

## The Yugur Ethnic Group

A story by the name Pearl Deer has been popularly told among the Yugurs. The story tells that a Yugur girl, in defiance of her parents' will, fell in love with a poor young man named Saka and they had to run away to another tribe; in a hunting Saka got lost and later on he found his way home under the guidance of the magical deer. The magical deer jumping up represents the fast development of the Yugurs and a promising future. The magical deer has a pearl on his head, with a snow lotus in his mouth, representing a fortunate life and a perseverant character. The clouds surrounding and Mt. Qilian and the red sun stand for wealth, brightness, and hope.



### The environment and population

The Yugurs have a population of 13 719 people, 90% of who live in Sunan Yugur Autonomous County in Zhangye area of Gansu Province. The rest live in Huangnipu Yugur Autonomous Township in Jiuquan city, and in Hami, Changji areas of Xinjiang.

Most Yugurs have at the northern foot the Mt. Qilian and the middle of Gansu Corridor. Those living at the northern foot of Mt. Qilian take on pastoral industry, focusing on the herding of sheep, goats, yaks, Pien nius (offspring of a bull and a yak), ox, horses, and camels. Some Yugurs living in Gansu Corridor take on pastoral industry as well, while those in Huangnipu Township take on agriculture. Overall speaking, the Yugurs are pastors. Besides influence from Han culture, their culture has an evident sign of Mongolian and Tibetan elements.

### Language

The Yugurs nowadays speak roughly languages: the east Yugur language (also known as Enge'er language, belonging to Mongolian language group), the Wet Yugur Language (also known as Yaohu'er language, belonging to Turkish language group), and the Chinese Language.

### The residence and transportation——Yaktents and the east-gated courtyards

The Yugurs used to live a pastoral life, so they mainly live in tents. Traditional Yugur tents are taper-shaped, sustained by respectively four, six, or nine pillars, covered with blankets weaved from yak feather or goat feather. Nowadays they usually live in a real house. The tents they live in when they have to move to another pasture every summer have a lot in common with the square tents of the Tibetans.

The houses they live in are very much similar to those of the Hans'. However they reserve their unique style. The Yugurs live on a relatively sparse basis, and every two families



have a distance of one or two kilometers or even farther. There are hardly any villages. The main halls of their houses usually face east, with wing rooms on both sides, and the gates of their courtyards are generally towards the East. There may also be pens for livestock on the two sides of the

courtyards. Each family has their own well for water supply.

### **The costumes and ornaments — — high-collared robes and bugle-shaped red-tasseled felt hats**

The Yugurs have unique traditional clothing style. Men wear high-collared long gowns buttoned on the left, red or blue waistband and round-topped felt hats. They wear fox-feather hats and high boots. In areas near to Tibet, the Yugurs like Tibetan clothing.

Women wear high-collared long robes, covered by a vest made of damask, and high boots. Their robes are often made of blue or green cloth, with a vent on the bottom edge. The edges of sleeves, the collars and the fronts of the robes are usually embroidered with patterns. Married women wear bugle-shaped spire-topped felt hats with red tassels, and they wear unique head-ornaments. These have become the representative clothing style.

An unmarried woman wear a set of “Shada’erge” on her forehead, which is a red ribbon, decorated with colorful corals and jade, hanging from her forehead just like a bead curtain.



### **The dietetic customs——roast lamb and milk tea**

The Yugurs’ staple diet consists of products of meat and milk, wheaten food follows and vegetable is least. Their representative food includes mutton eaten with hands, roast lamb, “Yangdu Kao Quanyang” (cut mutton into small pieces and stuff them into the lamb, then roast the whole lamb on fire), ghee, cream, yogurt, Qula (a kind of milk product), Shaokezi (roasted wheaten food), ghee pancake,

Suoyang pancake, etc. The Yugurs drink barley wine, which always goes with meat. They also like tobacco. The tobacco bags are often made of cow skin or cloth, decorated with red tassels, hung from the waist.

The Yugurs like tea, and they have the habit of having tea three times and meal once or the habit of two teas and one meal. This is how they make tea: grind brick tea and then out it into water in a pot, and put some fruits or ginger inside if you like. Put some fresh milk and salt into the pot when the tea becomes thick, and stir it with a spoon. When the milk and the tea is well mixed, the milk tea is ready to serve. Before you serve it, put some parched flour, ghee, and Qula into your bowl, then pour the milk tea into the bowl. Now the milk tea is ready to drink. After having morning tea, the pastors are ready to go out to work.

### **The marriage customs——“Wearing Head-ornaments Ceremony” and “Yaoda Quge’er”**

The Yugurs follow a complicated procedure in their wedding ceremony. They have the ceremony of wearing head-ornaments on weddings, i.e. the bride put on head-ornaments and red-tasseled hat representing her marital status in her parents’ family. They have various songs to sing on the wedding. There is a Dajian (stop for refreshment) Rite on the bridegroom’s way to the bride’s home. The guests from the bride’s side create difficulties for the groom’s guests, except for giving sacrifices to their gods.

When they arrive at the groom’s home, they conduct an amusing activity called Ramming the House Rite, where the cavalry formed by the bride’s guests riding on horses and camels try to ram the small tent set up by the groom’s people, while the groom’s try to defend. Victory of the bride’s guests will be proclaimed when the ropes fixed on the four corners of the tent are broken. Thereafter, the bride needs to jump off a fire and meanwhile the groom take a sore bow made of pillow branch to shoot at the bride’s waist.

The Yugurs’ wedding is formally called Yaoda Quge’er. It consists of dressing the groom with new clothes, and presenting the groom a Yaoda, which is a lamb’s crural shank wrapped with black and white wool. This symbolizes that a Yugur man’s marital status and a happy marriage life. The chief witness is invited to recite the Yaoda Quge’er, an ancient wedding remark, which describes various customs of marriage and the origin of the custom of Yaoda.

### **The festivals and recreations——sacrifices to Ebo and the Yugur folk Songs**

Apart from some Chinese festivals like Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Moon Festival, the Yugurs also observe some religious festivals. They go to temples to offer incense in Lunar January. The Lamas in the temples cast red dates onto the crowd, and they perform Lamaist dance with masks. They also hold Ghee Lantern Show at this time. On Lunar February 2<sup>nd</sup>, they give sacrifices to Ebo, and they put new purlins onto the Ebo. They celebrate this day by killing lambs and offer sacrifices. On the two assemblies in

Lunar September and October, they celebrate the birthday and death of Zongkaba.

The Yugurs like to sing as to entertain their guests. There is such a saying concerning the Yugurs: “Never stop drinking as long as the songs are going on”, Among the traditional folk songs are: We Are from Xizhihazhi, Salimake, Labor Songs, Wedding Song, etc. I Am the Yugur Girl is relatively new, and was once very popular.

### **The religions——Tibetan Buddhism and “Handiange’er”**

The Yugurs used to believe in Shamanism, worshiping spirits and ancestors. Now they have converted to Tibetan Buddhism. The pastors still believe in Handiange’er, which is a small cloth bag containing all kinds of grains, on the right-upper side of a tent they live in, hanging by a thin rope threading feather of many different types of livestock and colorful cloth stripes. They have this kind of activity to offer sacrifices to Handiange’er twice a year.