

# Beautiful Sichuan

Before and After the Wenchuan Earthquake



Information Office of Sichuan Provincial Government



# Beautiful Sichuan

Before and After the Wenchuan Earthquake

Qiankun Liu



**Information Office of Sichuan Provincial Government**



四川教育出版社  
SICHUAN EDUCATION PUBLISHING HOUSE



四川美术出版社  
Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House

Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

**Beautiful Sichuan: Before and After the Wenchuan Earthquake****Qiankun Liu**Publishing Director:  
Paul TanSenior Development Editor:  
Yang LipingAssociate Development Editor:  
Tanmayee BhatwadekarSenior Product Director:  
Janet LimProduct Managers:  
Kevin Joo  
Tan Lee HongSenior Publishing Executive:  
Gemaine GohCopyeditor:  
Cui FengProofreader:  
Pauline ChanCover and Layout Designer:  
S.T. Leng

© 2010 Cengage Learning Asia Pte Ltd

Original Chinese edition © Sichuan Education Publishing House and Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitalizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this text or product, email to [asia.publishing@cengage.com](mailto:asia.publishing@cengage.com)

ISBN-13: 978-981-4281-69-0

ISBN-10: 981-4281-69-7

**Cengage Learning Asia Pte Ltd**5 Shenton Way #01-01  
UIC Building  
Singapore 068808

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil and Japan.

Locate your local office at: [www.cengage.com/global](http://www.cengage.com/global)

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

For product information, visit [www.cengageasia.com](http://www.cengageasia.com)

# Table of Contents

## **1 CHAPTER 1**

### Historical Memories

- 2 The Great Wenchuan Earthquake
- 8 The Brilliant Ancient Shu Civilization
- 13 After the Elimination of the “Ba” and “Shu” States
- 18 The Southwest Silk Road and the Trading Posts for Tea and Horses
- 33 Fortresses Built to Resist the Invasion of Mongols
- 42 Cultural Diversity: Massive Waves of Immigrants from Huguang Province

## **47 CHAPTER 2**

### Mountainous Scenery and Culture

- 48 The Transverse Mountain Region and the Garden Art of the World
- 52 Sichuan’s Mountains: A Cradle of Alpine Flowers
- 58 Gongga Mountain or “Minya Kongka”: Unique Natural Landscape and Ethnic Groups
- 65 Qiang Ethnic Culture in the Min Mountain Range
- 74 Qingcheng Mountain: A Wonderland of Taoism

## **87 CHAPTER 3**

### A Cultural Map of Rivers and Lakes

- 88 Glacial Lakes: Cradles of Civilization
- 96 Lugu Lake: Homeland of the Matriarchal Society
- 106 Charming Lakes
- 118 The Jinsha River: A Corridor for the Migration of Ethnic Groups
- 129 Magnificent Views along the Dadu River

