



The Salar Ethnic Group

The legend goes that, more than 700 years ago, the ancestors of the Salars set off from Samarkhan in middle Asia with water, earth of their hometown and handwritten Koran on a white dromedary. After going through all kinds of hardships and difficulties. They arrived at Jiezi Township, Xunhua of Qinghai Province. When dawn came, people found that the camel lost in the night was found to have changed into a piece of white stone pouring out spring water. From then on the Salars started to inhabit there and multiply, and hence the names of Camel Spring and Camel Stone in the Jiezi Township came into being.

The population and environment

The Salars have a population of 104 503, and they are distributed mainly over of the Yellow River in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County and Hualong Hui Autonomous County in Qinghai, and Dahejia area in Jishishan Baoan, Dongxiang and Salar Autonomous County, Gansu Province. A few of them are dispersed over Xining City and Autonomous Prefectures like Huangnan, Haibei, and Haixi in Qinghai Province, Xiahe County in Gansu Urumuchi City, Yining County in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, the most concentrated area for the Salars, is surrounded by mountains, which alternate with valleys. The mainstreams of the Yellow River flow across the northern part of the county from the east to the west. The Salar



mainly reside in the river mouth near the banks of the Yellow River and the height here is about 1 800 meters above the sea level. This is one of the fine agriculture areas in the Qinghai formed by the warm climate and abundant water resources. The place abounds in melons and fruits and has gained itself the nickname of the hometown of melons and fruits. The first reservation mainly for wild plants in Qinghai, Mengda forest is known as the Xishuangbanna of Qinghai. In the reservation, there are charming sceneries and beautiful landscapes. What is more, the well-known Mengha Lake locates in the reservation.

The historic origin

The ancestors of the Salars are the Salars people from the west Turki of Uygusdu. In the Yuan Dynasty, they moved east from Middle Asia and have lived there for about 800 years.

After a long period of development, they assembled and mixed with other groups such as Hui, Han and Tibetan etc. to enlarge their main body of their ethnic group gradually. At the middle period of the Ming Dynasty a new community took shape in the family of ethnic groups.

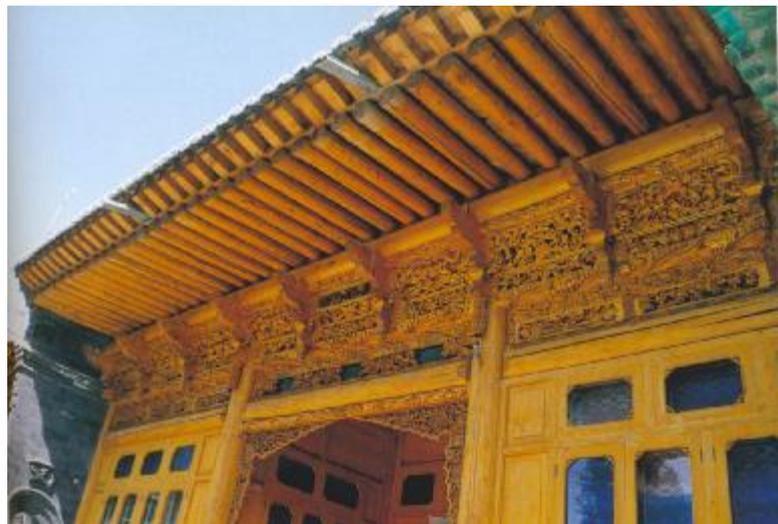
The names and the language

The Salars call themselves Salar'er, so people call them Salar for short. According to the historical records, they were also written in many other ways like Sarlar, Sara, Sala, and Sali. Because of their Islamic religion, they were also called Salar Hui and the native people call them Salar.

The Salars have their own language but has no written script. Their language belongs to Turki group of the Atlantic language family and it can be divided into Jiezi and Mengda dialects. Mengda dialects keep many features of the old Salar language. Due to the longtime communication with the Hans, the Huis and the Tibetans, they borrow words into their language from Arabian Persian and Tibetan. Nowadays most of the Salars understands Tibetan. People living in Xinjiang can also understand Uygur language. Chinese is mainly used for writing and communication.

The featured housing —The courtyard and engraving

The Salars are used to living together in terms groups. People who share the close kinship like Agenai, Kongmusa live in the same place.



The Salars pay great attention to their houses.

