

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE:  
FIELDWORK OBSERVATION AND EXAMINATION OF THE NEWS  
COVERAGE OF THE QIANG ETHNIC GROUP**

by

Qiuxi Li

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Disaster Science and Management

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## **ABSTRACT**

The massive earthquake struck the southwest of China leaving more than 87,000 people dead and millions of homeless. Many of the victims are Qiang, an ethnic minority group in China. In the years since the catastrophe, the Chinese government has undertaken the enormous task of rebuilding homes, infrastructure, industries as well as restoring ethnic culture. Eight years after the earthquake, the author revisited several sites in the quake zone, focusing on the reconstruction work, lives of survivors, and the impacts on Qiang culture. Through comparing the fieldwork observation with media reports, this study aims to unfold a rich image of the lives of people in these reconstructed sites. As a majority of the news coverage focuses on positive coverage of the reconstruction work, the fieldwork result indicated that these affected sites varied on their economic statuses. Moreover, tourism has played a critical role in the economic recovery in these sites. Stimulated by the demand of tourism, places that retain the purest ethnic culture pay more attention to maintain their heritage and cultural practices; while communities assimilated into the majority culture have witnessed a revival of ethnicity as a new source of income. Furthermore, the catastrophe is neither the main cause of rural-urban migration among Qiang people, nor the dying out of the intangible culture of Qiang. It is more likely to be an accelerator of cultural integration process that is already underway in the context of modernization and urbanization. The earthquake, in fact,

called unprecedented attention to the endangered Qiang culture and brought an amplified level of respect to the Qiang people.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 The Catastrophe occurred on May 12, 2008**

The massive 8.0 Sichuan earthquake on May 12, 2008 marked one of the most devastating disasters in China's history. The rupture of the fault started at YingxiuTown, 50 miles northwest of the city of Chengdu, and then, broke over a 240-km-long fault towards the northwest BeichuanTown, and a 72-km-long Pengguan Fault. The size and extent of the earthquake surprised many since it was not only felt in the local region but as far away as both Beijing and Shanghai –about 1,000 miles away. The massive earthquake induced thousands of aftershocks and landslides, leading to 374,177 injuries, 69,195 deaths and 18,404 people still buried deeply under the ruins today (USGS Earthquake Summary, 2008). The direct loss of the earthquake was the second highest in the history, very close to that of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of Japan, and exceeded significantly the Kobe earthquake of 1955, Northridge earthquake of 1994, and the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004 (Daniell et al, 2012). The impact of the catastrophe was not only felt through the death toll and huge economic loss but also in terms of the sheer number of people affected.

This earthquake led to 11 million homeless people, the highest count in history (AFP, 2008). The number of houses was destroyed (1.5 million) and damaged (6 million) was more than the total number of houses that are in the entire country of Australia (BBC, 2008). According to a data of the World Bank (cited by Bernal, 2012), the general

infrastructure in the region was damaged, with 34,125 kilometres of highway, 7,444 schools, and 11,028 medical institutions devastated. The Chinese government, therefore, faced a large scale reconstruction. A large number of ethnic minorities living in the affected region made the reconstruction work more complex.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Among the nearly 100,000 deaths in this catastrophe, one ethnic group's casualty figures were staggering – more than 30,000 Qiang people died, accounting for 10% of the group's total population. The distribution map of China's ethnic minority groups shows that 98.2% of the total 300,000 Qiang population is concentrated in the Sichuan Province (Sichuan Information, 2011), roughly along the fault line that produced this earthquake. The government identified ten hardest-hit counties in Sichuan, four Qiang were inhabited counties, namely Wenchuan County, Beichuan County, Mao County and Pingwu County (ChinaNews, 2008).

As the massive earthquake destroyed the ancestral homeland of the Qiang, sharply reducing its population, one could imagine how heavily the ethnic group suffered in this disaster. After the earthquake, millions of victims, including many Qiang people, were confronted with being resettled or relocated to newly-built towns that were completely different from their previous living environment. These changes had more profound impacts on ethnic group like Qiang as they are more vulnerable compared to the dominant group. What do these changes mean for Qiang people in terms of social, economic, and cultural aspects? What is the status of post-quake Qiang region? As

ethnicity and natural disasters have become ever more intricately entwined nowadays, more attention should be paid to the culturally vulnerable groups, not only in their response to the disaster but also their roles in the post-disaster reconstruction and recovery.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

Since the media is the main source of authoritative information, public's knowledge about the post-earthquake reconstruction is mostly came from media reporting. Although there were many reports about the Qiang during and after the earthquake, it was unclear if and to what extent the news reports described the reality. Considering that the news media has been active participants in propagating the framing of news stories, this study examined the major issues that the media emphasized, and looked at how these issues were depicted. Following the initial media content analysis, a two-week long fieldwork to multiple affected sites was completed, focusing on the issues highlighted in the news reports, such as resettlement work, newly-emerged tourism industry and the current lives of survivors.

Through comparing the media reports with the interviewee's descriptions as well as personal observation during the fieldwork, the study therefore sheds light on how the media frames the Qiang in this disaster. Furthermore, if and to what extent does the earthquake and the post-quake reconstruction impact the Qiang? Is the earthquake the main cause of the dying out of Qiang culture? More importantly, what experiences and

implications can the Chinese government bring to the world in terms of post-disaster reconstruction in an ethnic region? These questions will also be explored in this study.

**Key words**

Earthquake, media, ethnicity, reconstruction, cultural protection

## **Chapter 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Research Design**

The study was undertaken in three stages, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. As media is the main channel to inform and shape public perception of certain event (Protess & McCombs, 2016), in stage 1, the study used quantitative content analysis to examine Qiang ethnic group related news in a eight years' period. The intention to start with quantitative approach is considered a 'sequential explanatory strategy', which is characterized by the results of the initial quantitative research which informs the secondary qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009). Specifically for this study, the major topics identified in the news reports would serve as a guide to the questionnaire design. In stage 2, the questionnaire with a number of open-ended questions would be explored in greater depth and detail in the interviews with local people over a two-week field visit in July 2016, in China. In the final stage, a comparison between the news coverage and the analysis of interview, also including fieldwork observation and other supplement materials, would be unfolded by topics and case studies. This is helpful to understand how certain issues are portrayed in media as well as perceived by local people.

#### **2.2 Media Content Analysis**

With the purpose to study the news representation of the Qiang during and after the earthquake, this study not only detected the topics raised in the news but also

examined how they were described, so as to compare them with interviewee's personal description. Therefore, content analysis is suitable for this study, because it is a multipurpose research method that enables the "patterns, themes, or biases" in the news coverage to be identified through studying several phenomena such as context, sources and messages (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p.155; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.28).

To identify what aspect of Qiang group is featured in news articles, I, as the coder, read each story and then identified topics raised in the article and then entered them into SPSS, such as economic losses, government subsidies, relocation, employment, etc. When a new topic is recognized, I will return to the read articles to make sure there was not missed information. In contrast to traditional quantitative analysis, which focuses on scanning keywords, a more thorough coding of the texts allows some obscure issues to be revealed as well. The result will be a compilation of topics, with their respect frequency of occurrence, representing thematic threads that run through the set of articles.

News articles were obtained from CNKI and Baidu database. The time period started from 12 May 2008 to 12 May 2016. An eight years' time sampling was chosen due to the visibility of the earthquake related news coverage, throughout the entire process of the disaster, from the day it occurred until now. By doing so, this study revealed how much the media covered the event in immediate response and impact, and how much it addressed in post-quake reconstruction and recovery.

Since China's media do not differ in terms of political stance, four newspapers were chosen because they are the most influential newspapers representing national,

provincial and local geographies. *People's Daily* for national, *Sichuan's Daily* and *Huaxi City Daily* for provincial, and *Aba's daily* for the local source. Articles were manually selected as valid ones using the following criteria: 1) they had to be hard news, excluding editorials, interviews, opinion pieces, letters and emails; 2) they had to mention the 2008 earthquake as a context; 3) they had to feature ethnic Qiang as the main subject of reporting, not just mention the word "Qiang".

A search for the keywords or themes of both "Qiang" and "Wenchuan earthquake" in the target period in newspapers' database produced 844 articles. Once the selection criteria were applied, there were 179 qualified articles left, with eight from *People's Daily*, 37 from *Sichuan's Daily*, 25 from *Aba's Daily* and 109 from *Huaxi City's Daily*.

### **2.3 Fieldwork and Interviews**

Eight years after the May 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake of 2008, I met with earthquake victims including scholars, community leaders, officer, merchants, students, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, and villagers over the span of two weeks. Thus, the sample contained a mixture of people who would respond to the catastrophe and post issues in diverse ways. These meetings included series of informal interviews about the memory of the earthquake and the perception of the long-term effect of the earthquake on their lives. I also engaged in observations of earthquake ruins, new city construction, development of tourism, and the transformation of industrial structure in the reconstructed sites.

Interviews were undertaken at various sites, including Yingxiu Town, Beichuan Town, Luobo Village, and Jina village. The visits to these sites was because they are all

considered as Qiang inhabited area, they are all hardest-hit places that have been reconstructed, and they are the representatives of different reconstruction type, namely, reconstruction on original site, reconstruction nearby and relocation. Field visit to Zhitai Village, unfortunately, was finally cancelled due to a high incidence of landslides after several days' heavy rainfall. A section of road had also been obstructed by the debris. Instead, interviews with four experts who have done fieldwork in this village will be provided in this study as a supplementary material. Zhitai Village is the only case of a Qiang village that had been relocated to a Han region. Since the finding of Zhitai village is based on secondary information, it is a limitation of this study.

Overall, there were 28 respondents who participated in this study. They were chosen using what can be described as purposeful sampling. The majority was contacted through snowballing, after being recommended by key informants from various occupations. Some were known from fieldwork at the site. The length of interviews ranged from 15 minutes to two hours, with a median duration of 30 minutes, and discussions varied in terms of topic and level of detail.

Interviews were undertaken in a variety of settings including their workplaces, own homes, restaurants and teahouses. The settings were selected at each person's convenience. A majority of 25 interviews were audio recorded and three were stored via note-taking. A semi-scripted interview guide based on the result of initial media study was using and adapted as interviewee changed, and as data were gathered (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The guide consisted of major topics on personal sufferings in the quake, rescue situation, impacts on livelihood, impacts on ethnic culture, local tourism and

relocation process. Each topic also has a list prompt questions. These open-ended questions enable the researcher to obtain a wealth of detailed information in local people's own words (Polit & Hungler, 1991; Lofland, 1971). The full questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese by myself, a native Chinese speaker. However, several respondents spoke either the Qiang language or Mandarin Chinese with a strong local accent. Their phrases and words were confirmed during the interview by a third person who helped to translate. After each interview, I wrote memos to quickly record ideas and issues raised in that interview (Field & Morse, 1985; Burnard, 1991). The data was coded using an open-coding approach in which some categories of findings were either fit into the topic that built on initial media study or further generate a new topic. In such a way the researcher could enhance the validity of the categorizing, avoid bias, and more importantly for this study, to reveal the information that is invisible in the Chinese media coverage (Burnard, 1991; Huckin, 2002).

In the analysis process, the finding would unfold by a comparison between the media representation and the findings of interviews. All the news pieces were translated from Chinese into English, and all the interview data were also transcribed and translated from Chinese to English.

## Chapter 3

### REPRESENTING DISASTERS

#### 3.1 Theories of Media Framing

When a disaster strikes, journalists and reporters swarm into the affected area to cover the breaking news. In many ways, the media are the first to define the event as a disaster and the primary role of the media is to inform and update the public about the event. In other words, how a disaster is perceived by the general public is largely through the media (Rasinski et al, 2002). This is called by Walter Lippmann (1992, p.3) as the “pictures in heads” theory, which implies that the information perceived by people is mostly the result of second-hand information received through the media, because they have “nowhere else to turn for information” in this information age (Neuman et al, 1992, p.11).

Since the emergence of mass media and its ability to disseminate information on a large scale, the media have been utilized as an effective tool through which to sell not only the news but also to influence the way the audience should view current events. This construction of public perception, using tools such as language, structure, and images, is referred to as framing, which significantly affects public opinion. Framing involves the selection of “some aspects of a perceived reality” that makes those aspects salient to promote a particular problem interpretation (Entman, 1993, p.52). Through raising the salience of what is important and cutting out those news items deemed less important (Entman 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993), frames, on the one hand, organize complicated

information in an understandable manner; and filter audience's perceptions and slant them toward a particular way of thinking about an issue. In contrast to salience, media also have the ability to make something seem less relevant or even invisible thus minimizing and discounting the importance of the matter at hand (Huckin, 2002).

As universally acknowledged, the news has to inevitably go through the framing process. A number of variables that influence the production of frames have been discovered by scholars, for instance, ideological orientations, media organizational pressures and constraints, social norms and values, other macro-system factors and the more micro-characteristics of individual media workers (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Scheufele, 1999). Additionally, the national interests or the dominant ideology of a nation was argued as another major factor influence the selection of frame (see Reta 2000 study of South Africa elections in US press; Yang 2003 study of the NATO air strikes on Kosovo in Chinese and U.S. Press coverage).

In many instances, framing emerges or is shaped by institutional interests, reigning ideology-driven interpretations, and prejudices of media organizations (Edelman, 1993). Though the ideal in journalism is to present objective content, editors may to a great extent package of information to meet particular political interests. Particularly after a disaster, when sorrow, fear, and uncertainty about the future dominate every victim, plans and promises are helpful as forms of rhetoric, tools designed to comfort people and stabilize society. Clarke (1999) proposed "fantasy document" as those plans with little operational utility, and their promises may never be fulfilled. Rather than operationally

useful, sometimes planning is more symbolically to signal that the government is in control of danger (*ibid*, p.12-13).

Other disaster studies discover that framing scheme addresses broad categories of emphasis, such as economic, political, and environmental issues (Li, 2007). And a process called “frame changing” is witnessed as the attention and focus of events changed over time during the “issue-attention cycle” (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). According to the model, new events receive a great amount of attention at first, and all attention eventually fades. During the cycle, frames tend to change at different stages of the event. Though the media are believed to have a critical role in contributing to all phases of natural disasters (Masel & Hornig, 1993), huge amounts of news coverage are typically devoted into the immediate aftermaths on humans and the environment. According to a handful of scholars, the coverage of post-disaster reconstruction and recovery has been very limited (Houston et al 2012; Kari, 2013).

Since a natural disaster can impact individuals and communities in various ways, this study firstly examines those aspects of earthquake that are emphasized in the news coverage, thus assessing how the Qiang ethnic group in the disaster is defined for the audience. Then the study examines news depictions of the earthquake effects, and compares it with the fieldwork result in the affected areas, in such a way to reveal the similarities and differences between “what the media tell us” and “what we really feel”.

