



## The Kirgiz People

The Kirgiz people worship and care for the deer. In the historical folklore and realistic life the Kirgiz people are closely related with spotted deer and they regard them as saviors of the people and sacred beings. The image of the deer is deeply rooted into their life. In their eyes, the deer is the symbol of kindness and peace, as well as the embodiment of happiness.

### The population and environment

At present, the Kirgiz people has a population of 160 823, mainly inhabited in western Xinjiang Autonomous Region. 84% of them are concentrated in Kizile Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture, and the rest are scattered in Yili, Tacheng, Akesu, and Kashi areas, etc. Besides of these, several hundreds live in Fuyu County, Heilongjiang Province.

Kezile Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture is at the cross point of the two great mountain ranges, Mountain Tianshan, and the Pamir Plateau, in the southern of Xinjiang. Over 90% of the area is mountainous, and the average altitude is more than 3 000 meters. The climate is continental, dry and scarce of rain. But due to its multitude of mountains and complicated topography, the vertical climate variation is distinctive. Thus the colorful geographic and humanistic scene came into being. The gentle green waves of the plateau lakes, the white icy snow on the mountain peak, the pleasant and fertile land of the plateau pasture, the rich soil of river valley, and the vibrant oasis in the desert, all reflect each other in glory, making one rambling about, forgetting to return.

The Kirgiz people in Kezile mainly produce wheat, rice, cotton, muskmelons, watermelons, grapes, Badan apricots and apples. The best known is the figs in Atush, juicy and flavoring. In addition, the Muna'ge grapes and Hu'anna apricots also have their share of fame. The county has far-reaching pastures, grazing sheep, goats, bulls, yaks and horses, etc. It is an important base of husbandry in Xinjiang. The mineral sources of iron and copper are also rich in that region.



### The history

The ancestors of the Kirgiz were nomads in the upper region of Yenisei River in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

To the end of that era, they attached themselves to the Huns. In 87 A.D., the rule of Huns collapsed, and part of the Kirgiz migrated to the Tianshan Mountain and became subordinates to the Xianbei, Rouran, Turk and Huibe peoples subsequently. In the Tang Dynasty, the Kirgiz were called "the Xiagasi". In 684, the Tang government established Jiankun Administration in the Xiagasi district, thus making it officially part of the Tang territory. In the 20s of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Xiagasi prospered and founded the Xiagasi kingdom, dominating the north of the Gobi Desert. Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was under the control of the Kala kingdom, Liao, West Liao, and then the Mongolian kingdom. During that time, the

tribes in the Yenisei region migrated to the southwest, and merged into several Mongolian and Kazak tribes. Gradually, the modern Kirgiz people are formed.

### **The appellation and the language**

“Kirgiz” is how the people call themselves. The earliest record of the ancestors of the Kirgiz is in The Record of History, according to which they were called “Gekun”, in the two Han Dynasties, “Jiankun”. From the Wei to the Sui Dynasty, the general name was “Jilijisi” or “Qirjisi”. All of the above are the Chinese translation of “Kirgiz” before the Qing Dynasty. In the Qing Dynasty, people followed the Zhunge’er Mongolian way, calling them “Bulute”, which means “habitants of high mountains”. So was in the beginning period of the Republic of China. In April of 1953, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Xinjiang People’s Representatives decided on “Kirgiz” as the official name of the ethnic group.

The Kirgizs have their own language. It belongs to the Turkic group of Altaic family, including two dialects, Jiegai and Tesikai. The roots of most of the words, even basic vocabulary, are shared in all the Turkic languages. Thus people speaking them can communicate. The ancient Kirgiz language has been lost. After the Kirgiz’s convert to Islam, they once used Chahetai scripts. Now they use the modern Kirgiz scripts, based on Chahetai scripts.



