



## The Tujia Ethnic Group

The Tujia worship white tigers, and they deem white tiger as the god of family. In the Tujia's inhabitations, there are many places named after white tigers, and the images of white tiger also appear frequently on articles and dances. The "white tiger totemism" embodies the diligence, simplicity, courage, and the perseverance of the Tujia people.

### The environment and population

The Tujias also call themselves "Bizika", which means "local people". The present population of the Tujia people is 8 028 133. They mainly inhabit in the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Hunan Province, the Enshi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Hubei Province, and the Tujia or Tujia-Miao Autonomous Counties of Changyang, Wufeng, Xiushan, Yongyang, Qianjiang, Yinjiang, Yanhe which are respectively neighbored to Hunan Province, Hubei Province, Chongqing Municipality and Guizhou Province.

The hills where the Tujia inhabit are approximately 1000 to 1500 meters high above the sea level. In the areas flow over the Qing River and the Wu River, and spread the Mount Wu and Mount Wuling of the Three Gorges. The Tujias enjoy subtropical climate and plenty of rainfall throughout the year. Forest covers most of the region. Besides grains, tea and tung oil play major



commercial roles. The Tujias are also well known for their beautiful natural scenery and the riches of their tourist resources. As a typical one, Zhangjiajie scenic spot, which is known as "consisting of 3 000 wonderful peaks and 800 beautiful waters", was enlisted in the World List of Natural Legacy by the UNESCO in 1992, underlying the natural beauty of the unique hills and the strange stones as well as the ancient and wild scenery of the primitive hypo-forests.

### The ethnic origin and the language

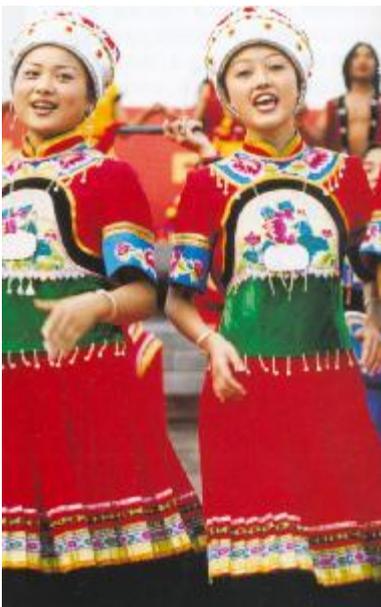
The Tujias have a long history, which originated from the ancient Ba people in the intersection area among the Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guizhou Provinces 2 000 years ago. The ancestors of the Tujias have been sequentially called "Wuling man", "Bandun man", "Wuxi man". After the policy of "converting the chieftain system as to be united to the political constitution of the nation" enforced by the Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, in order to distinguish themselves from the many immigrant Han people, the Tujias began to use the Chinese term "Tujia" (locals) to address themselves and "Kejia" (guests) to address the Han people. The Stated Council in 1957 officially approved the Tujias as one of its recognized minority ethnic groups.

The Tujias have an independent language close to the Yi language, which belongs to the Tibetan-Mian group of the Chinese –Tibetan language family. There are two dialect regions –the northern and the southern.. They have no written scrip and use Chinese character instead. The Tujias accepted the Han culture relatively early, so the minority is now using Chinese language except some 200 000 Tujia people still using Tujia dialect in some areas.

- **The resident characteristics—The buildings with suspended-corridor**

The Tujias typically dwell in wooden house. In the middle hall of a house, where there is a memorial tablet of their ancestors, they entertain their guests and worship their ancestors. There are fireplaces and bedrooms on both sides. The main gates and windows are all decorated with engraved wooden plates or wooden lattices, simply yet elegant. The special feature of the Tujia architecture is represented by the suspended-corridor of buildings. The house has tow stories, and the upper story has an extending corridor suspended in the air and the lower story has sculpted pillars on the ground. The eave points titled up on both ends of the corridor look grand. The complication of the architecture technique echoes to the saying : “A folk song is easy to say but hard to start, and for a carpenter to build a house with suspended –corridor is hard.”

- **The costumes and ornaments—The Bafuluo skirt and the embroidered pants**



In ancient time, the Tujia men and women all wore short dresses and pail form skirts, and kept awl-shaped hairstyle and bear feet. The clothing of men and women did not distinct until the Qing Dynasty. Traditional clothes are mostly made of self-weaved cloth, with black and blue as the most typical colors. Women roll their scarves into circles, and they like to wear jackets with buttons on the front-left., and “Bafuluo skirt” or “wide-legged pants”. The Tujias tend to embroider three colorful stripes on the edges of their clothes and trousers. Moreover they like wear silver jewels such as earrings, necklaces, bracelets, finger rings, etc. Tujia men usually roll their scarves into the shape of the Chinese character “ren”, and they wear jackets with buttons on the front and the embroidered pants. Nowadays, the young generation mainly prefers to modern clothes, and traditional clothes are only found in a few regions.

