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GUIZHOU PUBLISHING GROUP

# Piled Dwellings

Editor: Guizhou Ethnic Publishing House

Editor-in-chief: Wan Zhixian

Author: Ma Yongbin ,Zhong Tao etc





# TREASURES OF ETHNIC AND FOLK ARTS

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### Piled Dwellings

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# Overview

## I. Close Connection to “Nest buildings”

### 1. History of Piled Dwellings

Piled dwellings are beautiful.

The famed writer, Shen Congwen, has written many touching love stories happening in piled dwellings. People living in these buildings are kindhearted, honest and lovely; they and the buildings are admired, loved and dreamed by others.

Many scholars on history of architectural culture believe that piled dwellings have deep connection with the primitive style of living: living in nests. Abundant relating data in this field proves that nest buildings and cave buildings are both the oldest forms of residential constructions distributed in the South and North respectively.

Piled dwellings is a particular form of construction in South China, in which are dwelling ethnic groups in the areas of today's Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, Guangxi and Yunnan. The geographic distribution coincides with the areas which still have piled dwellings today. The earliest book which referred to piled dwellings as *Ganlan* is written in the Northern Qi Dynasty, named *The Book of the Liao People in the Wei Dynasty* (Liao, people lived in ancient Lingnan and Yunnan areas). According to this book, *Ganlan* is a house made of wood on trees. This shows that ancient names of piled dwellings are not Chinese but words from ethnic languages, which are recorded as *Ganlan*, *Malan* or *Ganlan* based on their sounds in Chinese. The languages of Miao, Yao, Buyi and Zhuang people today still have names with similar sounds and meanings, which confirm the narration of the ancient people. Meanwhile, it indicates that the earliest tribes who made and used this form of construction are the ancestors of these people.

The research of experts on the history of architectural culture proves that the cultural root of piled dwellings can be traced back to the *Ganlan*-style buildings, 7,000 years ago in Hemudu, Yuyao City, Zhejiang Province. From the perspective of genesis study, the cultural basis to primitive nest buildings is the living conditions in the south in ancient times. The southern ancients lived in swamp, in order to adapt to the watery area, they created this special residential style. This is an evolutionary process from simplicity to complexity.



### 2. Types of Piled Dwellings

Description and understanding of piled dwelling usually begin from its characteristics of appearance. Basically, the “legs” of these buildings, actually the pillars, are suspended in midair. This is the meaning given by culture others. Now, piled dwelling has broader meanings beyond its origin, becoming a construction form different from *Siheyuan* (the quadrangle). To understand this construction, we should analyze its sub-types.

Some scholars divide piled dwelling into “whole-building (*quanlouju*)” and “semi-building (*banlouju*)”. The bamboo buildings of Dai people are whole-buildings, and houses of Miao people living in Mount Leigong area, in Southeast Guizhou belong to semi-buildings. However, piled dwellings along the banks of rivers and brooks in Hunan, Guizhou and Sichuan areas, as those loved by Shen Congwen often seen in the West Hunan, are neither whole-buildings nor semi-buildings. And the wing rooms built by the sides of piled dwellings cannot be classified into either of them. Therefore, we suggest dividing piled dwellings into “principle-room building” and “wing-room building”.

“Principle room” is the name for principal buildings among folks, equaling to the main hall in a royal palace. Principle-room buildings include both whole-buildings and semi-buildings on mountains, as well as those built by the riverside preferred by Le Jiazao (the author of *History of Chinese Architecture*, 2005) and Shen Congwen.

Wing-room style piled dwellings are “sided houses” or *silou* in folklore, which are built on one side or both sides of the principle rooms.

### 3. Distribution of Piled Dwellings

Wing-room style piled dwellings mainly spread in West Hunan, West Hubei, Southeast Chongqing and Northeast Guizhou. This style can be further divided into single-wing building and double-wing building. One purpose of building this kind of piled dwelling is to enlarge the space; the other is to safeguard the residents. That means, the wing rooms are used for observation, preventing attacks from a commanding height. Moreover, it has more subtle and complex cultural objectives in terms of aesthetics and geomancy. If a piled dwelling has wing-rooms, a high wall will be built in front of the courtyard to form a closed space with principle rooms, wing rooms and wall. The door is open to the wing room. Strictly speaking, this kind of piled dwelling does not belong to what referred to as *Malan* or *Ganlan* in ancient



books like *Introduction to Lingnan*. It is the annex to the closed courtyard with the characteristics of *Malan* or *Ganlan*. With a long history of evolution, it has become a unique type of piled dwelling, overshadowing the characteristics of the main building it annexed to.

Principle-room style piled dwellings mainly distribute in Southeast, South and Southwest Guizhou and North Guangxi. Southeast Guizhou is the representative, where this kind of construction can be seen throughout the areas of Qingshuijiang River basin and Duliujiang River basin.

#### 4. Ethnic Characteristics of Piled Dwellings

Peoples, which build and use the principle-room style piled dwellings, are Miao, Dong, Buyi, etc., along with Han people and other ethnic groups living in these areas.

During the construction and use of this type of piled dwellings, each ethnic group has its own cultural objectives and characteristics related to the living conditions. In comparison, Miao and Dong people in Southeast Guizhou and East Guangxi have similarities in building and using this construction: the materials are all wood. The slight difference lies in that Miao people make the houses suspended high above the ground, while Dong people tend to build the houses clustering around the drum tower. Buyi, Miao and Zhuang peoples in Southwest and South Guizhou are obviously affected by the Karst topography in building and using this construction in that they rely much on stones. The upper part of their piled dwellings is made of wood and the lower part, stone.

Two-story piled dwellings are commonly constructed and used by Han, Tujia and Miao peoples in West Hubei, Southeast Chongqing, West Hunan and Northeast Guizhou. Among them, Han and Tujia peoples show similar ideas and interests in this respect; while Miao people build more single-story piled dwellings and their two-story piled dwellings have no wall in front of the courtyard which connects the main building and the piled dwelling to form an enclosed space.

In Miao's villages in Rongjiang County, Southeast Guizhou, there's a unique kind of piled dwelling, which is composed of two parts: the lower is a supporting framework and the upper is the house. The house is built on the platform supported by the framework. This does not resemble to the whole-building nor the semi-building, but its spatial function well fits the description of "the upper being used for residence and the lower for the livestock" in ancient books, so it should be counted as piled dwelling.

#### 5. Appearance of Piled Dwellings

The principle-room type of piled dwelling is built on mountain slopes or along the river sides. The rear part is jointed to the slop and the forepart is suspended by wooden pillars. The ground floor has shallow depth and the floor is partly on the ground and partly in the air. The width is mainly three bays and occasionally four bays, with an orderly arrangement — three higher and one lower. Since the shortage of money or limited terrain, some families only build two rooms or even one room, but the mortises are left for further expansion when the condition permits.