### 3.2 Media Content Analysis Result

Table 3.1 The Frequency of Earthquake Effects and Post-quake Reconstruction and Recovery Topics

Topics	Number of times frame appeared in all news articles (n=179)	Proportion of all stories that included frame (%)
<b>Disaster Effects and Responses</b>		
Destruction of infrastructure and homes	44	24.6
Casualties and Rescue	23	12.8
Medical Treatment	15	8.4
Evacuation	13	7.3
Economic losses	12	6.7
Ecological effects	7	3.9
Psychological effects	6	3.4
<b>Post-Disaster Reconstruction and Recovery</b>		
Cultural Protection	72	40.2
Infrastructure recovery	46	25.7
Tourism development	37	20.7
Government Investment in quake zone	34	19
Resettlement/Relocation	32	17.9
Paired-assistance efforts	31	17.3
Re-employment in reconstruction	28	15.6
Government subsidies for victims	26	14.5
Economic development	20	11.2
Protection of earthquake ruins and the establishment of earthquake museums	20	11.2
Education recovery	17	9.5

Agricultural recovery	9	5
Emerged problems	4	2.2
<b>Total</b>	496	277.1

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The table shows frequencies of the earthquake effects and post-disaster recovery variables across all the earthquake news stories. As Masel and Hornig (1993) said, media take an important role in contributing to all phases of natural disasters. As the focus of the earthquake changed over time, a “frame changing” is also witnessed (Chyi & McCombs, 2004) from immediate impacts and response impacts to reconstruction and recovery.

In terms of the earthquake effects and responses, coverage about destruction was the most frequent earthquake effect, appearing in 24.6% of all disaster news stories. After destruction, the most frequent disaster effects followed by casualties and rescue (12.8%), medical treatment (8.4%), evacuation (7.3%) and economic losses (6.7%). Ecological (3.9%) and psychological (3.4%) effects were frames that have been mentioned the least in the news. This result is consistent with finding of a past study by Houston and his colleagues (2012), which suggests that issues associated with destruction of buildings; human survival and economic costs usually received most attention. Note that the present study examined news articles only concerning Qiang people in the earthquake-related news; the distribution of the frames may be different if the population as a whole is set as the study target.

Despite prior studies which claim that media tend to cover the impacts of disasters (Houston et al 2012; Kari, 2013), this study indicates that huge amount of news coverage was devoted into post-quake reconstruction and recovery issues. The proportion of news reports that addressed the issues related to post-quake reconstruction and recovery was much higher than the proportion that addressed disaster impacts and response. This is because of the severity of the earthquake, which cost years of reconstruction and recovery efforts.

In the post-quake reconstruction and recovery part, there were 13 frames identified. Over 40.2% of news stories addressed the issue of Qiang cultural protection. This topic was not only the top one in the reconstruction part of the study but also the most frequent frame among all the variables identified in this study. After cultural protection, infrastructure recovery and tourism development appeared in one-fourth and one-fifth of all news reports, with 25.7% and 20.7% respectively. The following most frequent frames were government investment, resettlement and relocation projects, paired-assistance efforts, the issue of re-employment, government subsidies, economic development, protection of earthquake ruins, education recovery, agricultural recovery and emerged problems. These issues seemed to be separate, but many were related to each other. For example, tourism development, government investment, and agricultural recovery could be the reasons for economic development. Also, resettlement projects required government subsidies and the assistance from a paired province. Considering both the presence of topics and the accessibility of information, this study selected several most covered topics for further exploration in the fieldwork and interview,

namely, cultural protection, tourism development, resettlement/relocation projects, paired-assistance efforts, the issue re-employment and the protection of earthquake ruins.

Another finding from this media study was that the “emerged problem” was the least frequent one among all variables. Among the 179 news articles, only four articles briefly mentioned the problems rising in the quake zone. These problems included intense tourism competition, increasing labour costs and economic uncertainties. A majority of the news reports focused on the accomplishments that have been done in the reconstruction. Out of curiosity of the status of the quake zone, and the doubt of the impartiality of the press, I went to several affected sites in the quake zone in a two-week period, focusing on the reconstruction work, lives of survivors and the impacts on Qiang. Since ‘cultural protection’ is the topic that received the most media attention, the following chapter will illustrate what I found in the fieldwork in terms of earthquake impacts on Qiang culture. Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to introduce the background of ethnicity in China.

## Chapter 4

### IMPACTS ON ETHNIC CULTURE

#### 4.1 Ethnicity in China

As a large multi-ethnic nation, China is comprised of 56 recognized ethnic groups, which are distributed extensively throughout different regions of the country. Among them, Han is the dominant group accounting for over 90% of the overall population, and the 55 non-Han groups, also called ethnic minority groups, comprise approximately 8.5% of the population while occupying about 60% of China's territory. The imbalance between Han and ethnic minorities in spatial distribution and population makes the ethnic affairs a complex and a critical concern for the Chinese government, for as Brady (2012, p.3) says, in China, ethnicity can either be a unifying or an undermining force. Considering China has a population of 1.3 billion, 8.5% means ethnic minority citizens numbers exceeds 110 million, which is not a 'small' group.

Though these ethnic groups have existed on this land for thousands of years, they had not been fully recognized and categorized as ethnic 'minorities' until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, after the creation of Han predominance and authority. The new central government embarked upon an endeavour to identify as nationalities those who qualified among 400 groups applying for national minority status in accordance with the historical criteria created by Stalin in 1913 (i.e, common location, linguistic, economic life, and in the performance of the common cultural identity). The final 56 recognized ethnic groups were labelled as 'ethnic minorities' in 1980s. However,

the term ‘ethnic majority’ is not used as often as ‘ethnic minority’, because the majority Han has always been considered the cultural norm, equated with the term ‘Chinese’. What is worth mentioning is that even though the ‘Chinese’ are composed of various ethnic groups, people consider themselves as members of the same race, in other words, “ethnically near-homogenous” (Jacques, 2012). “*Zhonghua minzu*”, translated as “Chinese nation” or “Chinese race”, is a crucial political term created in late 19th century, which initially consisted of five races, namely the Han, the Meng (Mongolians), the Man (Manchus), the Hui (ethnic groups of Islamic faith), and the Zang (Tibetans). The term has been reinforced and expanded to embrace all 56 ethnic groups since the late 1980s, under the government of China’s Communist party. As an embracing ideology and a unique establishment of cultural and national identity, the concept “*Zhonghua minzu*” is rooted in the expectations of bringing various ethnic groups into a national state based on a single nationality, that is, one republic with various nationalities, rather than many republics united under one republic like the Soviet Union. The ideology of the ‘multinational unitary state’ included two notions: that minority groups would enjoy a certain level of autonomy, but must remain as part of China, and this would become the basis of a unitary Chinese ethnicity (Mackerras, 1995; Lawrance, 2004).

The weakness of this “unitary civilization”, as argued by many, is that the Han has developed a deep sense of superiority vis a vis the other ethnic groups (Jacques, 2012). Historically, such superiority was generated from economic and cultural power due to its advanced agricultural civilization and Confucianism. The ethnocentrism of Han as a result, gives rise to the claim of the cultural assimilation and the “Han-ization” of other

groups (Norbu, 1995, p.305; Sautman, 2003, p.176). In fact, in ancient times, many ethnic groups of China as well as neighbouring countries such as ancient Japan, Korea and Vietnam accepted the superiority of the Han culture and adopted Han characters as their writing system (see Japanese “Kanji”, Korean “Hanja” and Vietnamese “chữ Nôm”). Domestic groups such as northern nomadic tribes also experienced a cultural evolution with the Han from conflict to merging, which had steadily expanded the Han group, making it over 90% of China’s population today. Therefore, Fei (1989) points out that Han was not a single group but a syncretic group with a cultural orientation.

One the other hand, nowadays, with the development urban centers and socio-economic improvements in many parts of China, cultural integration and modernization of ethnic groups has become an inevitable trend of the times (Bruner, 2005). One of the reasons is that many of the native ethnic minorities are living in the vast steppe, plateau, mountainous, frigid, and frontier regions, where socio-economic quality of life is less developed, and the natural environment makes populations more vulnerable to disasters as compared with Han regions in the Central Plain. Ethnic minority areas cover four out of six of China’s mudslide-prone regions (Fu & Wan, 1997), as well as areas with high frequencies of sand storms, droughts and snow disasters. Worldwide, ethnic groups’ socio-economic status is deeply implicated to class differences, for as Bolin (2007, p.113) writes, both the “intentional acts of discrimination” and the “more covert, diffuse, and persistent institutionalized racism” give rise to long-lasting social, political and economic disadvantages for these minority groups. These disadvantages are reflected in their class

position, as well as differential effects on employment, education, and residential opportunities.

The Chinese government has implemented various preferential policies to assist minority groups, such as excluding them from the one-child policy, giving them priority in school admissions, hiring and promotion, and allocating fiscal subsidies as well as tax deductions and exemptions to them. However, a large proportion of minority groups are still living in a relatively underdeveloped status. One of the results of these differences is that an increasing number of people choose to leave their hometowns to look for jobs in big cities as migrant workers with the hope of changing their living conditions. The tendency of young people to migrate to big cities, along with the trends of urbanization and modernization, accompanied with Han culture's powerful influence, have meant that there has been an ethnic reaction in many cases, leading to losses of traditional value, behaviour patterns, and a gap of cultural continuity.

#### **4.2 The Qiang, and its Losses in the Earthquake**

The Qiang, who call themselves “Erma,” means “native people.” As one of the oldest ethnic minority groups in China, Qiang has inhabited on this land for over 3,000 years, as evidenced by inscriptions on ancient oracle bones (Xi, 2012). Qiang is also well known as the “group in the clouds” since they usually live in the upper reaches of mountains. The primary reason that Qiang people ignore the broad and even valley but to “go uphill” was considered to avoid the national control in ancient times (Xin & Zhao, 2013, p.72). “Moving uphill” contains surviving wisdom of ancient Qiang people, and is

consistent with James Scott's (2007) theory that "civilization (referring to the nation) does not climb a mountain."

As mentioned above, China's ethnic groups are distributed extensively throughout different regions of China, with a high geographical concentration of their respective groups. Specifically for the Qiang, 98.2% of its population live in Sichuan province, which is the place the earthquake occurred. Because of a high overlap between the Qiang population distribution and the quake fault line, the Qiang group lost approximately 10% of its total 326,000 population in this earthquake (Sichuan Information, 2011). Only in Wenchuan and Beichuan, there were over 16,000 Qiang people dead (La, 2008). Normally natural disasters do not affect the age structure of a population, even though it leads to casualties (La, 2008). Yet for this earthquake, because the time it occurred was at 2:28 pm, when most kids were at schools. Many schoolchildren and students died. The 2010 Census revealed that the proportion of young people in Qiang ethnic group decreased 5.27%.

The earthquake also led to destruction of many traditional Qiang villages, including Luobo Village, Zhitai Village, Baishi Village, Xiaozhaigou, Taoping Village and many other villages. Most of these villages have hundred years of history. Qiang landmarks such as watch towers were destroyed, and a large number of Qiang ancient books, historical archives and folk artefacts were buried after the quake (Wang, 2008).

Apart from the loss in the Qiang's tangible cultural heritage losses, the earthquake also resulted in a great loss of the Qiang's intangible cultural heritage. There were 40

Qiang cultural experts, scholars and intangible cultural heritage inheritors, such as Qiang flute inheritors and Shibi inheritors killed in the quake. The Shibi culture is considered as the essence of Qiang culture, and Shibi is the power force for Qiang people's cohesion as well as subsistence (Fan et al, 2008). Since Qiang does not have its own written language, their history and rules are transmitted through Shibi. Shibi are the respected wizards of the Qiang people. They preside over ceremonies at rituals, festivals, marriages, funerals, treating illness, naming babies and building houses. Their scriptures are an encyclopedia of Qiang, involving the history, calendar, astronomy, medicine, belief, architecture, agriculture, and so forth. Most importantly, Shibi must undergo strict training and can only inherit this supreme position within their family. Because of the sudden decrease in the number of 'Shi bi', Qiang's thousands of years' history and tradition has confronted a great deal of difficulty (Wen, 2008; MacLeod, 2008). As a consequence, the tradition of Shi bi's inheritance was forced to change to keep it alive. The inheritors now are opening up to the society and are not restricted within Shi bi's family anymore; age is also not a restricted condition. A 20-year-old boy named Wang Xiaoyong, has become the youngest Shi bi in Qiang's 3,000 history (Aba prefecture government, 2011).

It could be seen from the media content analysis that cultural protection is the topic that has the highest frequency of occurrence in the post-quake news coverage of the Qiang. These coverage involved issues such as rescue Qiang cultural heritages, funding intangible cultural heritage inheritors, establish Qiang museums, build a Qiang City in Mao County, assist women in restoring their traditional embroidery skills, create Qiang stage plays and many other efforts. This study did not explore every aspect of cultural

protection, but focused on the earthquake's impacts on intangible culture such as the Qiang language and the Qiang Shibi Culture.

### **4.3 Fieldwork Finding**

#### **4.3.1 Language**

The use of the Qiang language is a very complex subject. It is not a unified language; it varies greatly in different villages in the Qiang region. The Qiang language can be divided into a Northern dialect and a Southern dialect, of which the Northern region has five kinds of dialects and the Southern region has seven kinds of dialects. Currently, there are 300,000 Qiang people in China. According to the data from Chinese scholars (Sun, 2001), 100,000 can still speak Qiang language now, accounting for only one-third of its population. Yet among the 100,000 Qiang speakers, there are two cases: one is in the relatively isolated villages where people are using Qiang entirely as their native language. This group of people consists of only 30,000 individuals. The other group is in the villages that have more contact with the outside world, where people use Mandarin most of the time and speak Qiang sometimes. This group of people consists of 70,000. The remaining 200,000 Qiang people do not speak Qiang anymore. UNESCO has a series of criteria that outline how a language is doing in terms of its survival. Based on these criteria, Qiang is severely endangered.

One of the UNESCO criteria is if children in the home are still speaking the language. One of my interviewees, CSL, is a father of an 8-year-old girl. His family originally comes from a remote Qiang village called 'Black Tiger' in Mao County, and

now working in New Beichuan as a schoolteacher of the Qiang language. When I had a conversation with him, his daughter was sitting next to us. I noticed that the father and daughter were speaking in Mandarin. Even though Beichuan is considered a Qiang county, it has been “Han-ized” for a long time; therefore it does not have a Qiang language environment. As CSL explained:

*“My kid cannot speak the Qiang language. Since I left my hometown - Black Tiger Village - there is no language environment for her anymore. I try to pass on our native language to her during our spare time, but who can she speak with in a Han environment? She can only speak Han Chinese with her classmates and teachers, right?”*

Scholars generally consider several reasons to account for the vanishing of ethnic languages in China, including ethnic groups’ intermarriage, the impact of modern life such as television programs and pop culture, development of tourism and displacement (Zhang & Yang, 2012). Note that the movement of CSL from a traditional Qiang village to a “Han-ized” Qiang area is not due to displacement following the earthquake. Local government has launched a series of programs to assist “Han-ized” Qiang areas in restoring Qiang culture. CSL was one of the ‘assistance-workers’ who came from a traditional Qiang village and moved to Beichuan to teach Qiang language. A similar situation of a “language shift”, which is known as a process of one language being replaced by another one (Fishman, 2001), has become increasingly common in ethnic regions in China. After the earthquake, the emergence of the tourism industry and the relocation of villagers provide more opportunities for Qiang people to use Mandarin with outsiders. In the following chapter, I will provide detailed information on the case studies of Luobo Village and Zhitai Village. It is important to understand that for a lot of Qiang

people, using Han Chinese is a necessity of communication; yet such a change may be unfavorable to the protection of Qiang culture.

