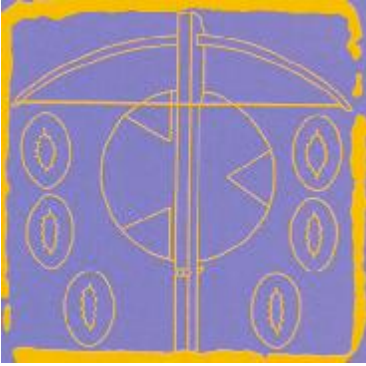


The Lisu Ethnic Group



Crossbow is the traditional hunting tool of the Lisus. People compete with their knives and crossbows and even exchange their crossbows to improve their friendship. The fire pit is the center of the family as well as the saint place. Iron triangle for supporting pot is the guardian god of the Lisus families, which has the meaning of stability, peace, and purity. Shell is the decorative stuff for women, which means beauty and grace. The pattern composed of crossbow, iron triangle and shell represents the union of men and women and diligence, wisdom, comity and peace.

The environment and population

The Lisu ethnic group has a population of 634 912, who mainly live in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, and in Weixi Lisu Autonomous County of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Some also live in the areas of Lijiang, Baoshan, Dehong, Chuxiong, Dali, Simao, and Lincang, etc.

Most of the Lisus live in the Nujiang River Canyon where the Nujiang River, Lantsang River and Jinsha River joint together. The three rivers divide this area into many high peaks and deep valleys, with the greatest height gap of 3 900 meters. The climate differs according to the altitude, which forms the solid climate where four seasons co-exist in one mountain and the weather may well differ ten miles away. Many animals and plant lives have found their best climate to live and prosper there.

The Lisus mainly live in mountain areas, high and cold, and they live on farming, with hunting as an important complementary device. Their fields are all on the steep cliff, which the local people describe as “fields hanging on the cliff”. There is a rich storage of tour resource here.

The historical origin—The frequent movement

The Lisus originated from the Di-Qiang tribe in ancient time, once called “Sou”, “Gui”, “Pu” in the Qin Dynasty and the Han Dynasty, “Wuman” in the West and East Jin Dynasty. The name “Lisus” first appeared in the Tang Dynasty, where The Book on Ethnic Groups in the South recorded: “The Lisus have two surnames...both belong to the Wuman and Baiman ethnic groups.”

The Lisus kept moving in their 2000-plus-year-long history, from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to Sichuan Basin, and then Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. They wre mainly spreading out the valleys of the Yalong River, Jinsha River, and Lancang River at the time of the Yuan Dynasty. Later they moved to Nujiang River Valley, and some even went as far as Burma, Laos, and Thailand. The moving history of the Lisus finally came to an end in early 20th century, when the Lisus first took shape as an ethnic group.

The subgroups and the language

The Lisus has a close bond with the Yis and the Naxis in terms of origin, all belonging to the Yi Language Branch of the Tibetan-Mian Language Group of the Han-Tibetan Language Family. There are many different names used by other peoples. But they’d prefer to be called the Lisus, which literally means “the people who obtain grains through slash-and burn cultivation” in Chinese language, and the “people who

fight for truth” in their own language.

The Lisus speak three different language at all times. One is the Old Lisu Language created by western missionaries based on Latin alphabet, mostly used in reading scriptures and eliminating illiteracy. The second language is the syllabify language created by Wang Renbo, a Lisu farmer in Weixi, which used to be used record folk tales. The third language is the New Lisu Language formulated in 1957 based on Latin alphabet, widely used in bilingual teaching, radio programs, and publications etc.



The featured housing and the transportation—The thousand-foot house and Cable Sliding



The Lisus villages are mostly built near mountains and waters, usually formed by people from the same clan or the same tribe. There are bamboo-structured, wooden-structured and wooden-adobe structured houses. According to the custom, a house must be built up within one day; so all people from the whole village come to help when a family is building a house.

Bamboo-structured houses are very popular in the Nujiang River area, where there are many steep braes. So the houses are mostly standing in the air, with 20-30 wooden stakes, floored with wooden blocks and surrounded by bamboo fences, and topped with straws or wooden blocks. This kind of house has two storeys, competent to keep away from humidity and hot weather. The name Thousand-Feet-House comes from the many wooden stakes that sustain the house from underneath.



