

KS3 Geography. Life in China

Chan'gou

RUIQIN: Hu Ruiqin. I am ten years old.

NARRATOR: Ruiqin and her family live in a small village in a mountain valley in the Jijiang district of Yunnan Province. Her village is called Chan'gou. It's a very beautiful place in a mountainous and remote part of China.

The landscape is covered with terracing to provide patches of flat farming land cut into the steep slopes. This ingenious method of farming allows people to grow a whole range of crops like rice corn barley wheat and sweet potatoes.

RUIQIN (TRANSLATED): You have to take a windy, narrow mountain road to get to Chan'gou village. We have two busses a day between our village and Lijiang. It takes three hours to get here from Lijiang. My school is Jinjiang Primary School. It's the only one in Chan'gou. It has 78 pupils. Children come here from the age of five to eleven. Our school motto is, 'Education achieves your future. Knowledge changes your fate'.

Some kids sleep at school - like me - and some go home. There are six people in my class. Today is the day of our Maths exam. I find Maths quite hard. I prefer Chinese. We're breaking up for our winter holiday and it's also our Spring Festival.

NARRATOR: The teacher sends the children on their way with instructions to do their homework and respect their parents, but also with a word of warning about fire. There are always lots of fireworks around at festival time.

RUIQIN (TRANSLATED): This is my dormitory. There are eight of us living here. The younger ones sleep on bottom beds, and the older girls on the top. My dad is fetching me and my little cousin. We take all our bedding home, so it gets washed.

NARRATOR: The journey between school and home is often too far to walk every day, which is why so many children board during term times. There are no buses, so walking is the only way.

- NARRATOR:** The route is rugged and tiring, especially when you have to carry everything. But the views along the way are stunning.
- RUIQIN (TRANSLATED):** There are lots of small rivers around my house. So you always hear the sound of flowing water. The most famous river near my house is called the Jinsha river.
- NARRATOR:** The Jinsha River is deep and wide. It's a headwater stream of the famous Yangzte and winds its way south through a deep gorge. Jinsha actually means golden sands. Over the years gold deposits have been found along its banks.
- The ferryboat is a lifeline for people living in the remote villages along the riverbank. Without it they wouldn't be able to buy or sell goods, or even see a doctor if they were sick.
- The trails and tracks of the rugged terrain are heavy going. Mules and horses are still the best way to get around.
- RUIQIN (TRANSLATED):** I am really happy to be home because I can be with my mum, my little sister and my dad again.
- NARRATOR:** After a long journey home everyone is hungry. Almost everything Ruiqin's family eats is home-grown.
- RUIQIN (TRANSLATED):** These are chillis that we grow ourselves. These dry corn on the cobs are for feeding the pigs. These are dried peas. We dry them on a bed of straw.
- Over there are our pumpkins. Sometimes we cook the pumpkins with goat meat or pork. It's really tasty.
- Yunnan dishes are well known for their flavour. This is a radish. We'll cook it for lunch. When I'm home I help my parents with cooking. All our water is spring water from the mountains, and all our food is home grown. Mum often teaches me how to cook.
- We're cooking homemade bacon, rice and lots of different vegetables. I love eating at home because mum and dad's cooking is really delicious.
- This is my baby sister. Her name is Shiqi. She's only five months old. It will be nice to play with her in my break.

- NARRATOR:** Like most people in the mountains, Ruiqin's family are subsistence farmers. They grow only what they need to eat well and the chances are that everything they have is grown within a five-mile radius.
- RUIQIN (TRANSLATED):** Here we grow potatoes, potatoes, potatoes, and barley. Now we have to weed regularly, so that the wheat can grow tall and healthy. I really love it when the crops and scenery are all green.
- NARRATOR:** Life can be hard here. Travelling any distance is tricky and growing enough to eat requires skill and perseverance. But communities here are close and supportive of each other. It's a healthy and simple life but Ruiqin and her family love living in such a remote, mountainous area.