

## The Dai Ethnic Group



The Golden Peacock is the symbol of beauty. Many poems take the beauties and princess as golden peacock. The design of peacock is often seen in the knitted works and paper-cuts. The storied building made of bamboo is the traditional residence for the Dais. The elephant-foot-shaped drum is musical instrument most frequently used for accompaniment of the dance. The design composed of peacock, storied building made of bamboo and the elephant-foot-shaped drum as a whole symbolizes the aspiration of

the Dais for freedom, happiness, peace, beauty, and goodness.

### The environment and the population

The Dai ethnic group with a population of 1 158 989 lives mainly in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous region in Yunnan Province, while the others scatter in different counties and cities in Yunnan Province. The Dais's appellation is Dai. The Dais in Xishuangbanna region call themselves "Daile". The Dais in Dehong region call themselves "Daina". The Dais in Gengma and Lancang call themselves "Daibeng". And the Dais in Yuanjiang, Xinpin, Jinpin call themselves "Daiya", whose united appellation is the Dai ethnic group.

The Dais mostly live in the regions of valley and flat embankment of low latitude, within 500 to 1 300 meters high above sea level. In the regions there are mountains and rivers in length and breadth with spectacular landscape, and fertile, fertile soil and abundant rains, the weather belonging to the tropical or subtropical types. The animals and plant resources as well as the tourism resources in the



Xishuangbanna region are very rich, where there are large areas of tropical rain forest, known as the "Kingdom of Plants" and the "Kingdom of Animals". To travel in the region can be close in touch with the exuberant exoticism of the ethnic minorities and the subtropical scenes.

### The historical origin

The Dai ethnic group was originated from the "Baiyue" ethnic group widely scattering in the south and southeast of China. There were some historical documents in Chinese language in the third century B.C. about the "Baiyue" ethnic group. In 109 B.C., the Han Dynasty set up Yizhou Prefecture, and later on set up Yongchang Prefecture, which ruled the Dais' areas. In the Tang and Song Dynasty, the Dais were called "Mangman", "Jinchi" and "Baiyi", who were ruled successively by the Nanzhao and Daili local regimes. Before and after the 12<sup>th</sup> century were set up the local regimes, Mengmao Kingdom with Ruilijiang as the capital and "Jingling Golden Hall Kingdom" with Jinghong as the capital. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), the system was later abolished. During the period of the Republic of China, the county and the administrative bureau were established while the appellation of headmen was preserved.

## **The branch and the language**

The Dai language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family and has two major dialects, Daile and Daina dialects. In the past the Dais used the Daile script, Danna script, Daibeng script and Jinping script. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the new Dai script was created on the basis of the original ones, which is written in an alphabetic script and widely used in the education, broadcasting and TV, press and publication.

## **The dwelling characteristics—The storied building made of bamboo with balusters and flat-roof house**

Most Dai villages are built up at the foot of mountains or near the rivers. There are rows of storied buildings delicately made of bamboo with phoenix-bamboo and palm trees around, and pieces of rice fields with water net interwoven in them, looking like an idyllic rural scene with poetic beauty.

The Dais in the embankment areas live the storied buildings made of bamboo with balusters, which are supported by several pillars or roles of bamboo stripes. Under the floor are raised domestic animals and stored sundries. The roof of the building is covered by couch grass. It is commonly called that rains drip down from the four sides of the roof. Nowadays many people build the house with bricks and tiles and wood instead of couch grass roof and thin bamboo strips wall so that the houses become more solid, but the traditional style is preserved.

The Dais in the mountainous areas inhabit in the flat-roof house, which is more massive and solid. The flat-roof house is built of wood and mud, generally two stories, one for living and the other for storage of sundries. The walls are very thick, advantageous for heat insulation and warmth preservation, so that it is cool in summer and warm in winter. And the flat roof consolidated by tamped earth and wood can also be used for grains sun-drying.

## **The dressing characteristics—Tight skirt and the colored- waist Dais**



The Dai men mostly wear collarless jacket with buttons down the front and long trousers, with white or blue cloth around the head, the end of which is decorated with colored wools drooping at the both sides of the ears.