Piled dwellings on mountains usually sit against the hillside and face the river, extending parallel to contour lines. If necessary, people will dig, fill or rebuild the slopes to ensure the buildings vertical to contour lines. On gradual slopes, the houses will be moved forward to let the forepart leave the ground. The house should not fully touch the ground which is uneven, so the floor is partly on the ground and partly in the air. Space of the building is divided into three layers: the bot-



tom is used for production, the middle is for living and the top is for storage. In ancient Chongqing, many villages and towns have wooden houses that share the above mentioned characteristics, but they are not piled dwellings exactly.

The basic structure of piled dwellings is called "chuan-dou framework" (*chuan* and *dou* are names of two kinds of horizontal columns perpendicular to each other), under which the main pillars bear the load, and the weight of the house is transmitted to the ground through the vertical pillars directly. To maintain stable, the peripheral pillars and central pillar are connected by horizontal columns, called *fang*, which are further connected by logs running through the central pillar. One more *fang* will be added to those close to the roof, and in lower levels, one *fang* connects the front pillar to the interior peripheral pillar. Each pillar is ranged with equal distance to adjacent the one and each rafter on the purlins bears equal weight of the roof. Today's piled dwellings are usually covered with grey tiles or fir tree bark.

Walls in piled dwellings nearly bear no load, but function as shields or partitions. They are mainly made of wood. Floor slabs are set according to the height between stories to lay the planks, one end of which joins the ground and the other mounts on the girt. The hanging floor is built on beam columns stretching out of the pillars; or another beam column is used to connect the interior and exterior peripheral pillars.

*Yaoyan* (a type of eave) is formed by the downward slanting crossbeam, covered with tiles to protect the structural components from the erosion of wind and rain, as well as shield the house from the sun. In order to meet these goals and al-



low ventilation at the same time, *yaoyan* is densely arranged with tiles, jutting out 1 to 1.5 meters from the walls, oblique with an angle of 25 to 30 degrees. This structure not only increases the stability of the construction, but also beautifies its appearance.

The middle layer is the main story of a piled dwelling. The middle layer of piled dwellings of Miao and Dong peoples in Southeast Guizhou and North Guangxi is divided into the interior and exterior parts.



The interior part is laid on the solid ground, while the exterior part is suspended in midair. The bottom floor is for the livestock. The width is three bays: the hall is the principle room and the minor rooms are bedrooms. The principle room sets back, in front of which is a corridor as long as the three rooms or the hall and one minor room. The section of corridor right in front of the principle room is installed with gracefully curved railings, which are known as *Meirenkao* in Chinese; literally it means leaned by beauties because it is said that ancient beautiful girls, who cannot go out much, often lean on these railings to look out. Those proper curves of the bentwood make a beautiful contrast with and the straight lines; they complement each other and well blend in. The spacious and bright front corridor is the place for rest and needlework; it also serves as a transition space between the inside and the outside — leading the outside scenery to the room. The principal hall is a public space for the whole family, also a sacred space for family worship and other ceremonies.

Wing-room piled dwellings have two or three stories. Suspending pillars are used to build corridor upstairs and, at the same time, avoid erecting another row of pillars for this end. Obviously, more pillars will decrease the area of the courtyard. The overhung eaves are protruding outward to a great extent, towering into the sky. This structure is not set by any rules; it is a kind of humanism expression of residents' identities. The wing room seems conspicuous but actually refrained in the size and structure by the principle room. If the principle room has five rows of pillars, the wing room should only use three or four rows. It's a violation to the taboo if the wing room has the same amount of pillars or even more. Moreover, the wing-room piled dwelling cannot be higher than the principle room no matter how



many floors it has. Among the folks, nobody dare to build the wing-room piled dwelling that equal to or larger than the principle room in terms of size, structure and height. The violation indicates the family will have black sheep, jeopardizing the whole family. Hence one can see that the beauty of wing-room piled dwelling has no limits, but its structure is strictly restricted by the principle room. The hierarchy of structure was laid out by the loyal family, which consists of the core of Han people's architectural culture. To conclude, we think the beauty as well as the function of this kind of piled dwelling is a decoration and shield to the principle room. The main cultural connotation of the characteristic construction style is not a form of piled dwelling, but a variant of courtyard construction in ethnic areas.

## II. Spatial Function

House construction has many considerations, which consist of a series of traditional rites, with involvement of wizards, craftsmen and

common people, ceremonious and mysterious. Outsiders and culture others cannot understand it, and tend to consider it as superstitious activities. Actually, the traditional knowledge and ingenious ideas in it have their own logics.

### 1. Construction Process

The construction process refers to the whole process from site selection to work completion. During this process, there are a great many rites, usually related to safety and the owner's future fortune; hence highly regarded by the builders and the wizard.

#### (1) Selecting the site

Each ethnic group has its own way of selecting sites for houses. Han and Tujia peoples care more about geomancy (or *fengshui* in Chinese), so they will hire geomancers to measure with tools like compass, to analyze with principles in books, and then choose the site for laying the foundation. Miao people in Northeast Guizhou, West Hunan, Southeast Chongqing and West Hubei also invite geomancers to appraise the site of the house foundation. Such things should be planned before hand. Miao people in Southeast Guizhou, South Guizhou, Southwest Guizhou, South Sichuan and North Yunnan choose the site for the house foundation by practising divination. Miao people in Southeast Guizhou will invite a wizard to measure the terrain and then slaughter a duck at the selected site for foundation. After cooked, if both of the duck's eyes are open or closed, the site can be used; if one eye open and the other closed, the site should be abandoned. For those who have no duck, a rooster can be used to replace it. However, this is not the final. Bamboos or maples should then be planted; if they survive and thrive, this foundation can put into use; otherwise, it should be abandoned. This method is called "plant divination". There's another method of divination for site selection in this area, which can be called "rice wine divination". It requires people to get an egg-sized lump of new soil from the selected foundation and crush it into powder. Then spread the powder into the glutinous rice ball which is ready to produce sweet wine (rice wine). Repeatedly stir it until it's evenly spread. Put them into an earthen jar, make it compact and seal the jar. Ten days later, open the jar and check: if the wine is sweet, it shows the foundation is auspicious; if the wine does not ferment properly or goes bad, it's an ill omen meaning the foundation should be abandoned at any rate and choose another site. Miao people still have some other site-choosing methods initiating associations, though they are no accompanied with rites. These methods show their respects to a certain life phenomenon which possesses divine essence, like some mystical objects and phenomenon. If some big families decide to move and they don't know where to go, they will wait some mystical phenomenon and follow it until reaching a destination which is not predetermined. For example, there is a Miao village in Northeast Guizhou, named Shuiwei in Chinese, located in an out-of-the-way mountain area. The ancestors of this village chose this place because they once caught a tiger here that gave birth to a cub in the cage. They thought it was a mystical phenomenon or a hint given by deities. This method is quite different from those based on metaphysic ideas, like *yin* and *yang*, *qi* or *xing*; but results from the understanding to the life signs of the divine phenomena. Miao people believe that all "objects" (including plants, mountains and rivers) have life and that to approach, pursue and admire those mystical objects will receive their shelter and help, share their unique "power" of life, and acquire special vitality through the process of assimilation or involvement with them. Next ritual after site selection is ground breaking. Miao people will invite a local prestigious wizard to host the sacrificial ceremony to expel the evil and