The positive impact of the quake is that more and more people have come to realize the importance of protecting their native language. WYQ is the speaker of a web radio program called *Qiang Language Online*. The program was designed to teach audiences with some useful Qiang words and phrases. It also offers a platform for the audience to share their experiences in learning. Some of her audiences are Qiang speakers, some are “Han-ized” Qiang who cannot speak the Qiang language at all, and some are even Han people. Though the program has just launched recently, it has gained a lot of attention. As WYQ remarked:

*“The audience really took it very seriously, they worked very hard to learn it. I can tell from their comments. This is a big change after the quake.”*

An important reason that the Qiang language is the primary carrier of Qiang culture is that there is no written form in this language. The Qiang used Chinese characters for reading and writing. Therefore the Qiang language is the only carrier that allows tremendous amounts of information such as culture, custom, history, lifestyle to be stored and encoded in Qiang’s own way. Since 1989, the Chinese government has promoted a creation of Qiang alphabetic writing and applied it in Qiang inhabited areas. Yet, some experts believed a phoneticized Qiang was not good for the inheritance of Qiang language. Another change after the quake is that some experts began to design non-alphabetic characters for Qiang language. In the end of my conversation with WYQ, she showed me her name in the newly-designed Qiang writing form. In her program of

*Qiang Language Online*, she now uses both alphabetic writing and the characters to represent sounds and written forms of Qiang.

In accordance with the government's planning slogan of "Qiang language entering campus", the Qiang region has also witnessed the emergence of several bilingual elementary schools after the quake. Bilingual education in the Qiang region was implemented in 1998 but was gradually cancelled due to the lack of funding. After the quake, under the support of local government, bilingual elementary schools such as the Fengyi School, the Long-xi, and the Pu-xi School once again appeared in this region. Also in Beichuan, a series of textbooks called Qiang Language have been used in all schools in the county. Besides, some schools such as New Beichuan Middle School have arranged a specific time every day for Qiang language broadcasting. Even though Beichuan is considered to have been "Han-ized" to some extent according to an expert from the Southwest Ethnology Institute, its government has invested the most in protecting and restoring Qiang culture.

An obvious change after the quake is that the public and government's awareness of protecting the Qiang language has greatly improved. However, it is undeniable that the impacts of modernization on minority languages continue to deepen. As an interviewee said:

*"While, this is a conflict, unless you force us to stay in our villages forever, then the language environment, the culture, will exist forever. I think we also have rights to choose where to live, we also want to leave the mountains and live a more convenient lifestyle, but the consequence may be the vanishing of our native language."*

The conflicts that happen among ethnic groups have no easy answer; people cannot reach a consensus about whether ethnic people are supposed to adhere to their culture and homeland, or if they should be free to choose their own lifestyle, or even to integrate within the dominant culture. As an emergent event, the earthquake called public attention to the protection of the endangered language, but to what extent it can impact the Qiang language remains unclear. It is still useful to consider ways to protect endangered languages in this rapidly developing modern society.

#### **4.3.2 Intangible Cultural Heritage - The Shibi Culture**

Since many of the ancient ethnic minorities did not have written forms to record history, their traditional culture were basically passed down by word of mouth and contained a large number of intangible cultural artefacts. In regards to Qiang, the Shibi culture represents the essence of Qiang's intangible culture. The Shibi are the respected shamans of the Qiang people. They preside over ceremonies at rituals, festivals, marriages, funerals, treating illness, naming babies and building houses; they even participate in making laws for their villages. Shibi are always male and must undergo strict training. Most importantly, since Qiang does not have written characters, they have to remember the entire history of the Qiang and all their scriptures taught by their masters.

The earthquake not only destroyed a lot Qiang architecture, villages and cultural relics but also led to the death of 50 Qiang culture experts, scholars and intangible cultural heritage inheritors (Wang, 2008). Because a lot of Qiang culture bearers died in this disaster, the dynamic development of Qiang culture was seriously obstructed. It is

believed that the devastated Qiang intangible culture is facing the threat of extinction and fighting for its survival after the earthquake (Wen, 2008; MacLeod, 2008). The following two pieces of news described the crisis the Qiang culture faced.

“The 2008 earthquake was devastating for the Qiang intangible cultural heritage which relies on oral inheritance. It is of great importance to protect and inherit Qiang culture.” (Huang, 2014)

“The earthquake led to a number of Qiang cultural experts dying, which is likely to mean that many Qiang traditions cannot be passed down. They are facing the threat of extinction. The impacts of the quake on Qiang culture are much more serious than expected.” (Zhang, 2008)

As the news described, the Qiang intangible culture was facing an unprecedented inheritance crisis due to the earthquake, and the government is trying its best to rescue, collect and compile the intangible culture. Several Qiang experts participated in my interview and were questioned about the status of Shibi culture and if the earthquake was the main reason leading to the Shibi culture’s extinction. The responses seemed a bit different from the news description.

*“Even if there was no earthquake, Shibi culture is dying out over time. At least the quake let the public realize it.”*

*“No, no, it is impossible. Actually at the time when the quake occurred, the number of Shibi was already very few. The drop in the number of Shibi has nothing to do with the earthquake; it is related to previous policy. You know what I am referring to – the Cultural Revolution.”*

Luckily, I got a chance to interview one of the few dozens of Shibi left among the Qiang. The Shibi, a 76-year-old, inherited the title from his master, a 92-year-old Shibi who died in the 2008 earthquake. Our interview was undertaken in his house, where a

silver plaque hanging on the wall, says “The inheritor of Qiang Shibi Culture.” He further discussed how the previous policy destroyed the Shibi culture.

*“You know, during the Cultural Revolution, all the “niu-gui-shen-she”<sup>1</sup> (Monsters and Demons) were criticized and persecuted. After the Third Plenary Session<sup>2</sup> taken in 1978, the government called for protecting ethnic culture, but it seemed a bit late....Let me give an example: if apprentices want to learn Shibi’s rules, a specific site is needed. Some of our knowledge can be taught at home, some cannot. Scriptures that involve god, heaven, death, and evocation cannot be discussed at home, we have taboos. In the past, we had a transmission site, a temple, and it was built after the Third Plenary Session. Even though the Revolution is already long gone, an official who came to our village said communists should be atheists, Shibi culture was a heresy. The temple was later sold to a businessman. (Shakes head)*

*How can I keep the Shibi culture when I even don’t have a transmission site?”*

Back in 1966, Mao’s government severely persecuted ethnic minorities across the nation by attributing ethnic conflict to class conflict (Hansen, 1999). He and his supporters also mobilized thousands of young, radical “Red Guards” to destroy the Four Olds - old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits of mind. During that time, many religious sites were destroyed, ancient books were burned, and ethnic groups’ faiths and customs were forced to change. After the death of Mao in 1976, the ten years of revolution finally came to an end. The new central government began to accept cultural

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<sup>1</sup>Niu-gui-she-shen: Meaning Monsters and Demons. It was the Cultural Revolution term reserved for the “specialist”, “scholars”, “authorities” and “venerable masters” who “entrenched themselves in ideological and cultural positions.”

<sup>2</sup>Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee was a pivotal meeting taken in 1978. It repudiates Mao’s Cultural Revolution and set China on the course for nationwide economic reforms.

diversity and took a lot of efforts to restore ethnic cultures after the trauma of the Cultural Revolution (Bruner, 2005). However, the impact of the revolution is still present after many years.

According to the Shibi, the temple was finally closed and abandoned by the businessman. Though the central government implemented a number of policies to protect Qiang Culture after the Third Plenary Session in 1978, the memory of Cultural Revolution made people afraid of being connected to anything that seemed to be a feudal superstition. Since then, Shibi's new transmission site was selected at a specific site on the mountain. Now, the atheistic, communist government that once hounded and humiliated ethnic culture has spent billions in protecting intangible cultural heritage. The government also provides each inheritor with monthly subsidies, hoping to assist them in preserving the tradition. Even though there is no inheritance crisis at this moment, the process of modernization and urbanization still poses a threat to it.

*“The government’s policy on us is very good. Without the earthquake, there would not be so much effort or funding. But to be honest, in this current society, becoming a Shibi does not sound attractive. Why not go out to find a job or go to a college for education? Well, there are still some people who want to learn. I have seven apprentices now, honestly, no inheritance crisis at this moment. But I don’t know about the future - after all, becoming a Shibi does not bring any benefit. Young people can only have a better life if they go to college.”*

The earthquake has brought an unprecedented attention and funding to Qiang culture. The endangered culture has therefore been well protected and revived. However, how long can this attention and investment last? Moreover, under the background of globalization and urbanization, how effective is the role of government in supporting an

endangered culture? These questions require more time to be explored. Aside from the government funding, the emerging of ethnic tourism and stage play also provides incentives for local people to retain their culture and tradition.

Looking at the news coverage of Qiang's cultural protection, a large proportion was related to cultural exhibitions and tourism-oriented performances as a mean to preserve Qiang culture, for example, *Qiang Culture Exhibition Attracting Ten Thousand People* (Li, 2008), *Qiang Songs are being Transmitted in Youth Choir* (Zhang & Huang, 2009a), *The First Qiang Tourism Stage Play - Qiang spirits: Using the Stage to Create an Intangible Cultural Heritage Transmission Site* (Zhang & Huang, 2009b). Using the stage as a transmission site could be a strategy to achieve both the transmission of Qiang culture and economic profits. Additionally, as can be seen from news reports and the conversation with local people, some Shibi began to perform in occasions for tourists or leaders. Such a performance and stage play need to be paid attention to since it could be a misleading showcase rather than a real reflection of the culture. As the Shibi, said:

*“The old Shibi in Long-xi village had passed away; his apprentice is what I called “performance Shibi”. He performs dancing and singing when tourists come. When tourists see the performance, they will think: good, Shibi culture is still alive and it is well inherited! Actually that Shibi on the stage may not know what he is performing. He knows very few of the Shibi knowledge and skills. Someone asked me to perform and to dance in front of tourists. I refused. A real Shibi does not dance.”*

In addition to the “performance Shibi”, there are many other forms of tourist-driven acts emerging in some places after the quake. A market-oriented display of ethnic culture, in forms of stage play and ethnic tourism, could be a double-edged sword. It

provides economic incentives for these places to protect, regenerate, and provide upkeep of their ethnic culture, but the commercialization of the Qiang culture could also undermine the soul of the tourist destinations. It is thus important to balance the protection of intangible culture and commercialized tourism.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

Returning to the initial question: to what extent has the earthquake impacted on Qiang culture? This study indicated that the impacts of the earthquake on Qiang culture are limited, at least not as serious as the media described. Media are believed to have an inclination to focus on dramatic, sensational, and exceptional aspects of the news (Tierney et al, 2006). By depicting Qiang as a vulnerable group that faces extinction and is in need of strong protection, the media immediately grabbed public attention, and in the meantime, successfully portrayed the government as highly efficient and concerned with the well-being of ethnic groups.

Even though there were many Qiang culture bearers like Shibi killed in the earthquake, the earthquake was not the main cause of the sharp decrease of Shibi. The cultural crisis of Qiang existed for a long time before the earthquake. One main reason is the side effects of the Cultural Revolution; the other is the trend of globalization and urbanization, which make many ethnic cultures become assimilated into the dominant culture. Instead of being the chief culprit, the earthquake actually raised public awareness of ethnic cultural protection.

Previous research of cultural vulnerability in the context of disaster discovered that disasters call attention to issues of race, ethnicity and class vulnerabilities (Bolin, 2006). It also raises public awareness of protecting heritage architecture (Karkee et al, 2005). This study discovered that natural disasters not only call attention to an endangered culture but also result in attempts to revitalize the culture. What is worth mentioning is that the regeneration of the Qiang culture in the quake zone, especially in the “Han-ized” ethnic region, is very much stimulated by the demand of tourism. Ethnic tourism has been popular for a long time worldwide, since the cultural exoticism of some groups is very attractive for many tourists to observe, photograph and interact in other ways (van den Berghe, 1984). The most marketable forms of ethnic tourism include activities such as visiting minority housings, being involved in traditional festivals and ceremonies, watching performance and dances, or merely shopping for ethnic handicrafts and souvenirs. Ethnic tourism has been considered a strategy of the Chinese government to boost local economies as well as preserve culture in ethnic minority regions. As tourism is promoted in the quake zone, a shift in the priority among the minority and majority group is also witnessed. The following conversation demonstrated the psychological changes of local people after the earthquake.

*“In the past, some of us may have thought that Han is better than Qiang. We could feel the advantage of being an ethnic minority only when considering preferential policies, otherwise being Han is better.*

*(How can you tell, can you give an example?)*

*A lot of Qiang people wished to leave, especially girls; they wanted to marry someone “outside.” Also, in the past, if Qiang women wore traditional long gowns walking on the street of Yingxiu Town, other people would see them as a*

*disparate group. From my personal experience, when I was in school, some of my Han classmates laughed at Qiang people's dark-colored skin, accent, you know, ethnic minorities usually have a strong accent. Now, after the quake, it is totally different. You can see Yingxiu Town has lots of people wearing long gowns, and those Han who said unpleasant words have themselves dressed in Qiang clothes.*

*Everyone depends on this concept (Qiang culture) for a living. Though some of them are "fake ethnic minorities," I must admit that after the earthquake, local people and the government are more aware of the importance of preserving Qiang culture, and Qiang has received unprecedented respect."*

The quake zone has witnessed a shift in the power dynamic between the two groups. The Han were prioritized before the quake, but now the Qiang have experienced an amplified level of respect after the quake. This respect is very much due to newly emerged ethnic-themed tourism resulting from the quake. This also indicates how the economic benefits of tourism constitute a new form of ethnic relations. On the other hand, profits usually come with problems. Many scholars believe that ethnicity tends to be commoditized, since selling points such as artefacts, and performances are re-created and marketed to visitors (van den Berghe, 1984; Yang et al, 2008; Smith, 2012). The phenomenon of "performing Shibi" is an example of how a commercialized ethnic tourism may not have positive impact on cultural protection. The phenomenon of using ethnicity as a new source to earn money will be further discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5

### THE RECONSTRUCTION

#### 5.1 National Policy and Reconstruction Achievements

Three months after the earthquake, the State Overall Planning for Post-Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction was released. Since then, the largest reconstruction in China's history took off. The reconstruction process included the optimization of the urban and rural planning, the restoration of rural production; the restoration and creation of cultural, sporting, medical, educational, scientific, employment, social welfare and other public service; the reconstruction of industry; the enhancement of disaster prevention and mitigation systems; the restoration of the ecological landscape; and the rehabilitation of psychological for the affected population. The chart below illustrates the achievements of post-quake reconstruction two years after the earthquake.