The living houses are surrounded with caly walls as courtyard. In the yard they plant flowers and fruit trees. At the back of the houses is the garden of fruits and vegetables. The houses there have kept the cultural features of the Middle Asian courtyard: every house has garden and every garden has its own joys. The buildings are of clay and wood structure with flat roof. The principal rooms face south. The east wing is for kitchen and storing rooms while the west wing is fold room for livestock. The Salars strive for the decoration art of their houses. Flowers and trees are engraved in the roof beam, doors and windows with great care. On the walls of the central room are the scrolls of calligraphy in Arabic words and they are written freely and energetically.

The Salars living in the east part of Mengda district usually build tow-storied buildings.

They weave willows to make fences to build the walls mixed with clay. Usually the upper floor is bedroom and the ground floor is kitchen and storing room. In recent years, many people set up storied buildings of clay and wood and quite a few of the new buildings are made of bricks and wood.

The costumes and ornaments—The brim-curved wool cap and green “Gaitou”



Their dress styles are the same as the Middle Asian nomadic people. Men like to wear caps with curved brim made of wool, loose coat or long shirt, long trousers. They tie a belt or silk belt around their waist and wear boots. In winter, they wear fur-lined jackets or woven “hezi”. Young men prefer wearing white Chinese shirts inside and short sleeveless jackets and with a red cloth or an embroidered belt around their waists. With black and white sharply contrasted, they look spick and span.

Women wear colorful Chinese shirt and sleeveless jacket with long earrings, finger rings, bracelets, and strings of pearls. Women commonly put a “gaitou” (a head cover) on their head, but the colors differ according to the age. Young girls and bridegrooms wear green while the middle-aged prefer indigo blue and the old white.

Now with the living condition improved, their dress has changed a lot, women wear colorful and fashionable dress made of chemical fiber, silk and wool fabric and put a “gaitou” made of georgette. Men wear woolen Chinese tunic suit and western-styled suit and fashionable leather shoes.

The dietetic customs—Mutton eaten with hands and the wheat tea

The staple food consists of wheat, highland barley, buckwheat, potato and vegetables. There are many different ways to cook; therefore there are so many different kinds of food, such as steamed bread, won ton (dumpling soup), deep-fried dough cake, steamed twisted roll, wheat slices, noodle and “jiaotuan” ect. When festivals come and relatives or friends visit, they fry youxiang and sanzi, make cakes, cook mutton eaten with hands, steam buns with sugar stuffing and buns with vegetable stuffing, cook “bowl vegetable” and make chafing dish etc. The meat and the method of cooking are the same as the Muslims’. The poultries are generally killed by imams and the elders and they are fine to eat after the blood has been strained out. Acts such as drinking, smoking and ladling water backhand are forbidden. The steamed buns must be broken off with hands before one eats it, and biting is not allowed.

The Salars like drinking milk-tea and wheat-tea. Wheat-tea is a kind of homemade traditional drink. The Salars call it “youji”. The method of making wheat-tea is as follows: At first, stir and bake the wheat till it turns brown color and then grind them into granules and boiling them. After that, add some water, right amount of salt, Chinese prickly ash, fennel and almond that make the tea taste delicious, tasty and nourishing.

The festival customs—Bailate Night and Gaide’er Festival

Their festivals originated from Islam. The Lesser Bairman and the Corban are their most important festivals. The celebration is the same as other Muslims. Besides, there are some other festivals. “Bailate Night” begins on the 15th night before Ramadan. On that day, each family will invite Imams to their house and chant scriptures and then give Imams and neighbors youxiang. On the 12th day of Ramadan, they have “Fatima Festival” in honor of Mohomet’s daughter-Fatina. Only women are allowed to celebrate it. The 27th night of Ramadan is the “Gaide’er” which is also called Little Lesser Bairman. A Kongmusa is one unit, they make Mairen rice, youxiang and steamed bun, etc. together and invite Imams and Manla to their houses and chant scriptures and after that they resume a meat diet.

The religion—Islam and “Gazui System”

The Salars believe in Islam, belonging to Sunnite. There are no sects within the religion. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, some sects as the old sect and the new sect appeared. These different sects basically have the same belief but they have different explanations to the religious doctrine and religion rules. Gazui System is the special organizational form of the religion. People originally elected Gazui. And then it evolved to be a hereditary position, as the supreme religious authority. Under him, there are three elders-Haiyi, Imam and Atibu—who are mainly in charge of chanting and preaching, and “Three-level Institution of the mosque”, which divides the mosque into Supreme Mosque, Higher Mosque and Branch Mosque.