settle the divine. For Han and Tujia peoples, Dong people in the north and Buyi people in some places, the main function of the ground-breaking rite is to evade the demons like Taisui and to report the commence to the local God of Land. Otherwise, it's possible to irritate them and incur disaster. At the rite, the owner will prepare meat and liquor as sacrifice to worship in the Temple of Land God in the village, asking for his shelter. Then a rooster will be slaughtered, and its blood, mixed with rice and tea leaves, will be spread on the boundary of the foundation. Four corners of the boundary will be hoed, representing the ground breaking. The specific practices during this process vary slightly in different areas. Take Dong and Tujia peoples for example, they will decide the direction in which the gate is open before breaking the ground. This procedure is called *jia xiang*, a mystical wizard activity. If the house is built on an old foundation, the old stones and soil should be moved after the sacrificial ceremony and new soil should be filled in or dug out; if the old house on the foundation was burnt, the foundation should be plowed at a ceremony: a wizard, mounting on a bull, plows the foundation with three round trips, before which a section of red cloth, a red rooster, liquor and meal, candles and incense, joss paper, etc. should be prepared.

#### (2) Choosing building materials

The residents are peculiar about choosing the wood. It seems that they prefer fir trees or pine trees as the building material, without any distinct taboo or preference. However, Miao people love maple trees among the others, taking it as the only "precious" material. In the past, Miao people insisted on finding a high and straight and flourishing maple tree as the central pillar for their houses at any cost. Although now it's quite difficult to find such a maple tree, they will try their best to find maple to make the pillar. Only in this way can they feel at ease. If they find a maple tree that is proper for making the central pillar, they will worship it no matter how far or dangerous is the way. As it rarely rains in the autumn, it is the time for hewing. They will invite a master carpenter and some strong men in the family to fulfill this task. The selected men should have sons, daughters, and parents alive and health, as well as good conduct and healthy body. Before hewing, the owner should faithfully worship this maple tree with meal, liquor, incense and candles. Then the owner and the master carpenter each hew at the tree once, and then those strong men continue to cut down it. When the tree is about to fall, they join their efforts to push or pull the tree to fall in the direction of the east, where the sun rises. Then, they chop off the branches and carry the trunk back home. On the way home, the end touching the ground should point to the front. Then it should be put on a place seldom reached by people, with stones below and raising it about 70 cm above the ground. People are prohibited to step across it or sit on it. Every morning and evening, people should worship it with tea or liquor, and during the festivals, the sacrifice should be more steps. All in all, the wood selected for making pillars, beams or columns should be suitable for construction and able to imply auspicious meanings. The wood mustn't have any connection with death or sterility. Therefore, trees beside tombs can never be used to build houses; trees surrounding temples can neither be used nor be logged; trees on venues of lawsuits against demons or ghosts or places that thought to be haunted by devils can never be used either; otherwise, there will be disasters. Moreover, trees on which somebody has hanged himself/herself, trees hit by thunder, trees that die without reasons, and so on are all considered ominous, thus cannot be used in construction or even making coffins. To conclude, the construction materials should avoid associations with lawsuit, ghosts, devil, etc. and the auspice means staying far away from the objects harmful to

the multiplication of lives.

#### (3) Deciding constructors

The main participant in construction is the master carpenter. Generally speaking, people will hire those who learn craft from great masters and have excellent skills and "magic powers". The carpenters with divine nature can build houses that will enrich the dwellers and remove the ill fortunes. And the whole process of construction will go on smoothly and harmoniously. Less importantly, the carpenters should be carefree and broad-minded. Additionally, they'd better be blessed men with a lot of children. Those who have no kids will not be hired as master carpenters. Other participants are normally the owner's brothers, cousins or intimate friends. From the requirements on carpenters and participants in important matters, we can see that they believe the multiplying results of the carpenters directly affect those of the future dwellers. They hope the carpenters use their crafts and magic powers to pass their own multiplying ability to the dwellers. It seems that the construction process is thought to be something as continuing the family line.

#### (4) Rites during the wood work

The pillars should be made following the growth direction of the plant, namely the tip still pointing to the ceiling and the root touching the ground. The reverse is violating the taboo. On the first day, a central pillar should be made, as a rite of starting the construction, called *famo* (it literally means drawing the first line with ink as a benchmark). This rite should be done on a lucky day. When the master carpenter arrives, other participants should carry the tree used as the central pillar to the construction site and set it on a wooden horse in the direction set by the geomancer. The master carpenter lays out his tools on it, and then burn some incenses and candles to worship, mumbling imprecations to invite deceased masters to enjoy the meal and liquor and come to help and to send off unlucky ghosts and spirits, in order to ensure a smooth construction. His performance is under a mysterious aura. When uttering the imprecations, he is holding a red rooster and making bows with hands folded in front (*zuoyi*). After finishing, he



breaks the rooster's crest and spread its blood on all his tools and the ends and center of the central pillar. After this ceremony, the master carpenter will load its ink marker with new cotton ball, new thread and new ink, and then make an ink line on the central pillar solemnly. This procedure is the so called *famo*. This line should start from the root of the wood. If the line is clear-cut and even, it represents good luck. Therefore, the preparation for making this ink line should be adequate: the ink should be sufficient, well-mixed with proper amount of water; and the thread should soak enough ink. The owner and all participants attach much importance to the omen given by this rite. In the case of the good omen, all are happy and cheerful and the owner will give the



carpenter gratuities. Then the master carpenter will whittle the central pillar with an ax and the first stroke should be made with great force. The wood chips should fly the farther the better, indicating the owner will become rich fast and long. During the construction process, the most important rite is that for “making beams”. The trees used for making beams are fir trees with two branches. The tradition observed by Han and Tujia peoples in West Hunan, Southeast Chongqing and Northeast Guizhou is to steal others’ trees for making beams. So do the Dong people in the North area and the Yao people in the North Guangxi. The rite to worship the beam is closely linked to the mystical arts in Taoism. The construction process integrates the architectural culture of the Northern Han people and the interpretation to house, life and fortune of the Southern ethnic groups. The beams are greatly respected, though they are not functionally important parts for piled dwellings. At all the rites throughout the construction process, none of the poems or eulogies is recited completely in ethnic languages but in Chinese. The purpose is to show respect to Lu Ban, the greatest master in construction in Chinese history, and use the master of the Year of Earth to frighten the ghosts and devils. The beams are not aboriginal in the culture of piled dwelling, which are not an important component in its primitive forms. Probably, it results from accumulated experience of nest constructions, for the security of nests relies on the supporting trunk and its branches. The trunk supports the whole house while the branches bear the weight of the roof and the pull from all sides. Piled dwellings are deeply influenced by this kind of experience. The initial purpose of living on trees is to avoid assaults from beasts; this kind of construction resembles birds’ nests. Naturally, living in these buildings will accumulate a lot of living experience and life associations linked to birds, which will evolve into the root knowledge of a tribe and derive more complex variations.