### **The featured housing—The white felt house in the deep of Tianshan Mountain**

In spring and winter, the Kirgiz nomads living in the deep Tianshan Mountain live in settled villages. In summer, and fall they stay in the pastures, taking their felt houses (called “beziwu”) along. The houses have red willow fences, and are framed by 50 to 120 wooden sticks on top. Covering the frame is a layer of Jiji grass and another layer of snow-white thick

wool felt. These white, round felt houses are distinct against the azure sky and white clouds above the plateau pastures. The felt house looks like a dome with fireplace and ovens in it. A wooden shelf facing the door carries a big wooden clothes box, on top of which are clothes and quilts. The floor before the box is covered with a woolen rug, which serves as guest seat in the day and bed at night. Under the skylight sits a triangular potholder, where one makes food and tea. The felt house is warm in winter and cold in summer, easy to bring apart, and fit for the nomadic life.

The farming and settled Kirgiz live in flat-topped rectangular houses, built with earth and wood, or bricks and wood. Normally the structure has one bright and two dark rooms. The middle one with a door is the kitchen, and the two at each end belongs to the parents and the children. The adornment in the rooms is paid great attention to. There are tapestries and curtains hanging on the wall and by the bed, felts and colorful cushions on the bed, and padded blankets on the cushions.

### **The costumes and ornaments—collarless long shirt Geban and KuiyiOnaike gown**

A Kirgiz man often wears a white round-collarless shirt embroidered lining. On top of that is a collarless

long shirt “Geba”, made of goatskin or cotton, dyed black or blue. Sometimes he would wear a long shirt with sleeves made in camel hair with a black cloth lining, as well as a leather belt, from which hang knives and flints. A jacket with a straight collar and collar buttons in the front of the garment is also common. For pants they wear wide-legged ones, accompanied with a pair of long boots. In summer, “karpake”, the white pelt hat is also applied. A girl would normally wear a blouse and long stockings, or pants padded with cotton or fur. Their long boots have pattern designs. A Kirgiz girl likes to wear necklaces, earrings, bracelets and rings etc. Their braids are adorned with silver laces or coins. Silver brooches are also common.



### **The dietetic customs—“Naren” the Pilaf**

The Kirgiz diet mainly includes meat, flour and dairy products. For meat, there are lamb pilaf, barbecue, lung sausage, stuffed intestine, and common sausage, etc. The most common is the lamp pilaf. For the flour part, there are Nang, fried dumplings, fried pies. Youguozi, Kaosu, noodle soup, floor slices with meat, floor slices with a milk topping, “wumashi” (porridge made of wheat or highland barley), and so on. “Naren”, eaten with the hand, is a special food for guests, made of meat and flour and slices. The dairy products include horse milk, milk, skin on boiled milk, cream yogurt and cheese etc. The milk tea is an indispensable daily beverage for the Kirgiz. When serving the guests, they show their respect by presenting the goat’s head. For a guest to eat the lamb, he should first eat the fat on the tail, then scapula meat and head meat. Their fasting is about the same with other Muslim peoples.



### **The festival customs—Nuoluzi Festival**

The Islamic Kirgiz observe the two traditional Muslim holidays: Rose Helt and Corban. All the Kirgiz observe “the Nuoluzi Festival” like the Spring Festival of the Hans. In the evening of that day, a pile of Jiji grass is burned in front of each felt house, over which people and animals leap to show that disasters and mishaps will be avoided. Celebrations are also held around the burning piles. A kind of sticky porridge “keque”, made of wheat, barley, green beans, lamb and cream, etc., a total of 7 kinds of food, is made once every year on “the Nuoluzi Festival”. The purpose is to pray for a friendly climate, longevity and

great harvest.

For every holiday, the Kirgiz gather in plazas or grasslands and hold all kinds of entertainments. Besides singing, dancing and chanting, the common activities are grabbing the sheep, horse racing, tug-of-war, and so on.

### **The religion—Islam**

The Kirgiz mostly believe in Islam. The doctrines, principles and religious rituals are about the same with those of the other Muslim nationalities. Some Kirgizs in E'min County, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and Fuyu County, Heilongjiang Province, believe in Lamaism. A few in Fuyu County believe in Shamanism.