means mountain), of which one symbolizes black and white, having the meaning of no confusion, one symbolizes the Heaven, and one symbolizes the Earth. The sacred Houpi Hat should not be worn by apprentice Shibi.



Figure 7. Houpi Hat.

There are many other patterns in the traditional dress and adornment which have rich cultural meanings. For instance, the pattern of peony, usually being embroidered on bride's wedding dress, implies being happy and auspicious. The symbol “卍” is embroidered, having the meaning of avoiding natural and man-made disasters and blessing peace. The worship of the symbol “卍” was mainly influenced by the Tibetan Buddhism practiced by the Qiang's neighborhood.

Conclusion

With the increasing cultural exchanges with other countries, more and more Chinese cultures, including cultures of ethnic groups, go abroad to show their unique charm and are active in the international arena. The Qiang ethnic minority is a long-standing ethnic group in China, creating long-standing and brilliant cultures which should be introduced to countries and regions across the world, and communicate with other cultures, hoping growing number of people would know, understand, and love the Qiang culture. Since there are a few studies on the Qiang culture outside China, this paper, under the background of promoting cultural diversity nowadays, introduces the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment (mainly Tou Pa, gown, Yangpi Gua, Yunyun Shoe, puttee, apron, waistband, Guo Du, and so on) and discusses their rich cultural meanings in order to help the Qiang's traditional dress and adornment culture go out the Qiang villages and go abroad to exchange with other cultures around the world and help increasing people know the unique charm of Qiang's traditional dress and adornment, at the same time hoping that the traditional dress and adornment culture could be protected and inherited.

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