#### (5) Rite for the completion of construction

This rite begins from the framework completion to the completion of tiling. During the whole process, Chinese is the language for reciting eulogies. The main procedure is to worship Lu Ban when the lucky day comes. The master carpenter should burn incenses and joss papers, uttering incarnations to invite his ancestors to help him, driving away demons and devils, protecting the safety of him and other participants, and guaranteeing a smooth construction process. Then he will read aloud exorcisement holding a red rooster. After finishing, he will knock the foot of the pillar with the back of an ax, making loud sound, and recite another set of curses at the same time. Under his guidance, people join their efforts to assemble the well-made frameworks by pulling the top with ropes and propping up the middle with tree forks. The frameworks should be pulled up and assembled following the sequence: the left and then the right. The last step is to pull the beam onto the pillar.

#### (6) Relationship between width and height

The width of a room is the distance from a row of pillar to the adjacent. A principle-room piled dwelling normally has five rows of pillars and three rooms. Its height of the first floor is 2.3 to 2.6 meters, and that of the second and third floors is 5.3 to 6.5 meters. The exact height should be a lucky number by adding its figures of *zhang*, *chi*, and *cun*. The room is 3.5 to 4.3 meters wide and 4.6 to 5.4 meters deep. A wing-room piled dwelling usually has only one room or two at most. Its principle room is 3.5 to 4.3 meters wide and 5.3 to 6.3 meters high. The exact figures are all decided in the same way, such as 1.16 *zhang*, 0.98 *zhang*, 1.28 *zhang*, etc. A wing-room building can have two or three floors, but its size cannot be equal to or bigger than the principle room. For instance, if the principle room has five rows of pil-

lars, it can only use three or four rows.

#### (7) Relationship between structure and scale

In the Han culture, the number “8” is attached with blessing to family members and their fortune because “8” is pronounced similarly to the Chinese character *fa*, meaning becoming rich. However, ethnic peoples care little about this phonetic association; they prefer “8” just because of their understanding to the overall measurement of the house structure. Yet they have clear idea to the number of pillars, especially Miao people. All forms of structure are acceptable but those without central pillars; besides, there should be an odd number of pillars, like three, five, seven or nine.

### 2. Interior Space

The partition of the interior space contains abundant traditional culture. The core is the belief of “the lengthwise central being the respectable”, to the contrary of Han people’s respect to the “widthwise central”.

#### (1) Space for ancestors and gods

Han people and some ethnic groups that are deeply influenced by Han people set shrines in the principle room. Miao people are different. Influenced by Han people, some will place a “niche for ancestors” on the wall of the principle room, with no tablets for idols. Typically, Miao people will place ancestors’ tablets on pillars (usually the central pillar on the left of the principle room); some even place them under the tiles in the back room. This is a typical feature of nest living cul-



ture: putting the ancestors’ niche at a high place would be safe. The primitive nest buildings are not quite stable, so the most suitable place for the elders to live and rest is somewhere close to the pillar, the most secure place. The door of the principle room is a symbolic component. Every ethnic group has similar or identical ideas on this. The bottom is slightly wider than the top by 1.2 *cun*. Some explain that it is easier for carrying firewood into the room; others say the shape resembles a funnel, with two leafs and high sill, so it can invite in wealth. Actually, these interpretations haven’t got the point. The top wider than the bottom signifies “the sky larger than the earth”; and 1.2 *cun* represents 12 months of a *year*. Moreover, the door should be narrower than the shrine by 1.2 *cun*; the figure has the same connotation. And the wider shrine implies that nobody can move it out and the divine will always accompany the house’s masters. Wing-room piled dwellings leave no space for ancestors or gods.

#### (2) Space for living

A principle-room piled dwelling normally has three rooms; the middle one is the main space for family activities, such as meeting



guests, taking a rest, dinning, family education and sacrificial ceremonies. The minor room on the left is for parents and the one on the right is for unmarried daughters. The inside is an open space without partitions, used for placing stoves, cupboards, water jars pickle jars and kitchen utensils. Wing-room piled dwellings are usually the living place for unmarried children. Boys live on the side to which the side-door opens, in order to guard against burglars. Girls live on the other side, embroidering and reading.

### (3) Space for livestock

Livestock live under people's living space; this arrangement is fixed by life experience in the nest living age. Livestock at the ground floor can alarm the people against burglars; staying overhead enables people to fight back easily in the case of assaults. Wing-room piled dwellings have the same arrangement for the same purpose, but the underlying logic is more complicated, involving the overall arrangement of the courtyard system. A piled dwelling serves as the annex to the principle room, adding its complexity and beauty, shielding the principle room and integrating the whole house into a living space similar to a castle. Therefore, arranging the functions of the ground floor should correspond to the structure of the principle room. If the house has two wings, the barn and kitchen are arranged on the side where girls live, and the livestock, ash fertilizer cellar and toilet, on the other side where boys live.

## 3. Exterior Space

The exterior space includes the platform extending from the piled dwelling, the courtyard, backyard, fields of various plants, etc. which could stretch to a vast area outwards. This space is recognized by the house owners themselves and enclosed by fences or other objects. Within the boundary, the house owners can build other constructions as they wish, such as a basement, baking room, etc. The exterior space of a principle-room piled dwelling is mainly a platform or bracket extending from the pedestal or somewhere else of the house, centering on the principle room and catering to various needs for convenient life. The supplementary space makes the whole house a complex structure in the midair, never touching the ground.

## 4. Logic Behind Space Allocation

### (1) Spiritually requirements on space allocation

Piled dwellings are mainly in Luban's construction style, whose space for gods should always be the central room, no matter what transformation it has undergone. However, the rule has been neglected by Miao people gradually. They think gods should live on the central pillar in the room with fire pit. For Han people and those influenced by Han culture, the sacred position of the central room is determined by the divine position of the house foundation. The center of the central room is a "cave", the only point of wealth and prosperity under the geomancy system. Interestingly, we can draw such a conclusion here: the outset of Han's architectural culture is the experience of living in caves; in other words, it's based on the divinity of the land and the terrain.

