



The Ewenki Ethnic Group

The Ewenki ethnic group is a people who use reindeer earlier than other ethnic groups in China. Reindeer is viewed as the symbol of good luck and its image frequently appears as a decorative pattern. A symbolic design in which a primitive cone-shaped house is combined with bonfire and rainbow, and the rotary reindeer antler is the major sculpt, demonstrates the ancient culture of the Ewenkis and its people's yearning for prosperity and luck.

The environment and population

The Ewenkis have a population of 30505, who are densely distributed in the Ewenkis Autonomous Banner, Hulun Buir League of Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, and sparsely scattered in the other six banners of Hulun Buir League and Neibe county of Heilongjiang province.

The region where the Ewenkis are densely populated locates in the hinterland of Hulun Buir grassland, the depths of the Greater Xing'an Mountain forests and hill and plain area of Nen river basin. It is at an average elevation of 617 meters, with a climate of frigid temperate. It has vast grassland, undulating mountains, crisscross rivers and thick forest. In summer, rainfall is abundant and vegetations luxuriate. In winter, white snow vastly expands, "what magnificent northern scenery!" This region has abundant resource of wild animals and vegetations, which provide good condition for agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry. Due to the differences of residences, some Ewenkis people work on animal husbandry or hunting as others on agriculture.

The ethnic origin

Ewenkis are self-asserted name, meaning "people living in mountains". In history, the Ewenki were once named as "Suolun", "Yakute", "Tongus", etc. In 1958, Chinese government authorized a joint name "the Ewenki".

As for the origin of the Ewenkis, there are different opinions at present. Some say that the Ewenkis originated from Bei Shiwei people of the coastwise of Lake Baikal and northeast China. Some believe that they originated from the Anjugu tribe, one of the seven Mohe tribes along Wusuli River. In 1640s, the Russians began to invade Heilongjiang basin, and forced the Ewenki people move from the northern bank of Heilong River downstream to the Nen River basin in succession, where they were arrayed to Buteha Eight Banners. The Ewenki soldiers were courageous in battles. They contributed a lot to safeguarding the border region.

The language

The language of the Ewenkis belongs to the Ewenki branch of Manchu-Tungusic Group of the Altaian Language Family. It consists of three dialects, Buteha; Mo'ergele river (Chenba'erhu), and Erguna (Aoluguya). The Ewenki people do not have their own written script. In the past, they once learned to speak Manchu language. Currently, Mongol and Chinese are both widely used in the pastoral area, while Chinese is the main language in those farming and mountain areas.

The featured housing——“Zuoluozi” and the Mongolian yurt”

The Ewenki people in Ergun primitive forests mainly live on hunting over a long period of time. They live in a convenient tent named “Zuoluozi” (it is called “fairy pillar” in the Ewenkis’ language) instead of settled houses. Zuoluozi is 3 meters tall with a diameter of 4 meters. To built it, people use three hold timbers with forked branches on the top to form a triangle stand, and about 20 rods crosswise on the top, then cover it with some birch barks or hides. A conical house is thus completed.

The Ewenkis’ storehouse is very peculiar. To build it, the Ewenki people choose two big close-in trees and cut all the branches, leaving then as row columns. They use woods to set up a pendent warehouse on the top of them and lean a ladder-like timber against it to help them go up to the warehouse. Food, quarries, clothes, and tools are stored in the warehouse. However, it is never locked and moved, even when the host has moved to other places. If the host isn’t in, passers-by can get whatever they need from the warehouse, in condition of returning them in full later.

The Ewenkis lives in Mongolian yurt during the nomadic period of time. The settled herdsmen and farmers live in wooden houses or brickwork, which are surrounded by wickers or branches, forming an independent yard.

The costumes and ornaments——the fur gowns and the conepeaked caps

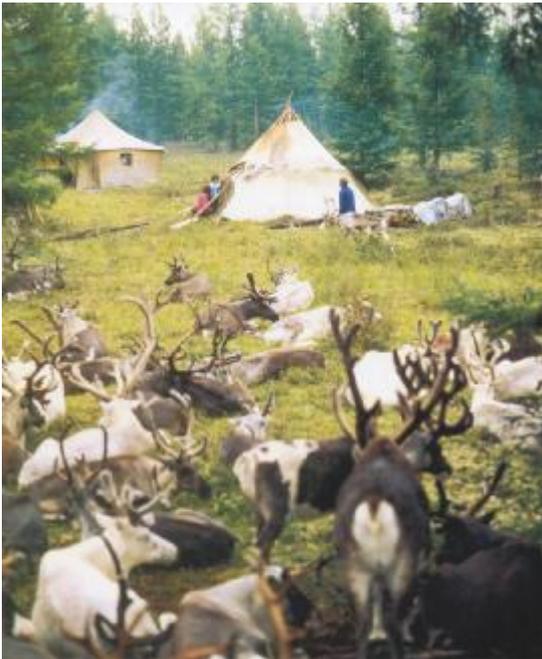
Living in the northern cold region, the Ewenkis wears traditional fur garments. Fur gowns are covered with cloth, decorated by variety of stripes, which features the characteristics of such an ethnic people. Fur gowns for men are right-buttoned, with vents at the front and back, and a long waistband. They are decorated with a dagger and smoking paraphernalia, etc. Long gowns for women are mainly made of cloth, with no vents, but long or short sleeveless jackets. Both in summer and winter, The Ewenki women of Chenba’erhu Banner wear dresses of which the upper parts are narrow but the lower parts are loose and many-pleated.

