



The Daur Ethnic Group

An eagle soaring into the blue sky symbolizes the Daur's enterprising and perseverant spirit. Carrying the sun over its head, the eagle also embodies Daur people striving for a brilliant future with their strong shoulders.

The environment and population

The Daur, now with a population of 132 394, are mainly distributed in Molidawa Daur Autonomous Banner and Ewenki Autonomous Banner of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and also in Meilisi Daur area of Qiqihar City in Heilongjiang Province.

Daur people mainly inhabit on the banks of Nenjiang River at the middle of foot of Daxing'anling Mountain, where fertile land is abundant, forest is vast and pastures are lush. Daur people mainly engage in agriculture as well as livestock husbandry and hunting. The main crops they plant include corn, sorghum, wheat, soybean and rice. The local and special predicts of Aohua (a kind of turtle), carps and whitefish are well known.

The ethnic origin and language

“Daur” means pioneer. Because of different translations, other names such as “Dahu'er” and “Da Hu'er” were also used in the past. There are two most influential versions of the origin of Daur people. One is that they have common ancestry with the Mongols and the other is that they are the descendants of Qidan people.

Daur people are the earliest agricultural pioneers of Nenjiang River Valley. In the Qing Dynasty, they were garrisoned in the frontier fortress as one of the Eight Banner Contingents, known for their bravery and fighting skills. The Daur people in Xinjiang today are the offspring of the garrisoned officers and solders at that time.

Their language belongs to Mongolian group of the Altaic language family, which includes three dialects of Buteha, Qiqihar and Xinjiang. However, they do not have their own scripts. In the 19th century, they used Manchu alphabet as their written language. Nowadays, the majority of them use Mandarin Chinese.

The featured housing—“Manzi Kang” and “the cradle hanging on the roof beam”

The Daur have built their lives by the river and around the gorges with fine scenery. In the village, there are well-laid-out streets. And their houses all face south, around which are fields and gardens in good order. The fields and gardens are enclosed with a fence made of osier or birch, which forms their own courtyard. Their houses are built with earth as walls and plastered with clays inside and



outside. The roof is herring-bone-shaped and covered by hay or tile. In the living room, there is a big bed called Manzi Kang (a brick bed closely linked with the kitchen range), which connect together in three directions. This Kang is connected with the kitchen range, so when the meal is cooked, the kang is also heated, kang is the center of family activities.

In the Daur people's house, the most noticeable object is the cradle hanging on the roof beam. The cradle that is carefully made of boards is traditionally used for breeding babies and is engraved with well-decorated birds, animals, flowers and plants. The bottom of the cradle is hung with animals bones or fish bones, which can produce rhythmic sounds when shaken and make the baby fall sleep.

The costumes and ornaments—fur robe, fur trousers and leather hats with earflaps

The Daur dress is characterized with the fishing and hunting culture. In summer, men like wearing dresses made of cloth and long robe. In winter, they wear fur-lined robe, fur trousers and leather caps. Women wear dresses made of cotton and cloth. They like wearing long gowns narrow on the top and wide on the bottom with kick pleat on the bottom and have a sleeveless jacket on, which is trimmed with elegant laces. Their hat, which is made of fur of the roe deer, fox or wolf's head and with two ears upward, has the most distinctive features. Some has also had symmetric horns. The Daur use the hat to keep warm and to disguise them when hunting.

The dietetic customs—"roe deer meat" and "willow sprouts"

The Daur like eating gruel. This gruel has short growing period, and the rice made from it is very soft. Buckwheat noodle is also one of their main foods. The delicious roe deer meat porridge made of oats or buckwheat is the favorite of the old people. They like eat stewed dishes and meat eaten with hands and sliced meat. Milk-tea is their daily drink. Traditionally they make the milk into cream, cheese or butter and then into rice or pancake made of flour for eating. Every family gathers Liugao sprouts annually before or after the Dragon Boat Festival (in the month of April according to the Chinese lunar calendar). Liugao sprouts stewed with pig intestines or pork is Daur people's traditional dish.

The traditional handicrafts—"the big wheel wagon" and "vessels made of birch skins"

The Daur are good at making big-wheel wagons called "flying on the grass". The wagon is made of wood except for the iron bonds on the axle. A wagon weighs only 100 kilograms, but the wheels, whose diameter is about 1.3 meters, are tall and big, which is very convenient to advance in the grassland and marsh.

Their folk art features are embroidery and containers made of birch skins. Embroidery used to be the main standard for evaluating the quality of Daur girls' needlework and their wisdom. The signs of the embroidery include flowers, birds, human beings, animals, cloudlike lines and geometrical patterns, which are colorful and vivid. Because being used in every day life, the containers made of birch skins are also artistic works, which show the Daur people's excellent skills.

The traditional sports—"Boyikuo"

The Daur practice the traditional sports as the Mongols, such as horse-riding, wrestling, archery, etc.

Boyikuo, which is their most distinctive characteristic, is a sport very similar to hockey. It was very popular among the Qidans in Liao Dynasty and kept until now by the Daur and has been prevailing among the masses. The Daur Autonomous Banner regards it as the leading sports game and has trained many famous hockey players. The Daur people have won honors for our country in many competitions. Therefore they have gained the title of “the hometown of hockey”.

The education—A tradition that education is highly valued

The Daur own the historical tradition of advocating science and education. The Daur have their own education for local people ever since the Qing Dynasty. After the founding of People’s Republic of China, the central government has granted many special supports to the Daur’s education, and they have nurtured numerous outstanding scientists and artists. By 2000, among the group of people aged six and above, 7.61% of them have received vocational school education and above, which is fair higher than the national standard of 3.81%.



The festivals—“A’nie Festival” and “Hanbo dance”

The Daur’s festivals are much alike the Hans’. The grandest one is the lunar New Year, which is called A’nie Festival in Daur language. During the festival, they set off firecrackers and eat dumplings on the lunar New Year’s Day, which symbolizes bidding farewell to the past and welcomes the coming year. They also fire cow and horse dung in front of the gate. The flaming fire

shrouds the whole village in the smoke. People also throw cooked meat, dumplings and cakes into the fire to pray that the whole family and the livestock will be all well in the coming year and they will have good harvests. “A’nie Festival” lasts till the 16th day of the first month of the new lunar year and the 16th is called “the day of back ash”. When the morning comes, the old will plaster some black ashes on the foreheads of their sons and daughters to keep away the devil, avoid diseases and pray that everything will go well.

The Daur people’s recreational activities are varied and colorful. Their folk song “lullaby” has been widely spread. And the Hanbo dance is an indispensable part of the celebrations. This kind of dancing is rich in changes, sometimes it is slow and long, and sometimes it is lively and cheerful. What is more, the pasture and movement are elegant.

The religion—Shamanism and divine shawl

Most of the Daur believe in Shamanism and some believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Shamanism is an original religion that is widely spread among different ethnic groups, whose language belongs to Altaic language family in the north. The followers believe that everything in the world has its spirit. The principal rituals include “Receiving Gods” ceremony when a person becomes a new Shaman, and the “Hanminan” ceremony when a new Shaman apprentices to the master. When they perform shaman’s

trance dance, they wear the specially made costumes and use drum specially made that are believed to have some divine meaning. There are shawls studded with shells and round-shaped chest protector, with the pattern of birds believed to be god-messengers on both shoulders. There are all the essence of the Daur's handicrafts of the early times.