

The Puyi (Bouyei) Ethnic Group



In the ancient time, the Puyis regarded the luxuriant-growing bamboo as their totem and there was a “Legend of bamboo king”. The life rituals of the Puyis such as “taking sedan chair as a bride at the wedding”, “birth ritual” and “releasing souls of the dead from purgatory” have been current up to now. At the ancestor worship rite of “Guyewang”, the Danan bamboo was chosen to be the totem pole, with two dragons twining around. The totem pole symbolizes that the Puyi people adore the growth and the prosperity of nature.

The environment and population

The Puyis’ population is 2,971,460 currently. They mainly live in the South Guizhou Puyi and Miao autonomous Prefecture and the southwest Guizhou Puyi and Miao autonomous Prefecture, and some in Puyi and Miao autonomous counties like Zhenning, Ziyun, and Guanling in Anshun prefecture. They are also interspersed in Guiyang City, the southeast Guizhou Prefecture, the areas of interspersed in Guiyang City, the southeast Guizhou Prefecture, the areas of Liuzhi, Tongren, Zunyi, Bijie, Liupanshui and also Luoping in Yunnan province.

The Puyi are is located in the subtropical karst highland the south west of China, being proud of its beautiful scenery and abundant touring resources. Besides the world-known Huangguoshu waterfall, there are also Huaxi, which is regarded as “the pearl in the highland”, the dragon palace in Anshun, the “Seven Small Holes” in Libo, the great canyon in Zhang River as well as the rich local customs there, these tourist spots have been attracting thousands of tourists from home and abroad.

The main crop there is rice, but some industrial crops such as cotton, cole, sugar cane, flue-cured tobacco, tea and chestnut are also planted there. The tea named “Duyun Maojian” once won the excellent prize in the panama Expo. Rich in coal, gold, phosphorus and other mineral products, the Puyi area is regarded as “the coal sea in the southwest”. The exploitations of the hydroelectricity of the south and north pan River help the local economy grow by leaps and bounds.

The ethnic origin and language

The Puyis come from a branch of “Baiyue” people, and they are closely related with the Zhuang People in terms of origin. It was called “Puyue” or “Puyi” at the time before the Qin and Han Dynasty, “Liao” in the time of Wei Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, “Fanyi” in Tang and Song Dynasties and later “Zhongjia”, “Nongjia”, “Bulong”, “Yizu” and so on. In 1953, it was named “Puyi” according to their own will.

The language of the Puyi is one of the Zhuang-Dai branches of the Zhuang-Dong group belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages, and it is divided into three local dialects in southern, middle and western Guizhou Province. In the past a certain kind of characters modeled on Chinese Character spread among the folk, and people named it “Puyi” character. In 1956, the writing system based on Latin letters was created.

The featured housing—combination of two-storey houses and bungalows and flagstone houses

The villages of the Puyis are often located at the foot of hill and beside a brook. The brooks flowing here and there in the field feast your eyes on idyllic and picturesque scenery. People there build their buildings on the mountains instead of building the one-storey houses with a courtyard. The first floor is set apart for their livestock and people live on the upper floors. Some people build a bungalow behind the storied buildings, which is called “a combination of two-storey houses and bungalows”. In the area around the “Huangguoshu” waterfall the Puyi people are good at making good use of the abundant stone materials there. Their houses are all built with stone. They also make many stone utensils like stone milling, stone jar, stone trough, etc. What amazes people is that even the roofs are made with stone. Many pieces of flat stone make the roof a patchwork of lozenge-shaped, scale-shaped or shell-shaped pictures. This kind of decorative roof is not only beautiful but also waterproof, fireproofing.



The costumes and handicrafts—“the pleated skirts” and “the Puyi batik”



The clothes of the Puyis are mainly in green, blue and white. In the old days the short buttoned jackets, long trousers and scarves were the typical clothing of men, but nowadays they dress themselves almost the same as Han people. Women wear jackets buttoned on the right, in which the collar, the arm and the edge are brocaded or batik, and long trousers or pleated skirts. In the festivals, they dress six jackets and nine skirts. The Puyi women like to wear silver jewelries. They pay much attention to their headwear. The unmarried women make their hair braided and wear a scarf with an embroidered case, while the married wear a headwear made by bamboo shell named “gengkao” with the meaning of having already married.