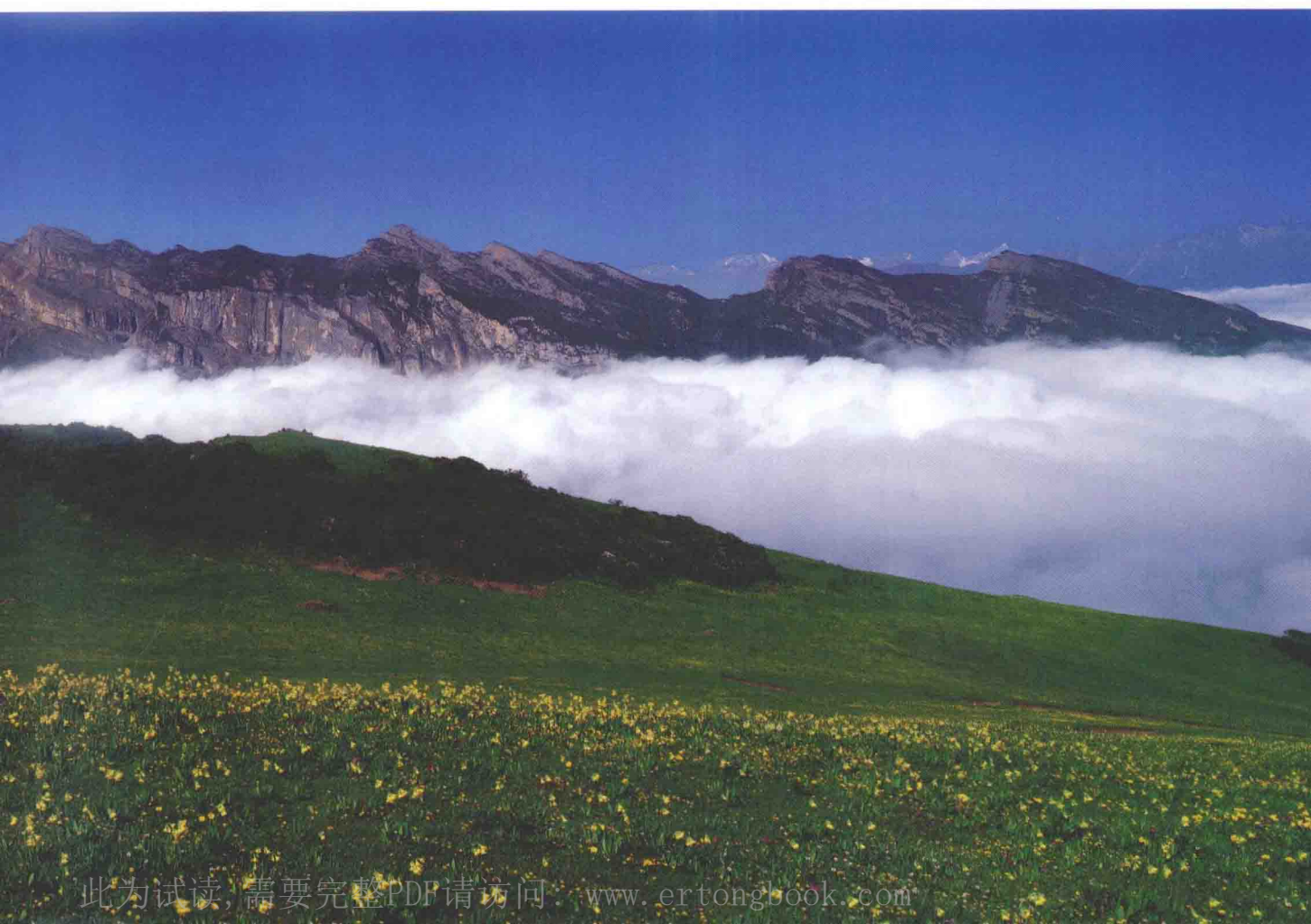
## **141 CHAPTER 4**

### The Sichuan Basin: A Poetic Land of Residence

- 142 The Chengdu Plain: A Heavenly Land of Plenty and a Perfect Dreamland
- 149 Residences Scattered Across the Sichuan Basin
- 155 Food in Sichuan
- 163 Happy Life Soaked in Tea
- 168 Charming Folk Culture
- 175 Index



# Historical Memories



## I. The Great Wenchuan Earthquake

THE terrible Wenchuan earthquake of May 12, 2008 occurred along the Longmen Shan Fault, a thrust fault that runs along the base of the Longmen Shan Range in Sichuan Province in southwestern China. Seismic activities concentrated on its mid-fracture, known as Yingxiu-Beichuan fracture.

At 14:28 on May 12, 2008, the earthquake with a depth of 19 kilometers struck the Wenchuan area in Sichuan Province without any warning. Accompanied by tremendous roaring sound, the ground suddenly began to move up and down and mountains also shook left and right. It seemed as if everything was being roughly dragged into new positions. Landslides and boulders crashing down the mountains blocked roads and buried buses, trucks, cars, houses, and buildings.

Tens of thousands of people were killed. Some were buried and injured by the landslides or rubble. Millions of lives were at risk because of the potential aftershocks, flooding, and disease.

This devastating earthquake affected more than half of China and even some nearby countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia, where buildings swayed with the vibrations of the distant earthquake.

According to the China Earthquake Administration, the epicenter was near Yingxiu Town, Wenchuan County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, about 80 kilometers

**Preceding page: Jiuding Mountain.** Photographer: Linglong Lü

**Below: Beichuan county after the earthquake.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma





northwest-west of Chengdu, capital city of Sichuan Province. The earthquake had a magnitude of 8.0 and lasted for more than 3 minutes. It was one of the three strongest earthquakes since the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. The other two powerful earthquakes were the 1950 Chayu Earthquake in Tibet with a magnitude 8.5 and the 2001 Kunlun Mountain Earthquake with a magnitude of 8.1.

