



## The Maonan Ethnic Group

The flowery bamboo hat is called “Dingkahua” in Moanan language, which means a bamboo hat with patterns at the backside. The hat is delicately woven with neat flower patterns and beautiful designs. It is multifunctional and meaningful, which is considered to be the symbol of the Maonan’s goodwill for a happy life.

### The environment and population

The Maonan people has a population of 107 166, most of them living in the Huanjiang Autonomous County in Guangxi. Others live in the counties nearby. Still, there are few of them in Guizhou. With a good name “the hometown of the Mapnans”, the “Three Souths” mountainous area of Huanjiang County is the major habitation of Maonan (Three Souths means: Up South, Mid South, Down South).

“The Hometown of the Maonans” is located at the foot of the east part of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, featuring typical Karst physiognomy. There are stony bluffs and crag jutting up here and there with caves in them. Many small streams and paths winds their ways among small hills that are scattered in the paddy rice fields. You will gasp at the quiet of the scenery.



The Maonan people are chiefly engaged in agriculture generation after generation. Their major agricultural crops include paddy rice, maize, sweet potatoes and beans. Taking advantages of the local conditions, the Maonans develop their stockbreeding, the Maonan beef cattle, which are marketed within and beyond China, are small in size, with good shining fur and tender meat. The Huanjiang Pigs are also famous at home and abroad for the delicious meat.

### The historical origin

The origin of the Moanan people can be traced back to the Liao and Linren which were derived from Baiyue. According to the history record, by the end of the Han Dynasty, 1800 years ago, the Maonans and the ancestors of the Shuis and the Dongs were resident in the area near the border of Guangxi and Guiozhou Province. They called themselves

“Junnan” or “Ainan”, which means “people from Maonan”. In history, the general term of “Three Souths” area is different Chinese spelling of “Maotan” and “Maonan”. That’s how they got their name as “Maonan”. In 1956, the name was changed into the Maonan.

The Maonan language belongs to the Dong-Shui branch of the Zhung-Dong language group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Almost all the Moanans know both Chinese and the zhuang languages.

The religious belief of the Maonan is mainly Daoism, with some Buddhism influence, as well.



### **The featured housing —Stone house on pillars**

Most of the Maonans live in the houses built on pillars. These houses are usually double-floored with the upper floor for people to live in and the lower one for keeping livestock. Now the condition of man living with livestock has been changed. There is a

veranda outside the door of the upper floor for people to enjoy the cool and give the clothes an airing. The house can be called stone house on pillars because it is made of stone, which makes a difference between it and other ordinary houses. The Maonan’s hometown is a mountainous area. Stones are inexhaustible construction materials. So the Maonans make full use of this resource when they build their house.

Stone makes up its foundation and walls against the mountain slope. The pillars of their houses are built of stone; the steps inside the building are laid with stone chips. Moreover, the flat roof for drying clothes, the animal fences, tables, stools, water vats and basins are all laid with or carved of stone. Vivid and fascinating images of such animals as birds, worms, fish and insects are depicted on the stone. The stone house is good for many practical functions and, at the same time, very beautiful. That’s why the stone carving of the Maonan enjoys a good reputation.

### **The costumes and ornaments—trimmed clothes and “Dingkahua”**

The dresses of Maonan are brief and not too complex. In the past, they were made of hand-knitted cloth in blue or black. Men and women wear blue or green cloth jackets buttoned down the front on the right and loose-legged trousers. Men usually use black scarves to wrap their heads. The opening of women’s garments is embroidered with three black trims. Keeping their hair in a bun, they all love to wear ornaments made of gold,

silver and jade etc. Today, with the popularization of machine-made cloth and the ready-to-wear, the Maonans seldom wear the traditional dresses except in their festivals.

The Maonans are skillful craftsmen of bamboo hats, which are works of art in themselves. Moanan women are particularly fond of a kind of flowery bamboo hats. In the language of Maonan, they are called of “Dingkahua”, which means the flower under the hat. The diameter of ”Dingkahua” is 70cm or so. The cine-shaped hat is made of hundreds of narrow bamboo bands. There is a flowery band weaved at the edge of the hat. It is the combination of golden and black bamboo bands and is decorated with neat diamond pattern, with the similar beauty of simplicity you can find in baldachins. It adds the beauty of young girls when they wear it or hang it on the back.