### (2) Space allocation under the systematic management

House is the living place of dwellers, their daily activities like placing, taking and using means of livelihood and production require orderly allocation of the spaces. People in different area have their own ways to manage the interior spaces, related to utilization of natural resources. For instance, in the area with well-developed water transportation networks, the surrounding rivers should be taken into consideration. The space allocation of piled dwellings should prevent from floods on the one hand, and on the other hand, facilitate making



full use of the boats in the river. Principle-room piled dwellings on mountains also follow a systematic arrangement: the middle floor is for living; the ground floor is for livestock, tools keeping and toilet; and the top floor is storage. Wing-room piled dwellings, as annexes to the principle room, expand its space as needed, enhancing coordination and harmony between different functional spaces and facilitating life and production to the greatest extent under a fixed structure. To conclude, the importance of spatial functions of piled dwellings decreases from the interior to the exterior, from their satisfying survival needs to life needs to spiritual needs. For example, convenience of life brought about by the interior system outweighs beauty of the exterior appearance.

## 5. Emotional Space

Emotional space refers to some public facilities and places, varying among different ethnic groups. Miao people's emotional spaces include level grounds called *Lushengping* (literally, a place for playing *lusheng*, a Chinese traditional reed-pipe wind instrument), colourful bridges, maple forests for worshipping ancestors; Dong people's emotional spaces mainly include roofed bridges and drum towers.

(1) Relationship between emotions attached to and forces of construction components

The key component of the primitive nest buildings is the pillar (the tree). It gives the vertical support to the house, absence of which will bring devastating disasters to the construction and the dwellers. Consequently, love of and worship to the pillar or the tree have been developed in nest life for the safety, which further derives corresponding architectural culture. The most primitive part remained in the culture of piled dwellings is the attachment to pillars (trees). For cave houses, the key component is the roof, which provides horizontal support and ensures the safety of the construction and the dwellers. Lack of this force, deathly catastrophes will ensue. Naturally, stressed by life experience, the importance of the "roof" derives worship and various architectural components. During





the architectural evolution, roof has evolved into beam, so the worship to roof has been turned to beams. The core of Han people's architectural culture is the worship to beams.

#### (2) Logical relations between spatial structure and safety idea

The core principle behind piled dwellings' spatial structure is to build them on high and dangerous place according to the terrain. A high and dangerous place increases the difficulty for invaders to assault the residents. Primitive nest buildings can achieve this purpose in two ways: to build the house on a high tree or to choose a tree in a dangerous place. Therefore, the location and structure of houses have been set gradually and the suspension style has become the principle of construction.

#### (3) Rules for space expansion

The space expansion of piled dwellings centering on the main house as an axis and complex structures are vertically arranged as needed. The whole structure should benefit the dwellers only. People believe that the invaders, their enemies or animals, will alarm the livestock on the ground floor; dwellers on the second floor can fight back from a higher position; and the foodstuffs above are convenient for protection and use.

### III. Decoration and Annexes

The beauty of piled dwellings never relies on decoration; on the contrary, they are plain, with little decoration. Even if there are some, they are not in pursuit of beauty but for some functional purposes. So we can say the beauty is not designed by constructors on purpose, but out of chance.

Generally speaking, main decorations or places with decoration are partitions, doors, windows, firepits, short pillars, railings, corridors, stairs, etc.

Materials used for decoration can be wood, which is the most common, or others like bamboo strips, cornstalks, sunflower stalks, small wood strips, fir tree bark, straw, wheat stalks, withered grass, stones, clay, lime and bullshit, etc. Selection of materials depends on the family's financial situation and accessibility of materials. Rich families can decorate the house with wood, bricks and tiles, even well-shaped stones.

Decorations with local characteristics include wall of bamboo strips and roof of tree bark.

In places abundant in bamboos, partitions made of bamboo strips are common. Bamboo strips, cornstalks, sunflower stalks, small wood strips, fir tree bark, straw and wheat stalks are usually used by poor families, who will improve the decoration gradually if they have more money. To make bamboo partitions, bullshit is used as auxiliary material. After the partition is weaved with bamboo strips, bullshit is needed to print both the interior and exterior sides. Sometimes, lime will be mixed into bullshit to make it whiter; and if necessary, straw cut into pieces of 1 to 2 cun will be blended into it to increase the strength of the coating. Bullshit cannot only make the bamboo partition more smooth and beautiful, but also help to keep the house warm. Ancient people also make use of bamboo partitions to defend because it's resilient, hard to be pushed over, and meanwhile, the insiders can observe the outside through the gaps on the wall and respond quickly.

#### 1. Interior Decoration

As partitions are usually made of wood, which is easy to be damaged by sunshine and rain, households will, if they have money, print a layer of oil (oil from trees called tong or other kinds of oil) to protect

it. Partitions covered with this kind of oil will turn to purple brown, blending well with the grey tiles or fir tree bark on the roof.

Partitions include the fence around the house, plates dividing interior space, floor plates, etc. Carpenters to make the niche for ancestors should have a prosperous family with both sons and daughters. The day to begin the construction should be decided by a geomancer.

Installation of the surrounding plates usually begins from the room with firepit, namely from the left to the middle and then to the right room. Installation of the floor plates starts from the ground floor, followed with the surrounding plate of the second floor; and then the floor plate of the top floor, followed with the surrounding plate of the third floor; at last, the surrounding plate of the ground floor. The strange order actually follows the principle of "places for ancestors and elder generations first".

After the surrounding plates installed, the next step is to install partitions for dividing rooms. The order is basically from left to right, but it can also start from the middle and then the two sides. To follow which order depends on the same principle mentioned above.

Installation of the gate is a symbolic task, which should be done in an auspicious day. For Miao people in Southeast Guizhou, carpenters should slaughter a duck and spread its blood to the gate.

For the ethnic groups deeply influenced by Han people, the decoration of the main hall resembles typical Han families, but their shrines are attached with special symbols and meanings. For example, a big Dong family may have a similar idol niche to that of Han people, but the carving decoration reveals different stories. To take another example, on the idol niche, some ethnic groups sacrifice bows and arrows; some, root of trees or bamboos; others, wood carving dog heads. These are all differences in decoration of the main hall.

Decorations of doors in piled dwellings have two forms. First, some households may use the ground floor for living instead of raising livestock, so they need a gate as the entrance and exit. These houses are usually built on flat places. Outside the gate, a short gate stands to the height of an adult's waist, open outward. The socket of the short gate and the columns of the main gate are shaped like a buffalo horn. Second, some piled dwellings on precipitous terrain, called Malan, have no gate because the only route leading into the house stretches from a side or the back of the house. However, on the second floor, where people live, a big opening serves as the gate, installed with railings called *Meirenkao*.