- **The ethnic delicates—Ciba and oil tea soup**

The Tujias are mainly fed on rice, corns, beans and potatoes. They favor sour and spicy food, and they like drinking. Every single family makes Ciba (sticky rice pie) on December 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar. To make “Ciba”, first soak sticky rice in water, and then steam it before grind it, finally use a wooden mold to press it into any desired design. It is good for home consumption and as well as for entertaining guests or for presenting a gift. The Tujias also enjoy oil tea soup. To make oil tea soup, first heat a steel pot till it looks red, and fry tea with oil made from tea tree seeds, and then put some water into the pot until the water becomes boiling. And finally put some sesame, ginger, onion, salt, dried rice and walnut into it. You must love the flavor.

## • The festivals—“Gannian Festival” and “Baishou Festival”

“Gannian Festival” is the most important traditional festival. The Tujias celebrate the Spring Festival one day earlier than the Han people do, and that’s why it’s called “Gannian” (earlier new year). It is said that when the ancestors of Tujias were fighting against foreign invasions, they celebrated the Spring Festival one day earlier to encourage the soldiers. And they defeated the enemy on the Eve of the Spring Festival. To memorize this victory, the Tujias began to celebrate their Spring Festival one day earlier since then.

“Baishou (Swinging Hands) Festival” on January 3<sup>rd</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> of lunar calendar is also a traditional festival of the Tujia people. They have grand song and dance activities on these days. Moreover they have the “Cattle King Festival” on April 7<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar and the “Sacrifices to Ancestors Festival” on June 6<sup>th</sup> of the lunar calendar. The Tuwang (head chief as local god) and the ancestors are all worshiped on every festival.

## The traditional handicraft —Xilankapu

“Xilankapu”, also called “Tujia brocade” is the famous craftwork of the Tujia. It is woven on the ancient slanting loom, with five-colored cotton yarn as the warp. And it is woven horizontally with identical



yarns, and the patterns are woven from the back. There are about 200 different traditional designs, which are all based on life and labor, and flowers, birds, worms, fishes, and beasts. The sophisticated technique and the magnificent colors make it enjoy the same prestige with Sichuan brocade and the Zhuang brocade. There is a wide range of products from quilt covers, pillows, brocade bags, brocade clothes, sofa covers, tablecloths, and hangings. All these products are very popular both at home and abroad.

## • The songs and dances—The crying-over-marriage songs, the hand-swinging dance and “Da liuzi”

The Tujias love singing folk songs, and they can give an excellent performance by playing a tree leaf in their mouth. There are various kinds of folk songs such as labor songs, custom songs, and the crying-over-marriage songs sung by the bride on her wedding. Every girl learns and practices ever since childhood. The wording goes as follows: “So sad are the brother and sister-in-law, seeing their young sister leaving; come to see our mother in spite of the water, which is before our house flowing.” The song fully expresses the bride’s reluctance to leave home.

The Tujias in the Xiangxi area hold a grand swinging-hand dance that may attract thousands of participants shortly after the Spring Festival. The dance has more than 40 different series of actions,

which range from labor, life, to wars and myths. The ancient drama "Maogusi" is usually played during the break time, when the actors are dressed in straws, imitating the three generations of their ancient ancestors.

The Tiaosang dance is the typical funeral and memorial dance of the Tujias. The Chief dancer sings as he plays a drum in front of the dead and meanwhile others join the song with their dance. The melody is changed according to the drum beating.

Nuo Opera is also an integrated performance art favored by most Tujia people. It combines drama, zarzuela, music, dance, and it originated from the ceremonial dance when the Tujias redeem their vows. The actions of the dance are somewhat minified and words are popular and funny.

"Da Liuzi" is a unique percussion instrumental performance, which combines chess drum, first cymbal, local gong and horse gong. It takes three to four players and offers excellent cooperation and clear rhythm. There are more than 100 different beautiful types of music for voices.

#### • The religions—Tuwang worship and the Linjun legend

The Tujias believe in the primitive religion of animism. From the Tang Dynasty on, they began to believe in Tulaosi (local chief) and their ancestors. The chieftains named Peng ruled the Xiangxi region for more than 800 years, so the Tulaosi became the god worshiped by the Tujias. Every village has a Baishou Hall where three idols of Penggong, Xiang Laoguan and Tian haohan are worshiped. Besides, Taoism also has certain impact on the Tujias.



The story of the "Linjun" is still told among the Tujias in the Qingjiang River valley. It is said that their ancestor Bawuxiang was later elected as the cacique of five different tribes, and was then called Linjun. And his soul became a white tiger and ascended to heaven after his death. Since then, white tiger became their god of ancestor.