

The Pumi Ethnic Group



The houses of the Pumi are made of wood, the walls of which are all made of round woods. And the house is erected square pillar and placed a shrine for idols or ancestral tables. Bamboo is regarded as the guardian deity of the Pumi people. The Bamboo stripped box is valuable gift presented at weddings, funerals and other occasions in the Pumi community. It symbolizes good luck, friendliness, holiness and happiness.

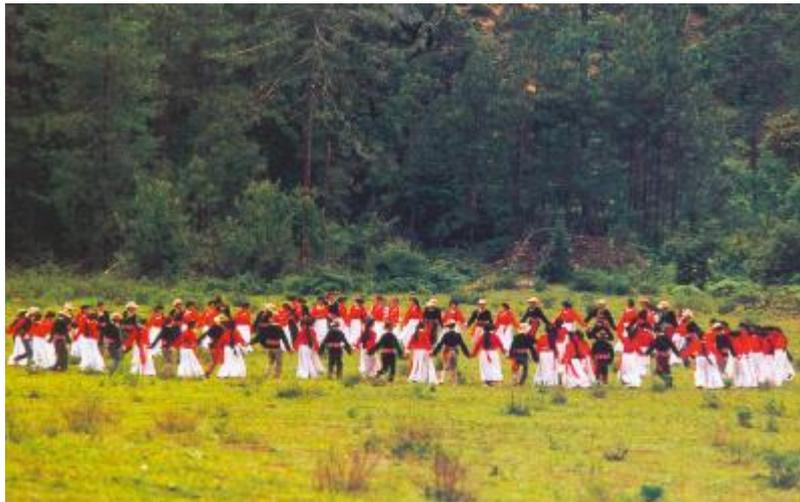
The environment and population

The Pumis have a population of 33 600 people, which is mainly distributed in Lanping Bai and Pumi Autonomous Counties, Nujiang Lisu Prefecture; Ninglang, Yongsheng, Lijiang Counties (autonomous) in Lijiang Region; and Weisi Lisu Autonomous County, Diqing Tibetan Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Some people live in Yan Yuan, Muli Counties, and Sichuan Province as well.

The northwest region Yunnan Province, where the Pumi people gather, with an average altitude of 2 500 meters, has a solid climate. And the temperature here varies greatly between mountains and valleys. In this area locate the surging Jin Sha River. Lancang River, beautiful snow mountains of Yulong (jade dragon) and Lugu Lake. Its water and forest resources are quite rich and abundant. Pumi people mainly engage in agriculture, and livestock farming takes an important place. The cultivated land is mostly hillside field. Products are maize, wheat, highland barley, buckwheat and potato, etc.

The origin and history

The Pumi people derive from ancient tribe of Qiang in the northwest of China. After the Pre-Qin



period they gradually moved to the west plateau of Sichuan Province. In the Han Dynasty they were called “white wolf” or “zuo”. After the Song Dynasty they were called “west barbarian”. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the Tibetan ruled them. When the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty went south to conquer the Kingdom of Dali in 1253, part of Pumi people joined the Mongolian army and moved to the northeast of Yunnan. These people gradually formed the present Pumi ethnic group.