The woman dresses are quite different in different areas, with Xishuangbanna raiment as the typical one. The women mostly wear tight jacket with round collar and narrow sleeves and buttons down the front, and also tight skirt with variety of designs and colors. The tight skirt is made of a

whole piece of barrel-shaped cloth, straight up and down, the middle part of which is folded on the waist with a silk belt around tightly. The waist and buttocks parts of the skirt are tightened, while the lower part of the skirt is loose. They are accustomed to wear hair knots on the top of the head, with comb and flowers interposed in the hair, and some of them wrap the head with a piece of cloth. When they go out,

they carry on the arm a barrel-shaped handkerchief and traditional colored umbrella. The kind of costume makes women look graceful and slender with nice walks.

In the areas of Xinping and Yuanjiang, the colors of the costumes are mainly black and red. Women love to wear head wrappings and wear leg wrappings with variety of colors, and wear multiform of silver accouterments, which jingo all the way when they walk. And they also love to wear the hat made of thin bamboo strips with the brim tilting up and wear the colored belt around the waist, so they are called the colored-waist Dais.

### **The special food—The rice in bamboo tube, “sapie”, and “roasted fish”**

Rice is the staple food for the Dais and the most special food is the rice in bamboo tube. The way of cooking it is to put some sticky rice in a bamboo tube and roast it. It is very fragrant and delicious. And nuomibaba (a kind of sticky rice cake), wrapped in the leaves of Japanese banana and steamed, may be donated as a tribune to a temple for the blessing of the Buddha and presented for entertaining the guests.

The Dais like the tastes, sour peppery and bitter. Whenever a cattle is killed, “sapie” must be taken as food. The way of cooking it is to boil the gall bladder of the cattle and then put the chopped cattle liver and heart with deferent flavorings. It tastes bitter and cold, taken as the flavored food for entertaining guests. The Dais love to eat roast food. One of the famous is the “roast fish with fragrant couch grass”. The way of cooking it is to insert shallot, ginger, garlic, pepper and salt into the fish, which is bundled with fragrant couch grass, and then roast it, so it has special flavor. And fried green bryophyte is also particularly fragrant.

### **The calendar and the festival—The Dai calendar and the joyous Water Splashing Festival**



season from May to August, and the rainy season from September to December.

The Water Splashing Festival is the new year of the Dai calendar, held between June and July of the dai calendar (in April of the Gregorian calendar) for three days. The first day is called “wanmai”, equivalent to the Spring Festival’s Eve of the lunar calendar, when people hold dragon boat race, set off

The Dai calendar is a combination of the lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar, that is, the year is the year of the Gregorian calendar, while the month is the month of the lunar calendar. The date of the founding of the reign is 22<sup>nd</sup> of March in 638 A.D. There are three seasons in the Dai calendar, the cold season from January to April, hot



fireworks, and so on; the second day is called “wannao”, when they heap up sands and play cockfight; the last day is “wanpayawanma”, equivalent to the new year’s day, when people have to get up early to worship the Buddha and the girls wash the dusts on the image of the Buddha with water on the surface of which some flowers float. Then people begin to beat the elephant-foot-shaped drum and the gong. They splash water to each other while singing and dancing with good wishes.



### **The religious belief—The Bamboo-shoot Pagoda and the Village-center Stone**

The Dais believe in Hinayana of Buddhism. There is a Buddhist temple in almost every village. The Buddhist temple is generally composed of main hall, hieratic residence and scripture storehouse. There is a stupa in a bigger temple, even a group of pagodas. The famous one is the Manfeilong bamboo shoot pagoda in Xishuangbanna and the Jiele pagodas in Ruili, composed of a main pagoda and several small ones. The white body of the pagoda is like a silver bamboo shoot breaking through the soil, so it is called the bamboo shoot pagoda.

The festival of the Buddhism is Guanmen Festival and Kaimen Festival, held respectively from the 15<sup>th</sup> of September to the 15<sup>th</sup> of December of the Dai calendar., during which the monks must hold commandments and chant scriptures, and the farmers are forbidden to get married and build houses, but lead a life similar to that of the monks.

The Dais preserved the primordial religious beliefs, offering sacrifice to the mountain, the river, the tree, the stone, the ancestors and the divinity of the village. In the center of every village erects a stone, called the village-center stone, untouchable by anyone.

### **The rich and colorful arts—The beautiful peacock dance**

The Dais love poverty and excel at epic. The epic Zhaoshu Vollage and Nanmanuona, Ebing and Sangluo, are the art treasures of China. There are a variety of dances, most of which are the imitation and the personification of animal motions. The peacock dance comes from the beauties motions of peacocks, and also the lovely folklore of the Dais. The famous dancers Dao Meilan and Yang Liping are known at home and abroad for performing the peacock dance.