

The Manchu Ethnic Group



The Manchus excelled at riding, shooting, fishing and hunting in history. Haidongqing is a kind of falcon, skilled at capturing waterfowl and small animals, and thus is regarded as precious hunting toll by the Manchus. The red sun arising from the horizon, and the white Haidongqing flying in the vast sky, demonstrates the heroic, vigorous and high spirited nature of the Manchus, and symbolizes a flourishing and brilliant future of the Manchu people.

The population

The Manchus, with a population of 10,682,262, are distributed mainly over Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces, and the rest of them mostly in Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Shandong and Fujian Provinces. A small portion of the Manchus scattered in large or medium-sized cities like Pecking, Tianjin, Shanghai, Xi'an, Chengdu and Guangzhou, etc. In the Manchu residential areas in the northeast of China, seven Manchu autonomous counties (Yitong, Qingyuan, Xinbin, Benxi, Huanren, Kuandian, Xiuyan) have been established; and in the north and east of Hebei province, there are Fengning, Kuancheng and Qinglong Manchu Autonomous Counties together with Weichang Manchu-Mongolian Autonomous County.

The historical origin

The Manchus originated in the northeast China. According to ancient Chinese historical records, the origin of the Manchus can be traced back to the Sushen tribe before the Christian era, and later to the Yilou, Huji, Mohe and Muchen tribes. The early 12th century witnessed a successful insurrection led by Aguda from the Wanyan tribe of the Nuchen people, which served as the key force in their fight against the Liao Dynasty. They then founded the Kingdom of Jin (1115-1234). In the 13th century, the Nuchen was conquered by the Mongols and later came under the rule of the Yuan Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty had 384 military forts and outposts established in the Nuchen area. From the mid-16th century onwards, repeated internecine wars broke out among the Muchens, but they were later reunified by Nurhachi, who was the governor of Jianzhou Prefecture. Once then Nuchen were united, Nurhachi initiated the "Eight Banner" system, under which all Manchus were organized along military lines. In 1635 Huangtaiji (1592-1643, the eighth son of Nurhachi and later enthroned as second emperor of the Qing Dynasty), chose the name of "Manchu" to replace Nuchen for his people. In the following year, when he ascended the throne, he adopted Great Qing as the name of his dynasty. In April 1644, the troops marched towards south and broke through the Shanhaiguan Pass, and unified the whole of China.

The language

The Manchus have its own script and language. Their language belongs to Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altaic language family. The Manchu language was created in the late 16th century based on Mongolian alphabets. Since the Qing troops marched south of Shanhaiguan Pass in 1640s, the Manchus have gradually adopted Mandarin Chinese as their spoken language. Nowadays, only a few elders in the outlying rural areas in Heilongjiang Province can speak Manchu language, and the Manchus in other places generally speak mandarin Chinese.

The featured housing—the sack houses and the curving bed

A Manchu house generally consists of three or five rooms. It faces south, and there is a door in the east gable. The house looks like a “sack”, and thus it is called “sack house”. Gradually, people began to keep the door in the middle of the wall instead of the east gable, and they use the west and east rooms as bedrooms. There is Huokang (brick-beds which can be heated in winter) in the bedrooms, through which the smoke and fire from the kitchen goes into the chimney beside the gable, so that people can cook food and get the rooms heated at the same time. The Manchus value the direction of west, and they have a high regard for the west rooms and the west Huokangs. They offer u their sacrifices at their ancestors’ spirit tablets beside the west wall. The huokangs laid against the west wall, the north wall and the south walls are linked up, taking the shape of a curve, so they are called “wanzikang” (curving kang). The old saying”the sack house, the curving bed, the chimneys erecting on the ground” vividly summarizes the characteristics of traditional housing of the Manchus.

In the early days, the Manchus usually built thatched cottages with wooden frames, and they pasted sheets of papers over the windows. They hanged cradles over the crossbeams inside the rooms, and babies were put inside the cradles, listening to the lullabies sung by their mothers and falling asleep quietly. Nowadays only a small number of the Manchus reserve the traditional architectural styles, and the majority builds bright and spacious brick houses with tile roofs.



The costumes and ornaments---the long gown with mandarin jacket and the cheongsam

In the old times, the traditional costumes of males are mandarin jacket (a narrow-cuffed short jacket) over a long gown. A Manchu man keeps the back of his hair growing long, and makes it into a plait or queue. They wear rounded caps made of furs, and over their trousers they wear leggings. They also put on coat-shaped cloth shoes with two leather straps.

A Manchu woman usually wear cheongsams, and coils her hair on top of her head (called dapantou), or divides her hair into two locks and made a flat swallowtail-shaped bun at the back of her head (called dual-tufted style). On solemn occasions, woman does a hairdo called qitou (banner hairstyle), wears long handkerchiefs around the waist, and put on qixie, a kind of shoes that have wooden high heels measured 10 centimeters or so in the middle part of the shoes. Qitou is a fan-shaped hairdo, made of satin, brocade, yarn and other materials, and it is festooned with silk flowers. Woman with a qitou hairdo seems elegant and poised. In modern times, gradually the Manchu clothing tends to be similar with that of other peoples. However, after constant improvements, the cheongsam is still popular because of its unique charm. The modern cheongsam has high neck, collar closed, and its sleeves are tight. The dress is buttoned on the right side, with a fitting waist, and slits up from the sides. It covers the knees, and fits well the graceful figures. The cheongsam creates an impression of elegance and gracefulness.