Table 5.1 The Reconstruction Achievements within Two Years after the Quake

Projects	Number/Length/Dollar
Total investment in post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction	1.7 trillion yuan (US\$255 billion)
Reconstruction of cities and towns	38
Housing reconstruction	12 million people (5 million households)

Re-employment of victims	1.7 million
Resettlement of landless peasants	200 thousand
Reconstruction of schools	8283
Reconstruction of medical institutions	2292
Projects for prevention and control of post-quake geohazard	2334
Reinforcement of dams	1222
Restoration and reconstruction of highway	6,500km
Restoration and reconstruction of railway	6,500km

Source: Beichuan Earthquake Museum

The completion of these achievements was in accordance with the government’s promise to “complete the three-year tasks of reconstruction within only two years” (The Overall Planning, 2008). Overall, about 29,692 projects for recovery and reconstruction were undertaken, 99 percent of which were finished within two years. This was largely made possible thanks to the strong leadership of the Chinese central government and the “paired- assistance scheme” set up among provinces.

Unlike many other developing countries that highlighted the post-disaster reconstruction in terms of recovery (Simpson, 2001), the post-Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction is known as development-oriented reconstruction. Chinese scholars call it the “Sichuan Model” (Jia, 2011). The Model has two meanings: instead of merely recovering to the pre-disaster level, the reconstruction should significantly surpass the pre-disaster level. One of the examples is that all the new buildings are built to withstand

an earthquake of 8.0. Moreover, while ensuring the completion of all projects associated to the well-being of people, the reconstruction work also highlighted the importance of industry, which is crucial for the affected area in the long run.

Another notable measure is the above-mentioned “paired- assistance scheme” – Basically, the Chinese government paired up each of the severely affected counties with an unaffected well-developed province or municipality, and then worked to provide financial and technical support for recovery and reconstruction. Those well-developed provinces made great contributions to the reconstruction work in terms of human, material and financial resources. Roughly 100,000 workers from 20 provinces and municipalities were involved in the reconstruction effort. These provinces allocated at least one percent of their annual fiscal revenue into their respective reconstruction projects for two years. The one news piece with the title of *Hand in Hand, Reconstruct Our home* demonstrated some of the efforts that have been done in this partnership mechanism.

“Earthquake is disaster, but reconstruction is an opportunity. Paired-assistance should integrate both ‘transfusion’ and ‘hematopoiesis’, we need to solve the immediate problems but also assist it for long-term development.

Shanxi Province not merely assisted Mao County in funding and reconstruction projects, but also sent 1000 experts from various fields to Mao County; received students from the affected region to study in Shanxi Province; as well as provided 3851 employment positions.

Technicians from Hunan Province walked around all villages, mountains in Li county. They described their working status as “white plus black” and “five plus two;” all of their time was devoted into the assistance effort.

Anhui Province promised to make Songpai County a tourist destination within three years.

Jilin Province has just started its Heishuiya mountain tunnel project this month.” (Wang, 2009)

The paired-assistance scheme is a model of inter-regional mutual assistance and resource coordination. The counterpart provinces and cities not only helped the affected sites to build permanent housing, infrastructure, schools and hospitals, but also participated in planning the industrial park. The layout of the redesigned Industrial park went from scattered to convergent, thus making the social and economic resources used more effectively. More importantly, as mentioned in the news reports, the ultimate goal of the scheme is to achieve local self-sustaining. In the words of the news from the counterpart provinces, “transfusion” to the affected sites led to “hematopoiesis”. The paired-assistance not only brought funding but also provided experts to the affected sites. The arrival of the workers also influenced local people in terms of opinion, lifestyle, and the awareness of cultural protection.

A respondent who was originally from a village called Siwa, shared his experience with me. The Siwa Village is located at an altitude of 2,800 meters up on a mountain in Mao County. Due to its environmental occlusion, Siwa Village had not experienced many contact with the outside, thus the impact of foreign culture on local culture was very small. The benefit of Siwa’s remote location was perfectly retaining its traditional architecture and the Qiang culture. However, at the same time, local villagers knew little about the value of their architecture.

*“Our Siwa village resides in a remote mountainous area. Houses are made of stone, very traditional. There is a century-old watchtower in my village, nobody cared about it previously. After the earthquake, someone from the assistance team came to our village and discovered the watch tower. His photos of our village and the old watchtower had attracted lots of attention from ethnic cultural experts. Now, everyone in our village, both the ordinary villager and local government, realize that watch tower is very precious for Qiang culture and there even is a person employed full time to protect it.”*

The respondent believed that the influx of the outside workers, no matter whether they were workers, technicians, scholars, experts or officials, have opened up their horizons in different ways. Another two respondents I interviewed, who were students at the time when the quake occurred, believed that the assistance had changed their lives.

*“Two months after the quake, all the students of my school went to Shanxi Province. The school there provided us with free accommodation, tuition, and also psychological support. We came back to hometown when the construction of our new school completed. The new school was built by works from the paired Guangdong Province. Now, several years later, more than half of our classmates, including myself, entered colleges and working in major cities. I think I would not be the person I am today if I did not ‘come out’ at that time. So does my cousin, he studied in Jilin province after the quake under the support of the paired-assistance scheme. He is now a graduate student in a famous music college.”*

*“I may not get out of this mountain in my lifetime if earthquake did not happen. Because of the quake, I was able to go to Guangdong Province for education, where I see the well-developed outside world. Now, I’m running my yak jerky business on Wechat (a Chinese app), which made me earn a good bit of money. I always go out for travelling. This year my friends and I are planning to go to Beijing.”*

The earthquake destroyed people’s life, but the assistance projects provided these victims with an opportunity to leave their hometown, which was considered poor and

remote. They were able to see the developed areas and got touch with something that was inaccessible previously. This experience had a great impact on these students. Eight years after the earthquake, most of the paired-assistance works are completed. The achievements of the assistance made a deep imprint in those reconstructed places. It is very easy to find the achievements of the paired-assistance scheme: usually, the paired province left their names on the plaques of some major projects such as bridges, tunnels, schools, museums, and earthquake monuments. In fact, the topic of the paired-assistance scheme was not designed to be explored in detail initially, whereas many local people mentioned it in our conversation. They mentioned how much subsidies their paired provinces provided to each household, how many infrastructure facilities and buildings they built and what local problems the assistance team helped to solve. The paired-assistance scheme is not only an innovative initiative of the Chinese government but also an embodiment of the symbol of unity of nation. Therefore, we could see the display of the reconstruction achievements of paired-assistance in different places, including news articles.

The following part shows the fieldwork results in these affected sites. These sites are divided into three categories in accordance with the geographic locations of the resettlement, namely, reconstruction on original site, reconstruction nearby, and relocation. Through the introduction of background information, housing policies, media description and the conversations with ordinary people, it is hoped to unfold a rich image of the lives of people in these post-reconstruction sites.

## **5.2 Fieldwork Finding**

### **5.2.1 Reconstruction of New Town on Original Site**

#### **5.2.1.1 Case Study: Yingxiu Town**

Ethnic Composition: Han, Qiang, “‘Han-ized’-Qiang’, few Tibetan

Death toll: nearly 7,000 people killed, about a third of Yingxiu’ population

Yingxiu, the epicenter, once a well-off town, was razed to the ground by the devastating earthquake. Yet, with 1.7 billion yuan (254 million US dollars) from central and provincial governments, as well as from the paired assistance of Dongguan city in Guangdong province, the new town rose from the ruins. Within three years, the rebuilt town covered about 200 thousand square meters of (2.2 million square feet) public housing, and 80 thousand square meters of (861 thousand square feet) public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, markets, a youth activity center, a memorial museum, and municipal infrastructures such as water supply facilities and a sewage treatment plant. The exception is the Xuankou middle school (see figure 5.1), which was reduced to rubble by the earthquake and is now a memorial ruin. Everything else is rebuilt to withstand 8.0 in seismic intensity on the Richer Scale. The new houses are built in Qiang-style and Tibetan-style with the purpose of highlighting the distinct ethnic culture. Looking downwards from the mountain where the memorial museum and victims cemetery are located, the whole Yingxiu is in sight. The middle school ruin is surrounded by well-designed green areas, and rows of neat, newly-built houses. Nearby are rolling mountains and the flowing Min River.



Figure 5.1 Xuankou Middle School- the earthquake ruin

Soon after the earthquake, the central government decided to rebuild Yingxiu on the original site after much discussion and field surveys. Most factories have been moved out, and the middle school is the only quake relic that has been preserved. According to many local people, the condition of the middle school was only relatively slightly damaged compared to other buildings such as Yingxiu elementary school and preschool. The elementary school and preschool were wiped out during the earthquake, one with only 100 out of 447 students and teachers survived, the other one with 40 out of 81 children survived. The reason why the elementary and preschool were not kept as memorials, as a local said,

*“There was entirely nothing left, while the middle school did not completely collapse. At least we could see some quake-battered architecture.”*

The reconstruction that tore down the whole town except the middle school led to Yingxiu's lagging behind Beichuan in disaster tourism, as the latter preserved the whole town. LJ, a 36-year-old local tour guide remarked:

*“A lot of visitors came and said that we were not as serious as Beichuan. Actually, we were gravely impacted, but we only kept a small portion of the quake ruins, and that portion is slightly damaged. If you want to see the most real disaster scene, you should go to Beichuan. I guess that's why our disaster tourism has not developed well.”*

Everyday, dressed in traditional Qiang ethnic clothing, LJ takes tourists to the symbolic middle school. After losing her job at the middle school that was destroyed in the earthquake, she now earns money as a tour guide. I met her at the highway exit to Yingxiu where she stood waving hands to attract tourists. According to her, she is one of the local guides with tour guide qualification certificates; she is allowed to find visitors only at the visitor center. But as more and more local people without qualification found visitors by themselves, she had to move forward to the highway exit instead of the visitor center.

*“I know my behavior is not good for the image of Yingxiu, but competition is fierce.”*

In my field visit in Yingxiu, almost all respondents mentioned that there has been a steep decline in visitors in recent years.

*“Early after the quake, people gave much attention to us and a lot of visitors came to see the ruins. As time passed, visitors and their curiosity tailed off.”*

*“The first two years (after the quake) were good. Now it is very difficult.”*

*“The ruin is more likely to become an education site where students from different schools and universities come while the number of tourists with personal purposes will not be many. “*

*“Our tourism is transit tourism, people drive down the highway to take a look at the earthquake ruin, and then leave here to their final destination - Jiuzhaigou national park. The earthquake ruin and museum are free. They do not stay here, they do not spend money here, and therefore it does not drive economic growth.”*

*“Guesthouses for tourist accommodation on the main street can hardly find a guest.”*

Yingxiu’s tourism is facing great difficulties. Before the earthquake, Yingxiu was famous for its prosperity in western China. Each year, Yingxiu town paid over 300 million in taxes to Wenchuan county. Local people’s livelihoods mostly relied on agriculture, breeding of livestock. They had jobs in over 30 local factories such as hydropower, steel tube and pharmaceutical factories. The reconstruction project, which was subsidized by Guangdong city of Dongguan, redesigned the layout of the town and industrial structure. Most factories moved away, and surviving villagers have all moved into the newly-built three-story apartments. The cost of housing is 2770 yuan per square meter. The government paid for 2000 Yuan per square meter, victims only have to afford 770 yuan per square meter. There were three types of housing designs to choose from depending on the size of a household - 100 square meters for one to three people, 120 square meters four to five people, 140 square meters for five people. Housing was assigned by drawing lots by the head of each household. In addition to the government subsidies, Macao Red Cross provided 20,000 yuan for each family, and the central government also offered six years’ interest-free loans for those who cannot afford it.

WYQ, a 26-year-old, is a survivor at the Xuankou middle school. She is currently working in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, and goes back to her hometown frequently to visit her parents. Talking about her new home in Yingxiu, WYQ thought it was much better than her previous house in terms of community environment and house appearance, however, she was not very satisfied with the housing design,

*“120 square meters are divided into three floors, so that means for each floor, we only have 40 square meters. It’s very narrow. Our previous home was about 200-300 square meters, not to mention we had a big yard.”*

Though the three-story housing is designed in accordance with the Qiang style, the newly built housing cannot meet people’s expectation. In pre-quake Yingxiu, most families had a piece of land where they could farm. Making a living in Yingxiu was not a difficult thing at that time.

*“We did not merely depend on farming; we had many factories and very rich hydro-power resources. Many of us earned money in hydro-power station for long-term, short-term contracts, and some owned stakes. Besides, running small businesses was also very easy to do.”*

One year prior to the quake, WYQ’s father built a pig farm using all his savings. After the earthquake, all of the pigs were shot to prevent plague. Except for 5,000 yuan in compensation the government gave to her family, they had nothing left. Everything had to start from scratch. Her family moved into the new home and her parents are now running a small restaurant on their house’s ground floor. Yingxiu transformed into a quake-themed tourist attraction after the quake, and the new homes are designed to adapt

to this change in accordance with the government planning that “everyone household has a shop, and everyone can work in tourism” (cited in *Sichuan Daily*, 2010).

Different from the traditional function of the three-story Qiang housing - ground floor for livestock, second floor for people, third floor for drying grains, the ground floor is now designed to be a shop or restaurant; the second and third floor is for personal use or tourist accommodation (see Figure 5.2). With a decline in tourists, most people have turned their ground floor into their living room. As most of the farmland and factories are gone, villagers are taking up new occupations. Making a living has become a difficult thing in Yingxiu, and a lot of people choose to go out to find a job.



Figure 5.2 The Three-story apartment in the reconstructed Yingxiu Town.

*“My husband and my brother are migrant workers in Dujiangyan city. I cannot leave here; I have a child and parents to take care of.”*

*“Our housing conditions have improved greatly, but I miss the old days because we had primary industry and secondary industry at that time. Now, we just rely on tourism.”*

*“Our government knows it’s not going to work if just rely on earthquake ruin, so we also want to highlight our ethnic culture. That’s why our architecture is built in fashion of ethnic minority tradition. This is a good idea, but honestly, Yingxiu does not have ethnic culture tradition, now you suddenly create it, and you have Wenchuan, Mao county nearby where is the real center of Qiang culture, how can you compete with them?”*

Since the location of Yingxiu is close to the traditional Han region, a lot of Qiang people in Yingxiu are largely “Han-ized” and decidedly Han in their dress, languages, and lifestyle. The standard to judge a person is a Qiang or “Han-ized”-Qiang is somewhat subjective in its use of language, inheritance of ethnic custom, and lifestyles. Most times people are happy to say whether they are “Han-ized” or not. The tour guide, LJ, I interviewed is one who admitted that she has been “Han-ized” since her parents’ generation. Her Qiang identity was inherited from her parents with the purpose to enjoy some preferential policies for ethnic minorities. Interestingly, all the tour guides in Yingxiu town, no matter if they are Han, Qiang, or ““Han-ized”-Qiang’, wear Qiang traditional dress. As a Qiang culture expert HY comments on this phenomenon:

*“They are depending on it for a living.”*

This is the current development predicament Yingxiu is confronting. It competes with Beichuan for quake-themed tourism, and also competes with Mao County and Li County for ethnic tourism. Yingxiu seems to be at a disadvantage. Without other industries’ support, Yingxiu needs to find its way in the future. Despite these difficulties, local people appreciate government’s efforts in reconstruction and the decision of “rebuilding on the original location”.