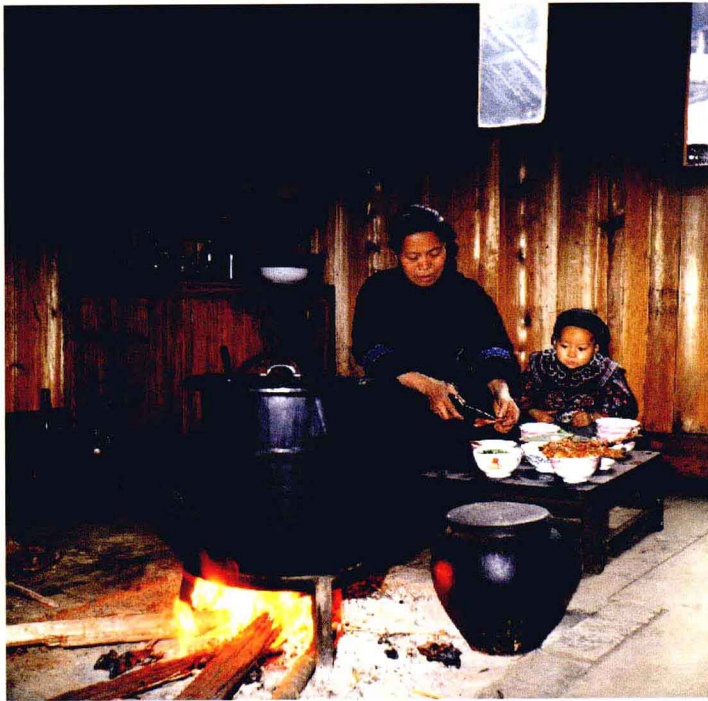
This kind of railings is an important symbol of piled dwellings. Some only have one place set with it; some have several in front of the middle room and on other sides. These railings are not only beautiful but also provide a place for recreation, sight viewing and observation.

Corridors are common decoration for piled dwellings. Outside the corridors are installed with railings, which are of an average height of 80 to 90 cm and with intervals of 20-30 cm between bars, usually without decoration.

Decoration of windows refers to the patterns of the window grids. ethnic groups usually have no complex patterns on windows, what they have are only some simple geometric figures.

Fire pit is the main place for activities in a piled dwelling. It's located in the room behind the left room or in the main hall. It's a cubic with 80 to 120 cm side length and 25 to 35 cm depth; the size is not standardized. The brim is built with stones or bricks, at the same level with the floor. A grill is suspended above the fire pit, 160 to 170 cm or 130 to 140 cm high. Some even hang a smaller grill under the big one. The grills are used to smoke preserved meat, dry firewood or other wet objects, like bamboo utensils and wet shoes. In the past, fire pits are





used for another important purpose: to boil food with pots suspended above.

There are two kinds of stairs: movable and fixed. Movable stairs are used to connect the floors for temporal purposes; and fixed ones are for routine purposes. For example, the interior channel connecting the living floor and the ground floor must be fixed stairs and the pedals are wide, known as slab stairs. The two columns of the stairs are made of broad, thick and strong wood. Slab stairs are also installed to lead to the storage floor.

There's no standard for decoration of wing-room piled dwellings, which is made according to the master's desires. During the times with rampant banditry, the order of decorating houses is from the exterior to the interior. Before decorating the interior, an earth wall or stone wall should be built to surround the piled dwelling and principle rooms and a stable gate should be erected. Interior decoration begins from the upper floor to the lower floor. This order serves the defense purpose. Nowadays, decoration usually begins from the ground floor, used as kitchen, livestock fold and toilet. If the family has school-age children, decoration begins from the upper floor, used as the kids' study.

## 2. Exterior Decoration

The short pillar or the suspension pillar is the most conspicuous part with carving decoration outside the piled dwelling. Although some are very coarse, their lower part is shaped like a pumpkin, pomegranate or grapefruit, signifying reproduction and wealth.

Wing-room piled dwellings have more suspension pillars. Some even have these on three sides of the building (leaving the side of the principle room), and thus the three sides have railings. Suspension pillars serve as functional parts supporting the railings, instead of decorative parts. However, they do beautify piled dwellings, so we can consider them as a kind of decoration.

For wing-room piled dwellings, the most conspicuous decoration is the rising eave. The corner is remarkably sharp and raised high; the whole building is like flying. The raised corner is made of naturally curved wood.

The ridge of the tiled roof is a meaningful decoration, whose pat-

terns, according to cultural scholars, symbolize "two poles and reaching the sky". However, we have different understandings: they should be related to concepts in the nest living age, specifically, a cultural pattern in Hemudu Culture — two mating birds embracing the sun. The two ends of the eave are raised upward, representing two mating birds; the middle is a ball-shaped or triangle-shaped tile tower, representing the sun or an ovum, which is a typical symbol of oviparity culture.

In order to expand usable space, a row of poles may extrude from the second floor or the roof, on which are laid some wood slabs or strips, forming a suspension platform for drying stuffs like grains, chilli, etc. This is the way conceived by people living on cliffs to expand space, not for decorative purpose. If the condition permits, some have several such suspension platforms in front or on both sides of the building on one or more floors.

## 3. Annexes

### (1) Annexes to a separate house

Annexes refer to affiliated constructions sitting in the rear, connected or attached to the main building, or standing alone. Among them are loft, side room, watchtower, pavilion, storehouse, toilet, stockyard, railings, platform, enclosure, fence, etc.

Principle-room piled dwellings and wing-room piled dwellings have different annexes. The former has the protruding platform and side room attached to the corridor as its most typical annexes. The latter itself is a kind of annex of the principle rooms, but it also has its own annexes.

The oldest forms of annexes include toilet, stockyard, storehouse, and the like, which stand alone near the principle rooms.

### (2) Annexes of the village

These annexes refer to those concentrated storehouses, stockyards, caves and shacks for storing sweet potatoes in the village, and construction camps at a distance from the village.

### (3) Relationship between principle rooms and annexes

Wing-room piled dwellings as a form of annex have relatively more complex meanings in construction. They sit on one side or both sides of the principle rooms and shape like a "U" or "L" with principle rooms. They can have large capacity than the principle rooms but smaller size. That's because people associate the rooms with people's hierarchy. And people believe that during the process of construction, rooms are bestowed with biological life.

Annexes of principle-room piled dwellings play a limited role in extending space. No matter which method is used to build annexes, people are cautious about the holding capacity of principle rooms' components. Annexes are usually built in the rear or on both sides of the principle rooms.

Annexes have a multitude of forms, but one rule can be applied to all of them is: clustering around the principle rooms.

