

The Li Ethnic Group



The pattern of human and dragon image draw materials from the famous double-sided embroidery of Li people. The huge human image in the middle contains ten human pattern groups with dragon patterns on both sides. The humans are up of gigantic stature and are indestructible. "Nine dragons" are symbols of cohesive force of the Chinese people. On the topside is the Wuzhi Mountain, and five rivers and waves of the South Sea on the lower side indicate the rapid development of Hainan. The ethnic traditional decorative pattern

expresses Li people's spirits of intelligence and eagerness to make progress.

The population and the environment

The Lis have a population of 1 247 614 and now 94% of them live in Hainan Province. The most compact communities are six counties: Qiongzong, Baoting, Baishi, Baisha, Ledong, Changjiang, Lingshui and three cities: Tongshi, Sanya, Dongfang and al of them are located in the middle and south of part of Hainan.

Lis inhabit in the middle and south region of Hainan Island. In that part there are lots of connected mountains and rolling trees. The towering mountains of five fingers chain in the ridge of the island, the rivers on the island flow into the sea in a radioactive shape and the water drops in great elevation. The water resources are abundant there. Between the mountains are scattering some basins which have already been the living places of Lis. Along the coast are the boundless alluvial plains with fertile soil. Because of the location of Tropical region, there is rich rain and great sunshine. The tropical plants grow luxuriantly, the wild animals are of every kind in numbers and the scent of melons and fruits is wafting all the year round.



The historical origin

The Lis originate from a branch of Baiyue in history. The Luoyue people in the West Han Dynasty, Li people and Man people in the East Han Dynasty, and Li and Liao in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, are all ancestors of the Lis. According to the recorded materials, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty set up prefecture on the island and the primitive people of the Li started their communities with the Han people who moved from north. General Fubo in the East Han set up cities and marketing places here. In the Sui Dynasty, Madame Xian, the leader of the Lis in the south, submitted to the central government with the districts she ruled, including Hannan Island. After the Tang and Song Dynasties, the central government quickened their steps to develop the island. Lots of immigrants from other groups like Han, Miao moved in and the relations between the ancestors of the Lis and the Central Plains became more and more tense.

In 1952, the Chinese government set up Hainan Li and Miao Autonomous Region of Guangdong province and it changed into an autonomous prefecture. At the same time four Li autonomous counties: Changjiang, Ledong, Baisha, Lingshui and two Li and Miao autonomous counties: Baoting and Qiongzhou were established. Cities like Sanya, Tongshi, and Dongfang can also enjoy the benefits and the treatments as the autonomous regions. What's more, there are also 12 ethnical towns. The establishment of these autonomous places has effectively guaranteed Lis' rights as the master of the country.

The ethnic appellation and the language

Because of the difference of living places, clothing, accents and customs, etc, even the Lis themselves have several names to call themselves like: Qi, Meifu, Run, and Sai. But Sai is the most commonly used when communicating with the other groups. In history, the Han people called Lis' ancestors as Li, Man, Li, Liao and so on. In the ending period of the Tang Dynasty, some people called themselves in the sound of Li so the name became well accepted and passed down till now.

The language of Li belongs to Zhuang, Tong and Li branch of Han-Tibetan language family. Different places have different accents, but they have no written script. Through the long period of communication with Han people, many Lis know the Chinese language very well.

The featured housing—The boat-shape house and the three-stone kitchen range

The Li people mostly live in groups and they build their villages and stockades near mountains and rivers. Surrounding the house are bamboos whose form is like a green canopy. The traditional houses are fenced and its shape is like a boat with covering. The house has two stories. The roof is like a bow and is covered with glass. The wood trunks sustain the house on the base and the upper floor is for people to live on. The walls and the floor are covered with bamboos; one door or two doors are opened in the walls. There is always a triangle stove range in the room. The kitchen range is made up by three stones. Among them two are solid called "base stones", one is movable called "moving stone" and it can be adjusted according to the size of the pan. The ground floor is for livestock. This kind of house becomes down to the ground later. But due to the influence from Han people, the houses of the Lis are almost the same as the Hans'.



