



## The Blang Ethnic Group

Bandore is the symbolic musical instrument of the Blangs. The songs and dance accompanied with bandores are the typical art forms of the Blang. Many beautiful lyrics among the people are sung with bandores. The bandores embody the history and emotions of the Blangs, and represent purity, optimism and a fortunate life.

### The environment and population

The Blangs has a population of 91 882, who mostly live in Mt. Blang, Xiding, Bada, Mengman, and Daluo areas of Menghai County in the Xishuangbaina Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Some Blangs live in Simao, Lincang and Baishan areas.

The Blang villages usually spread out in mountain areas to the south of 25-degree north latitude, 1500 to 2300 meters high above sea level, where, under the semi-tropical climate, there are mountains up and down, and the forests endless. The Blangs have a rich resource of animals, plants and mineral products. It is one of the origin places of the well-known "Pu'er" tea. A 1700-year-old, 34 meter-high ten plant stands in the primitive forest in Mt. Bada is known as the King of Tea plant, which is also a living witness to the fact China is the home land of tea.

### The ethnic origin

The Blangs, along with the Vas, the De'angs, originated from the ancient "Baiqu" tribe, who were once called "Baoman", "Minqu" in the Han Dynasty, "Puziman" in the Tang and Song Dynasty, "Puren" or "Puman" in the Yuan Dynasty. From the Qing Dynasty on, the Vas began to be called "Guci" or "Kawa", while the De'angs were called "Benglong" or "Bolong". Only the Blangs continued to be called "Puren" or "Puyi".

There are many ways to address the Blangs, with "Puren", "Wu", "Benzu", "Lawa" as their self-applied names, and "Puman", "Kapa", "La" as the given names. The Blangs have been officially called "Blang" since the founding of the new China,. Their language belongs to the Blang language branch of the Menggaomian group of the South Asian language family. There are two different dialects, with the Blang dialect mainly spoken in Xishuangbaina, and the Wu dialect spoken in Lincang and Simiao areas.

### The resident features—bamboo articles and exquisite barns

Just like many other ethnic groups living beside waters in the south, the Blangs mainly live on bamboo house on pillars. The buildings have two floors, the upper floor having a fireplace, as the sitting room. Bedrooms are separated with bamboo stripes and floor

slabs are fixed with bamboo splits. Bamboo buildings can usually stay in use for 20 years and require an overhaul of the roof with new straws in every two years. Everyone from the village lend a hand when a new house is built, and they hold celebration when the construction is completed.

The Blangs are good at using bamboo in not only construction of houses but also in the making of furniture and tools, such as tables, stools, sofas, back-baskets, dinner boxes, ect. The Blang men are all experts in intertexture, and the bamboo tolls they knit can even be compared to artistic items. Most of the bamboo products are used by themselves at home, and some are brought to market for sale.

There stand rows of small houses on high pillars on the hills nearby their inhabitations, which are the private barns owned by each single family. That the living places are distant from the barns prevents the barns from catching fire. Smooth ceramic-coated crocks are put on the end of wooden pillars to keep mice away.



#### **The costumes and ornaments—Tight jacket, pail-shaped skirt and loose trouser**

The Blangs' clothing is mainly in blue and black. Men wear collarless jackets with buttons down the front and loose trousers. They wear turbans of black or white cloth.

Women in the Xishuangbanna area wear black turbans and large earrings. They also wear collarless jackets and tight skirts. The jackets, as short as up to the upper part of belly, are embroidered on the edges. Both sides of the jacket fronts are tied with white silk ribbons. Young women tie their hair into buns and cover it with layers of colorful cloth with flowers on the hair, and many silver bracelets on both arms, and a number of

colorful glass ball, all of which make them look very beautiful.

The Blang women in the Baoshan area wear black triangle-shaped turbans, one end tied with a velvet ball. They wear high-collared long-sleeved jackets and a necklace with a dozen of small balls. The jackets are buttoned with an embroider-edged apron tied around their waists.