Here is a story about the “Dingkahua” that is interesting and pleasant to listen to. Long ago, there was a industrious Maonan young man, who often wore the flowery bamboo hat he wove by himself when working in the fields. One day, it rained cats and dogs. He lent his hat to a beautiful girl to shelter her from the heavy rain. Shortly after that, they got married. The story of the flowery bamboo hat was spread over among the Maonans. Since then, it has become a custom for young men to give the flowery bamboo hats to the girls they loved as a sign of true love.

### **The dietetic customs—The “three sours” and the “Maonan rice”**

Rice and maize make up the Maonans’ staple food. Their favorite vegetables include sweet potatoes, beanstalk and radish ect. On festivals, they like to eat Zongzi(glutinous rice dumplings) and glutinous rice pies, deep-fried bean curd. They are fond of sour food. Guests are asked to taste the traditional Maonan dishes of the three sours: sour preserved meat, sour pickles and sour field snails. In hot summer, they like to eat Maonan rice. The Maonans mix pumpkin, maize, ground maize, bamboo shoots and beanstalks etc together and cook the mixture. After it is boiled, fresh pumpkin flowers, vegetables and seasons are added. With the rice and dishes together, it has a very special and delicious taste.

### **The folk-customs—Singing, “Vow-redeeming Dance” and “Tongding”**

Singing is a popular recreational activity of the Maonans of all ages. The songs that are most frequently sung are “Bi”, “Huan”, and “Paijian”. There are 20 to 30 melodies. “Bi” is the song that people sing in the mountain. In most cases young men and young women sing it outdoors. You will hear “Huan” in the important occasions like birthday parties, weddings, and the foundation laying of a new house etc. “Paijian” is for story telling.

When young people are in love, they sing songs in the mountain to express their feelings. What's more, the guests of wedding also sing songs to one another. The contents are wide-ranged, from blessing of the wedding to the legends of the ancestors, from portraying the sun, the moon and the stars to love affairs.

Maonan's folk dance is primarily performed by Shigong (local priests) at the temple fairs to serve as prayers for good harvests and prosperity. It is called "Feitao" in the Maonan language. It is also known as "Huanyuan Dance", meaning "dancing to vows redeemed". The dance composes of ten scenes. The newly created "the flowery bamboo hat dance" has some novelty and is the reflection of the goodwill of the Maonan people to pursue a better life. It has become very popular.

Among the Maonan people, there is a very special sport event called "Tongding", which was listed as one of the sports events in the National Sports Meeting for Ethnic Minority Groups. Two people stand in a 3m-diametered circle. With hands on their chests and their feet straddling on the ground, they use their shoulder to bump to each other. The one who bump the other down or bump the other out of the circle wins the game.



### **The traditional festivals—The “Fenlong Festival”**

The Maonans have many festivals, and the most ceremonious one is the “Fenlong Festival”, which is held after the Summer Solstice according to the Chinese lunar calendar. It lasts for three days. In the past, the first two days are for offering sacrifices at the temples. The

Maonans would hold a ceremony for the gods by offering a bull. Wearing a mask and dressed in a gown, a powwow would dance “Huanyuan Dance” in the ceremony. The third day is for offering sacrifice at home. People used to worship their ancestors and pray for good harvests. Now the ceremony of worshiping the gods has been abolished, and more forms of folk entertainment have been added in the celebration of the festival.

### **The education—Zealousness of study in the “Three-South area”**

The Maonans have a good tradition of valuing education. On the Chinese Lunar New Year's day, parents will urge their children to light a lamp to read aloud in the morning. So the houses in the whole Maonan area are illuminated and you can hear the voices of children reading aloud from everywhere. Reading embodies their blessings and goodwill for the future. When talking about the Maonans, people like to use a saying: There is a zealousness of study in the Three South area. Since the People's Republic of China was

founded, with the help of the government, the education of the Maonans has making great progress. The Maonan people are among top-ranked in terms of over literal degree in the local area.

In the late 1970s, a seven-year old Maonan child, by the name Tan Wenxi, won the first prize in the Fourth International Children Painting Competition with his wash picture "Guilin Scenery". Another painting by him has been incorporated in a memorial post stamp for the International Children's Day, issued by the China Post Ministry in 1983.