



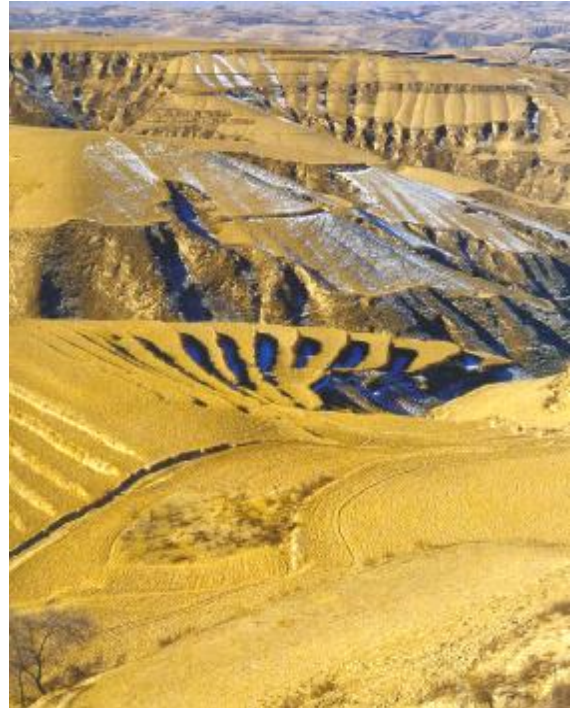
The Dongxiang Ethnic Group

The Dongxiangs formed a bucolic traditional during the course of development. Sheep, which has the character of easygoing and harmoniously living, plays an important part in the Dongxiang people's work and life. Therefore, the Dongxiang people consider sheep as the symbol of their national spirit, which is, expecting luck and loving peace.

The environment and population

The population of the Dongxiang people is 513 805, 80% of which distribute in Linxia Autonomous Prefecture of Gansu Province, especially in Donxiang Autonomous County. Others scatter in Lanzhou city and Gansu province, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

The Dongxiang Autonomous County, where the Dongxiangs congregate, has Yellow River, Tao River, and Daxia River run through it deliberately from the northwest, east and southwest. The terrain of the riversides is land high and plain, which is good for the agricultural irrigation. But the dry land still covers about 80% of the county, especially the center, where the terrain is high and steep, mountains and chains are undulating and the gullies are crisscross with hardly any river. It has hot summer and cold winter with little and unbalanced raining.



The ethnic origin and history

There is no certain theory of the origination of the Dongxiangs, but the comparatively agreeable opinion is: formation and the development of the Dongxiangs had direct relation with the military Tun Tian activity (garrison troops opened up wasteland for cultivation of good grains) in the Northeast in the Yuna Dynasty in the 13th century. According to the historical records, after the western invasion, the Yuan army brought a great number of soldiers and craftsmen of different nationalities in the Weastern regions, who were called "Se Mu people". After that, in order to attack the Westrn Xia Dynasty, the Southern Song Dynasty, and finally unite the whole country, Genghis Khan and his descendants left parts of "the red army of mounted scout", which was composed of the "Se Mu people" in the western regions and led by the Mongolian officials, to secure the rear. Among them, some Hui soldiers were sent to the Lin Tao, He Zhou and Dongxiang regions, which was located in the east of He Zhou. In the following years, the Hui soldiers communicated and amalgamated continuously with the native Hui, Han, Mongolian, Tibetan peoples. Generally, a new community was formed, that is, Dongxiang.

The ethnic appellation and the language

The Dongxiang people call themselves “Sa’erta”. They were called “Dongxiang people” because they live in Dongxiang County, Linxia Prefecture. Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, they were not admitted as a single ethnic group, but were called “Dongxiang Hui People”, “Dongxiang Mogolian People”, “Dongxiang natives” and so on. In 1954, the national Congress approved Dongxiang ethnic group as a single one, and made “Dongxiang” its name.

The Dongxiang people have their own spoken language, but no written script. The Dongxiang language belongs to Mongolian language of Altai language family. Nearly half of the vocabulary is the same as or similar to the Mongolian language, even in pronunciation and grammar, the features of ancient Mongolian language can be found now. Besides, there are also lots of borrowed words from Turkish language and Chinese. Using their language, Dongxiang people can communicate with Tu people in Tangren, Qinghai; Bonan people in Dahejia area, Ji Shi Mountain; and Yugur people who speak En’ge language. Most Dongxiang people can speak Chinese as well, and Chinese character has become their written language.



