

The Uygur Ethnic Group

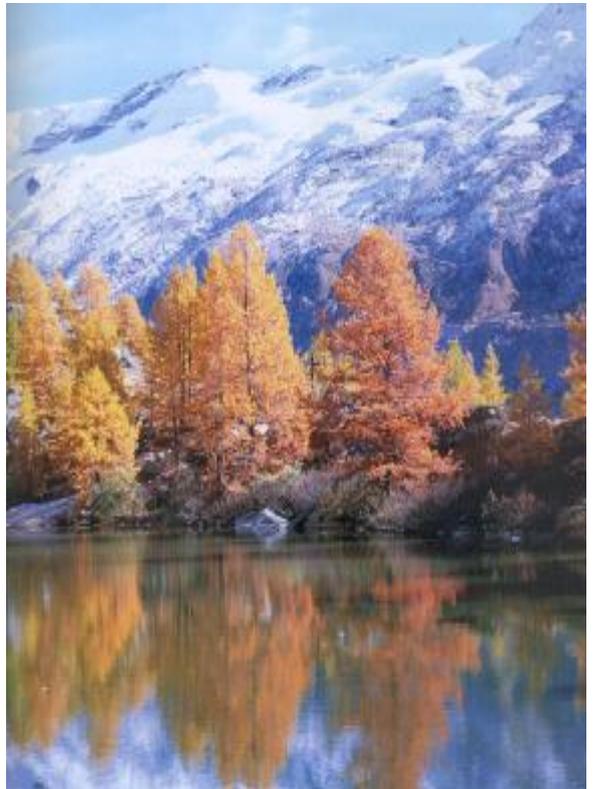


The nightingale is the favorite precious animal of the Uygur people. It is a symbol of purity, nobleness, friendship, love, peace and spring. In the Uygur poetry there are a great deal of praise and description of nightingale and the ancient musician was called the “king of nightingale”. The Uygur people are good at singing and dancing and the particular arts of singing and dancing as the Twelve Kamka are very popular among all peoples of the country. The nightingale is a symbol of the diligent, wise, simple, artistic Uygur people.

The environment and population

The Uygur People have a population of 8,399,393 over 99% of them live in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous Region. Most are concentrated to the south of mont. Tianshan, to a total of 80% of the entire population. The most concentrated areas are Hetian, Kashi and Akese. Besides these, a few live in Taoyuan County and Changde city, Hunan province, as well as in Beijing.

The Xingjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was established in October 1955. The area is 1,650,000 square kilometers, about one sixth of the whole Chinese territory. It is the largest region in China. The Uygur settlements have the climate of typical continental arid or semi-arid. The temperature difference is distinctive, with an average daily discrepancy of over 13????, even as much as 30???? Every year. So there is a saying, “Wearing a leather coat in the morning, and a silk dress in the afternoon. Surrounding a red-hot oven, we eat a watermelon.” The natural scenes and humanistic resources are rich and colorful. The grand desert, endless sandy wilderness, magnificent countains, standing modern glaciers, burning hot “ovens”, tranquil lakes, unique flat, topped architectures, distinctive gallery of thousand-li long rocks, fragrant grape valley, skill-fully built Kan'erjing, exquisite Hetian jade, graceful singing and dancing, special folk culture and so on, all appeal to the tourist and adventures, both from home and abroad.



The historic origin

The history of the Uygurs is rather long, for it has many origins. The ancestors of the Uygurs are directly linked to the Huihus. The Huihus were previously called Huihe, one of the Tiele (an ancient people in China) tribes. Originally they occupied the Seleng'ge and E'erhun River Region, and then migrated to the north of the Tula River. In 744 A.D., the Huihe people intermarried the locals, which was the foundation of the forming of the Uygur people.

The appellation and the language

“Uygur” is how they call themselves, suggesting “unity”, “integrity”, and “cooperation”. In different historic periods, the names of the Uygurs were also different. In the North Wei Dynasty, they were called “Yuanhe”, or “Wuhe”. Starting from the 7th century, “Huihe”, in 788, “Huihu”, in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, “Weiur”. In 1934 the provincial government of Xinjiang decided on “Uygur” as the Chinese name of this ethnic group, which is still in use today.