The history of the Puyi batik dates from one thousand years ago. First they use a copper knife dipping with liquid wax to draw some ripple or geometrical pictures and then dye it with indigo blue liquids mixed with herbal medicine, and the stripes of crack flower pattern is formed after the wax is removed. The batik cloth, owning a decent beauty, was made clothes in the past and now becomes the material of all kinds of adornments that are being sold in China and many other countries.

The dietetic customs—Puyi Zong, Dushan pickles and Huajiang dog meat

The Puyis have the reputation of “rice people”. Rice is their staple food. They like to cook a kind of sticky rice, which is made colorful with all kinds of flowers and leaves. There is a special food called “Puyi Zong”, in which sticky rice, preserved ham, black sesame and walnut are cooked and wrapped in a bamboo leaf. The Puyi Zong is the sacrifice to their ancestors, and it is a gift for their relatives and friends.

The Puyi people like pickled Chinese cabbage very much. There is a popular saying among the folk, “You can’t walk steadily after lacking three days of sour food.” Dushan pickles were one of the tributes to the emperor in

Qing dynasty. It is made from vegetables with sticky rice distillers grains, red capsicum, garlic, and sugar candy. The whole dish is limpid and shining with a yellow color, combining several favors such as sour, spicy, sweet, salty, etc. The Dushan pickles are sold to North American and Southeast Asia.

The Puyi people like to eat the meat of dog. The Huajiang dog meat is famous for its distinctive way of cooking and its tasty favor. The way of eating is quite complicated. First you put the thin pieces of dog meat to the hotpot and then dip it with salt, shallot, pepper, and mint. The favor is unforgettable.

The marriage customs—“Langshao” and “Staying away from husbands’ homes”

The Puyi people have their special ways of dating. Usually they meet on the fairs or other festivities. When a young man has affection for a girl, he would ask his sister to be his matchmaker. If the girl likes the young man, she would come with this young man to the mountains to sing songs to each other. This way of dating in Puyi language is called “langshao”, meaning dating. The “langshao” is mainly shown in the form of singing songs to each other. In the past, a young man would be regarded uncivilized and discriminated if he could not sing songs and he probably could not find a spouse.

In the past, there was a custom that the bride didn't come to live with her husband after the wedding ceremony. Many reasons contribute to this phenomenon. For example, the bride was too young, or the bride's family lacks labors. The age of the bride determines how long she stays with her families after she gets married. Generally speaking, it lasts from three to five years, but some people prolong it to seven or eight years, the wife would not come to live in her husband's home until she gets pregnant and begins to wear the headwear named “gengkao”. But this custom has been changed now.

The rites and festivals—the Spring Festival and the “cha-Bai fair”

Besides the festivals native to the Han People, the Puyis also have their own festivals. At the dawn of the lunar New Year's Day, all the girls strive to shoulder the first dan of water back home, which is considered “Clever Water”, while the boys strive to go to the local gods' temples to bring the little stones with rope to their stockyard, hoping the domestic animals all thrive. There are other festivals. According to Chinese lunar calendar, March 3rd is the day on which the Puyi people worship the mountain gods for their harvests; April 8th is the day to remember the farm cattle; June 6th is the day to worship the gods of land.

In the Chabai county of Xingyi City, people “go to the cha Bai fair”, a festival on June 21st of the lunar calendar. This festival is to commemorate a young man called Chalang and a girl named Baimei, who died for their love. People have observed this festival from Ming Dynasty. Every year thousands of young people in Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangxi come together on that special day. There are a lot of activities designed to celebrate the festival, such as singing, dancing, playing the Yueqin (moon guitar, a Chinese musical instrument) and “langshao” as well.

The ethnic arts—Bronze drum and “Nuo Opera”

The bronze drum is a traditional musical instrument that is highly respected by the Puyi people. Designs like sun, clouds, thunder, or boat are drawn on the surface of the drum, which is used mainly on grand occasions. The Puyi opera has been prevailing from Qing Dynasty among local people. The plots mainly stem from the legends of the Puyis. The actors are local farmers who are busily engaged in farming. The most distinctive Puyi opera is Nuo Opera, which is regarded as “the living fossil of Chinese opera”. The actors of Nuo Opera wear the masks sculpted by poplar wood. This exaggerated mask itself is a precious handicraft.

The religions—ancestor worship and nature worship

The main religions of the Puyis are ancestor worship and nature worship, and they are polytheists. Their traditional religion is the Mo Religion. The professional workers of Mo religion are called “bumo”. They esteem Baolutuo as their founder, have their own sutra (Mo sutra) and settled religious rites. Some people of the Puyis believe in Buddhism, Taoism and Catholicism as well.