The featured housing—Flat-roofed house made of wood and adobe

Generally speaking, the traditional residents of Dongxiang have a house with a yard. The house usually locates in the north and faces the south. The northern house is to be a high class. It is mainly of earth and wood structure, with flat roof, one door and two windows. The Dongxiang people, who live in the mountainous area, also have cave dwellings, which are warm in winter

and cold in summer. The furnishing in their house is very simple: a cupboard against the wall to contain food and clothing; a clock or tea set on the cupboard; a pair of Arabian couplet on the wall. It is forbidden to put the portrait on the wall. With the improvement of their living condition, most of the Dongxiang people have already had tile-roofed houses with post and panel structure, and some even have two-storey buildings with brick and concrete structure. Televisions, washing machines and other electrical equipments also come in Dongxiang people’s houses. Some families have telephones.

The costumes and ornaments—White horn cap and long veil

The Dongxiang people’s traditional costumes are very different from what they are wearing today. In the past, most of the men’s clothes were large gowns, belts with dagger and tobacco pouch hanging on it. Women had their coats with wide sleeves, embroidered wristband and collars. Even the cuffs of their trousers have embroidery on them. On festivals, they often wore embroidered dress, embroidered high-heel shoes, with all kind of silver adornment in their hair and in front of them.

But in recent decades, their garment and adornment have changed a lot,



and are becoming similar to those of native Hui. Generally, men have white or black horn caps, white shirt, black vest and large blue trousers. Women have veils, which are long enough to reach their waists and cover their hair. Usually, the maid and newly-married women have green veils; the frail and middle-aged women have blue ones; and the old women have white ones. Young women love wearing red or green clothes, with large coat and vest, and their trousers, mostly blue, are long enough to reach the ground.

The dietetic customs—Lamb eaten with hands and Three-fragrance Tea

The Dongxiang people live on wheat, highland barley, corn, legume and potatoes. The forbidden food is the same as other Muslim's. "La Haha" (hand-pulled noodles), Fried-fragrance, chicken and lamb eaten with hands are their famous dishes. The lamb eaten with hands there is fresh but has no smell of mutton, fleshy but not greasy. It is carefully concocted, with a special flavor, and can be called a unique in the Northeast. The eating of chicken by



the Dongxiangs is particular. They divided the chicken into 13 parts of different classes, among which the chicken tail is considered to be dignified. When the relatives and friends gather together, they will distribute the parts of the chicken according to the seniority in the family. And the chicken tail will be given to the most respected and oldest one or the honored guest.

The Dongxiang people love drinking tea, and usually treat the guests with the Three-fragrance Tea. They put tealeaves, candy, and longans or Chinese date, raisin and preserved sweetened apricot into the tea-bowl, so that the color of the tea is bright and lustrous, and the flavor is fragrant and sweet. It is also called "three batteries".

The festival customs—The Ashoula Festival

All of the Dongxinag people's important and traditional festivals come from Islamic festivals. The ways of celebrating Erde Festival, Id-Kurban, and Saint Memory Festival are basically the same as other Moslem ethnic groups.

The Ashoula Festival is the one that belongs to the Dongxiang people. Ashoula is the transliteration of an Arabian word, which means "ten". That is January 10th in the Moslem calendar. It is said that Allah created the ancestors of human beings-Adam and Eve on this day. After many years of departure, they reunited on this day. Generally speaking, the Ashoula Festival is the festival for the Dongxiang women and children to gather together, and is celebrated by the housewives in turn. To the Dongxiang women, Ashoula also has the meaning of "food festival", expressing their good wishes for an abundant harvest of all food crops. This has nothing to do with religion.

The religious belief—Islam and Menhuan System

The Dongxiang people believe in Islam, which is divided into "old religion" and "new religion". There are

four Menhuan systems (denominations) in the “old religion”, but none in the new one, which insists on “respecting the scripture”. But wholly speaking, no matter whether they believe in “old religion” or “new religion”, they all practice “reading, ceremony, fasting, taxing, pilgrimage”, five assignments of a Muslim.