The Wenchuan earthquake affected 10 provinces and 417 counties, covering 500,000 square kilometers. In Sichuan, this sudden movement of the earth's crust affected 20 cities and 88 counties. It caused more than 69,000 known deaths, more than 18,000 people were listed as missing, and more than 370,000 were injured. Millions of people were left homeless. Strong aftershocks, some of which exceeded magnitude 6, continued to strike the area even months after the main quake, causing new casualties and damage. The Wenchuan earthquake was the deadliest earthquake to strike China besides the 1976 Tangshan earthquake.

Shortly after the earthquake, Premier Wen Jiabao flew to the earthquake stricken-areas to oversee the rescue work, and Chengdu Mili-



Firemen searching for survivors. Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma



Buildings along the Longmen Shan Range. Photographer: Tie Cao



**The People's Liberation Army entering the earthquake stricken area.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma



**Volunteers making an inventory for the relief supplies.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma



**A child donating his pocket money to the earthquake stricken area.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma



**A medical team ready to enter the earthquake stricken area.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma

parts of China. Helicopters were deployed to deliver food, water, and emergency aid, and evacuate the injured.

However, it was very difficult to enter the quake-hit mountainous areas, because roads were completely damaged or blocked off by landslides. Aftershocks and landslides continuously threatened the search and rescue groups, which hindered their progress. It was dangerous for helicopters to fly near the mountains because of strong wind and heavy fog. On May 31, a rescue helicopter carrying earthquake survivors and crew members crashed in Wenchuan County because of the heavy fog and air turbulence. None of the crew onboard survived.

tary Area Command started their rescue operations and dispatched troops and armed police to help with the disaster rescue work. Troops from other parts of China all started to move quickly toward the earthquake areas.

Many rescue teams, including ten emergency medical teams from China's Ministry of Health, joined the rescue efforts in Sichuan. Tents, medical supplies, drinking water, food, clothing, and quilts rushed into Sichuan from all

**Facing page, from top: Mourning in the Tianfu Square.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma; **Mourning for the earthquake victims.** Photographer: Xiaofeng Ma









**Dujiangyan Irrigation System.** Photographer: Tie Cao

The survivors could hear the cries of those who were still buried under the rubble and dig with their hands or shovels to save their family members, neighbors, and strangers. The whole country watched the reports on TV and read the news in newspapers and on the Internet about the many rescue efforts. People prayed for the dead and the shattered families that survived the catastrophe.

The People's Liberation Army soldiers were quick to act. Most of the roads in the worst hit areas ran through the mountains. The blocked roads made them impassable. The soldiers took great risk to move forward on foot and finally entered the Wenchuan area, bringing hope and needed supplies. One injured person after another was dug out from under tons of rubble.

The army and civilian specialists restored communication lines. The soldiers and citizens worked quickly to get the roads cleared and repaired. The People's Liberation Army also dug new channels for the drainage of dangerous lakes that had been created by the landslides damming of rivers. The devotion, sacrifice, and efficiency of the soldiers and many volunteers moved the whole country and the world.

Rescue groups from South Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Russia participated in the rescue effort. Many foreign countries and organizations offered condolences and assistance and donations.

After the earthquake, many volunteers including students, teachers, farmers, business people, taxi drivers, retired workers, doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and army veterans from all over the country were lending a hand at the rescue spots, in hospitals, in tents, in blood-donation vans, and so on. These volunteers played a very important role in saving the lives of quake-victims.

People who did not go to the quake-stricken areas offered their love and aid by donating money or blood. Booths were set up in schools, at banks, around gas stations, and on the streets. Lines of people stood in the streets or lanes to donate blood, even blocking traffic in some places.

The Chinese government declared a three-day national mourning starting from May 19, 2008. At 14:28 on May 19, 2008, seven days after the earthquake, people across the country observed a moment of silence for three minutes to remember the victims. All the vehicles stopped on the roads, while fire sirens and the horns of vehicles, vessels, and trains thundered.

At Tiananmen Square, Beijing, the flag was lowered to half-mast during the mourning period. This was the first time in Chinese history that the national flag was lowered to honor the deaths of civilians. It was also the first time that a national mourning period had been declared for the dead who were not the late state leaders.

More than one year has passed. The dead are at rest, and the survivors are working hard to rebuild their ravaged hometowns. In the once quake-stricken areas, crops are growing in the fields; machines are humming and running in factories; products are being transported out of the workshops; teachers are writing on the blackboards in temporary school buildings, and the students are listening carefully.

After the earthquake, Sichuan is as beautiful as ever.