The mountains here are very steep and waters are very torrential. Cable sliding used to be the major traffic device. Cable sliding is made of bamboo stripes bridging over the torrential rivers. There are two ways to cross the river through cable sliding, which are horizontal cross and steep cross. The cables in the former way are plane and straight, and one must use his feet or hands to get the drive to move across the river. The later way has two cables linking the two banks with gradient, so that one can slide very fast

through the cables with the help of the gravity. The cables are able to convey men as well as livestock such as cows, horses and other stuff.

The costumes and ornaments—The hundred-pattern skirt and Ou’le Hat

Traditional Lisu clothes are mostly made of self-woven cloths. Women wear short jackets and long skirts, and red or white beads on the heads. They wear colorful and beautiful necklaces. Men wear short shirts, and their pants are usually deeper than knees. Some wear black scarves and carry knives around the waist.

Women wear skirts that are tailored with hundreds of cloth stripes of all colors, with patterns on the edges. That's why they are called Hundred-pattern skirts. Women in Nujiang River Prefecture wear Ou'le hats, weaved with trumpet shells and coral beads, forming a beautiful image of many stars surrounding a moon. Ou'le hat has become a representative element of the clothing of Lisu women.



The dietetic customs—The heart-alike wine and the roast piglet

The staple food of the Lisus consists of maize, and buckwheat. They like roasting meat, thanks to their hunting tradition. The most famous dish—Roast Piglet, is made through roasting a baby pig on the fire. It looks reddish and tastes crunchy on the skin yet very tender inside. It is a popular delicacy for entertaining guests. They like drinking wine brewed by themselves, and when they drink, they prefer two people to share the wine out of one bowl, which is called heart-alike wine. This is deemed the highest etiquette offered by the Lisus to drink wine with hearts laying close on hearts, and faces touching faces, and even mouths neighboring mouths. It shows the intimate kinship between the hosts and the guests.



The marriage custom--The skirt-dressing ceremony and expressing love through whistling with leaves

The Lisus hold a skirt-dressing ceremony. The girl first gives her salutation to all the elders, and then her mother dress her up with the flax skirt made by Mother, while singing: "Dear daughter, it's your independence day today. You have grown up today and you can fly away like a free bird." After the ceremony, she is allowed to wear head-ornaments, earrings and gain rights of sociality.

Youngsters have a free air of dating. In the past when communication were still inconvenient, they used to whistle with tree leaves, breaking tree branches, tying straw knots, laying stones, and laying chopsticks to express their love. Every single device has its unique meaning, for instance, by laying chopsticks they are appointing the dating place, and they whistle with tree leaves to inform their love that they are not able to come for some reason. Nowadays, youngsters communicate with each other much easier with the help of letters and telephones.

The calendar and the festivals—The flower-bird Calendar and the Knife-pole Festival

The Lisus determine climatic and productive periods according to the times when flowers come out and birds sing, so their calendar is also known as Flower-bird Calendar. They divide a year into two sections as dry section and wet section and ten periods. The dry section ranges from November to February the next year, and the wet section from March through October. The ten periods are: Blossom Period, Bird-singing Period, Mountain-burning Period, Hunger Period, Collecting Period, Hunger Period, Collecting Period, Harvest Period, Heating-wine period, Hunting Period, New-year Period, and the House-building Period.

Kuoshi Festival and Knife-pole Festival is the legal New Year festival, which is celebrated since December 20th, when there are three days off. Knife-pole Festival is celebrated on every Lunar February 8th, when a 20-meter-high pole is set up in the middle of the meeting ground, with 36 or 72 knives bound on it, blades up. The knives and the pole form a ladder of knives bare-footed with the sound of gongs and drums. They set up a flag when they get to the top of the pole and light firecrackers. The crowd will respond with loud cheers. Many other activities follow up after this one.

The religion—Polytheism

The Lisus used to believe in Polytheism and worship the nature, believing that all things in the universe are subjected to the authority of Misi (heavenly god), and below Misi, there are over 30 types of Nis (ghosts and spirits). They also worship ancestors and keep some remains of Totemism. The wizards and priests conducting all religious ceremonies are called either Nibas or Nigubas. Since the middle of 19th century, Christianity and Roman Catholic have also reached out to this area.