

The Shui Ethnic Group

It is said that during the flood period, an elder brother and his sister who hide in a gourd had a narrow escape with fish's help. Their descendants multiplied to be the Shui ethnic group. So the pattern of double fishes holding a gourd often appears in the Shui people's inscription. The Shui combined gourd, which represents reproduction of population, and fish, which has close relation to their life, to form a gracefully designed pattern of carve stone, which has profound folk flavor.



The population and the environment

There are in China 286 500 Shuis, the majority of whom dwell in the Guizhou province and others scatter in Dandan, Yizhou Counties of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Fuyuan County of Yunnan Province.

The Shui people in Guangzhou province live in compact communities in the Sandu Shui Autonomous County and in Libo, Dushan Duyun Danzhai, Leishan and other counties. This is in the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and the terrain slopes from north to south, with average elevation of 500-1000 meters above sea level. People also called the place "90% mountains, 5% water and 5% farmland". It belongs to sub-tropical monsoon climate and is rich in waterpower and forest resources.

The ethnic origin

Chinese scholars think that the Shui ethnic group has close relation with "Luoyue" of the early Baiyue ethnic group in ancient China. It is said that the Shui people's ancestors consist of three branches: Suimin, Suigan and Suiiu. They used to live in the Yongjiang River area, where ancient Luoyues also dwelled. In 211 B.C. the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty sent out five hundred thousand troops to Lingnan area, so Shui ancestors were forced to sail against the Longjiang River and settled in the boundary between Guizhou and Guangxi. They separated from Luoyue and formed as a single ethnic group during the Sui and Tang Dynasty.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the Sandu County where the Shui people live became Shui Autonomous County in 1957. In 1990's Chinese government set up sixteen Shui villages and two Yao & Shui villages in the Qiannan and Qiandongnan Autonomous Prefectures in Guizhou Province.

The ethnic appellation, the language and the script

The Shuis call themselves "Sui", whose Chinese pronunciation is "Shui". Historically, the Shui was called "Man", "Liao", and "Shuijiamiao". In 1956, Chinese government adopted "Shui" as their formal ethnic name.

The Shui language belongs to the Zhuang-Dong branch of the Chinese-Tibetan language family and has no dialectical difference, but they have idioms. The Shuis use Chinese in their daily lives. They used to

have an archaic writing script, which was pictographs and included about 300 words. The Shuis call it “Lisui”, which means “Shuishu” (Shui language) in Chinese. These ancient words are still used for religious purpose by shamans and common people who do not understand them. The Shuishu also keeps a set of calendar, Shui Calendar.



The costume characteristics—Blue and green colors favored

The Shuis usually love to dress in black and blue and the material, namely the famous “Shuijia Cloth”, is usually homemade and dyed. Men have long collarless gowns, black turbans and white short jacket inside. Their trousers and shoes are also blue. Now men’s costume is as the same as those of the Hans. And women, with their hair in buns, usually wear collarless blue blouses, black trousers and aprons, all of which are embroidered. On festival occasions, they put on a variety of silver earrings, necklaces and bracelets.

The dietetic characteristics—The Chinese chive-stuffed fish and boiled fresh fish

Glutinous rice, vinegar-salted meat, vinegar-salted vegetables and Jiuquan wine are Shui’s favorites. Glutinous rice is the staple meal for holidays and sacrifices, so it is also called “ghost rice”. The Shuis also love to eat fish and cook it in distinctive ways. Chinese chive-stuffed fish and boiled fresh fish are the traditional delicacies. To cook it, the first is to cut the fish from back, then wash it and smear several kinds of condiments, and at last to stuff the fish with Chinese chives and chestnut and then boil them in clear soup with the fish wrapped with straw. To cook the boiled fresh fish is to put fresh fish in water filled in Chinese prickly ash or garlic first in order to make the fish excrete wasted things, then boil the whole fish. After the fish is cooked, bone it and viscera internal organs. And some condiments will make the meals more delicious.

The singing and the dancing---The Shui songs and the copper drum dance

The Shui have rich oral ballads, which fall into several categorized, such as ancient ballads, ceremony ballads, wine ballads, funeral ballads, love ballads and marriage ballads. And according to their forms, these ballads come into three categories: double ballads, single ballads and Diu ballads. The lyrics are rhymed and most of them have seven characters in a line with analogy and metaphor.

Copper Drum dance, the most famous dance of the Shuis, evolves from ancient sacrificial rice dance and is enjoyed during sacrificial rite, holidays and funerals. The performances are male and the number of performers should be even. During the performance, the drum is placed on the tripod. The performer beat the side of the drum with a wooden drumstick in one hand, and beat the drum with another drumstick in another hand and dance at the same time. The scene looks splendid.

The religion—The ancestor worship and the polytheism

The Shuis worship their ancestors and are believers of polytheism. The civil gods include female ancestor “Niangniang goddess” and male ancestor “En’gong”. The main religious ceremonies include Baixia and worship the god of fire. Baixia, worship the god of stone, is held every twelve or six year. The old Shaman who is familiar with the Shui language recite the words and everyone toast for the god and

pray for the good weather for crops. The worship of the god of fire is held every year. At first, Xizhai is held. During the period of Xizhai, strangers are not allowed to step into the villages and cannot set fire or light a lamp. After Xizhai, villagers pick a lucky day to sacrifice cattle for the god of fire and the god of the village to pray for peace and happiness.



The festival costumes—The Duan Festival and the Mao Festival

The Shui have a calendar of their own which takes the ninth lunar month as the beginning of a new year and the eighth month as the end of a year.

Their biggest festival is the “Duan Festival” that is celebrated with great pomp after the autumn harvest from the beginning of the 11th lunar month every year. Garbed in their colorful costumes the day before the holiday, the Shuis sacrifice the copper drum and their ancestors. On the holiday, after the reunion feast, they watch horse races and perform Copper Drum dance and Lusheng dance. Mao Festival is during May and June. Young men and women dress up to sing in antiphonal style to find their lovers.