#### **The dietetic customs—pickled cabbage, sour tea and fresh baked fishes**

The staple diet consists of rice, maize and beans, attached by buckwheat and potatoes. They prefer the soured food, such as soured meats, soured fish, pickled cabbages, and soured bamboo roots. Their unique drink is soured tea. The way of making the tea is to

boil fresh tea leaves first and cool them down till they become sour; put them into bamboo tubes before you airproof the tubes; then cover the tubes with bamboo and bury them in earth. After three or four months, sour tea is ready to serve.

The Blang food is mostly boiled with fresh water, and the most unique way to cook is the wrapped cooking. Prepare fishes or meat by washing and cutting into small pieces, mix with capsicum, salt, onion, ginger, garlic, parsley, and cilantro; then wrap them with well with Japanese banana leaves and put them into the fire in the fireplace. There is a unique flavor of banana leaves. The chicken with sour bamboo roots, and fresh baked fishes are the most famous dishes.

### **The unique marriage customs—“The teeth-dying ritual“ and “the twice weddings”**

The Blangs have an adulthood ritual when they are 15 years old. Some ethnic groups change their clothing to symbolize adulthood, but the Blangs dye their teeth. This kind of ritual is usually conducted collectively with the help “Youth Head” (a youth organization of young people with the same age level). Young men help young women to dye their teeth with black ashes from burnt leaves of jute chestnut tree, then young women do the same for the young men. It is not until they have had their teeth dyed that they are eligible for sociality and dating.

The Blangs have very grand weddings. Different from other ethnic groups, they have twice weddings. After the first wedding, according to the ancient custom, the husband should live in the wife’s home for three years, when he stays and works with his own parents in daytime, and goes back to his wife’s home only at night. Three years later, if the couple are keeping a good term and have children, they can manage to hold the second wedding.



### **The customs and the festivals—The “Ikebaba Festival” and singing with bandore**

The Blangs have different festivals in different areas. In Xishuagnbanna, the festivals mostly have to do with the religions, such as Opening-door Festival, Closing-door Festival, Water-splashing Festival. In the Baoshan area, they also celebrate the Spring Festival, Tomb-sweeping Festival, Torch Festival, thanks to the influence of the Hans and the Yis. The most important festival, Water-splashing Festival is celebrated on every April 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>. They wash away dirt from Bhddha statues, and wash the hands and feet of the elders, and kowtow to wish for a fortunate year. Apart from splashing water, the Blangs in the Shuangjiang area also pile up sands and arrange flowers in unique pattern. That’s why it’s also called Sand-piling Festival, or the Ikebaba Festival.

The Blangs like singing and dancing, and they always enjoy themselves singing and dancing in times of festivals. Their traditional musical instruments are elephant-leg-shaped drums, bee-bucket drums, Mang gongs, cymbals, urheens, bamboo flutes, trichords, etc. Circle Dance, Knife-and-stick Dance, Bamboo Stick Dance, Tea-picking Dance and the singing with bamboo are the most popular entertainment among the Blangs.

### **The religion—Little monk and “Zhaixin Worship”**

The Blangs mainly believe in Hinayana (Little Vehicle Buddhism), and Buddha temple can be found on the top sites of almost every village. Temples generally consist of a great hall, monk bedrooms, meditation hall and a library. The great hall is generally a



building with multiple eaves on the hill slope. According to the Blang custom, a boy must go to a Buddha Temple to become a monk when he is 13 or 14 years old, and be secularized several years later. A man has to fulfill this deputy before he is entitled to get married and have children, and to obtain social status.

Meanwhile, the Blangs also believe in primitive religions. Apart from worshipping all things in nature, they also uphold Totemism and ancestor worship. The stone pillar called “Zaiman” in the middle of the village is considered as sacrosanct. The pillar on both sides of house gate are the divine pillars of their ancestors, with the left side as male gods, and the right female gods. There is a Penates behind the house, not to be touched by anyone out of the family. Besides, they also take the “Tai Ga Gun”, as the god of family, actually a bamboo basket with all kinds of tools inside, such as shells, silverware, scissors, and scriptures. The basket is kept by the head of the clan and is worshiped when important events are going on.