



The Yi Ethnic Group

In the center of the design is a shining sun, a presentation of four-dimensional space-time and brightness. The design that consists of couple circles with the same center point means the union of the Yi's that can never be destroyed.

The environment and population

The Yi ethnic group, with a population of 7,762, 272, is mainly distributed over the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou, and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous Regions. Yunnan Province has more than 4,280,000 Yis, In Guizhou, more than 81,000 Yis live in compact communities in Anshun and Bijie. Several thousand Yis live in Longlin and Mubian counties in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There are over 1,780,000 Yis in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which holds the single largest Yi community in China.

Most Yis scatter in mountain areas, some in frigid mountain areas at high altitudes, and a small number live on flat land or in valleys. The Yi areas are rich in natural resources, not only rich in coal and iron, but are also in non-ferrous metals and waterpower. The scenery is very beautiful, the "Shilin" in the south-east of Yunnan, the Weining Grass Sea in Guizhou Province, the Qinghai in Sichuan Province are the famous sites for traveling.



The origin and the history

The ancestors of the Yi ethnic group can be traced back to the Qiang people living in northwest China. They later migrated south and joined the local southwest aboriginal and created the Yi ethnic group. In the period between 384-362 B.C, because of the expansion of the Qin State, a person named Ang led his people migrated to the south west of China.

In the Han dynasties, the ancestors of Yis founded "Dian Kingdom", and subjected to the Han later, and the Han Emperor bestowed a seal to the King. In the Sui and Tang Period, the Yi ancestors divided into two parts, called We (black) man and Bai (white) man, and the Nanzhao Dynasty founded mainly by We man controlled southwest China for three hundreds years. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the Yis living in "East Cuan" were called "Wu mans." In different historical periods, "Cuan" changed from the surname of a clan to the name of a place, and further to the name of a tribe. In the Yuan and Ming dynasties, "Cuan" was often used to refer to the Yis. After the Yuan Dynasty, part of "Cuan" acquired the name "Luoluo" (Ngolok), which probably originated from "Lulu man," one of the seven "Wu man" tribes in the Tang Dynasty. From that time on, most Yis called themselves "Luoluo," although many different appellations existed. This name lasted from the Ming and Qing dynasties till liberation.

The branches and the language



According to the ancient books of Yis, the ancestors of Yi name “Dumu” had six sons, their sons formed the six branches, called Wu, Zuo, Bu, Mo, Ru, Heng, who were the surname of Yis. And the scattered setup was founded.

The Yi language belongs to the Tibetan-Milanese Language Group of the Chinese-Tibetan Language Family, and the Yis speak six dialects. The Yis used to have a syllabic script called the old Yi language, which was formed in the 13th century. A number of works of history, literature and medicine as well as genealogies of the ruling families written in the old Yi script are still seen in most Yi areas. Many stone tablets and steles carved in the old Yi script remain intact.



The dwelling features—Tuzhang house

Most Yi houses were low mud-and-wood structures without windows, which were dark and damp. Ordinary Yi houses had double-leveled roofs covered with small wooden planks on which stones were laid. Interior decoration was simple and crude, with little furniture and very few utensils, except for a fireplace consisting of three stones, called “GuoZhuang”, it was the center of the home life. In the Liangshan Mountains, slave owners’ houses and slaves’ dwellings formed a sharp contrast. Slaves lived with livestock in the same huts that could hardly shelter them from wind and rain. Slave owners’ houses had spacious courtyards surrounded by high walls, and several or a dozen pillboxes protected some of them. In Yunnan-Guizhou area, there are the houses called Tuzhuang house, whose foundations are made by stones and the walls by mud. The houses are warm in winter and cool in summer and the

flat roof can be used to dry the grain.

The dress—Zier and multi-layer skirt

There are a great many Yi costumes with unique designs stemming from various places. In the Liangshan Mountains and west Guizhou, men wear black Jackets with tight sleeves and right-side askew fronts and pleated wide-bottomed trousers. Men in some other areas wear tight-bottomed trousers. They grow a small patch of hair three or four inches long on the pate, which is named “Zier”, and wear a turban made of a long piece of bluish cloth. The end of the cloth is tied into the shape of a taper jutting out from the right-hand side of the forehead.



Women wear laced or embroidered jackets and pleated long skirts hemmed with colorful multi-layer laces. Some women wear black turbans, while middle-aged and young women prefer embroidered square kerchiefs with the front covering the forehead like a rim. They also wear earrings and like to pin silver flowers on their

collars. When going outdoors, both men and women wear a kind of dark cape made of wool, hemmed with long tassels that reach the knee.

The dietetic customs—Gangan wine and Toto meat

In most Yi areas, maize, buckwheat, oat and potato were staples. Rice production was limited. The Toto meat is boiled in the big block of meat in plain water. It's a local delicacy. In the Yi areas, people think 'no wine no festival', and there are many styles to drink, such as "Zhuanzhuan", which people sit around and turn the bottle one by one, Guangan which people stand around the jar and drink with pipe. The Yis sing songs to customs to bestow wine, and would not stop until dry the wine, which expresses the enthusiasm of the Yis.

The marriage—the adult ritual and "axi mon dance"

The Yi juveniles have adult ceremony at the age of 14~17 years old, for boys it is called 'wearing trousers', while for girl called 'changing dress'. And after that they can communicate to each other as adult.

Men and women make association by many ways, in some areas, they dance and sing around the bonfires; in some areas they change songs in a singing gathering. In the past there were various kinds of costumes for marriage: inter-marriage within the ethnic group; marriage outside the clan; no marriage between the mother's sister's son and daughter; preferential consideration for the marriage between the father's sister's son and the mother's brother's daughter and vice versa. And after marriage the wife does not live in the home of her husband's parents. The costumes have change nowadays.

The festival customs—Torch Festival

Yi people have many traditional festivals and the most important include the Torch Festival and the October



New Year. Like most of the mountain inhabitant, the Yis worship fire. Torch Festival is in June the twenty-fourth of the lunar calendar every year. In that day, people kill chicken to give the sacrificial rites and pray peace. After meal, they hold touches to go around the houses and fields, just like fire dragons dance in the field and the scenery is very grand. After that, Young people light the bonfire, play KouXuan and YueQin musical instrument, and dance GuoZhuang dance through the night.

The religion—spirit worship and Bimo

The main religion of Yi is nature worship and ancestor worship, the priest is called Bimo, who takes charge of all kinds of sacrifice ceremonies. They are very familiar to the Yi ancient books besides reciting the books. The Saman in Yi is called Suni. They can do witchcraft, which can expel the evil and cure the sickness. In some areas of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, Daoism and Buddhism influence the Yis.

The political development—from slave system, lineage to autonomy

Before 1949, the Yis in the Liangshan Mountain areas were stratified into five different ranks—"Zimo," "Nuohuo," "Qunuo," "Ajia" and "Xiayi." The first two ranks belonged to slave holders, and the last two belonged

to slaves, while the middle one belonged to common people. Every lineage had the same ancestors and stable manor. The Yis traditionally associated the father's name with the son's. The last one or two syllables of his father's name would be added to his son's. And those who could fluently recite the family tree were highly respected.

In the Yuan Dynasty the chieftain system was practiced. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the chieftain system was changed into the administration by the officials appointed by the central government. After 1949, the minority autonomy was set up in the Yi areas. There are Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, and Honghe Yi autonomous Prefecture, as well as 18 Yi autonomous counties, including those cooperated with other ethnic groups. The Yi people govern their home and develop their own economy and culture.