

The She Ethnic Group



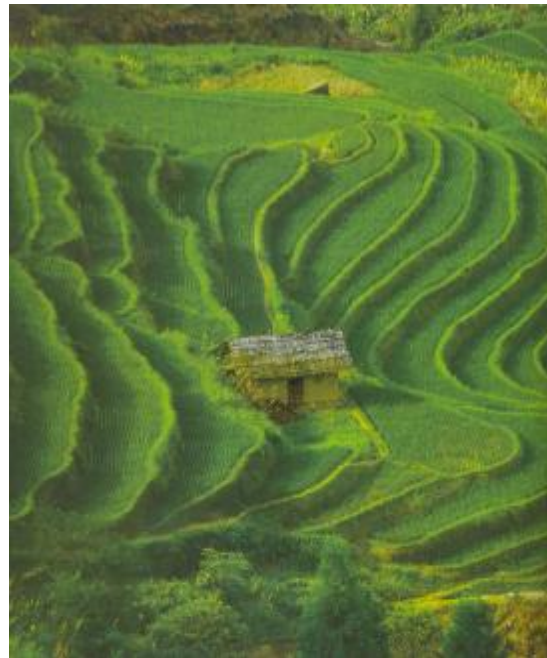
The phoenix mountain of Chaozhou in the Guangdong is the birthplace of the She people, who considered phoenix as the bird of luck. The She women love to wear phoenix dress with their phoenix-coronet-like head decorations and their aprons are embroidered with patterns of phoenixes. Peony stands for good fortune and luck. The pattern of phoenix playing with peony represents the aspirations of the She people for happiness.

The environment and population

There are altogether 709 592 She people in China, who mainly live in Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Guangdong Provinces. They scattered in the areas around the girders of Fujian and Zhejiang Provinces and live in small communities mixed with the Han people.

The government in 1984 founded Jingning She Autonomous Township in Zhejiang Province, the only She Autonomous County so far. In addition, there are 18 She Autonomous Townships in Zhejiang, 17 in Fujian, 2 in Jiangsu, and 1 in Anhui Province.

The Shes lives in hilly land, 500-1500 meters higher above the sea level, mainly in subtropical climate. With plenty of rain, warm and humid weather, it's important secondary forest zone and famous tea-producing area as well. The mountain areas of the Shes are also famous for raising rice and indigo.



The history and the formation of the Shes

The Shes have a close bond with the Yaos, both the offspring of the Wulingmans recorded in the documents in Chinese language in the Han-Jin period. There might even be some relationship between the Shes and the ancient Baiyue People. As an ethnic group, the Shes were formed in the Song Dynasty. In late Nan Song, other names to refer to the early Shes appeared and then passed down, such as Shemin. Thus the She people were recognized as an ethnic group. This name, along with Shanha, which the Shes used to address themselves, implies that the Shes used to be nomad farmers in mountain areas, featuring typical slash-and-burn cultivation.

The subgroups and language

There is no obvious difference between branches of the Shes. With the loss of their own language and culture, the Shes do not have a clear classification among the different branches of the Shes. But what's special with the She surnames is that they have Lan, Lei, Zhong, and Pan as the most dominant four surnames almost everywhere. Apart from that, Li and Su are also very influential surnames.

The Shes used to have their own language, which belonged to Miao language group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family, very close to the Jiongnai dialect of the Bunu language of the Yao people. But only few elders of the She people in Haifeng, Zengcheng, Huiyang, and Boluo counties speak this language. In daily conversations, they mainly speak Hakka dialect of Chinese Language. They do not have their own script. Chinese script is widely applied.



The costumes and ornaments —Phoenix

The Shes used to dye the self-made flax into dark blue and make clothes out of it. This kind of cloth is still popular among the Shes in rural areas. The unique clothing style is mainly embodied in women's clothes, especially in the phoenix sets consisting of Phoenix

hair-bun and Phoenix dress.

The phoenix sets can be put into three groups according to the age some key features: First, small phoenix set for young woman. They coil their hair on top of the heads and tie it with red wool thread, with bang hanging on the forehead. Their sleeves and collars are embroidered with narrow patterns on the edges. A girdle is bound towards the back on the waist, representing a phoenix tail. Then there follows the big phoenix set for married women, which, as the representative of the all phoenix sets, is featured for the higher hair-bun and more colorful patterns designed on clothes. The old-fashioned phoenix set is intended for aged women, with lower hair-bun and simpler color and patterns. These clothes are very much different from those of the neighboring ethnic groups, because they want to remember the Mt. Phoenix as the origin place of the Shes.

The She women also wear bamboo hats. Shanha ribbon is seen as the lucky article of the Shes, which is weaved with silk thread, also known as Huadai, Zidai, used as girdles, bride prices, gifts, or collections. Men have the same clothing style as the neighboring Han men.

The folk songs—Ocean of songs

The Shes like singing. They sing in fields when they are laboring as well as in some festival occasions among youngsters. Singing as to speak, singing as to express love, singing as to win the battle of wits has become one of the most popular scenes. There are two ways of singing: the falsetto by the youngsters and the real sound by adult men. There are solos, antiphonals, chorus, and the unique duets called Shuang Tiaoluo. They often hold grand song show on the Fenlong Festival in Lunar April, and on Lunar June 1st, July 7th, on Autumn begins, on August 15th, and on September 9th, when all the excellent singers are entitled to show their singing talents. There used to be bands playing folk musical instruments and acting dramas recomposed based on Chinese-written novels. Their favorite songs include The Songs of Gaohuang, which introduces the origin and the migration of the people; Zhongjingqi, and Lantianyu, which are composed based on folk stories. The Shes hence have been given a nice name as the ocean of songs.

The religion—Panhu worship

The Shes' religion is very typically featured in Panhu worship, a kind of ancestor worship. Panhu, also known as the Prince of Loyalty and Courage, is considered to be the common ancestor of all Shes. The whole system of Panhu worship consists of the stories of the birth, growing up, victories in battle fields, bearing children and death of Panhu, and the Zutu (paintings of the ancestors) based on all these stories, the Dragon-Head Stick representing Panhu, and the regularly-held (once in every three years) sacrifice-offering ceremony have become an important local festival.

Apart from the Panhu worship, the Shes have also incorporated elements of the Taoism and of the Han Buddhism. In recently years, some of the Shes have converted to Roman Catholic or Christianity.

The festivals

The Shes share much in common with the neighboring Hans regarding the festivals, such as Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Moon Festival and even Double Ninth Festival. But they celebrate these festivals in their own way. For instance, the first day of Lunar January is intended for the Jiangjiu Assembly, where the elders sing the Song of Gaohuang, recalling the oral history of the She people; the second day is for young men to go up to the mountains and offer sacrifices to the god of hunting, memorializing the long history of their farming and hunting life in the mountains areas. Moon Festival is also the autumn festa of their ancestor, when the Shes all make rice cake. The Shes also have festivals of their own, like the Huiqin (meetint relatives) Festival held on Lunar February 2nd, also the time for



Pangehui (Grand Song Show) in eastern Fujian. Wufan Festival is held on Lunar March 3rd, also known as Chengge Festival, when people eat Wufan and hold song parties; and on the Cow Resting Day, on Lunar April 8th, all the cows are off from work in fields and rest.