The Uygur language belongs to the Turkic group of Altaic family, and is divided into three dialects, Hetian, Luobo and central. There are many loanwords in Uygur, especially from Chinese, Iranian and Arabic. The Uygur letters are written from the right to the left. From the 6th century on, the Uygur language underwent gradual changes, and evolved into the Chahetai language in the 13th century, based on the Arabic letters. The whole Xinjiang region used it, even till now. In the 50s, the Chinese government created a new Uygur alphabet, based on the Latin letters. It was applied from 1976 to 1982 before the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous government decided to reuse the old Uygur alphabet based on the Arabic letters.

The featured housing—the flat and the skylight

Wood is rarely used as the building material of traditional Uygur architectures. The top of a house is usually flat, for the use of drying fruit and rice. The walls are mostly built with earth bricks, which are rather thick. In the wall there are niches of various sizes for storing the odds and ends. The rooms usually have a door, but no windows. The walls are adorned with curtains and tapestries. The fireplace and ovens serve to warm and cook. The houses form square yards, and the gate is never supposed to face the west. Around the house, grass, flowers and fruit trees are planted. In front of the house there are usually some grape shelters, forming a cool shade. Some houses also have broad front verandas.



The costumes and ornaments—the little patterned cap and the long dress

Men or women, young or old, all the Uygurs love wearing caps, especially the unique four ridged patterned little caps. On them all kinds of exquisite Uygur style designs are embroidered, and sometimes, colorful beads are attached. The traditional costume for men is a cotton robe, “Qiapan”, with large sleeves, no collar, no buttons, and a cloth belt in the middle. For women, they wear bright-colored long dresses, and a vest with the front split in half. Accompanying the costumes are trinkets, like earrings, bracelets and necklaces. In the recent years, the Uygur people in the city are dressed very much in the modern way.

The dietetic customs—the whole roasted lamb, honeydew melon and Tulu fan grapes

The Uygur diet is rich and colorful. It has a cuisine all its own. The main methods of cooking are baking, boiling and stewing. The most representative would be mutton kebab, pot-baked meat and whole roasted lamb. The mutton kebab has come out of Xinjiang and become a popular folk snack all across the country. For the staple food, baked Nang, made of flour, onion and pure oil, and pilaf, stewed with rice, mutton, pure oil, carrots and onion are the most common. Also there are roasted big dumplings and fried Sanzi. The Uygur people have a green thumb. Their most famous fruits are honeydew melons, Kurlu pears, Tulu fan grapes, apricots, figs and apples. The Uygur ethnic group is the people who average highest in consumption of fruit in the whole country.



The festival customs—Corban and the 12 Mukams

The traditional Uygur holidays are mostly corresponding to the Islamic religious holidays. The most important are Corban and Roze Heit (the doay to stop fasting). The former is the “big year”, and the latter is the “small year”. Their dates are set according to the Islamic calendar. According to the Islamic doctrine, the Muslims should fast for a month every year. The day when it’s finished is Roze Heit, and almost every household would celebrate on the day, killing their goats.

During the holiday, besides greeting and congratulating each other, dancing and singing meetings and sports activities are also held. The Uygurs are known as artistic. The classic 12 Mukams is a composition of talking, singing, dancing and music, which lasts for 25 hours. The representative styles of singing dancing and dancing-to-the-music are sainamu and Xiadiyana. Sainamu has no fixed formula. The tempo is light and fast, and one, two or every many can dance to it. Xiadiyana is more bold and unrestrained, unlimited by the number of the participants. The dancers lift their hands up, and move a lot with their necks, hands and legs.

Dawazi (tight rope walking at tremendous height) is a traditional sports activity among the southern border folks. It requires superb skills of the performer. In the walking process, one is also supposed to make dangerous movements, like side walking, standing on the head, blindfolding, stepping on plates and high leaping. In the recent years, this sport for the brave is known all over the country, due to the successful performances of Adili, a master of Dawazi.

The religion--Islam

In history, the Uygurs had believed in Shamanism, manicheism, Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity and Buddhism. Now it’s Islam. Most believe in Hanaifei denomination of Sunni. Also there is some who believe in Yichan denomination of Islamic mysticism. There are still a few believing in Wahabi. The religion is closely related to the daily life of the Uygurs. They choose a name from Koran for newborn babies. The boys are circumcised. The newly wedded couple is witnessed in the ceremony. The decreased are mourned. Traditional holidays are observed. All there require corresponding religious rituals.