

The Hezhe Ethnie Group



The Hezhes love white swan. The Hezhe women dance swan dance at the festivals. It was said that the swan girl fell in love with a handsome young hunter, but she was favored by a wicked man and forced to marry; the girl, faithful and uncompromising, jumped into the river and became a white swan. The Oval divine drum, as a kind of percussion instrument, is still popular among the people. The design containing a flying white swan, a jumping sturgeon and three rivers of different colors stands for the prosperity of the Hezhe people who live by fishing and hunting from generation to generation in the reaches of the three rivers as the white swan fling upward.

The population and environment

The Hezhes, with a population of 4 640 now, dwell in Tongjiang, Fuyuan, Raohe counties in Heilongjiang Province of northeast China, the rest in Jiamusi, Fujin, Jixian and Yilan counties of the same province.

The Hezhes mainly live in the Three-river-plain by the Heilong, Songhua and Wusuli rivers over a long period of time. The area, though lying in a high and cold zone of high latitudes, has rivers here and there and dense mountains and abounds lying in a high and cold zone of high latitudes, has rivers here and there and dense mountains and abounds in resources of fishing and hunting as well as animals and plants. There are chum salmon, sturgeon weighing several jin, carp, whitefish, variegated carp, and well-know “three Huas”(turtle, bream, crucial carp) and “five Luos”(Zheluo, Faluo, Yaluo, Huluo and Tongluo). And all of these of these benefit the Hezhes who live on hunting and fishing over a long period of time. In recent years, in order to preserve to preserve the resources of wild animals and fish, the Hezhes turned gradually to taking planting as the key link and key link and developing a diversified economy with the help of the government.

The ethnic origin

The Hezhe ethnic group has a long history, Their ancestors were called Sushen or Xishen during the pre-Qin days, Yilou during the Han and Wei Dynasty ,Wuji during the Northern and Sothern Dynasties, Heishuimohe during the Sui and Tang Dynasty, Nuzhen during the Yuan and Ming Dynasty and Hezhe during the Qing Dyansty.

The Hezhes of different regions call themselves by various names, the prominent among which are Nanai, being used in Fujin and he riparian regions along the Wusulijiang River, Nabei, being used in Gaerdang area, Naniao, being used in areas below Jiejinkou-all meaning “natives”.

The language

The Hezhes have a language of their own, which belongs to the Manchu-Tungusic group of Altaic family. And there are some similarities in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar between the Hezhe language and the Manchu language, the Xibo language, the Owenk language as well as the Oroqen language, which belong to the same language group. The Hezhes in China speak mainly the dialect in the Songhuajiang River area and a few people speak the dialect in the Heilongjiang River area. As the Hezhe language has no written form. Most of the Hezhes use the spoken and written Chinese language.

The dwelling characteristics—the horse-stand house and the fish house

The Hezhe housing falls roughly into two categories, the temporary and the permanent. That former is mostly built on the localities of fishing. Among those are Cuoluozi (a simple cone-shaped tent), Diyinzi (a simple half-underground house), thatched and so on. And the latter, mostly in a village, used to be a horse-stand house, thatched, with a triangular roof. Different from those ordinary ones, a horse-stand house had a door open in a hill-wall southwards rather than under eaves. In recent years, the majority of the Hezhes live in houses made of bricks, some even two-storey houses.

Fish house, Taketu in Hezhe language, is used as a store for fish. Generally built in a courtyard, it is used as a store of dried fish, dried meat and other food as well as some articles of everyday use. That's how it is built: stand four to six wood poles up as basic poles; then connect them by wood boards, boards, logs or willow twigs and a new house with wood stars is completed, which is more than one meter high from the ground. The fish house, dry and pleasant, well ventilated, mice away, can be used as a storage. At the same time, even in hot summer, people can go to sleep there.