The Ewenki people’s headbands are very unique. A man’s cone-shaped cap is made of blue cloth, with red tassel at the peak. There are another men wearing cap called “Four Tiles”, inside of which there are four segmentary ears that are big on the right and left but small at the front and back. Women wear jewels like earrings, rings, bracelets, etc. Their headband is a black-cloth sleeve with silver chains on it. It can cover their hair-tress.

The dietetic customs——the reindeer milk tea and “Nizhuxi’e Tobacco”

The Ewenkis’ traditional diet is influenced by the characteristics of the region. In the past, the staple food for those people in hunting area is meat. Their supplementary food includes broth, meat porridge, dried meat, bread and noodles, etc. Their unique food includes fender milk tea and reindeer cream. People in pastoral area mainly live on meat, milk and flour. The dairies include cheese, cream, dried milk and milk dregs. They have milk tea at every meal. Their wheaten food includes deep-fried twisted dough, pasty, and noodles. The herdsmen love a kind of alcohol brewed by sour milk. In the agricultural area, the staple food consists of buckwheat, barley, oats and various vegetables as well. The dietetic customs vary a lot.

The Ewenkis have a unique tobacco called “Nizhuxi’e” that is made as follows: Grind the tobacco into powder, mix them with one third woodchips, and put in some alcohol and syrup to get them well mixed up, then put it in a cigarette case. Hunters like smoking this tobacco when hunting, because it can keep the mind fresh and help to refresh from fatigue.



The economy—the reindeer husbandry

The Ewenkis have a long history of raising reindeers that were once named as “E’lun”. Reindeer is originally a wild animal, commonly known as “Sibuxiang” (not of any known animals), because of its peculiar look unlike any particular common animals. Reindeer, with a light body and four big hooves, is good at walking in dense wood and marshland. Therefore it has a nickname “boat of forest” and becomes an indispensable transportation means in the life of the Ewenki people. A reindeer has treasures all over its body. Its venison is edible, its milk is drinkable, the deerskin can be made into leather, and the pilose antler and the reproductive organ are valuable medical materials, so it has undoubtedly become an important economic source of the Ewenkis.

The festivals and entertainment—“Mikuolu Festival” and “Swan Dance”

The traditional festivals of the Ewenkis include A’nie (Spring Festival), Lantern Festival, the sixteenth day of the first lunar month (Plastering Black Ash Festival), the second day of the second lunar month, “Tomb-sweeping Day”, “Day of Offering Sacrifices to Kitchen god” on the 23rd of the 12th lunar month, etc. In late May every year, The Ewenkis celebrates their own ethnic festival: “Mikuolu Festival”. Finishing the work as lamb-birth delivery and care, sheering and emasculating a sheep, stamping horses, people get together and kill cows and sheep to celebrate the harvest. In every May, people offer sacrifices to Aobao (heap of sand, stone or earth laid out as a road market or boundary sign by Mongolians). They get together to add some stones to Aobaos and tie colorful silk ribbons onto the Aobaos. They hold some competitions as wrestling and horse racing as well.

The Ewenki people are good at singing and dancing. Songs are usually sung at festivals, weddings and their leisure time. The songs are melodious, smooth and can express feelings naturally. Dance is accompanied with songs and shouts; the actions are firm and potent in a quick rhythm. They have traditional



dances as “Aidahaxiluo Dance”, showing their fighting with wild boars and “swan dance” in which they imitate all kinds of gestures of swans.

The religion and the taboo—Shamanism and the worship of fire deity

The Ewenkis mostly believes in Shamanism, while some in pastoral areas believe in Buddhism. Shamanists worship the gods of ancestors, mountains, fires, livestock protectors, baby-caretakers, reindeer protectors, etc.

The Ewenkis consider fire as the perpetual deity, and do whatever they can to keep the firelighter aflame. Before meals, they throw a piece of meat and sprinkle a cup of wine onto the fire. On weddings, the couple will salute to fire. They have many taboos concerning fire. For example, it's not allowed to touch fire with any sharp ironware, or to pour water on fire, or to throw filthy things into fire, or to put out fire with feet, etc.