### (4) Cultural meanings of decoration and annexes

The main principle of decoration is the order of space partition. Two rules can be found in existing constructions. First, in the Luban-style structure the middle is the most respectable and important, as the meaning endowed with the niche for ancestors. Second, experience from primitive nest living and its spatial functions decide that the lengthwise middle is the most respectable and important, and that pillars, especially the central pillars, are the center of ancestors' living space. As for the order, decoration generally advances from principle rooms and to annexes, from life necessities to anesthetic needs.



## IV. Surroundings and Layout

### 1. Cluster Layout of Villages

Villages of piled dwellings are all built on mountains and by rivers. They may have somewhat central area, but none of them are arranged as regular geometric figures. As people take piled dwellings as



tools for survival, they are required to be helpful to observe, resist or hide from assaults and devastations. Naturally, people usually choose high positions or areas by rivers, favorable for defense and withdrawal. Seemingly unordered, the individual houses and village layout are designed with a hidden rule, closely clustering in a restricted area.

#### (1) Villages nestling under a mountain and near a river

Piled dwelling villages in Southeast Guizhou are almost leaning against huge mountains and facing trickling rivers. Layout of the villages has little relevance to geomantic ideas in Han culture. They are unordered clusters of constructions, without centers. Their deep attachment to mountains and land reveals the collective psychology hidden behind; this kind of layout is based on twofold reasons: livelihood and safety. In other words, the constructions should integrate three factors: viewing scope, necessary shelter and convenience for work.

#### (2) Villages beside rivers or farmlands

Villages beside navigable rivers tend to gather closer and evolve into a port. Border towns, described by Shen Congwen, are examples among them, such as Chatongchang in Huatan County, Hunan Province; Xiasi Town in Majiang County, and Gedong Town in Taijiang County, Guizhou Province; etc. Pillars of piled dwelling extend down into the river and a part of the building hangs over the river. It's convenient for boats to pull in beside the stairs leading into the building. Along Wuxi (the Five Brooks, geographically referring to parts of Hubei, Hunan, Chongqing and Guizhou), villages have similar layout. These villages built on sediment of the brooks, where grow luxuriant crops, along with wavy mountain ranges, zigzagging rivers and rustling sailing boats, constitute a celestial scene.

#### (3) Villages on cliffs beside rivers

On cliffs hanging over Wujiang River, there are some piled dwelling villages. Confined by the terrain, these villages are usually small. On an irregularly-shaped terrace, flanked by cliffs and hanging rocks, a dozen households huddle together, overlooking the rushing river. The road leading to the village is narrow, winding among the cliffs, like a long linen thread, linking the village with the outside. Taking a look at it or walking on it, you will feel the scene beautiful but lonely.

Typical Miao villages are in Mount Leigong area and Moon

Mountain area in Southeast Guizhou. These villages are usually built on high or secluded hillsides, overlooking brooks from a distance and leaning against huge mountains.

Typical Dong village are under mountains and near rivers, over which roofed bridges are built.

### 2. Public Constructions

#### (1) Drum tower

Drum towers are common public constructions in Dong villages. In South Dong area, nearly every village has one or more drum towers, tall and magnificent. They are a symbol of a Dong village. It's a surprising construction with exquisite workmanship: tens of layers stand dozens of meters tall without a single nail or rivet.

#### (2) Colourful bridge (Roofed bridge)

Miao people attach great importance to the construction of bridges: they should be able to not only stand the erosion of rain and water, but also beautify the environment, representing Miao people's civilization. The main function of colourful bridges is connecting villages on the two sides of the river. In the past, the whole bridges were made of wood and a single arch spanned no more than 30 meters. Nowadays, the body of the bridge is made of steel and cement, stronger yet still elegant. Roofed bridges of Dong people are their characteristic symbol of architectural culture. They are built with outstanding workmanship, similar to those handed down from Song Dynasty in the west of Fujian Province in terms of technology and craft, showing that they have so long a history.

#### (3) Lushengping

*Lushengping* is a round ground located at the center of a village, covering hundreds of square meters. Xijiang Miao's Village, Leishan County, Guizhou Province, has a huge *lushengping*, approximating 600 m<sup>2</sup>. And Nanhua Miao's Village, Kaili City, Guizhou Province, has a *lushengping* of 500 m<sup>2</sup> on a hillside called Jielongpo, behind the village. *Lushengping* is surrounded by arched corridors, where visitors can sit and take a rest, watching *lusheng* performance, dancing and singing. At the center of the ground erects a "flower pillar" (totem pillar) for hanging copper drums during the performance.

### 3. Relationship between Village Layout and Structure of Feelings among the Ethnic Group

Piled dwelling villages existing now are different from those in decades or a hundred years ago in terms of the layout. It's hard to figure out the ideas guiding the layout planning long ago, but it's sure that there was layout planning, as revealed from structure of roads, relation between houses and function of public constructions that remain unchanged during these decades. These arrangements are based on experience from fighting in mountains and seeking living resources.

#### (1) Relationship between clustering and cohesion among the ethnic group

Judging from existing samples, villages with packed piled dwellings are not shaped as regular geometric figures. The buildings are not arranged orderly beside the road, but clustering around a certain center. The internal relationship within the construction complex is revealed by the location, size and orientation of each unit; the center of the complex is not any landmark determined by the community but a place naturally accepted through usage. It's a central place for activities and with great density of buildings.

#### (2) Cohesion among the ethnic group embodied in architectural culture

Villages can be large or small. Large ones may have thousands of



households. Normally, residents in one village are relatives. It's safe to say that the kinship and affinity are the basis of the village. Therefore, the cohesion among the ethnic group exists before the constructions. The bonds out of kinship and affinity are the basis for their fighting for common interests, one of which was resisting invaders during the past hundreds of years. Based on the experience of coexistence, they stress making use of the terrain and ensure that the layout and design of the village are in favor of the insiders and unfavorable to outsiders. The clustering structure of the village signifies a lack of ruling awareness and corresponding principles to establish and maintain the internal hierarchy. Actions against emergencies are almost out of sudden outburst of group consciousness rather than premeditation. For people living in one community, trust and obedience are based on recognition of kinship or affinity. As the village is a closed structure, there's no organization or cohesion on top of the kinship or alignment, such as administrative order, national sovereignty, etc.

Through the villages that remain ancient appearance, we've discovered some intriguing ways of village planning which are fading away. During the period of the Republic of China or even earlier, the idea of "street battle" was employed to plan and build these villages, which were enclosed by wall and moat. To further explore the "wall-moat" style villages, people can find that the basic function of them is defense, which guide the layout planning and constructions. This function is realized through increasing the difficulty for entry. Among all the public facilities, few are used for administrative activities, few are for trades, or in one word, few are for reinforcing regularized ruling and external business activities.

## V. Culture in the Root

### 1. Orientation and Space Derived from Piled Dwelling Culture

On top of culture connected with shape, piled dwellings bear far more cultural contents hidden inside, which are hard to recognize and hard to find its relationship with the construction.