**The opening ceremony of Xiaoyudong Bridge in Pengzhou City.**  
Photographer: Qiankun Liu



**Residences built after the Earthquake.** Photographer: Qiankun Liu



## 2. The Brilliant Ancient Shu Civilization

ACCORDING to fossil records, humans first appeared in the Sichuan Basin in the prehistoric times. According to the skull fossils discovered in 1951 in Ziyang City, the earliest settlers in the basin may date from tens or even hundreds of thousands of years ago. More than 20 pieces of early man-made stoneware have been collected. These items are the earliest human traces that have been discovered within the basin.

Historians and anthropologists generally agree that the earliest people in Sichuan originated from the Gansu-Qinghai Plateau, where they used to belong to the ancient Qiang Nationality that lived close to the water and grass around Qinghai Lake.

Among these ancient groups, the Huangdi tribe was one of the strongest tribes that had migrated to the Minshan mountainous area.

The beautiful legends from the first three dynasties, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou gave the Chinese people the earliest images of themselves. With huge amounts of cultural relics unearthed in a series of archaeological excavations, the dust-laden history is slowly lifting its veil of mystery. Many sites of historical importance, such as the Mount Yingpan site, the Sanxingdui site, and the Jinsha site, provide direct evidence for our understanding of these Chinese ancestors who once lived and created civilizations in this ancient land of central China.

There are many more similarities than differences between the site of Mount Yingpan dating back 5,500–5,000 years ago, and the sites of the Sanxingdui culture and the Jinsha culture dating from 5,000–3,000 years ago. They represent the evolution and development of the ancient Qiang

**The site of Mount Yingpan.** Photographer: Qiankun Liu





**Cultural relic of Mount Yingpan.** Photographer: Qiankun Liu



**Bronze ware.** Photographer: Rongsun Yuan

ethnic culture along their route of migration to the east and the south. Traced back to the same origin, they constitute the story of the brilliant Bashu civilization. With the excavation of the site of Mount Yingpan, the ancient Shu civilization was pushed back to 6,000 years ago.

Situated on the bank of the Minjiang River and surrounded by waters on three sides, Mount Yingpan is an ideal place for defense against enemy attacks. It is near Mount Minshan, the birthplace of the Bashu civilization, and less than 50 kilometers from the source of the Minjiang River in Songpan County. The site of Mount Yingpan represents the highest level of cultural development in the entire upper reaches of the Yangtze River 5,000–5,500 years ago.

With a length of 1,000 meters and a width of 100 meters, the total area of the site of Mount Yingpan amounts to 150,000 square meters. At the time, the site was absolutely the biggest city in the entire Yangtze River valley, as well as the

center of civilization in Southwest China. One amazing aspect of the site is that more than 60,000 stone coffins of different sizes were scattered over the area. Under the tableland was the site of a large ancient public square, over 200 square meters of which have been excavated. Archaeologists believe that it was the major place for important public gatherings. And under the layers of hard earth of the square, four circular pits for human sacrifices were discovered.

Archeologists have also excavated large quantities of stone, pottery, and bone tools, and pottery cooking utensils. From these objects, we can imagine how the people who once lived in that area made a living by farming.

Also uncovered at the site was a vivid pottery figure of the human face, whose nose and ears are molded while the eyes and the mouth are carved. Another pottery human face is even simpler, and only the eyes and the mouth are etched. These are the earliest pottery figures that archaeologists have been able to discover within this province. This site is the cradle of the art of sculpture of Sichuan.



**Pottery articles unearthed at the Jinsha Site.** Photographer: Qiankun Liu



**The golden mask.** Photographer: Hong Huang

Three or four kilometers away from Guanghan City, there are three hills rising abruptly from the Chengdu Plain, where is the site of world-famous Sanxingdui culture, a civilization that flourished from 3000 B.C. to 800 B.C., reputed as “The Ninth Wonder of the World.”

There were hardly any articles for daily use among the huge amounts of bronze excavated at Sanxingdui. Most of the recovered relics were apparently used for sacrificial purposes. This indicates that a primitive religious system had already taken shape in the ancient

Shu State. The sacrificial offerings are mostly seashells and tusks. More and more shells have been found in the on-going excavations. Sacrificial offerings with different geographical features seem to suggest that Sanxingdui was the world’s pilgrimage center in ancient times.

The over 300 bronze objects are the most remarkable of all the thousands of pieces of bronze, gold, and jade ware discovered at Sanxingdui. Characterized by huge sizes, vivid shapes, and complex designs, these bronze articles were exquisite art works showing a fairly high level of craftsmanship. A perfect example is the amazing sacred bronze tree.

