

## The Mongolian Ethnic Group

Blue sky, white cloud, the Mongolian Yurt and the flocks of sheep form the particular scene of inner Mongolian plain. The Mongolian yurt is the traditional residence for the Mongolians. The yurt culture is a miniature of the Mongolian culture. Suliding is the commanding instrument in the ancient war, a symbol of being ever victorious, marching toward sunlight. A sacrificial rite for Suliding is held in the memorial ceremonies at the Genghis Khan's mausoleum of Yikechao league. Lele-cart is traditional transportation means in the plain, on which a long history of nomadic life of the Mongolian people is recorded.



### The environment and population

The Mongolian ethnic group has a population of 5 813 947 now. The Mongolians live mostly in the Inner Mongolia autonomous Region, with the rest residing in Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang, etc.

The Inner Mongolian autonomous Region, with its capital at Hohhot, was founded on may1, 1947, as the earliest such establishment in China. The Mongolians in the area amount to 73 percent of the total Mongolian population in the whole nation.

Mongolian inhabitant area has vast and varied topography with rich natural resources. Here are enormous tracts of excellent pastureland, endless desert, rich and fertile land and dense forests with various kinds of wildlife and plants. The Mongolians have long lived a nomadic life and have a particular emotion for horse, so they are called "people on horseback".

### The historical origin

The Mongolian ethnic group can be traced back to Wuhuan, Xianbei and its descendants Monershiwei. Mongol was initially the name of a tribe roaming along the Erguna River. Moving to the grasslands of western Mongolia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongols settled in the vast region between Onon River and Lake Baikal. Early in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Temujin of the Mongol tribe unified all these tribes to form a new national community called Mongol. In 1206, he was elected the Great Khan of all Mongols with the title of Genghis Khan and founded a centralized feudal khanate. From then on there appeared a new ethnic community in the north of China—the Mongolian ethnic group.

Early in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Genghis Khan began his first Western expedition, respectively founding four khanates and breaking through the land route between Europe and Asia. Meanwhile the Mongolians marched south and united China after more than 70 years. In 1271 the Yuan Dynasty was founded, which lay a foundation for the formation of territory of modern China.

### Language

The Mongolian language belongs to the Mongolian group of the Altaic language family, the Mongolians use three dialects: Inner Mongolian, Baragburiyat and Uirad. The Mongolian script was created in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the script of Huihu, which was revised and developed a century later into the form used to this day.

### The traditional residence—mobile yurt

The Mongolian yurt is formed by flexible netted “Hana” as wall and umbrella-shaped framework as roof. The wall and roof are covered with thick felt and the structure is fixed by wool rope. The window in the top of the umbrella-shaped roof ventilates and lights the yurt and window can be covered while winding and raining. One of the most prominent characteristics of yurt is that it is movable and can be carried away by two camels or an ox cart. The yurt can be set up in two or three hours. It is warm in winter and cool in summer inside, appropriate for nomadic life. Now the herdsmen have ended their nomadic life and settled down, many of them have their own brick new houses.

### **The traditional dressing**

Both men and women like wearing loose cotton robes, colorful silk belt and knee-high leather boots. Mongolian costume is high-collared and long-sleeved, the front opening of which is edged with beautiful lace. They have one-layer robe, padded robe, cotton padded robe and fur robe for different seasons. The material for robe can be cloth or silk. Men generally like brown and dark blue, women prefer orange, light green and pink. Mongolian costume has many functions that it can protect herdsmen from cold on horseback and can be used as quilt at night. Mongolians men wear cone-shaped hats. Girls wear their hair parted in the middle, embellished with two large beads and agate, coral and green jade ornaments.



### **Special food-“shou ba rou” ( large piece of mutton), tea with milk and liquor with mare’s milk**

Mongolian herdsmen take beef, mutton and dairy products as their staple food. They like cutting mutton with bones into big pieces and boil them without any condiment. As soon as the mutton turns in color in boiling water, it is taken to table and people eat it with Mongolian knife and it is called “shou ba rou”. “Roast lamb” is a famous dish for distinguished guests. The way of cooking it is to take out internal organs before putting in different condiment and roasting it upon charcoal fire. The roasted lamb looks reddish gold, while the skin is crisp and fragrant and the flesh is delicious.

Tea is indispensable for the Mongolians. This kind of tea is a mixture of brick-shaped tea boiled and fresh milk, which can refresh oneself and satisfy one’s thirst. While they have tea, they have parched rice, cheese, butter, cream and acidophilus milk. Koumiss tastes savory, the best drink for the distinguished guests.

### **The traditional modes of transportation—horse riding, “lele cart” ( a kind of cattle cart) and camel**

In the past the Mongolians primarily rode horse when they go out or graze cattle, and used “lele cart” for short-distance portage, and relied on camel trade caravan for long-distance transportation. When the herdsmen transferred to another pasture, the cattle carts wiggled, one by one, on the plain. In the desert, jingles of camel bells were a peculiar western sight. Nowadays automobiles have replaced camels and some herdsmen used motors instead of horse. The traditional modes of transportation have changed.

### **The cultural heritage—“long melody”, “horse-head fiddle” and “Mongolian medicine”**

The Mongolians have made important contributions to literature, astronomy, medicine and art. The Secret History of Mongolia is magnum opus of history and literature written in Mongolian language, confirmed by the United Nations scientific, educational and cultural organization as the world’s famous cultural heritage. Jianggeer, a reflection of the social history of the Mongolian tribe wars, was one of the three heroic epics in the history of Chinese literature.

The Mongolians are good at singing and dancing. The most well known of the ballads is the long melody,

popular in pasturing areas, in which the lyric is short, while the tune is long, loud and sonorous, sounding remote. It is an expression of the particular feelings of the sons and daughters of the plain. The dancing rhythms are brisk and the motions are vigorous, with the shoulder shaking and arms flexible movement and horse step as the characteristics. The traditional dances are “Chopsticks dance”, “Erduosi Dance”, and “Adai dance”.

Horse-head fiddle is a musical instrument favorite with the Mongolians. It provides fine accompaniment to solos with its low and deep, broad and melodious sounds, most expressive of pastoral beauty of the plain. The playing techniques of horse-head fiddle are very sophisticated and its famous melody is “Thousands of horse galloping”.

The Mongolian medicine was invented before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, excelling particularly at treating osteitis and trauma, and also needle therapy. After the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongolian medicine, absorbing the essences of the Han, Hui and Tibetan medicines, especially the Tibetan medicine, was developed and advanced and it still plays an important role nowadays.

### **The festival customs—“Nadamu” and “a memorial ceremony for aobao”**



During July and August every year, a grand assembly called nadamu is held in the plain. It was said that Nadamu was often held for celebration of victories after Genghis Khan won them. Now the old activities have converted the festivals for celebration of harvest.

In the Nadamu three athletics, wrestling, toxophily and horse race are held, the winners of which are awarded prizes. The most attractive is the opening ceremony of wrestlers, who wear special wrestling cost, sing the wrestling song and dance the wrestling dance, looking powerful and strong. Besides there are performance of singing and dancing, and grand fair of commodities.

From May to August of lunar calendar each year, they hold a memorial ceremony for aobao in the plain, where people offer sacrifices to a pile of stones and go round it for three times, praying for prosperity of the people and domestic animal. After the ceremony, young men and young women make dating, for which the famous love song “Meeting at aobao” is produced.

### **The religious beliefs—Shamanism and Lamaism**

The Mongolians believed in Shamanism in the early period. Lamaism was introduced into the inner-Mongolian areas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was widely spread after the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At present there are still some lama temples in the Mongolian areas and some people believe in Lamaism.