#### (1) Nobleness of construction materials

As described above, during the construction process, some ethnic groups have some special attachment to some kinds of wood. For instance, Miao people believe the pillar should be made of the noblest tree, maple, so they will try all means to find it and satisfy their needs similar to religious emotion. This is possibly linked to certain collective memory in Miao people's ancestors, history and legends. We guess the logic relationship here is determined by some traditional knowledge shaped during nest living age. Maple trees are tall, and the branches and trunk grow evenly from a certain height and naturally form a safe and firm trestle for a nest. That's why it was considered as the auspicious tree for building houses by ancient people. In the regulations for construction stipulated by Chinese ancient imperial families, construction materials can be precisely divided into different classes. The classification is based on carpenters' rich experience on materials' holding capability and the like, as well as some metaphysic ideas, different from empirical ideas of dwellers.

#### (2) Ethnic history hidden behind piled dwellings

Constructions are silent history. As discussed above, there are two types of piled dwellings: principle-room style and wing-room style. Ethnic groups that adopt the former type mainly live in port towns in ancient Wuling Mountain area and mountain areas in Southeast Guizhou and North Guangxi, including Miao, Dong, Buyi and Shui Peoples. Ethnic groups that adopt the latter type mainly dwell in mountain



areas bordering Sichuan, Guizhou, Hunan and Hubei, including Han, Tujia, Miao and Dong peoples. Obviously, the former type is original southern construction, and the latter is a derivative from principle-room piled dwelling combining northern courtyard dwelling. The cultural rule of the latter first follows that of the courtyard dwelling and its shape of piled dwelling shows its attachment to the principle-room piled dwelling. As for the luck brought about by the construction, wing-room piled dwelling is not taken into consideration, for it's just an annex with beautiful shape. Here reveals the creators' ideal of integrating the northern courtyard dwelling into southern conventions on the one hand and maintaining their lovely and beautiful piled dwellings. What information do the creators and dwellers want to deliver through this construction form? Perhaps the history of their ethnic groups. The majority creating and utilizing this form of construction is Han and Tujia peoples. The two peoples share uniform construction form, suggesting their close relationship in history. From another point of view, the existence of wing-room piled dwellings and their architectural culture have taken shape through the mutual infiltration between southern nest buildings and northern cave houses and they reflect the history between Central Plains (comprising the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River) civilization and northern ethnic civilization. Geomancy is a key factor in piled dwelling culture. Most ethnic groups use this theory, referred to as *fengshui*, to choose the site of living. In fact, when we get down to the details, we will find the practices under the cover of geomancy are actually auguries. For example, when Miao and Buyi peoples select the foundation site, they not only adopt rites like divinations with rice, rooster, egg, plant (bamboo), etc., but also observe and imitate animal behaviors. These activities reveal that where animals can thrive, it must be a good place with divinity favorable for human prosperity. Therefore, on dangerous cliffs or peak of mountains, down to river valleys, or deep into caves, wherever animals or plants show mysterious phenomena and give people hints for reproduction and good luck, they will follow and build piled dwellings there, expecting prosperity of life.

### 2. Cultural Phenomenon of Worshipping Birds

No evidence proves that ancestors are inspired by birds to build nest buildings; however, after they feel the safety and comfort of these houses, they naturally connect themselves with birds, which have similar housing style and better skills. To make association between two lives is the simplest and most direct way of showing admiration. Tracing back, the groups still constructing and using piled dwellings belong to "Dongyi Group", "Nanman Group" "Jiulisanmiao Group" or "Baiyue Group" recorded in ancient books, who lived in the area "most



suitable for primitive nest living” in China. Descendents of these groups living in this area still worship birds, trees and even something high or flying.

Experience of nest living plays a role like a “generator” in generating, developing and formalizing wizard armomancy of southern ethnic groups. People live in nests on trees, which resembles the avian housing style. Nevertheless, birds have innate capabilities that human can never have and hence admired by humans. Admiration tends to endow the objects with divinity, which makes the worshipers believe their behaviors signify foresight or foreknowledge. The common avian divinations (with roosters, ducks or eggs) in Miao, Buyi, Dong, Shui and Tujia peoples’ culture clearly demonstrate the knowledge: the divinity of birds exists in different limbs and organs. The grounds behind avian divination are that birds can fly high in the sky and make observation over there, which are hard to achieve for humans. This capability of bird is realized by certain parts of its body where the divinity exists. Yet peoples’ opinions vary on that in which parts the divinity hides. Some peoples believe it exists in legs and wings, some, in the head, some, in the esophagus. The divination methods vary accordingly. For example, if it is believed that the divinity exists in the head, the divination method made by reading and interpreting the “image” on avian beaks. Although peoples have different opinions on divine parts of birds, they have the same understanding to the relationship between birds’ capability of flying and their divinity. This seems reasonable to nest-living ancestors, but it’s quite different in modern knowledge system. Therefore, all divination methods are considered as superstitions. However, for nest living groups, all the knowledge of interpreting the world is based on the logic closely related to nest living, which further links to the cultural concepts evolving from it. We cannot cut it at any point and include one part into “science” and the other “superstition”. Therefore, we cannot retain the scientific contents while discard the superstitious contents; even if we can, the “science” is just water without source or a tree without roots.

“Analogy and metaphor” are the logic behind the witchcraft like avian divination, the very basis under the whole wizard knowledge system, and the forecasting knowledge mastered and applied by common masses. They are an accumulation of primitive and naïve ideas, which are reasonable at a particular time but not necessarily suitable for later more complex environment. They are fixed as the thinking framework of an ethnic group, directly or indirectly affecting the reconstruction of the group ideology. We should not only look at this kind of root knowledge from those “professional” wizards, but also we should understand that it’s a reflection of the knowledge of nest living.



## I. The Village

In the mountain area of Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Chongqing, Hunan, Guangxi, Hubei, etc., plain but beautiful piled dwelling villages spread everywhere. Some only have couples of households; some have dozens or even hundreds. These villages are all leaning against mountains and facing rivers, thickly dotted on the uneven terrain. Piled dwellings are nestling together under natural and random layout, each showing its own beauty and tranquility.

In these villages, main constructions are people's residence — piled dwellings — closely linked to annexes like drum towers, roofed bridges, grain storehouses, shelves for drying rice, toilets and so on.

Drum towers primarily appear in Dong villages, as one of their main symbols.

More roofed bridges are in Dong villages, being the highlight of these villages.

Grain storehouses are a place for storing grains, being special in Miao, Dong and Yao villages. Some have many in clusters, showing unique scenery.

Many villages have public places for activities, such as gatherings, singing and dancing, sacrificial ceremony, and the like.

Miao villages on mountain tops with nest-like piled dwellings are loaded with extraordinary freshness and plainness.