The costumes and ornaments---The favorite color black

The craft of spinning and weaving has a long history. The Li brocades with exquisite workmanship and excellent pattern were always the articles of tribute for emperors. Clothes are made of cotton and flax. They spin these materials and weave, dye and sew the entirely themselves. Huang Daopo, the famous cotton spinner in the Yuan Dynasty, learned the skills of cotton spinning from the Li women. The clothes of

Lis have different features because of their different branches but most people love black. For women, they wear collarless jackets buttoned down from the front and close-fitting skirts. In some places pullover

shirts are also popular. They coil a bun on the head with a muffle. Women like neckband, earring, bracelet, and ankle bangle very much. Women in some places still keep the customs of tattoo. For men, they wear jacket buttoned down on the front as well and they knot their hair on the neck together and wrap the head. In the areas inhabited by several groups, the Lis' clothes are the same as the Hans'.

The dietetic customs—The bamboo-tube rice and chewing Areca

The main foods of the Lis are rice, tomatoes and maize. Everyday the boiled or soaked rice is the most popular food. The meats are most from pig, ox, sheep, dog, and chicken and their favorite are fish, shrimp, crab and snake. Most times the Lis roast or salt them and preserve them for food. Self-made glutinous rice wine is excellent drink for treating guests. The Lis love food of glutinous rice, especially the bamboo rice. To make bamboo rice, the Lis first mix rice and meat together and put them in a hollow bamboo with one end, and then seal the other end with vanilla or plantain. After fill some water in, the Lis roast it on fire. When eating, people cut the bamboo up and they can feel the delicate fragrance and delicious taste. The Lis like chewing areca very much. Every family has areca for guests and some mid-aged women even tie a pocket under their waist. Areca is always in mouth no matter when they are working, relaxing, talking or visiting.

The songs and dances—The Tunes of Li Ballads and the bamboo-striking dance

The Lis are good at singing and dancing. When festival or meeting arrives, they will sing in loud voice and dance to their heart's content day and night. The folk songs are beautiful in rhythm and resourceful in contents. The songs in the Li language are called tunes of Li ballads. The singers sing extemporaneously in different places. Bamboo-striking dance is common dance there. When dancing, two bamboo poles are put on the ground abreast of each other with several inches between them, and across them are several bamboo poles. Some young men couch on both sides holding one end of the pole and strike in a set rhythm. The dancers jump and turn as the bamboo set apart and get close again. When reaching the climax, all the people shout, making the atmosphere lively and exiting.

The religion—The ancestor worship and the Nature worship

The Lis believe that everything has its spirit, and all things in the nature are living temples of holly things, Ghost or gods. People mainly worship ancestors and they also worship nature (heaven, earth, mountain, water, atone, fire, sun, moon, tree, etc) and ghosts (ghost of mountain, ghost of earth, ghost of lightening, ghost of kitchen, ghost of ancestors). The Lis believe in ghost and they pay esteem to ghost of ancestors most. It is believes that the illness has something to do with the ghost of ancestors, ghost of mountains, so Liangmu and Daogong are invited to send them away. To offer a sacrifice to the ghost of ancestors, they need ox; to the other ghosts, pig, dog or chicken.

The festival customs—March 3rd Festival of the Lis

Most of the festivals of the Lis are same as the Hans' like the Spring Festival, Tomb-sweeping Day, Boat Festival, Ghost Festival, Mid Autumn Festival and so on. The most grand are the Spring Festival and their traditional festival "March 3rd". "March 3rd" gets its name from the lunar calendar. On that day people get together to commemorate ancestors and heroes to make a wish for the double good harvests of food and hunting. At the festival, there are also entertaining activities like bamboo jumping,

double-dagger dance and singing songs in antiphonal style by a man and a woman.