The dietetic customs—the pickle hot pot and the Ganguet of the Manchu and Han dishes

The staple food of the Manchus includes corn, broomcorn, millet, broomcorn millet, soybean and pea. One unique Manchu diet is “Suan Tangzi” (Sour Soup). To make Suan Tangzi, the manchus first ferment the corn

flour till it taste a little sour, and then make noodles with the fermented flour, Suan Tangzi has a distinctive flavor. Another Manchu diet is Suziyie Doubao (steamed bun, stuffed with sweetened mashed-beans, wrapped with perilla leaves outside). The manchus wrap weetned mashed beans with sticky rice, and then wrap the buns with perilla leaves before steaming them. Suziyie Doubao has the aroma of perilla leaves. Also there are various kinds of typical local dishes, and among them, saqima (a kind of candied fritter), Mung-bean cake, Ludagun (a kind of steamed roll made of bean flour and sweetened bean paste), Niushebing (a kind of tongue-shaped cake) are still loved by people nowadays because they are delicious and tasty.

The principal vegetables of the Manchus are Chinese cabbage and radish. They often eat pickled Chinese cabbage. They way of making it is as follows: First, soak the Chinese cabbage in jars, then ferment it till it gets sour and in winter cook it with meat. A typical dish is called Bairou Xiechang (streaky pork and blood sausage), and to make it, the Manchus put streaky pork and blood sausage into the pickled Chinese cabbage soup and then boil them. The Manchu hot pot has the pickled Chinese cabbage, pork and mutton as principal materials, and people boil thin slices of meat in boiling water and eat them. It has a special flavor.

The most representative Manchu food is the “Banquet of the Manchu and Han dishes”. This grand imperial banquet has a history of 200 years, combining the best cuisine from the Manchus and the Hans, as well as that of the Mongols, the Huis and the Tibetans. This royal sumptuous feast is the greatest classical banquet in China.

The festival customs—the Dragon Raising Its Head and Laba Festival

The Manchus celebrate the Spring Festival, lantern Festival, Tomb-sweeping Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-autumn Day. The second day of the second lunar month is a traditional Manchu Festival. “Dragon Rising Its Head”, on that day, the farmers spread kitchen ashes on the pray that the dragons bring them favorable weather for crops to grow. On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, they celebrate “Laba Festival”, and they eat “Laba porridge”, which is made of eight materials including sticky rice, red beans, Chinese red dates, walnut kernels and so on. They also offer “laba porridge” to worship Buddha, wishing they will be blessed with good harvests.

The culture and arts—Mangshi and Kongqi Dance and the Songs of Qingyin Youngsters

In the field of culture and arts, Manchu talents have come forth in large numbers. The most notable talents include the famous Qing Dynasty poet Nalan Xingde, and Cao Xueqin, the writer of the literature masterpiece A Dream of Red Mansions, and Laoshe and Duanmu Hongliang, the well-known writers after the May-fourth Movement. Cheng Yanqiu, the founder of Cheng Style Peking opera, and Hou Baolin, the master fro comic dialogue, also made great contribution to the Chinese cultural development.

The Manchus are good at singing and dancing. On the feasts of festivals, they usually dance their traditional dancing”Mangshi” and “Kongqi”. When they dance, two people face each other, rising one sleeve over the forehead, turning another sleeve against the back, revolving and gesticulating, and this is called ”mangshi”. As the dancers sing, others applause and say “Kongqi” to join in the chorus. Also “Taipinggu” (Peace Drum) dancing, sports activities like”Cai Zhenzhu” (Collecting Pearls) and play “Gahala” are popular among the Manchu people.” “Qingyin Youngster” was created in the middle 18th century by the qiren (Banner people). For this kind of art form, the singers sing, coordinated by clappers and three-stringed fiddle. “Qingyin Youngster” has a great influence for the shape-taking of Dagou, and artistic form of story-telling with accompaniment of drums.



The religion and the taboos—Shamanism and Wanli Mama

Traditionally, religious practices of the Manchus used to be centered in Shamanism. They worshipped ancestral spirits, heroic spirits and various kinds of nature spirits as well as animal spirits. Religious rite was generally performed by a shaman, who was said to have the power to be the medium between human beings and gods. The costumes worn by the shaman were resplendent with variegated coloration. He attired a colorful smock and a cap decorated with birds, animals and fishes. He also used hand-drum, waist bells, magical knives, and other musical instruments when he danced in a trance.

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The Manchus also worship Wanli Mama (a goddess). Hunting magpies and crows are forbidden, and eating dog meat and using dog furs are taboos.