*“This is our home, though shattered and scarred, we will not go anywhere.”*

I heard this a lot lots of time from locals. The new Yingxiu Town built within three years has already become the home to all quake survivors here. It has raised from rubble, with people’s memories and hopes.

#### **5.2.1.2 Case Study: Ji’na Qiang village**

Ethnic Composition: Han, ““Han-ized”-Qiang’

Death toll: 26 out of about 316 residents.

Another site of “reconstruction on original location” I visited was Ji’na Qiang village. Prior to the earthquake, it was called Mao’ershi village, a Han-Qiang hybrid village. According to a respondent, there are just a few elderly people can be recognized as authentic Qiang. The rest villagers are all Han or ““Han-ized”-Qiang’. The livelihoods of a majority of local inhabitants were directly dependent on subsistence practices such as raising crops or fruit trees planting, and livestock breeding. Men of the families also sought job outside as the area had a “small economic scale and a concentrated poverty-stricken population” (Chinese State Council, 2008, p.7). Therefore, the pre-earthquake Mao’ershi village could hardly notice the existence of Qiang culture since most residents here were Han.

In the earthquake, as official data suggested, 69 out of 71 houses in the village were razed to the ground. Of the 316 residents, 26 died and several were injured (Chen, 2009; Liao, 2010). Instead of being abandoned or reinforced, the village was promptly

rebuilt after the earthquake as the chosen site for an ecological model village, and the first ethnic minority permanent housing reconstruction project in Beichuan County. The village was also named “Ji’na”, meaning ‘Goddess’ in Qiang language by Premier Wen. This village was specifically selected for its suitability as a tourist destination. It located on the only road that people see upon entering Beichuan old town.

Based on the policy of rebuilding on the original site, the whole village was redesigned and rebuilt by the government. Each household got 20,000 yuan in subsidy from the Central Government, 50,000 yuan of interest-free loans from the bank, and the rest was self-funded. The construction of Ji’na village started in mid-July 2008 and was completed in December. A number of leaders, including Premier Wen, have come to visit the new Ji’na Qiang village. Looking at the media coverage of the Ji’na Qiang village, it seems that the village suffered a lot in the quake, and later with the efforts in reconstruction, Qiang cultural traditions are apparently rejuvenated.

One news article, “Ji’na Qiang village is seeking an amazing turnaround”, was published before the reconstruction:

“The earthquake destroyed the whole village and 200,000 square meters fruit forest. Unexpectedly, after much field visits and discussions conducted with experts from departments including Water Bureau, Land Resources Bureau, Ministry of Construction and Geology Bureau, these districts are going to build an ecological model village renamed “Ji’na Qiang village” integrating both residence and tourism. The new village will inherit and showcases the culture of the Qiang people and will become the starting point of Beichuan folk custom tourism.... Looking at the new Qiang village that is being building, villager Tang filled with anticipation.” (Chen, 2008)

Two years after the quake, the following article with a title of “New Ji’na Qiang village, spend a whole day do not feel tired”, described the ‘turnaround’ of the village:

“Ji’na Qiang village is now the “Beichuan Number One Village”. It brings an antique feeling when wandering among the reconstructed yards and architecture. You can see the magnificent watch towers, stone pagodas, various flags with “Qiang” character, sheep’s skull hanging out in every household and white stones on roofs that has significant cultural and religious symbolism in Qiang tradition.... The pre-quake village was called Mao’ershi village. The earthquake made 69 out of 71 houses collapsed completely. Now all the new houses, bridges and public infrastructures have completed. All the villagers are living in new houses and almost everyone makes some space in their house for tourism accommodation or restaurants. A local woman said she sells Qiang embroidery to tourists, and this helps her earn over 1000 RMB each month...The reconstruction of Ji’na Qiang village will become a brand.” (Liao, 2010)

The first article uses the word ‘unexpected,’ expressing local people’s surprise and gratitude to the government. Their desperation after suffering massive losses in the quake was replaced by the hope that the government brought to them. The second piece of news talks about the new appearance of Ji’na village two years after the disaster. It incorporates the marrow of Qiang culture in terms of architecture, handicraft and performing arts. Figure 5.3 shows the rebirth of the village with Qiang-style watchtower and housing. The emerging of tourism had greatly increased household incomes. However, some reactions concerning the village in the fieldwork were quite different from the media representation.



Figure 5.3 The watchtower in the reconstructed Ji'na Qiang village

Different with the official claim that “69 out of 71 houses were razed to ground” (Liao, 2010; Zhang et al, 2012), local residents from Ji'na and residents from nearby villages told me that the damage of Ji'na village was not very serious. Most houses were not completely collapsed. A local official YCJ who was in charge of demolition in the process of reconstruction, said,

*“Most residents in the Ji'na village did not want to rebuild a new village. Houses just partially destroyed in the quake, they preferred to repair it. They didn't understand why you (local government) tear down my house and rebuild a new one for me? And most of the residents are Han people; they don't need to change a Qiang-looking house. Obviously, people have to spend more in the new houses than just repairing their old ones. But someone (refer to local government) wanted to take this opportunity to develop tourism, so they just asked the villagers to accept their decision.”*

Clearly, the reconstruction project in Ji'na village did not get consent from local people. Later in my fieldwork, I talked with an ethnologist HY, also an ethnic-Qiang herself, who considered the Ji'na Qiang village a complete failure.

*“Ji'na Qiang village's Qiang-style architecture is dead; these architecture is meaningless for local villages since they are not Qiang people, at most just some expectations for tourism. If you look at Taoping Qiang village in Li County, every architecture is meaningful for local people. Even though it does not have a good location as Ji'na, it attracts lot of tourists with different purposes. It has its own attractions. You see how embarrassed Ji'na village is. It is just a cheap copy developed by a group of construction planning “experts” who know NOTHING about anthropology and ethnology.”*

There were very few visitors on the street of Ji'na Qiang village on the day I visited, possibly because of rain. I became a prey that every merchant and restaurant owner wanted to have. I found a restaurant that seated at one of the best locations of this village - very close to the entrance of the village. As the only customer of this restaurant at that time, I (Author “A”) had my interview with the restaurant owner (“RO”):

*A: What was your job before the earthquake?*

*RO: Farming*

*A: Comparing farming and running this restaurant, which occupation do you think make more profit?*

*RO: We didn't have tourists before the quake, so I think the post-quake is slightly better.*

*A: So you don't need to find a job outside anymore, right?*

*RO: No. A lot of people go out. You know our business is not good, not a lot tourists. Who give you money if not going out?*

...

*A: What is your wife's job now?*

*RO: She helps me in the restaurant sometime, also selling some Qiang souvenirs to tourists.*

*A: Qiang souvenirs, are you Han or Qiang?*

*RO: We are Han.*

The newly-built Ji'na Qiang village, with its distinct ethnic-Qiang style architecture, is developing tourism, and therefore provides villagers with some income. However, though decorated with Qiang ethnic markers, this Han-dominated village is by no means an authentic Qiang village. Local government's decision to re-invent a Qiang village could be a failure, and the tourism prospects here are hardly optimistic.

Yingxiu Town and Ji'na Qiang village are two cases of reconstruction on the original site. What they have in common is that all the ruins and buildings of the quake have been pulled down and replanned. The appearances of the new sites have undergone great changes compared with pre-quake status. With ethnic culture obviously rejuvenated after the reconstruction. Unfortunately, the ethnic culture, especially in Ji'na Qiang village, is only misleadingly presented. Not only these two sites but also a number of other Qiang villages were rebuilt in such a form after reconstruction. Apart from these two sites that I visited in the trip, there are also other cases of reconstruction on original site in the quake zone. Due to the extreme weather and limited time, I could not reach there in this fieldwork. Based on other scholars' fieldwork, good examples could be found in Mao County, where the most Qiang people are residing in, the real center of Qiang culture. The houses and watchtowers in villages were hit but not entirely destroyed; they were restored on the original site and kept their original appearance. At the same time, people's living standards have improved through the improvement of

transportation. With the deep ethnic culture root, traditional architecture and improved infrastructure, most people are enjoying their current life and the ethnic tourism is also developing well.

## **5.2.2 Reconstruction of New Village Nearby**

### **5.2.2.1 Case Study: Luobo Village**

Ethnic Composition: Qiang

Death toll: 44 out of 1071 killed

Luobo village is 50 miles' away from Yingxiu town, perched on a plateau rising 6500 feet from the sheer Min River valley. It is claimed to be the the biggest and oldest Qiang village built with loess, with a 3,000 to 4,000 years history. The village as a whole was built with a complete drainage system and fortification, in which the houses in the village were connected within a defensive wall to against intruders in ancient times. The village was designed as a maze, with only three gates. When someone broke into the village in the past times, the gates would be closed and the intruder would be stoned to death by villagers. As a typical ethnic Qiang village, the housing in Luobo Village had three stories with the ground floor for livestock, second floor for living, and third floor for drying grain.

The 2008 earthquake collapsed almost all of the 226 buildings, causing 44 deaths and over 80 injuries. The only winding road up to the mountain had 12 of 15 km severely damaged or blocked by debris-flow. The villagers suffered from extremely difficulties in rescue, food and water supply. As ZMH, a local villager said,

*“We spent five days dig out dead body. At that time we had nothing, military from outside cannot come in (road blocked), helicopter also not working because of the heavy fog in mountain. We had several small shops; they shared their goods to everyone. I remembered one week after the quake, PLA (the Chinese People’s Liberation Army) from Chengdu came in, 20 soldiers, walked along the mountain road. Everyone carried a big bag of rice on shoulder, as well as medicines, shovels and scoops.*

The Jiangmen City of Guangdong Province was the counter-partner to assist Luo-Bo Village for the reconstruction. After field survey and discussions with local villagers, except for a small portion of the old village which has been restored in 2012, the rest of the quake-ravaged village was preserved as an earthquake ruin (see Figure 5.4). A new site was selected one kilometer further up the mountain where the geological condition is more stable. After one year of reconstruction, rows of new houses were erected. The external stone wall is plastered with loess to echo with the old village style. Frames of windows and doors are decorated with Qiang’s totem patterns (see Figure 5.5). Like all other reconstructed buildings, the new architectural framing with reinforced concrete structures can withstand an earthquake of magnitude 8. The new houses are designed with one story and a uniformed standard of 52 square meters per household. Each family has subsidies of 10,000 yuan from Jiangmen city, 10,000 yuan from Guangdong province, 16,000-22,000 yuan from the government, and 20,000 yuan of a low-interest loan from the government-run bank.



Figure 5.4 The Old Luobo Village –  
the Earthquake Ruin



Figure 5.5 The New Housing in Luobo Village

Talking with local villagers, some of them indicated their inadaptation and dissatisfaction with the new housing.

*“No matter what is the size of your family, eight people or two people, every household is assigned with 52 square meters. That is too small.”*

*“Rich people can expand their house, add second floor or even third floor, but I’m relatively poor here, I don’t have money to expand it.”*

*“Our new streets are two meters wide, vehicles cannot drive in. Even though the streets in our old village were narrower, since we have an opportunity to redesign and rebuild a new village, why not design it to accommodate to the current needs?”*

*“Our old house was wood-and-loess structure, warm in winter and cool in summer. Concrete structure is not good, very damp.”*

*“My old house was near my farming land on mountain.”*

When I asked if they wanted to move back to the old village, most of them did not want to move back, even though they expressed their love for the old homes.

*“Old village is not safe anymore, I don’t want to live there, I’m afraid.”*

*“This (refer to the new house) can resist earthquake of 8 magnitude.”*

*“Shibi (sorcerer, priest) selected this location before construction, we trust Shibi.”*

Traditionally, when Qiang people need to build a house or select a piece of land, they need a Shibi, a person who has the highest position in village, to check the Fengshui of their location. Respondent indicated that Shibi has participated in the process of new site selection, which reflected the respect for ethnic minority culture in accordance with government’s “scientific site selection” principle (The Overall Planning for Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restroation and Reconstruction, 2008).

An issue that has affected the lives of people in Luobo village for thousands of years is water shortage. People here need to walk up to an hour each day to carry water from its source to their homes. In winter, they even have to climb up to higher mountain to bring ice back to their homes. In Luobo village, the accessibility of water is always a problem that every household has to confront with, as one respondent said:

*“Not just me, everyone, every household had to carry water. We carry water in summer and ice in winter. Everything needs water, human, animals and crops. For older generations, half of their lifetime spent on carrying water.”*

Water scarcity in Luobo village became more serious after the earthquake. A great amount of water seeped into cracks in the mountain that emerged after the quake. The counter-paired city Jiangmen from Guangdong province decided to invest 3.66 million yuan in water diversion project from an adjacent mountain. Among the few articles reporting Luobo village in the post-quake news coverage, almost all of them mentioned

this project and highlighted its difficulty and significance. As seen from the following news article:

“In September last year, technicians from Jiangmen found a new water source in an adjacent mountain at altitude 2600 meters. The perennial spring does not freeze in the whole year, even in the dry season; there is still 5 kilogram of water coming out every second. It will meet the needs of 1900 people in Luobo village. On February 15th this year, the water supply project with an investment of 3.66 million yuan (\$536,000) has launched. Workers built up water dam and filtering pond at altitude 2600 meters, as well as a 13.5 km long water pipeline connecting the spring and the village. The fresh water from 13.5 km away will flow into the reservoir built in Luobo village...Before May, every household will have running water in their homes.” (Zhao, 2009)

Five households were visited in Luobo village and it was found that all of them had running water in home. It seems that the claim that “Luobo village has ended its thousand years’ of carrying water history” has come true. However, respondents indicated their carrying water has not completely ended.

