

The Nu Ethnic Group



Dabiya is the indispensable musical instruments in the Nu people's life. The Nus compose and sing poems impromptu, accompanied with Dabiya, mouth organ, bamboo flute and hulusheng (a kind of gourd-shaped flute). The hand-made satchel is not only a love keepsake, but also a nice craftwork. The design composed Dabiya and a satchel represents optimism, good luck and happiness.

The population and environment

Numbering 28 759 in total, 90% of the Nus live in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. There is also a sparse distribution of the Nus in Weixi Lisu Autonomous County in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Chayu County in Tibet Autonomous Region.

In order to protect the rights of the Nu ethnic people, Chinese government set up Gongshan Dulong and Nu Autonomous County in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture



and made Bingzhongluo County, Bangda town in Gongshan Autonomous County and Pihe town in Fugong County, where the Nu people live in compact community, autonomous towns.

Most of the Nus live in Nujiang River area, which is the second biggest canon of the world and is a part of transverse mountain range with precipitous mountains, poor communication and farming resources. Though belonging to subtropical zone, the climate does not change abruptly and from river valley to hilly side field it respectively belongs to the subtropical zone, the temperate zone, the frigid zones, it promises various kinds of rare plants and medical herbs; hence it is called "the kingdom of medical herbs". Besides, the area is rich in mineral deposits and valuable medicinal herbs.

The ethnic origin and history

The Nu is an old ethnic group in the Nujiang River and Lancangjiang River areas. Inferred from the local folklore and related literature, the Nus seem to have two origins: the part which calls themselves "Nuosu" and "Anu" has close relation with the Yi ethnic group in Liangshan Mountain and develops from a part of the "Luluman" recorded in the literature

of Yuan Dynasty. However, the part of the Nus who call themselves “Along” maybe becomes the original in Nujiang River area.

In the early Ming Dynasty, for the first time the term “Nu people” appeared in “Baiyi Biography”, a very important ethnography on southeast China. From then on, terms referring particular to the Nu people such as “Nuren”, “Nuzi”, “Nuren” are fixed. And this shows that the Nu became an independent ethnic group.

The ethnic appellation, the language and the script

The Nu people in China call themselves in different ways. The Nus in Fugong call themselves “Nuoso” or “Ayi” and those in Lanping Pumi and Bai autonomous counties call themselves “Ruosuo” and those in Gongshan Dulong autonomous county are “Along”.

The Nu people speak a language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese groups of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. It has no written form. There are big differences between Nu dialects, so people speak different dialects cannot understand each other. Most of the Nu people know one or two other languages, for instance, Lisu, Bai, Tibetan and Chinese.



The resident features

—“the house with dozens of posts on the ”

The folk architectures of the Nu people come into five categories: cogon grass house, bamboo strips house, plank house, clay wall house, and gallet-roof house. Among those houses, the “Qianjiaoluodi house” is very common in the Nu areas. The house whose roof is made of bamboo strips is called “Bamboo strips house”, and these planks wall houses are called “plank house”. The major structure is to set u dozens of posts in the slope or the mountainsides, and build the walls with planks or bamboo strips. Cogon grass, planks or thin slab stone covers the both inclined plane roofs. The whole house is rectangular. There are two floors in the house. People live in the upper floor and the lower floor is house-shed.

The costume features—The linen clothes and “big lower hem skirt”

The costume of the Nus bears obvious differences among different groups. Traditionally, “Nuosu” and “Anu” like to wear homemade linen clothes. Men wear linen and trousers with linen puttees and chopper in the waist. They also bring a chopper at their waist and take bow, crossbow and bow bag, barefoot all through the year. Unmarried women wear a

black, dark red or dark blue short jacket outside the gown. The lower-hem of their skirt is very wide and even if they lift the hem shoulder-high, their knees will not appear. Married Nu women love to wear big earrings and hair hoop decorated with coral, shell, coin, and little bronze bell. They edge their skirt and shirt with lace and wear shell or beads, barefoot all year long. Now, men and women just dress as Han people.



The dietetic customs—“The glutinous rice gruel” and “the roasted cake on the plank”

The staple food of the Nus is corn, buckwheat, rice and millet. Other food includes pork, chicken, beef, mutton, sweet potato, bamboo shoots, bean, edible wild herbs and mushrooms. They used to hunt mouse, musk deer and wild goat for food. Nowadays people are aware of the responsibility of environment protecting, so the traditional hunting method has changed.

The Nu people usually love the gruel mixed with rice and vegetables. Both men and women like to drink. They used to smoke long-stemmed Chinese pipe, which was everybody’s daily necessary, and when people meet, they should offer a cigarette for each other. Besides, they have some local delicacies, such as roasted sucking pig, lute meat, Gala, Tree flower tea, Qiyou tea and roasted cake on the plank. The plank can be found in the seaside shady underground and when it is just dig out; it can be shaped as you want by knife. Fire and water cannot destroy it. The cake roasted on the plank is soft and delicious, even if there is not oil, the cake will not stick on the plank.

The dancing and the singing—The folk dance accompanied with musical instruments and group dance

Folk songs of the Nu people are well developed. Among them, group dance “Song of the God of Hunters”, “Wedding Song” which are hundreds or even thousands of verses long, are the treasures of the Nu ethnic group. The Nus have various kinds of folk dances, “accompanied with some musical instruments, such as “Dabiya”, “Jimi”. Group dance is the main dancing form. The stage is usually beside the campfire or the fireplace. The themes of their dances are various and almost include all the aspects of their life, such as, migrating, hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, cooking, love affairs, battling and religious ceremony, etc. “Sheep Contest Dance”, “Double Lute Dance” and “Counter-lute Dance” are their favorites.

The religion—The combined religion

The Nu people’s religion swallows many elements. They not only believe in primitive religion, also believe in Tibetan Buddhism, Catholicism, and Christianity. The same Nu

branch, village or even family maybe has different religions among the members. Objects of worship included nature, ghost, soul, witchcraft and shaman. Embodying in almost every aspect of the Nu people's religious life, these beliefs also produce a great impact on the Nu people's life and production.

The festival customs—“The Fairy Maiden Festival”

The Nu people's holiday include: Nu's New Year, Fairy Maiden Festival (also called Shanmu Festival, Flower Festival), Spring Festival, the god of Grain Festival, Mountain Forest Festival. Those Christians also celebrate Christmas.

Originally a big festival for “Along” in Gong Mountain, Fairy Maiden Festival on 15th, March, has become a holiday celebrated by many local ethnic groups. During the festival, every village will go to the “fairy maiden cave” to offer sacrifices. They bright the cave with pine torch and the shaman read the tribute, and then people kowtow to pray for happiness and protection from fairy maidens. After the ceremony, people wine and dine outside and hold all kinds of activities.