The bronze tree, with the top part of it missing, is 396 centimeters high, and the complete tree probably once stood about 5 meters high. Under the tree there is a round base, with three root-like sticks supporting the tree trunk, which is perfectly straight. The tree, divided into three layers, has nine branches altogether, with three ones on each layer. On each drooping branch sits a small



holy bird. It is somewhat surprising that there is no bird at the top of the tree. Archaeologists infer that there should have been one at the top. Could it be one of those bronze birds or birds with human heads unearthed together with the tree? Of all the archaeological discoveries in the world, this bronze tree at Sanxingdui is absolutely the only one of its kind.

Another priceless treasure found in the sacrificial pit is the earliest golden staff in the world. As the staff belonged to the king of the Shu State, it is a sign of monarchical power, religious authority, and wealth monopoly, symbolizing the king's supremacy.

The golden staff is thought to have been a keepsake belonging to the "King of Yufu" who was the third king of the ancient Shu State in present Sichuan Province. The staff is 142 centimeters long and 2.3 centimeters in diameter, and the gold weighs 0.5 kilograms. It is the longest gold staff so far discovered in the world. The bottom end of the staff is decorated with two human heads, while the top end is adorned, symmetrically, with four groups of elaborate patterns made up of fish, birds, and arrows.

Some experts have been trying to decipher these patterns that are the key to the mystery of Sanxingdui. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this mysterious site is that no written record has ever been found about it.

Many of the bronze human facemasks have grotesque eyes and ears, and three of them are especially worthy of note. The biggest of them all is 65 centimeters in height and 138 centimeters in width, with cylinder-shaped eyeballs sticking out about 16.5 centimeters.

The most mysterious find at the site is probably the bronze object shaped like a solar wheel.

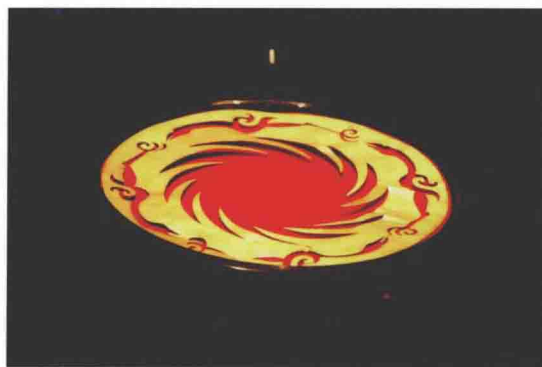
The huge bronze statue at Sanxingdui is the largest of its kind known so far in the world. It is 180 kilograms in weight. The base of the statue is almost a meter high. The statue and the base have a total height of 2.62 meters. It is honored as the King of Bronze Statues in the world.

As abruptly as it appeared, the splendid Sanxingdui culture disappeared, all of a sudden, without a trace. No one knows why it vanished. Everything was shrouded in mystery, and people didn't have a clue until the discovery of the site of the Jinsha culture.

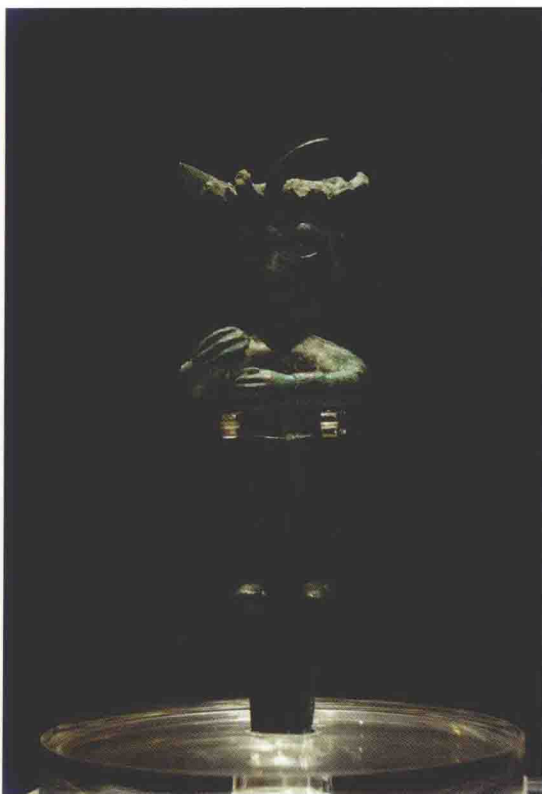
According to archaeological records, the Sanxingdui culture and the Jinsha culture seem to share the same origins, with surprisingly similar cultural implications and cultural carriers. A typical example is the worship of the sun. Only about 40 kilometers from Sanxingdui, the Jinsha culture prospered around 1200 BC that coincides with the time of the decline of the Sanxingdui culture. Jinsha inherited the essence of the Sanxingdui culture, and expanded and developed it further.