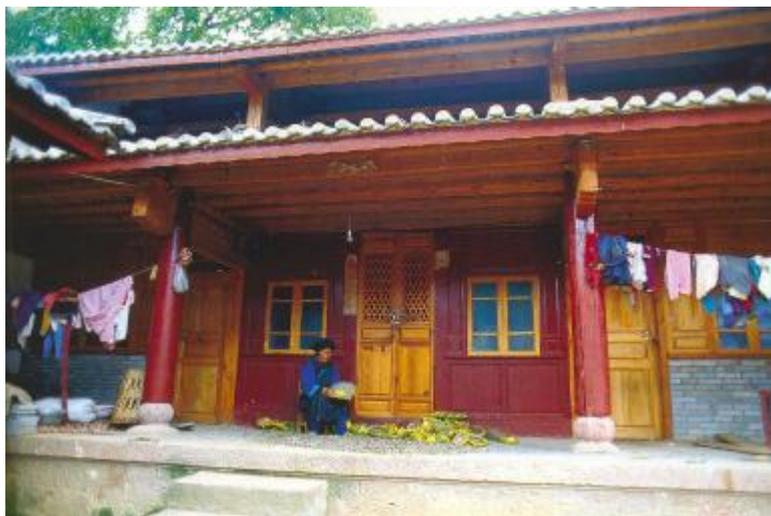
This group used to have many names, such as the West Barbarian, Bajiu, Puyingmi, Peimi, Pingmi. In 1960 they were renamed “Pumi”, which means white people.

The language and character—Multilingual and “the Han Gui Character”

The Pumi people speak a language belonging to the Qiang Branch of Tibetan-Burmese of Chinese-Tibetan Family. It is divided into the north and south dialects. The South dialect is spoken in Lanping, Weixi, Yongsheng and Lijiang counties, while the north dialect in Ninglang, Yanyuan and Muli, etc.

Because of living together with many ethnic groups including the Han, Yi, Naxi, Bai, Lisu and Tibetan for a long time, most of Pumi men can speak several languages of neighboring groups.

The Pumi people do not have their own characters. Some Pumi wizards used to record oracle inscriptions by simple picture writings. They also employed Tibetan letters to record Pumi-spoken scriptures of primitive religions, which is called “Han Gui Character”. Now the Pumis all use Chinese characters.



The featured Housing —“The Muleng house made of logs”

Clan members of the Pumi people often live together, and their village is built on gentle slope halfway up the hill. Most of the houses are made of wood. People pile up the logs whose diameter is 15-30cm to build the

walls all around, then cover the double inclines roofs like letter A with long plank. The houses are called Mulaeizi or Mulengfang. Every family of the Pumi people has one courtyard with four poles at the four corners. In the center there is a great cubic post, which is from the notion of ancient central post in a tent. Pumi people call it Qingtianshu (pillar up to heaven) and regard it the place gods live in. On the right inside the door is a fire pit for warmth. Behind it is a shrine and the beds are all around the fire pit. Heads of oxen and beasts are hung outside the door to keep the family from the evil and it is also the symbol of wealth.

The costumes and ornaments—“Pulu clothes” and “Baizhe skirt”

The Puli people often wear jackets made of flax, Pulu(wool) or cotton and long loose trousers. A long gown or goatskin garment covers the out part. They wear goat hair belt with two embroidered ends, and carry swords around their waists. They tuck the legs under the knees with felts, and wear leather shoes made by them. The elders grow long hair and wind their hair round their tops of the heads with woolen threads. They also prefer felt cap and brimmed hat.

The Pumi women consider thick and black plaits beautiful, and love to wind their plaited hair, mixed with yak tail hairs and silk threads on the tops of heads. According to traditions, women normally high-collared and tight-sleeved jackets with buttons down one side, and Baizhe skirt (pleated long skirt), with multi-colored wide belts round the waists and goatskins draped over their shoulders. They often wear necklace, bracelets, earrings, and eardrops. Current women often wrap their heads in handkerchiefs, wear long Chinese garment with collar band, buttons down one side, fine-edged cuffs of the sleeves; aprons edged with colors, showing beautiful and elegant.

The dietetic customs—“Maize pancake” and “Pipa pork”

The staple food of Pumi people includes maize, rice, buckwheat, and highland barley, with which they mainly make pancakes. They can toast, steam, braise, and bake to make pancakes. Influenced by the Tibetans, the Pumi people in Ninglang like to eat fried noodles with buttered tea. The typical ethnic dishes are sausage with Wangzi rice and Pipa pork. Pipa pork is made like this: first rid the butchered pig of the offal and bones, then rub the pork with salt and Chinese prickly ash again and again, finally press it flat to air dry. Its shape is like pipa(Chinese lute) and its flavor is beyond ham. It is the choice food for guests and excellent gift for friends. The Pumi people also like meat of swine head. And the stewed meat is widely known for its fine flavor.