The traditional costume —fish-skin clothes

Traditional Hezhe clothing and bedding were made of fish skins and hides. Among these, roe-deer-fur overcoats, clothes, bedclothes, headgears, gloves and Wula were made of hides and



fish-skin coats, trouser legs and Wula were made of fish skins. Hezhe women show marvelous skills on making clothes with fish skins. That's how they do it: first, skin and scale a fish and get a whole fish skin; and dry it and make it soft like cloth by rolling with hands or wood cane; then sew the fish skins sheet by sheet according to the patterns of skins are ready to be made into clothes. Even the thread used to make clothes is made of fish skins. Today, the Hezhes wear traditional Hezhe clothing only for festivals or great

events and they always wear modern clothing on ordinary days.

The dietetic customs——“Chasheng Fish” and the minced fish fried



In the past, living mainly by fishing and no farming, the Hezhes live on fish and animals as well as some edible wild herbs, wild fruits and grains. For the Hezhes, there are many ways to eat fish, basically, cooked or uncooked. As far as the former concerned, fish can be eaten roasted, stewed or fried. Anyway, the Hezhes prefer to raw fish and the most well known is Chasheng Fish, or sliced raw fish, which tastes fresh and tender and delicious. As for the way to make it, at first, blood, scale and slice a fish, then add some vinegar, salt, capsicum oil and something like that. Another distinctive dish is “cold raw fish salad”. Slice a fish and serve the fish-shreds with ginger, onion and wild capsicum as well as salt and vinegar, as the way to

make it. The “minced fish fried”, similar to dried meat floss, is made in such way: have a fish boiled and pound it to pieces then stir-floss, is made in such way: have a fish boiled and pound it to pieces then stir-fry the fish pieces until they become brown and crisp. By this way, it tastes delicious and can be kept for a long time.

The producing means——fishing skills and a dog-pulled sleigh

Having fished for a very long time, the Hezhes develop superb skills of fishing. They have various ways to fish, more than ten ways for single hook-fishing only. And fishing tools include nest, boat, hook, fork and something like that. Especially, the Hezhes are so good at forking fish that they always succeed in forking according to water lines. What’s more, they originate a new way to fish after making a hole in the ice of a river. Therefore, even in cold winter, fleshy fish are available.

In the north of China, the Hezhe ethnic is the only one that lives by fishing and uses sleighs worked by dogs. And that’s why it has ever been called the “fish-skin tribe” and the “using-dog tribe”. A sleigh worked by dogs, with a speed of 100 to 150 kilometers a day, is both the major vehicle of the Hezhes. And dogs are good friends of the Hezhe people for they play an important role in transportation, hunting, minding the house and something like that.

The festival customs——Deer-spirit Festival and Wurigong

Deer-spirit Festival, which is on 9th September, originates from the Hezhes’ belief of tiger-spirit. And it’s necessary to dance deer-spirit dance while offering sacrifices to the tiger-spirit. That’s why it’s called the Deer-spirit Festival. “Wurigong”, in Hezhe language,

means a recreation meeting or a recreation and sports meeting. It's generally held in May or June, lasting three days when swimming, boating, forking straw-ball, wrestling, casting a net, shooting and other as well as rich and colorful programs of entertainment are available.



The literature and art ——“Yimakan” and “the forking straw-ball dance”

Yimakan is a kind of ancient talking-singing arts of Hashes. Among the 40 now available, the majorities are about wars between the ancient tribes in clan society, They tell the stories about the hero, Morgan, who surmounted difficulties and conquered strong enemies. At the same time, they also describe the hunting, feast, wedding, rituals and other life scenes of the Hezhes. So, some scholars call Yimakan “the heroic of the Hezhes”.

To sing folk songs is popular among Hezhe people, who have various of folk songs such as ancient songs, Shaman songs, uniting-fishing songs, sad songs, happy songs, love songs, narrative songs and so on. “Wisely boat song ”, which rearranged from the ballad of Henna tune, is very popular around the country. And there are many well known dances such as “Shaman dance”, “Shaman dance”, “Sworn dance”, “Fish hawk dance”, etc. “Forking straw-ball” is a kind of traditional sports of the Hezhs and it has become an event of the traditional sports meet of nationalities.

The religious beliefs——Shamanism

The Hezhes used to believe in the Shamanism worship ancestors, totems and all spirits in the natural world. But now, with the development and popularization of science and technology, the Hezhe people do not believe in the Shamanism any longer.