The more than 200 exquisite pieces of gold ware excavated at Jinsha were of high quality and made by skilled artisans. They are most diverse and abundant of all sites in China during that historical period. The golden foil relic is the most precious that depicts the Sun surrounded by holy birds and it is the treasure of the Jinsha Museum of Ancient Ruins.

The Jinsha civilization reflects the fervent sun worship of the Shu people as illustrated by this pattern of the sun surrounded by holy birds. In the center is the shining sun with 12 golden rays rotating clockwise, symbolizing brightness, life, and eternity. Around the sun are four holy birds flying towards it in elegant grace. This attractive pattern is pregnant with meanings, expressing the ancient people's longing for freedom, unity, and a beautiful future. The numbers of 12 and four are frequently used in Chinese culture to signify the 12 months and four seasons and show the understanding of natural laws among the Shu people.



The golden foil relic. Photographer: Hong Huang



**A small bronze at the Jinsha Site.** Photographer: Hong Huang



**A 10-jointed jade cong.** Photographer: Hong Huang

Among the many examples of small-sized bronze ware discovered in the sacrificial area at Jinsha, the most famous piece is the bronze statue, the design of which is no different from that of the bronze statue unearthed at Sanxingdui, and that is half the size of the latter. What differs from the bigger statue is that the hair of the Jinsha bronze statue is hanging down, while the Sanxingdui statue has hair that is coiled up. Experts speculate that the different hairstyles represent a power struggle between the two groups of the people, which might lead to the collapse of the Sanxingdui culture. Perhaps the winner with hair hanging down established a new kingdom at Jinsha not far from the site of Sanxingdui civilization. This conjecture could be taken as a reference for explaining the mystery of these two similar civilizations.

Jades were the quintessence of the Liangzhu civilization dating from 4,800 years ago. After the decline of the Liangzhu civilization, jade wares of Liangzhu Culture period were scattered elsewhere. More than 1,400 pieces of jade ware were discovered at the site of the Jinsha civilization, which had existed for over 1,000 years after the Liangzhu civilization, including 24 pieces of jade cong. Each of them is octagonal with a round hole in the center. The heaviest one weighs 3.918 kilograms and is 22 centimeters tall. Studies show that these pieces of jade cong should belong to the Liangzhu civilization. Why and how did they appear at the site of Jinsha civilization? To answer it, there still has a long way to go.

In considering the origins of the ancient Shu civilization in Sichuan Province, you will face many puzzles and mysteries. Perhaps many of the fascinating aspects of the Shu civilization would be shrouded in mystery forever. However, with further discoveries and intensive archaeological research, it is possible for us to lift the mysterious veils one day.



### 3. After the Elimination of the “Ba” and “Shu” States

THE ancient Shu culture was rooted in the Sichuan Basin while the Ba culture originated in the Three Gorges region. Each had their own origins in the late Neolithic Age. The New Stone Age or the Neolithic Age of China ended in about 2,000 BC. The evolution of these two cultures apparently led to the establishment of the Shu State in the Chengdu Plain and the Ba State in eastern Sichuan. The Ba and Shu States may have aided the founders of the Zhou Dynasty at the Battle of Muye in 1046 BC, which resulted in the overthrow of the Shang Dynasty and the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty in 1027 BC.

During the tempestuous Warring State Period, which covers the period from 475 BC to the unification of China by the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC, the Shu State established its capital in Chengdu, and the capital of the Ba State was Zhi, present-day Fuling, Chongqing.

The Jianmen Pass, located in northern Sichuan and some 117 kilometers from Chengdu, is well known as a key impregnable pass along the Ancient Shu Pathways. With almost vertical cliffs standing on both sides, the mighty Jianmen Pass was divided by a gigantic breach in the middle. As one of the most important military strategic points in northern Sichuan, the pass was once the major pathway connecting the Sichuan area with the Central Plains. Jiang Wei, a Shu Han gen-

**The Jianmen Pass.** Photographer: Qiankun Liu