*“We didn’t have running water before the earthquake, but now every household has, thanks to the government.”*

*“The pipe will freeze in winter, so we still need to walk up to a mountain road to carry ice in winter. It takes about an hour for a round trip.”*

With the increase of population and tourists, the water shortage in Luobo village is still an issue that needs attention in the future. Before the quake, Luobo village has already developed rural tourism; it has an exclusive word in Chinese called “nong-jia-le”, referring to farm guesthouse for tourist dining, accommodation and entertainment. “Nong-jia-le” has become a growing trend among numerous villages in China. Tourists

from cities drive to these villages to experience rural life by picking fruits, hiking and eating rural cuisine. Luobo village also featured in its ethnic Qiang culture, including the traditional loessial house, Qiang customs and entertainment. While the earthquake ravaged the whole village, tourism here has been destroyed completely. After the reconstruction, government invested 30 million yuan in the restoration and development of tourism. The current tourism of Luobo village has two areas, the old village and the new village. The whole old village has preserved as earthquake ruin, and has no ticket fee but locals can find visitors for private tours, and sell souvenirs, fresh fruits, honey and cordyceps for visitors. The new village is mainly developing household-based guesthouses. Tourists may find it interesting that guesthouse owners attract tourists by highlighting their provision of toilets in houses. According to locals, traditionally they considered having a restroom at home is dirty and bad in Feng shui. Therefore they usually had public restrooms outside their houses. Such a change of house design has no link to the wrong decision in reconstruction, as villagers themselves wanted them after reconstruction to cater to the needs of tourists. Villagers see it as an advantage compared with other guesthouses that do not have restrooms. When confronting old problems, new problems emerge. As a consequence of winter water shortages, the restrooms become very smelly during those several months because there is not enough running water to flush.

ZMH, a 44-year-old man, is currently running a farm guesthouse in the village. As the former leader of this village, ZMH knows everyone in this village and everything about the village. ZMH's house has three stories, decorated with traditional Qiang

patterns and a number of lanterns. I spent my two nights in Luobo village in his guesthouse, also his home. Walking into his kitchen, several huge pieces of dark-colored pork are hanging under the ceiling. These meats are a kind of Qiang traditional food, called “old preserved meat”, usually stored for more than ten years. ZMH told me, these preserved meat were dug out from the ruin by him after the earthquake, the piece he served for me in dinner has 18 years old. Except for this unique cuisine, he also served me with wild agaric, mushroom, potheb, potato and pork which he planted, hunted or picked in the mountain all by himself.

*“Living on a mountain I live from the mountain, living near the water I live from the water” We can have everything from the mountain; we don’t have other spending except rice and salt. I have a good income from tourism, I even don’t need to pay for my kids’ education...they are reading in a school down the mountain in Wenchuan, they come back every weekends. Government’s policy is good, they have a 9+3<sup>3</sup> program, costing just 200-300 yuan fees. We don’t need to pay anymore, (such as) accommodation fee, and tuition fee. The kids can receive government subsidies monthly.”*

When asking about the comparison between the pre-quake and post-quake income, ZMH and WMY (35-year-old women) remarked,

*“Economy is much better than before..... After the quake, more people know our village, they come here to visit the earthquake ruin. They also pick cherry in May, plum in September; they taste our Qiang cuisine...my annual income increased tenfold! ...90% of people in our Luobo village do not need to work outside anymore.”*

*“My husband is running guesthouse as well working in our land; I do some Qiang embroidery in spare time and sell it to visitors. It is so good that more and more*

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<sup>3</sup>9+3 program: a 9-year compulsory education plus 3-year occupational education.

*people come to our village; they help us a lot economy-wise. If I wanted to sell some potatoes in the past, I had to carry the basket down the mountain. Now I just put it here.”*

Even as they enjoy increased income and other positive changes that the earthquake brought to them, respondents also expressed their wish that the next generations could leave the village.

*“Education is the most important thing; I hope my kids can go to a famed college or university. There is no future for them to stay on the mountain.”*

*“Of course I’ll stay here for the rest of my life, I am used to it, but I wish my next generation could go downhill. I bought an apartment in Wenchuan city; I prepared it for my kids. After all, our village is in the mountain, relatively remote and poor. I still wish they could go out.”*

According to locals, in recent years, there have been an increasing number of villages of both the Han and ethnic minorities, still living in mountain villages who have purchased real estate in adjacent cities. This issue is part of the rapid urbanization and modernization in China. For my respondents in Luobo Village, disaster brought them a chance to increase income and to have a better life. This finding is consistent with findings of past studies (Shaw and Goda, 2004; Henderson et al, 2009), however, it did not affect their decisions, and more accurately, their hopes for their offspring to migrate from rural to urban areas. Even though the responses in this fieldwork are limited and cannot apply to other situations, it is important to acknowledge the respondents’ view.

The fieldwork in Luobo Village found that the original layout had changed significantly. Fortunately, the tradition of Qiang has kept very well. It is also true of

Taoping Qiang Village where the old village with the most well-preserved architectures of the Qiang people is located, together with the new Village that is developing ethnic culture-themed guesthouses.

### **5.2.3 Relocation**

#### **5.2.3.1 Case Study: Beichuan County Town**

Ethnic Composition: Han, Qiang, ““Han-ized”-Qiang’

Death Toll: nearly 20,000, two-thirds of its population

As the most severely devastated site in the quake zone, Beichuan was wiped out, with nearly two-thirds of its population killed in the quake. As a local respondent described, “Only one tenth of the nuclear families in Beichuan is complete, and 100 percent of our big families are not complete.” Beichuan’s misfortune was to be located right on the fault that ruptured to produce the quake and resided in a deep valley with mountains on all sides. The immense power of the quake sheared off the sides of these mountains, and the massive landslides on the slope crashed down onto the town and bulldozed everything in their path, including almost all the buildings in the old part of the town while burying thousands of people.

A serious consequence is that huge amounts of boulders and sediment released by landslides destroyed the vegetation on mountains. The soil are loose, and during the rainy season, this area is very susceptible to flood and mudflow. Based on these considerations, Beichuan was declared too dangerous for habitation. Thus, on the advice of experts, a new area 15 miles away in An County was selected from six alternatives to be the site of

New Beichuan. As thousands of bodies remain entombed in the rubble, the Old Beichuan town is no longer inhabited and is preserved as part of the earthquake museum. The museum covers eight square kilometers and consists of three parts: a state-level earthquake museum, a town-wide earthquake ruin, and a center for secondary disaster display and natural conservation.

The construction of New Beichuan is the most extensive project in the history of China. It has the largest input force, the highest planning level, and is one of the most involved resettlement cases. It brought together more than 50 design institutions with the highest qualification in China. More than 1,000 experts and scholars participated in its design, and with 218 projects started at the same time. In one year, the new Beichuan was finished. The government provided 11,000 apartments for its inhabitants, with apartments ranging from 70 to 120 square meters.

As mentioned above, new Beichuan is located on an area that originally belongs 'An County'. Therefore the population of new Beichuan is not entirely from Old Beichuan, many are local farmers. Because of the construction of a new city, these people were forced to change their farming habits. I met a local official who was in charge of the resettlement of these farmers. As he explained, at the time when they asked local farmers for permission to acquire this land, almost all of them supported the government's decision. However, when the resettlement project launched, everyone expressed dissatisfaction, and many problems suddenly arose.

Before proceeding any further to the issue of landless farmers, first and foremost it is important to understand that land is fundamental to farmers, in particular for a traditional farming civilization like China. The relationship between the people and the agricultural lands around them marks the rural ecology very distinctly. Unfortunately, Beichuan town's relocation involved moving to An County's agricultural land. As a result, in An County, local people were asked to go into the newly-built buildings and thus become the citizens of the new town, which meant that they would be landless forever. The transformation of the land from agricultural land to non-agricultural land was inevitable in this case and more broadly, in the process of industrialization and urbanization that is occurring throughout China. However, even though they received financial compensation, they still found it hard to accommodate to this new status.

The 179 newspaper articles examined did not raise the issue of landless farmers. According to the State Council Information Office's press conference held on February 24, 2012, in the post Wenchuan earthquake reconstruction process, government assisted 1.7 million victims in finding employment; and relocated 200 thousand landless farmers in the quake zone. During my fieldwork in Beichuan Town, several respondents I talked with used to be farmers and were then citizens of the newly-constructed town. Because of the mountainous terrain and the rainy season, I hired a local driver who led me to my destinations. In my conversation with him, I found he was originally from An County. His land had been acquired by the government to build the new town in An County. And at present, he was resettled in the new apartment buildings in New Beichuan. According to him, people from Old Beichuan had to pay 600-800 yuan per square meter for the new

apartment, while local An County residents like him, need not to pay. The new apartments are free to them. The housing conditions are much better than in their previous rural housing conditions. However, when talking about re-employment, his words were full of frustration.

*“Before the earthquake, my family owned 10 acres of farming land, so that a part of the income came from farming. I also had a small business where I worked during slack time. During the reconstruction, my land was acquired to build the new town. I lost my land. I also lost my occupation. Now I can only find driving jobs to earn a little money. In addition to this, I have no other income. Should I go out to try to find work? But who would want to hire us? We do not have other skills.”*

Another interview took place in the home of the respondent. LX, a 19-year-old, just graduated from high school and was waiting for offer letters from college.

*“My mother takes care of me here, she does not have a job, just depending on pension. Government’s policy is good, a lot of people over 55 year-old do not need to go out to find jobs because they have pension. The pension is not a large amount of money, but enough for them to live well in our small town. But for families that need more money, we have to go out to find jobs. My father is working in a building site in Shanghai (biggest city in East Coast), he is in charge of transporting building materials. Often he is exhausted, but he has to earn money because I need to go to college and my family needs money.”*

It is the case that some resettled farmers, despite the improvement of their living standards and social welfare, they could only work outside and engage in heavy manual labor. Due to their loss of land and lack of other occupational skills, their employment opportunities are very limited. The reconstruction and urbanization brought significant, sudden changes that rendered their agricultural-linked technical skills irrelevant. If

Beichuan wants to keep these people in town, it will have to develop its local economy so that local people can find meaningful employment. However, the economy of New Beichuan is confronting some difficulties.

Unlike the Yingxiu Town as mentioned earlier, pre-quake Beichuan primarily relied on intergovernmental transfer payment and government financial subsidies. It was a poverty-stricken area (Chinese State Council, 2008). Even though Beichuan owned several industries such as hydropower, mining, construction materials and agriculture, the prerequisites for an expanding industry were very inauspicious. A tertiary industry such as tourism did not exist in this area. In the process of reconstruction, the government repeatedly emphasized the importance of combining both “transfusion” and “hematopoiesis” in the reconstructed site (Wang, 2009). The two metaphors used here are referring to the government assistance to the affected sites (“transfusion”) and the ability the affected sites are able to become self-sustaining (“hematopoiesis”). Therefore several industrial areas had been planned to establish in New Beichuan in an attempt to solve the problem of employment for some people and also to boost local economy, in other words, helping Beichuan to live on its own. Moreover, the Beichuan authorities proposed a development goal that taking “cultural tourism as the lead, new type industry as the support, and characteristic agriculture as the foundation” (Liu, 2011). The following piece of news described the new image and development advantages of New Beichuan.

“Beichuan has very obvious cultural advantages, such as Dayu culture (an ancient Chinese hero), ethnic Qiang culture, anti-seismic culture and thanksgiving culture; Beichuan has very obvious tourism advantages, including four national tourist areas, ethnic Qiang characteristics, and beautiful natural ecosystem; Beichuan has

obvious industrial advantage, we are currently planning the construction of an aviation industrial area, a stone industrial area and Beichuan-Shandong industrial area; Beichuan also has obvious ecological advantages because we have a forest coverage of 55.5%. Because of these advantages, we are proposing to construct Beichuan with a slogan of ‘Ecological Beichuan, Modern Qiang city, Rising ethnic county’ ... We found souvenirs of ethnic Qiang such as Qiang embroidery and lacquer are very popular among tourists....We are going to make Beichuan a world tourist destination.” (Yao, 2015)

Though the news piece described New Beichuan as having many advantages, my fieldwork showed that it was a ‘fantasy document’ (Clarke, 1999). Like Yingxiu Town, Beichuan was geographically near to the traditional Han region; therefore, a majority of Beichuan people had been largely “Han-ized” since a century ago. LX, the above-mentioned 19-year-old respondent, told me that her Qiang identity was kept only for her to be able to enjoy preferential policies for ethnic minorities. With the identity, she would get an extra 50 score in the University Entrance Examination, and would also receive funding destined for ethnic minority students. Aside from her identity, she is no different to Han people.

As a region that has been “Han-ized” for a long time, Beichuan’s “ethnic Qiang culture advantage” that highlighted in the news may be limited. In terms of the “obvious industrial advantage”, many respondents told me the industrial areas are not developing well. Due to the weak industrial foundation, the lack of raw materials, as well as a less competitive location Beichuan seemed to be less attractive for potential firms. Thus, the “industrial advantages” asserted by the news media do not appear to exist for this area. Currently, except the quake-themed tourism, other industries in Beichuan can hardly

support its economy. The observation of a famous business street in Beichuan gives a glance of the dilemma of Beichuan's tourism.

In 2011, the newly-finished "Bana Qia", a business street in the fashion of Qiang ethnic culture, was built on the central axis of the new county seat of Beichuan. Bana Qia means a market place in Qiang language. It occupies an area of 7.5 hectare and consists of 27 buildings, nine Qiang traditional watchtowers, and one big plaza. This street combines shopping, dining, accommodation and entertainment, it is one of the most symbolic projects in the construction of New Beichuan.

"22 days after the opening of Bana Qia Street, the crowded shops and the smiles on vendors' faces already represent how beautiful the new life in Beichuan is."  
(Yin & He, 2011)

Another articles with the title "New Town and New Life", that appeared one year later in the *Huaxi City Daily*, stated that:

"With the development of Bana Qia, it has attracted more and more tourists. Currently there are about 4,000 people running their business on this street."(Huang, 2012)

Curious about it, close to five years after the opening of Bana Qia Business Street, I revisited this famous street. It was morning on a Saturday; I walked on the Bana Qia business street and noticed that there were very few tourists in it. Some merchants stood outside of their shops to look for customers, and some were sitting inside staring at their cellphones. A male merchant WCM used to be a farmer in An County and now owned a shop on this street. He told me that I had come on a relatively peak time of this week, and

that usually there were even fewer tourists on this famous street, except on national holiday.

