



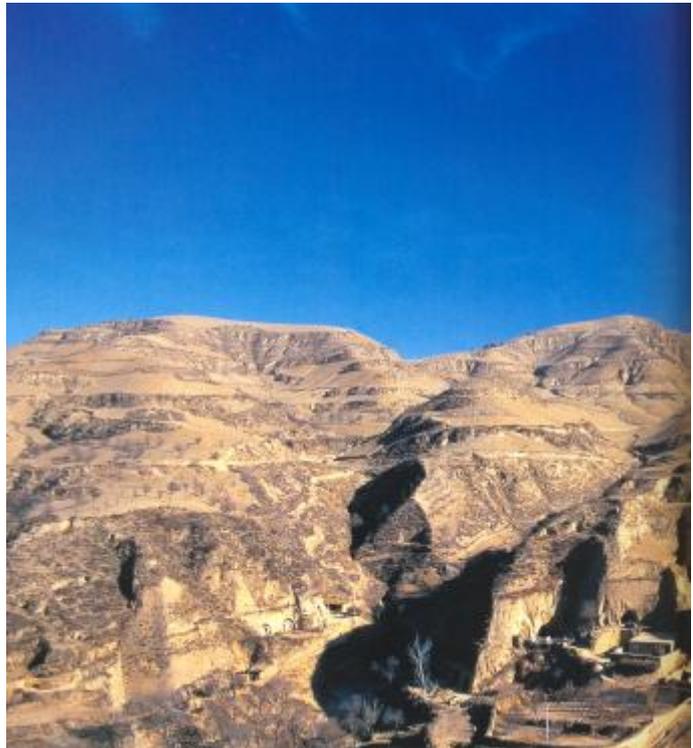
The Bonan Ethnic Group

The Bonan broadswords have long enjoyed the reputation in history. It has been about 800 years that the swords were made with wood handle and skin sheath in the Yuan Dynasty and now the swords are made an metal craftwork. The broadswords are made of the fine and smooth copper slice together with other metals and ox horn, organic glass, soldering silver, celluloid and so on, Being carefully made and polished, the broadswords glitter in various styles and colors.

The population and environment

The Bonans, with a population of 16505, is one of the unique ethnic groups in Gansu Province. The majority of the Bonans concentrated in Jishishan Bona Dongxiang Salar Autonomous County, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province. And most of the people inhabit in four towns; Dahejia, Liuji, Liugou, and Sibazi. A few of them scatter in other places in the prefecture.

The Yellow River flows through the Jishishan Bonan Dongxiang-Salar Autonomous County. This is a place where the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau meets the Loess Plateau. The terrains vary mainly from the Yellow River valleys. Loess Highland, low hill valleys, to the hilly lands by the mountains and the mountainous areas cold, wet and dry. The height of the terrains differs greatly, with the high point 2400 meters above the sea level. In winter and spring, it is dry, while in summer and autumn, wet. There are obvious distinctions between the dry and the wet seasons.



The ethnic origin and the history

Regarding the origin of the Bonans, there has been no accepted opinion because of the lack of recorded materials. But now according to their will and the acceptable opinions, the Bonans are thought to be the descendants of Senu people from Middle Asia in the Yuan Dynasty, who believed in Islam. During the course of garrisoning the frontiers and opening up the wasteland in Tongren district in Qinghai, they had contact with the Mongols and Tibetans, and after long period of assimilation, a new ethnic group was formed.

The Bonans originally live in Tongren distrect in Qinghai. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, they formed their own villages called Gashari, Baoan, Xiazhuang, which were locally named “the Three Villages of the Baonans”. In the second half of 19th century, the whole group of Bonan moved to Dahejia area in Gansu Province, and the people from “the Three Villages of

the Baonans” settled down in Dadun, Ganhetan and Meipo village, forming “the New Three Villages of the Baonans”.

The ethnic names and language

The Bonans called themselves the Bonan, which is from the name of their living place. In history, they were called the Bonan-Hui. In 1952, the State Council decided the Bonan as their name.

The Bonans have their own language but no written script. The language belongs to the Mongolian language group of the Altai language family. The Bonans’ language is divided into two dialect districts. Due to the close communication for a long period of time with the Han and the Hui peoples, the Bonan language borrows a great deal of vocabulary from Chinese language that covers 40% of the Baoan language. Nowadays Chinese language is playing more and more important role in their social life.

The featured housing——firm and practical house with flat roof

The Bonans inhabit together in villages. Their living house is almost the same as the others peoples: relatively low house built of clay and wood with a flat roof. The foundation of the house is usually higher than the ground. The eaves usually stretch out supported by trunks. The living room is connected with the courtyard. The whole building is built in a nice order.



clothes in bright colors and trousers in bright pink. Nowadays, the clothes of the Bonans are almost the same as the local Hui people.

Broadsword is one special handcraft the Bonans are proud of. It is famous for its carefully chosen materials, beautiful

The costumes and ornaments——visorless “cloth cap ”and “Bonan broadsword”

The traditional clothes of the Bonans have their own characteristics. Men wear white or black visorless round cap, white cloth shirt with a black sleeveless jacket. At festivals, they wear hats and black robes. The robe is decorated with hems in different width and colors. And also, they wear colorful waist belts, waist swords and cowhide boots. For women, they wear purple or green shirts, blue or dark hand-woven cloth trousers. Some wear robes down to the knees with a deep lace-trimmed garment. On the occasion of ceremonies they usually wear



appearance, sharp edges and superb techniques. The Bonans make a variety of swords among which “Double Swords” and “Double Ramparts Sword” are the most famous. The two types of swords mainly feature on the sheath and handle. They are made of fine and smooth black or white ox horn. The craft is elegant without any rival. And among the varieties, Shiyangjin swords enjoy the highest reputation. Broadsword has become an important part of the clothing of the Bonan men.

The dietetic customs——“Youxiang” and Muslim Food

The staple food of the Bonans includes wheat, maize, peas, of which are made steamed bread, noodles, Youxiang, Sanzi, Jiaotuan or Sanfan. The “youxiang” and “mail-shaped flour flakes” are the most special food of the Bonans. Pork, horseflesh, donkey meat, mutton, ferocious birds and dead animals and the blood of animals are forbidden. Meat must be butchered by ahung (or imam) to make it edible. The butchered ox, sheep, livestock cannot be called “dead” or they are not edible. When getting water or food with ladles, people cannot do it backhand.

The festivals——fast-breaking and “Huaer” the folk song

The major traditional festivals for the Bonans are Lesser Bairam (festival for fast-breaking) and Corban, both of which are related with their religions. The fast-breaking festival is the most important festival, when people hold several religious ceremonies and express their wishes to each other and give each other food like Youxiang as presents.

On the festivals, the Bonans would like to sing their folk songs Huaer, apart from the same form shared with that of the Dongxiang, the Salar, the Hui, the Tu and the Han peoples. Huaer of the Bonans has its own distinguishing features. The songs are loud and clear, with free styles and pure characteristics. The beautiful melodies and tunes proceed from high to low with a trilling effect.

The Religion

The Bonans believe in Islam, belonging to Sunnite. They are divided into two different sects: “Lao Jiao” (the old) and “Xin Jiao”(the new). Religion has great influences on the Bonans’ customs like wedding and funeral ceremonies, festivals and family lives.