The marriage and family—“The uncle as a heavenly authority” and “the repeated wedding ceremonies”

Like many ethnic groups in south of China, the Pumi family and society have also the custom of upholding the authority of the mother's brothers. As the saying goes "uncle as a heavenly", his position cannot be ignored. In the past, the uncle's son had the preference to marry the daughter of his sister's. And the uncle should manage all the matters at wedding or funerals. When a child is 13 years old, he or she needs an initiation rite, which should also be managed by the uncle. Such children step on the pig fat and moneybags, which are the symbols of wealth and good harvest. With the prayers of wizards, the uncle dresses the boy in short jackets and long trousers, and mother puts on the Baizhe skirt for her daughter. After this ceremony, children may take part in various social activities.

The Pumi people practice monogamy. A formal marriage has several procedures: seeking a marriage alliance, worshipping Guozhuang (kitchen range god), selecting an auspicious day and holding the wedding ceremony. In the Pumi society, young men and women enjoy

free social associations and contacts, but they should consult their parents if they want to marry somebody. After choosing the right girl, the man will ask an eloquent mediator to go together with him to propose an engagement to the girl. The elders of the girl's family are assembled to meet the man. Then they worship GuoZhuang and toast the elders with the liquor of the betrothal from the man. After the feast the relationship will be discussed and fixed.

The day of wedding is often chosen in 10th, 12th, or 2nd month of the slack winter. Wedding ceremony is lively and grand. The procession of wedding advances in magnificence, accompanied by the crescendos of music. After arriving at the bride's home, man must sing the song of Renqin (claiming the marriage connection). He can't enter the gate until the bride is satisfied. Bride should appear reluctant to leave her family. Upon leaving, she should drink the Chucun wine (wine for leaving the village) and sing the farewell song. When she gets the bridegroom's home, she is asked to sing the Kaimendiao (tune for opening the gate) and drink xiamabei (wine for dismounting from the horse). After that they offer sacrifices to the ancestors, kneel to their parents and sprinkle Zanba (staple food for Tibetans). At last the groom's family entertain the guests. They take part in the antiphonal singing of ancient songs, dance the Guozhuang and celebrate until the next morning.

Formerly Pumi bride did not live in her husband's family after the marriage, only staying several days before returning her mother's home. Therefore, the husband in some areas would take back the wife several times from her mother's home and hold the wedding ceremony repeatedly. This custom of marriage is called the repeated weddings. Now it has changed greatly.



The festivals and arts —“Dragon God worship” and lute

Traditionally the Pumi people mainly celebrate the Chinese Lunar New Year, on 6th-8th of the 12th month. People get clean water, offer sacrifices to ancestors and worship Guozhuang. Dragon God worship takes place in the 3rd

month of lunar calendar. People pray for favorable weather, preparing the spring plow. In the Changxin (taste what is just in season) Festival held after spring harvest, the people taste the new rice, worship gods and offer sacrifices to ancestors, celebrate the good harvest.

The Pumi people have many kinds of folk-dances, including traditional GuoZhuang dance

with sprightly rhythm. Everybody can dance it. Folk-tales abound here. Collections of Pumi Folklores, Collections of Pumi Ballads, and Proverbs of the Pumis have been compiled and published. The Pumi people like the lute (four-stringed instrument) very much. Young man often shows affection to a girl by the beautiful sound of the lute.

The religion—Tibetan Buddhism and “HanGui Religion”

The Pumi people believe in the polytheism. They worship ancestors and some believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Influenced by the Tibetan culture, their primitive religion Hanguì religion has the trace of Benjiao, a primitive religion in Tibet before the advent of Buddhism.