

## The Mulam Ethnic Group



In the mountain regions inhabited by Mulams, golden pheasants are the most common birds. With a vigorous and graceful figure full of power and grandeur, they are taken by the Mulams as the symbols of diligence, courage, and endeavors to make progress, pursuit of light and happiness.

### The population and the environment

With a population of 207 352, 80% of Mulams are inhabited in Luocheng Mulam Autonomous County of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. A few of them scatter among the Zhuang, Han, Miao, Yao, Dong near the counties or cities like Yihzou, Liucheng, and so on. Others live in Guizhou province and Guangzhou province.

The Mulams communities are at the southern foot of Jiuwan Mountain of Miaoling range on Yun-Gui plateau. In the place, the terrain is steep and among the rising and falling mountains locates flat lands of different sizes. Belonging to tropical monsoon climate, this region has abundant rains and has warm and moist climate. All these make it suitable for the growth of rice, corn, sugarcane and rape. The region abounds in tea, mushroom, and edible fungus and also is rich in mineral resources like coal, iron and tin.

### The ethnic origin and history

The Mulam is one of the native ethnic groups of Guangxi originating from Luoyue, Xi'ou branch of Baiyue group. Before Song Dynasty, Mulam were under the name of Liao and Ling. During the period from Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, Mulams broke up from Liao and Ling and gradually formed a single ethnic group around Luocheng district. General History of Guangxi issued during Emperor Jiajing regime in the Qing Dynasty put it like that: Liao of Tianhe (place in Luocheng county) was also called Mulao, showing that Liao and Ling groups had direct link with Mulams. According to history books and legends, in the Ming and the Qing dynasties people from many other groups moved in and they lived together and intermarried with Mulams, then gradually they were assimilated into Mulams.

### The appellation and language

The Mulams call themselves Ling or Jin; and in Zhuang language they are called Bujin. In Chinese history books, they were once named Mulao with different spellings. After the found of People's Republic of China in 1949, through checking and distinguishing, the government decided Mulam as their group name.

The Mulam has no writing characters of their own, but they have their language. The language of Mulams belongs to Tong-shui branch, Tong language group of Chinese-Tibetan family. It is similar to Maonan language, Tong language and Shui language. Most of Mulams manage to speak both Chinese and Zhuang language.

### The featured housing—The tile-roofed flat houses with mud or block walls

The Mulams set up their villages near mountains and rivers. The traditional houses are tile-roofed flat houses with mud wall or brick walls. In front of the house is an arch over the gateway and on each side of the house are cattle pen and pigsty with yard dividing them from principal room. Toilet is built on the side or at the back of the house. Rich families often have enclosing walls forming a compound with houses around a square yard. Great attention is paid to decoration inside. The upper part of the central room has beautiful decorative pattern. In the front of central room is an underground stove. The fire in the stove is always on for food-boiling, water boiling and keeping warm. Mulams pay attention to building. People check the geomantic quality for the choice of foundation and direction of door and windows. Auspicious days are chosen for digging the foundation hole, laying the foundation, installing doors, completing of walls.

### **The costumes and ornaments—favor in deep blue**

The Mulams love deep black for their clothes. Traditional clothes, both men's and women's are made of deep blue or black homemade cloth. The clothes are simple but in good taste, beautiful and durable. For men, they wear collarless jackets buttoned down on the front and long trousers. When working they wear self-made sandals from bamboo or linen. Young women wear garments buttoned on their right side and trousers. The aged women always cover their head with black handkerchief and wear black apron and they wear narrow-headed shoes in boat shape. On the head of shoes are decorated with flowers woven with knitting wool. For the unmarried girls, they braid their hair and wear their hairs in bangs.



After their marriage, they wear buns. Women like to wear earring, necklace, hair clasp, waist chain, and bracelets. But at recent time the clothes of Mulams are almost the same as Han's and Zhuang's.

### **The dietetic customs—“Pillow Zongzi” and “Mulam Pickle”**



The main food for Mulam is rice. Meat is mainly from pig, cow, chicken and duck while the meat of cat and snake is forbidden to eat. Glutinous rice is their favorite food and at festival they celebrate or exchange gifts with glutinous rice food. The most special food is “pillow zongzi”(glutinous rice dumplings), which can weigh 2.5 to 3 kilograms. The way of making it is as follows: first soak glutinous rice in water for four hours to make it saturated with water, then mix the rice with diced meat and kernel, then put the rice on a palm leaf and cover the rice with another leaf and go on, at

last, tie the leaves lightly and boil the rice for a long time till it becomes edible. People also like sour and peppery food like the traditional salted vegetable “Mulams Pickle”. It can be divided into water pickle and dry pickle. Every family has it and makes it every year. Even with dishes full of table on festivals, pickle is still indispensable.

### **The songs and dances—“Impromptu Song” and “Changgutiao” (Songs of old Stories)**

Mulams are good at singing folk songs to express history, working life as well as happiness and love. Mulams, young or old, men or women, all can sing in antiphonal style. When festival comes, songs are heard everywhere. The traditional style of songs is the Impromptu Song and Changgutiao (Songs of old stories). Impromptu songs are about congratulations, greetings and praise. The song usually has four to six verses and each verse has seven words. The song is usually sung on occasion of “slope-walking” for the young or wedding. Changgutiao(Songs of old Stories) are long narrative folk songs depicting story and historical figures. The verse of the song ranges from several dozen to several hundred even one thousand. Two people in different tones at weddings often sing this kind of song.

### **The religion—Polytheism and worship of the ancestors**

The Mulams have no unified religion. They worship many gods as well as their ancestors. As a result, this brings forward some festivals and taboos. For example, in February, people worship the god of kitchen and ancestors. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> in lunar calendar, they worship goddess “madam of flower” in charge of death and life. People will collect money and kill pigs to worship her. At the Grave Sweeping Festival, they not only sweep the graves of their family, but also have to collect money for ancestors’ graves, if they are one ancestor. On April 8<sup>th</sup> they worship the god of cattle. No matter how busy the day is they will let the cattle rest for one day and feed them with green grass and luminous rice to thank the yearlong work of cattle.

### **The festival customs—“Yifan Festival” and “Slope-walking Festival”**

Except the spring festival and min-autumn day shared with Han people, the Mulams have their own special festivals. Among them the Yifan festival held every three years is the grandest one with the intention of worshipping gods and exorcise the evil, keeping safe and happy and celebrating the good harvests. On that day, people celebrate it by killing pigs and chicken, singing songs and opera, dancing of dragon and lion and even the wizard is invited to hold a sermon. Besides this festival, the slope-walking festival is special for young men and women in love. Usually they are hold at the rest season after spring or autumn, especially on days before or after min-autumn day. At that time young people are dressed in splendid attire and walk in groups to the slopes, trees or books to sing folk songs and through the songs they look for their beloved one.