*“My business lost 20,000RMB last year...Obviously I earned more previously. I used to own land. But what can I do now if I don't want to leave here?”*

Another merchant I interviewed was an immigrant from Old Beichuan, she said,

*“My business was good in the first two years after the earthquake. Since last year, it is not okay anymore. To save money, my sister and I take care of the shop. We work very hard. I don't hire people. Due to the cost of the high rent and the utility there will not be any profit if I hire someone. Because we run the shop by ourselves, we can come at 8am and close it at 9pm. Just stay here for a whole day, hoping tourists will buy something. But for those who hire people, they close very early to save on the utility fee.*

*When the street was opening on April 20th, 2011; almost all the shops were occupied. But if you take a walk now, you can see most of them are closing now. The government spent a lot of money on this business street. Now, only about 10% of the spaces are used. Most of the merchants left after the first year. My husband is working outside. I cannot leave; I have to take care of the children and our parents. At least this shop lets me earn some pocket money.*

*I don't know about the future of Beichuan, I hope it will be better, but to be honest, Beichuan doesn't have anything to keep tourists. Who wants to see the earthquake ruin again?”*

In the first two years after the opening of the street, as the news described, there were a lot of tourists. However, as time goes by, people's memories of the earthquake as well as their curiosity about the ruin has gradually faded. Thus the number of visitors tailed off. Disaster tourism is also known as the “dark tourism” (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Jones, 2010; Tucker et al, 2016), compared to other attractions that bring pleasure to tourists, dark tourism often makes people feel sad. It is doubtful if dark tourism can

develop sustainably in most places and be a significant segment of recovery. At present, the tourism advantage of Beichuan is its preservation of the entire old town, a town-wide earthquake ruin, which is the biggest all over the world. However, the difficulty of maintaining the quake relic is beyond imagination. The news below illustrated how much work the local government had done after the quake.

“After the completion of the Earthquake Ruin Protection Planning in 2009, the local authorities began a continuous investigation on the mountains for potential dangers. There were 26 dams and 13,912 square meters’ nets built to prevent gravels and rock fall. In the meanwhile, in the old town, projects such as diversion dike, levee, interception ditch, a town-wide monitoring system, buildings’ support and strengthen have also been done. All of these projects were made to ensure the safety of the earthquake ruin (Yao, 2012).”

Despite the government’s significant investment in the effort to protect the relic, an employee of the national memorial museum we will call ZHU considered it was still extremely hard to maintain the relic forever.

*“The ruin you see today has changed a lot from the ruin eight years ago after the quake. If you come two years from now, you will find it changes again. Because a big proportion of the ruin and the boulders in it fell during the landslides, moss and vegetation covered them. Even though you still feel very shocked today, it cannot compare with the scene several years ago. To maintain the appearance of the Old Beichuan as much as possible, we organized a lot of people this year to weed among the ruins, but it is a very dangerous activity. You must understand the quake relic is a very dangerous place. Knowing it, how can you ask people to weed in those quake-battered buildings, or climb to the mountains to clean the numerous boulders? If we want to maintain the quake relic, the weeding must be routine. For such a large area, it represents a considerable cost in labor and expense. Is it worth it? I guess, perhaps, eventually, the whole town will be covered by vegetation and we will just let it go.”*



Figure 5.6 Beichuan's Town-wide Earthquake Ruin is covered with Moss and Vegetation

The future of the world's largest earthquake ruin remains unknown, but so far, the government endeavors to protect it. It is also encouraging emergency training and research centers in this field of study. Back in New Beichuan, the broad streets, neat communities, new buildings, green areas, and the Anchang River make the new town charming. Nevertheless, comparing to other cities or towns, New Beichuan seems to me to be a bit lonely. Lots of people work out of town. How to make this peaceful and beautiful place a sustainable town with its supporting industries is an important topic. New Beichuan needs to consider this long-term challenge, otherwise it will be an empty town. The good news is that I learned from a conversation with a local official, that New Beichuan is considering utilizing its peaceful and attractive environment to develop retirement services and education industries. Adjacent to it is Mianyang City, which is planning to move some of its schools, colleges, and universities to New Beichuan under the advice of the government. In the future, New Beichuan may be a paradise for elders, a University Town, and has its own disaster research center.

### **5.2.3.2 Case Study: Zhitai Village**

Ethnic Composition: Qiang

Another relocation case is the only Qiang village that was entirely relocated after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Unlike Beichuan town, Zhitai village is a very traditional Qiang village that retains its pure and primitive culture and has not been "Han-ized". From its pre-earthquake Long-shi Township in Wenchuan County to You-zha Township in Qionglai City, the village relocated about 150 miles. It was moved from an altitude of 2600 meters to 1100 meters, and from a Qiang residential area to a Han residential area. Traditionally, Qiang people live in mountainous or semi-mountainous areas, and for the members of Qiang village, it was the center of their daily activities as well as the primary carrier of their Qiang culture. In the post-disaster reconstruction process that impacted Zhitai Village, the main concern was the rebuilding of houses and reconstruction of villages. But in doing so, unwittingly the reconstruction violated some important principles of successful recovery, one of which is the choice of site (Hansen & Oliver-Smith, 1982). Such principles stress the advisability of rebuilding as close as possible to the pre-disaster site, in places in which occupational and functional activities could continue without undue difficulty, with the minimum disruption as possible to the neighbourhood, ethnic, religious, and familial arrangements of the people involved. In the case in question, Zhitai Village had to break completely from its original environment, so that people's living habits, social network, and livelihood were forced to change. Thus, the impact of the relocation can be expected to be very significant.

The old Zhitai village had 87 households, 436 people in total. They engaged mainly in farming (each household had 12 acres of farming land), breeding of animals, and sometimes collecting herbs on the mountains during free time. The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake damaged the village's ecosystems and its houses. Even worse, the only water source for the village was cut off by the quake; water shortage became the biggest obstacle to the survival of the villagers. Additionally, also severely damaged was the only gateway to the outside world. Mudslides and landslides occurred at multiple sites, and it was even impossible to walk on this road. Considering that the lack of water sources and the damage to roads were irreversible, on the advice of experts, the entire village relocated to Qionglai, 150 miles away from its original location. The constructions of new houses and other buildings in the new village were completed in April 2009, one year after the quake. The name of the old village- Zhitai was given to the new village.

Since all levels of government directed the relocation of Zhitai Village, the housing, infrastructure and community management of the new village are different from other villages. First of all, the appearance of the new homes is a two-storey villa, which is different from traditional Qiang housing. The space inside the houses ranged from 35 square meters to 175 square meters, depending on the number of people in a household. The government paid the whole housing cost, and villagers did not need to pay anything. Second, all the roads in the village are covered with cement, so that in comparison to the Old Village, the traffic conditions are much better. Third, New Village is implementing a community management, building with sports hall, running water reservoirs, parking lot, septic tanks, and other facilities. Last but not least, to retain the Qiang culture, New

Village has specially built some Qiang traditional architecture, such as “Guozhuang plaza” for Qiang dancing, and “Mountain God Temple” for Qiang praying. At this point, villagers began their new lives, but also started to face new challenges. Before illustrating challenges, it is instructive to see how the media portrayed people’s lives in New Zhitai Village. The article is entitled “Relocated Qiang People Celebrating the first New Year in Qionglai”. It reads:

“Now, everyone got a guarantee of life, kids got an education at school, and every household was assigned a tea plantation, farm land and forest land...

This winter, Qiang government provided villagers with 289 electric blankets, cotton quilts, 5,730 kilograms’ rice, 1,200 books, as well as medicines, sports equipment and seeds...The Qiong-lai city government embarked a 500,000 Yuan funding on guiding local landless farmers to develop Qiang culture featured guesthouse tourism...In the future, the tea plantation could bring 60 million yuan in revenue to the village each year.” (Shi, 2010)

Due to the limited time, extreme weather and the highly risk of landslide on the way to Zhitai village, I did not visit it during fieldwork. To get the information of the status quo of the village, I met with four scholars and experts HY, GJ, ZX and ZCX, who have done fieldworks in this area. According to them, people in Zhitai Village are confronting with various challenges. Their main problems can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, moving into the new home, villagers were away from their \relatives, friends and social connections. They did not adapt to the new social network in a non-mountainous region that seemed to be more open and complex.

Secondly, even though villagers owned the same two acres of farming lands as in their Old Village, the climate and soil conditions were not appropriate for vegetables and crops growing. Thus the production was not as many as previous. People hoped to have more farming lands, a fact was that local land resources were very limited and the government did not have more lands to assign. On the guidance of government and farm experts, villagers began to engage in tea and kiwi plantations, which they were not familiar with. However; tea and kiwi trees were not growing well and had not generate any profit so far. Villagers believed that they would get better results after several years of growing.

Thirdly, as a traditional livelihood of Qiang people, animal husbandry could not exist in New Zhitai Village. On the one hand, their new housings did not have spaces for the animals' shelter and breeding. And on the other hand, villagers said local people were very friendly to them, and that they would feel guilty if their animals destroy the crops of neighboring villages.

Fourth, villagers did not adapt to the new life in which 'everything costs money' and in which people 'could not live without the government'. In their past days on the mountain, the electricity fee was very cheap, the water gained from spring was free, woods were collected by themselves, and crops, as well as meat, were also obtained self-sufficiency. In this new village, electricity fees were higher, and gas tanks, water, crops, meat all cost money. Though the government allocated a lot of subsidies and offered cooking oil, rice as well as other life necessities routinely, villagers felt they need more money than just merely depending on government subsidies. Therefore, New Zhitai

Village elders began to collect woods again to save gas fee, while young people went out for jobs. Lacking higher education and non-agricultural skills, most of them work in the service industry such as hotels and catering.

In regards to education, villagers found it difficult to support their children to get a higher education. In Old Village, because of their ethnic minority identity, the tuition fee was free, and government also provided a lot of education funding for children. Even though Old Village did not have a higher education institution, it owned an elementary school on the mountain. After moving into Zhitai Village which is located in Han region, the village did not own any schools. Children had to go to schools in a neighboring town and go back every weekend. For most families in the village, they had an average of two or three children. Children's accommodation fee from elementary school to high school became the biggest burden for each family. Besides, since Qiang children of Zhitai Village were educating at same schools with Han students in this region, students were treated with no differences. Thus there is a lacking of native education regarding the Qiang history, tradition and language.

In terms of tourism, New Zhitai Village was still in planning stage. In the past, due to the remote location, inconvenient traffic, and villagers' self-sufficiency, tourism could not develop and also unnecessary for people in Old Zhitai Village. The conditions that had limited the development of tourism have become driving forces of tourism development today, whereas the appearance of the new village did not have Qiang characteristics. Even though villagers have retained the purest Qiang tradition, ordinary

tourists can hardly observe culture if they were not experts, especially when villagers are living in city-like small villas now.

Because of the unexpected earthquake, people in Zhitai Village started to live in a completely different life compared to other Qiang people who still living in mountain. They have to face a number of new issues and need to find their solving measures.

## **5.2 Discussion**

It is undeniable that during the field visit, I was amazed by the efficiency and the vast amount of projects that have been completed in the reconstruction. Though I visited few ethnic sites among the 38 reconstructed towns and villages, the big changes in these places reflected the great efforts that the Chinese central government and paired-assistance provinces went through. In the meantime, as can be seen from the fieldwork, that these affected sites are developing diversely now based on their different ethnic cultural context, resettlement type, and geographical location. Although the places I visited are all officially recognized as a Qiang region, there are huge differences among them in terms of the degree they have been “Han-ized”. Thus, the impacts of the reconstruction and the tourism development status on these sites are highly variable.

A common phenomenon in the quake zone, first and foremost, is the newly-emerged tourism industry, which is a combination of both disaster tourism and ethnic tourism. Disaster tourism is usually considered to be a subset of ‘dark tourism’ or ‘grief tourism’ (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Tucker et al, 2016). It is acknowledged as an increasingly common phenomenon worldwide in disaster zones. Examples could be seen

in the Christchurch earthquake of New Zealand (Hall et al, 2016), the L'Aquila earthquake of Italy (Wright & Sharpley, 2016), post-tsunami tourism in Thailand (Rittichainuwat, 2008) and post-hurricane tourism in New Orleans (Chacko & Marcell, 2008; Pezzullo, 2010). The emergence of disaster tourism is not only to respond by creating a new tourism product but also to highlight its link with disaster recovery. Arguing against the criticism of putting tragedy on display, some believe that dark attractions also provide the visitors a chance to “view the rebuilding of the physical and social landscapes” (Miller, 2008, p.128; Pezzullo, 2010), for example, as found in this field visit, where earthquake ruins are juxtaposed with new buildings, which shows tourists the success of reconstruction. Tour guides pointed out the massive losses of the town/village in the earthquake and the process being made by all levels of government, assistant workers, military, medical professionals, and the general public as they reframe the disaster landscape into a landscape of survival, hope and rebirth from complete destruction.

As much literature draws on the motivation of tourists to visit these dark sites (Rittichainuwat, 2007; Biran et al, 2014; Wang & Zhang, 2016) and the booming market of disaster tourism (Curry, 2012; Tucker et al, 2016), it seldom addresses the long-term outcome of disaster tourism. In many cases, disaster tourism is encouraged as a form of economic subsidy to devastated areas (see post-tornadoes Joplin in Missouri, and post-hurricane New Orleans). It is particularly evident in the wake of the Sichuan earthquake when the planning of developing tourism has already been made prior to reconstruction. Additionally, the protection of earthquake ruins, the design of new housing (see Yingxiu

Town's three-story house), and the construction of Business Street (see Beichuan Town's Bana Qia Street) are all made to cater for the needs of tourists. However, this study indicates that disaster tourism may not be a promising industry that enables the local economy to receive sustainable development. It has a decay curve. The amount of tourists is evidently declining as time goes along. Moreover, the protection of earthquake ruins, especially for a large-scale ruin, has become increasingly difficult. Therefore, the economy of affected sites cannot merely depend on disaster tourism.

As mentioned earlier, post-quake zones are developing tourism in a form of combining both quake-themed tourism and ethnic-themed tourism. On one hand, ethnic tourism can strengthen the identity of ethnic groups; on the other hand, ethnic tourism is widely believed to bring commercialization (van den Berghe, 1984; Yang et al, 2008; Smith, 2012). A revival of ethnicity can be seen in some places, driven by economic interest or nostalgic pride. One example is the town of Fredericksburg, Texas, where local people cling tightly to their German heritage. Other relevant theories associated with people's rebuilding of ethnic identity include "symbolic ethnicity" (Gans, 1979) and "situational ethnicity" (Okamura, 1981), which describes a pride in an ethnic identity only on specific occasions (eg. St. Patrick's Day), or depends on its usefulness in a given situation. However, there is a lack of literature that is focused on the revival of ethnic identity after natural disasters as a new source of income.

Although the places I visited in Sichuan are all officially recognized as part of the Qiang region, due to geographical location and historical reasons, some sites that are closer to the Eastern plain have become more "Han-ized" compared to Western

mountainous areas. Interestingly, after the reconstruction, one can see a rejuvenation of Qiang culture in these “Han-ized” sites, reflected in their housing design, clothing, festivals, cuisines and so forth. The reasons for this phenomenon in Sichuan after the earthquake, on the one hand, could be due to the governments’ encouragement. Ethnic tourism has been adopted by the Chinese government for a long time as one of the strategies to facilitate economic development and cultural preservation in ethnic minority regions. On the other hand, it reflects the needs of the local economy. Because disaster tourism is not enough to support people’s livelihood, an injection of ethnicity sounds more attractive for tourists. Therefore, ethnicity has been used as a tool to make a living. However, fieldwork observation indicates that ethnicity may have not been used very well in many places, for example, the Qiang-style Business Street in New Beichuan Town, and the brand new Ji’na Qiang village which was re-invented by the local government for Han residents. All of these constructions were meaningless for local people, since they were not Qiang. As a result, the outcomes of local ethnic tourism in these sites are not as good as they expected.

Looking at the authentic ethnic residential areas such as Luobo Village and Taoping Village, people’s income and living standard have greatly improved because of the success of ethnic tourism, even though these villages also have disaster tourism, in the form of the quake-battered old village ruins. The key to their success is the authentic ethnic culture reflected in native language, custom, clothing, cuisine, as well as the location deep in the mountains. As ethnicity permeates many aspects of tourism, tourism also impacts ethnicity. Tourism helps construct and strengthen ethnic identity through

the promotion of minority culture (Graburn 1983; Jamison 1999). Through the interaction with tourists, tourism also helps in enhancing awareness of ethnic groups that are being undermined, maintaining their heritage and cultural practices.

In addition to the issue of tourism, another issue that emerged during the process of recovery is the issue of disaster migration. Migration in the context of disaster has been studied on the basis of “environmental refugees” - people are obliged to leave their homes because of the threatening environment (El-Hinnawi, 1985). The literature on this topic in China covers many aspects, for the most part, dealing with rural-urban migration and the forced migration resulting from national projects such as the Three Gorges Dam Project (Day and Ma 1994; Zhao 1999; Heming et al 2001). Studies on disaster migration so far receive less scholarly attention in China. Through the analysis of two cases - Beichuan Town and Zhitai Qiang village, this study suggests that earthquake victims experience uprooting and relocation and must deal with more challenges than their counterparts resettled at the original site. These challenges echoed within the research in this field (Hansen & Oliver-Smith, 1982; Cernea 1996; Turton 2003) in terms of the loss of jobs, transformation of livelihood, adaption to the new environment, breakup of relatives and social networks, conflicts of interests between the new immigrants and native residents. Particularly for the Qiang people from Zhitai Village in this study, they are confronted with the issue of cultural adaption and the potential threat of their vulnerable culture to be lost in a dominant cultural environment.

Chinese ethnologist Zhang Haiyang describes the relationship between the land and its people as mother and child, and he further claims “to immigrate is to perform a

caesarean” (cited in Xu et al, 2011). This is particularly significant for people who belong to a particular ethnic or racial group because the environment is the main carrier of their culture, and it helps to reinforce a sense of belonging and group cohesion. A number of cases around the world show that the resettlement of ethnic groups could turn out to be a failure as most of them go back to their original villages due to cultural reasons, for example, the Macedonian people in the 1963 Skopje earthquake (Davis, 1977), and the Muslim Indonesians in the 1992 Flores Island tsunami (Boen et al, 2001). Different from these cases, disaster migrants in the Sichuan earthquake do not have an option to go back, since their old homes were completely wiped out and abandoned. It is important to understand that a disaster is not defined in terms of the event itself, but in terms of both the processes of responding and the post-disaster processes of adaptation in recovery and reconstruction. Therefore, lack of social and cultural considerations for ethnic groups in disaster recovery may further aggravate their vulnerability and marginalize them in the dominant cultural environment.

Another phenomenon found in this fieldwork is victims’ self-contradictions in terms of the nostalgia for the past and the eagerness to embrace the modern life. A majority of respondents expressed their strong affection for their old homes and complained about their new uniformed housing which is smaller, lacks expansion space, community-style management, shared yards, lack of space around dwelling for animal breeding and agricultural needs. This is particularly evident in traditional Qiang villages - for example, the Luobo Village and Zhitai Village, where people used to live in houses built by loess soil or stone and now live in the reinforced concrete house; on the other

hand, most of the people are satisfied with their current living condition which is considered more safe, convenient and modern. They do not want to move back. Of course, this is partly because many affected sites are not suitable for human inhabitancy or do not exist anymore. Even if there is an option, very few of them expressed their willingness to move back since they do not trust the safety of old houses. They are enjoying the open, modern and convenient lifestyle that reconstruction has brought to them. Evidence found during the relocation process of Zhitai Village showed that people from neighbouring villages showed jealousy for those who were leaving the mountain (Zhang et al, 2012).

We may expect some of the villagers to see movement as an opportunity to achieve rural-to-urban, mountain-to-plain migration, and to transform their pre-disaster life to a better status post-disaster. Interviews with Qiang villagers of Luobo Village also indicated that even though their living standards and income have greatly improved after the quake, they still wish the next generation could leave the mountains and live in urban areas. Therefore, we may assume that no matter whether there is a disaster, a rural-urban migration is going to happen in the social context of a rapid modernization and urbanization. The role of disaster is thus an accelerator, rather than the trigger, of a social change that is already underway. Similar study also found by Hansen and Oliver-Smith (1982) that the Peruvian earthquake accelerated the migration process of Peruvians from highland to coastal cities that had taken place for more than half a century.

Last but not least, in terms of the media description, the result suggested that the media played a critical role in informing the public about the reconstruction process, but the ways editors select and package information may not always be ideal for future policy

decision-making. The Chinese media mostly focused on positive coverage in terms of reconstruction. They were less likely to reveal problems that emerged during the process, but in fact, the comparison study demonstrated that some of the planning depicted in national media turned out to be a fantasy. Examples include the transformation of economic structure in Ji'na Village, the tourism dilemma in New Beichuan, and the issues of adaptation in Zhitai Village resulting from relocation. As the mouthpiece of the country, the role of the media in China is not only to interpret government policies but also to create a harmonious image of society for the audience. The framing of the news is in accordance with national interests and ideology to portray the government as highly efficient, capable and concerned with the well-being of people.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Overview

Through comparing interview with media depictions, this study described the damage and status of the Qiang region from different perspectives. The media study revealed that more news coverage addressed long-term reconstruction and recovery issues of the Sichuan earthquake. The issues with most frequent mention are cultural protection, infrastructure recovery, the emerging tourism, resettlement projects, and paired-assistance mechanism. Moreover, the Chinese media tend to focus on positive coverage such as accomplishments that have been made and the vision for future. There were very few reports that revealed problems.

Though the visited sites were all wiped out in the earthquake, their economic statuses vary in the present day due to differences in their geographical location, cultural backgrounds, and industrial structure. Generally, the places that retain the purest ethnic cultural tradition show great economic vitality after the quake, particularly those that were not relocated. Communities that assimilated to Han culture are now undertaking great efforts to rejuvenate their ethnic culture, in the meanwhile, by developing both ethnic tourism and disaster tourism. However, the local economy in these places is depressed and people are struggling to make a living. These “Han-ized” sites rely on tourism and lack primary and secondary industries.

Disaster tourism seems to have a decay curve. It may not be a sustainable industry, let alone a way to protect the earthquake ruins. Ethnicity has been used as a new source of income in many places after the quake. Since Qiang culture is the fundamental support in the development of the local economy, a shift in the power dynamic between the dominant group and minority group has taken place in the quake zone. Qiang has experienced an amplified level of respect after the quake. The phenomenon also showed how the economic benefits constitute a new form of interethnic relations, and how tourist interest can stimulate the revival of culture. And all these changes have happened. The newly-emerged ethnic tourism in the quake zone provides an important motive for many locals to care for and maintain their heritage and cultural practices. On the other hand, caution is warranted since a commercialized ethnic culture may have negative impacts on cultural protection.

The sluggish economy in Yingxiu and Beichuan also suggests that post-disaster reconstruction should not only solve the problem of victims' housing but also their livelihood. Reconstruction is not defined as simply rebuilding a house, or relocating the town to another place, it is a process that includes both reconstruction and the evolution of the economy. Industry is thus fundamental to an affected site's ability to self-sustain after reconstruction is complete.

In terms of the Qiang culture, fieldwork observation suggested that it did not suffer a deadly or devastating blow. The most severely-hit areas such as Beichuan and Yingxiu, though recognized as Qiang region, had been largely "Han-ized". The Mao County, known as the most pure and authentic Qiang inhabited area, did not have too

much damage in the quake. Other affected traditional ethnic villages such as Luobo and Taoping are now restored. Even though there is an actual case of an entire Qiang village being relocated to a Han region, this is an exceptional case. Moreover, the primary causes of the dying out of intangible cultural heritage, such as Shibi, are believed to be the Cultural Revolution and the trend of modernization. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Qiang culture was not greatly damaged by the earthquake. Instead, the earthquake called unprecedented attention to this endangered culture, both from the public and the government. Furthermore, the movement of Qiang group from “uphill” in ancient time to the “downhill” nowadays is an inevitable result of modernization and urbanization. Instead of being the trigger of rural-urban migration, the disaster is more likely an accelerator of change that was already underway.

Having the reconstruction work completed within three years, the Chinese government place a great deal of money and attention in rebuilding of this area. The partnership strategy used in the aftermath of the catastrophe is also a major innovation that shifted a huge amount of reconstruction efforts from operations directly commanded by the central government to the responsibility of local governments. Though 38 new cities and towns have re-emerged from the ruins of the disaster, government assistance will likely continue for some time. New life comes with new challenges. In the future, more attention should be paid to the role of the government in sustaining local economies and in rescuing endangered cultures.

## **6.2 Limitations and Implications for Future Study**

The first limitation of this study is that there is only one coder in the media content analysis. Given that a goal of content analysis is to examine objective characteristics of messages, reliability is crucial. Therefore, multiple coders – at least for a sample of content, are important to gain maximum reliability. Even when a primary researcher conducts most of the research, a reliability sub-sample coded by a second or third coder is crucial to ensure that, in the words of Tinsley and Weiss (1975), “obtained ratings are not the idiosyncratic results of one rater’s subjective judgement” (p.359). Another important limitation is that the region inhabited by the people with Qiang heritage includes many more villages than those included in the study, and the selection of the villages in the study was not random and cannot claim representativeness.

It should also be noted that as all the interviews and news articles were conducted and written in Chinese, the loss of meaning may be inevitable. There are also cultural and linguistic barriers in literary translation from Chinese into English. There are many cultural practices that exist in China that do not exist in other cultures, and it is difficult to express them in other languages. Therefore, while seeking to convey the message, some of the words and phrases which have a strong cultural meaning are translated into a form which makes sense in the target language.

Another limitation of this study is the fieldwork finding of Zhitai Village, which was based on secondary information from interviewees. Due to the extreme weather, risk of landslide and limited time, the field visit to this village was finally cancelled. Zhitai

was the only village that is representative of the pure Qiang village that was relocated to a Han region. Future research should include this typical case to try to understand the cultural adaptation of the Qiang in the context of disaster migration.

Furthermore, disaster tourism as a new type of tourism and a form of economic subsidy to the devastated sites is a complex topic deserving more scholarly attention. Currently, there are relatively few literature draw on this issue. Future researcher could explore the status of “dark sites” associated to it, the motivation of the people who visit them, decision-making involved in the planning of the dark tourism, victims’ altitude, as well as benefits and costs of developing disaster tourism. It is not known the extent to which this practice benefits or harms the cohesion of ethnic identities and the satisfaction that people feel in its practice.

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Figure 5.1 (2016). *Xuankou Middle School- the earthquake ruin*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Yingxiu, China.

Figure 5.2 (2016). *Three-story apartment in the reconstructed Yingxiu Town*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Yingxiu, China.

Figure 5.3 (2016). *The watchtower in the reconstructed Ji'na Qiang village*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Ji'na Village, China.

Figure 5.4 (2016). *The Old Luobo Village - the Earthquake Ruin*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Luobo Village, China.

Figure 5.5 (2016). *The New Housing in Luobo Village*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Luobo Village, China.

Figure 5.6(2016). *Beichuan's Town-wide Earthquake Ruin is covered with Moss and Vegetation*. Photo taken by Li, Qiuxi, July, 2016, in Beichuan, China.

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## Appendix A

### INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

1. Tell me a little about your sufferings in the earthquake (or negative influence of it).
  - Any casualties in your family? (Immediate family and extended family)
  - If you are still receiving any forms of aid or assistance now? Still receiving government subsidies, grant, loan, gift or other forms of assistance?
  - How much damage did you suffer related to the earthquake?
    - What is your estimate (housing)?
  
2. Tell me a little about the situation after the quake hit.
  - What did you and your community members do before the professional rescue team came?
  - What do you think about the rescue in the earthquake?

Which group or individual helped you the most? Can you tell me more about their assistance? Eg. Military/army, firefighters, international rescue team, NGO, volunteers, local government, national leaders, etc
  - How do you think the role of leader in this disaster?
  - How do you describe the efforts of paired-provinces in the reconstruction?
  
3. Tell me about your resettlement/relocation process.
  - Choice of Site
    - Access to employment or labor resources
    - Access to shopping

- Social factors such as distance from kin, ancestor, neighbors or from the old village
  - Safety?
  - Any impacts on cultural tradition due to the change of site? eg. Celebration of traditional festivals, fete ceremony, musical instrument performance.
  - Layout
    - Uniform designs lack of variety?
    - Enough space around dwelling for tool sheds, animal pens and other agricultural needs?
  - Housing design
    - Any difference with traditional houses in terms of function?
    - Domestic activities which require different kinds of spaces for different uses? Permit expansion and outbuildings?
    - Do you prefer your new home or the previous one? Why?
    - Repopulate old site, depopulate new site, and choose to migrate?
4. Can you tell me some impacts of the earthquake on your employment and livelihood
- What is your occupation now? What was your occupation prior to the disaster? What made you changed your occupation?
    - Is current income higher than the former occupation?
    - I know a lot of people chose to go to major cities for jobs; if possible, do you want to move?
    - How about your children? What is their consideration in terms of future education and employment? Where are they now?
5. What about local tourism? (*if the respondent's occupation is related to tourism*)
- Is there a lot tourists or audience?

If yes, how do you describe the disaster tourism? Do you think you are enjoying the benefits of it? Do you think it promotes local economic development?

If no, what do you think is the problem? Why?

- Is there any other problems or worries you are confronted with?
- How would you describe your ideal job?

6. Are there any other aspects of Qiang culture that have been affected by the earthquake?

- Cultural heritages and non-material cultural heritages' inheritor crisis.
  - Since lots of young people walked out of remote mountains after the quake and moved to urban areas, who can inherit those religious positions and traditional folk crafts in the group?
  - Are young people willing to stay here to be the inheritors?
  - How often do you attend Qiang traditional ceremony?
  - Any change compared with pre-disaster ceremony?
  - In your local area, do you think there is a big difference between Qiang and Han now?
  - How do you feel about the importance of keeping the Qiang identity?
  - What is your future plan?
  - Anything else I should know about how the earthquake impacted Qiang culture?

## Appendix B

### IRB EXEMPT LETTER



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551  
*Ph:* 302/831-2136  
*Fax:* 302/831-2828

DATE: June 3, 2016

TO: Qiuxi Li  
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [912687-1] The Myth of the Qiang Ethnic Group after the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
DECISION DATE: June 3, 2016

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (2,3)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or [nicolefm@udel.edu](mailto:nicolefm@udel.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

cc: