

The Oroqen Ethnic Group



The Oroqens, formerly living by hunting, ate beasts and lived in the Cuoluozhi (a kind of primitive awl-shaped house). “The decorative pattern of winded cloud” is the most representative design of the Oroqens, which is always used to decorate clothes, birch-bark boxes, fur pockets and the Cuoluozhi. The winded cloud, Cuoluozhi and bonfire show the traditional life and production of the Oroqens.

The population and the environment

The Oroqens, numbering 8 196, mostly dwell in Oroqen Autonomous League, Arong League and Molidawadawoer Autonomous League in Inner Mongolia as well as Huma, Tahe, Xunke and Jiayin in Heilongjiang Province.

The Oroqens live in compact communities in the forests of the Greater and Lesser Xingan Mountains with mountain peak towering into the sky, rivers here and there, fertile earth and products abound. And there are plenty of primeval forests and a great variety of wild animals and plants there. That’s why the Oroqens could go on a hunting trip over a long period of time. The Greater Xingan Mountains, averagely 1,300 meters above the sea level, is of frigid-warm zone. Therefore the winter there lasts a long period of time with the lower of 45 degrees below zero centigrade and the rivers’ freezing period is up to over six months long. The Oroqens previously live by hunting generation and lead a wandering life, migrating around, In 1950s’, the Oroqens led a settled life with the help of the government and lived by both hunting and growing and developed a diversified economy. Since 1996, hunting prohibition began to be practiced and the Oroqena switch to taking agriculture as the dominant factor and developing a diversified economy.



The ethnic origin and the language

The name of the Oroqen means “people on mountains” and “people using reindeers”. This name first emerged in the early Qing Dynasty. Then it was called “Eluochun” or “Elunchun” and something like that. Eventually, “Elunchun” was adopted as a regular name. Before the mid-17th century, the Oroqens mostly peopled the vast area east of the Beijiaer Lake and north of Heilongjiang Province, reaching the Kuye Is land. In 1640s’, the Oroqens were forced to migrate to the

Greater and Lesser Hangan Mountains near the Heilongjiang River because of the aggression of Tsarist Russia.

There are no records in Oroqen language and no archaeological about the Oroqen ethnic group. Anyway, the Oroqens are the offspring of the Shiwei ethnic group according to the dwelling area, the economic life or the customs. The customs of Shiwei ethnic group in the north collecting woods to build a house, putting dead bodies on trees and, loving on a log agree with the customs of wind burials and application of a skiing board in Oroqen society.

With no written script of their own, the Oroqens have a spoken language belonging to Oroqen branch of the Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altaic language family. The Oroqens have ever learnt and used the Manchu language and today, they use the written Chinese language.

The dwelling characteristic——“Xierenzhu”



The traditional Oroqen houses are called Xierenzhu in Oroqen language or Cuoluozi in Chinese, which means a wood-staff house. It is a circular-cone-shaped structure, consisting of more than 30 poles, covered with birch skin or reed in summer and fur of roe deer in winter. And every Xierenzhu, with a fire never stopping in the center and a bed nearby, consists of sixty or seventy roe deer skins. Hay is paved under a bed. In addition, the Oroqens spread hay under a bed and pave a roe-deer-skin mattress on it. The Xierenzhu, just like tents of Indians in America, is easy to be built and struck, and suits to those people who go on a hunting trip.

Another kind of Oroqen house is “Aolun”, same as a silo with high feet. Taking advantage of natural trees, it is built in the air for the storage of dry meat, grain, edible wild herbs, wild fruit, etc.



The costume and the ornament

——the roe-deer-skin clothes and roe-deer-head headgear

The Oroqens' traditional clothes are mostly made of roe deer skins. Of men or women, the clothes are with buttons down the front right and slits in front and behind or on left and right in order to ride a horse comfortably. The kind of clothes is durable, soft, warm, easy and convenient. Moreover, it is exquisite in style, the bigger front of a garment and the cuffs of sleeves edged with geometric figures, some even edged with collars of fur of foxes or lynxes. The roe-deer-head headgear, lifelike, is the most unique thing, which is made according to the original shape of a roe deer's head. Wearing this kind of headgears,

people can not only keep themselves from coldness but also camouflage themselves. For the Oroqens, roe deer skins can be made into both headgears, clothes, leather boots, gloves and bedclothes, sleeping bags, leather bags, sachets, small bags for carrying tobacco, belts, hunting knives and other ornaments.

The Oroqen women show marvelous skill in embroidering patterns of bow and arrow, antler, and winded cloud on roe deer leather, which are full of distinctive minority features. And the designs of flowers, birds, fish, insects and small animals they embroidered are vivid. What's more, they are good at making various daily necessities and handicraft with white birch bark and the patterns carved on them are lifelike and beautiful.

The dietetic customs——hand-meat and buds of wormwood

The traditional food of the Oroqens used to eat roe deer, most and then deer, moose, wild boar and so on. And now, they eat beef, mutton or meat as a substitute. The Oroqens process meat by cooking, baking, boiling, smoking and so on. Meat boiled in birch-bark-barrel and dried meat is peculiar to the Oroqens. The Oroqens like to eat hand-meat. The making way is: put a large piece of meat with bones into a pot and add only little onion, garlic and salt so that the meat cooked is fresh and tender and delicious, keeping the original taste. With the development of the agriculture, the proportion of grain in the dietary structure has risen gradually. Hunting dog and hunting horse, necessary to hunters, are called "the partner of hunters". Therefore, generally speaking, the Oroqens neither kill horses and dogs nor eat meat of them.

The Oroqens always gathered edible wild herb and wild fruits to break the monotony of the. Whenever the earth began to become green, the Oroqens, together with the Ewenkis and the Daur, as if by prior agreement, went to field and gathered buds of wormwood, which they liked to eat. At noon, with plenty of gains, people supported an iron pot and

cooked and fresh gains, singing and dancing, enjoying the buds of wormwood feast.

The culture and the art——“Mosukun”and “Yihanen Dance”

The Oroqens abound in folk literary works and artworks. The “Mosukun” is kind of talking art with substantial contents, which mostly talks and sings about a hero named Morigen, and his tragic life. The Gepaqian, a hero, over 1 900 lines and 100 000 characters, described vividly how Gepaqian struggled a demon. It’s a rare and grand epic of the literature treasure house of our motherland.



The main tune of folk songs include the Zandaren, a kind of folk song sung in the fields or in mountain area during or after work, the Lurigeinen, a tune for folk group dancing, and the Shamanism tune, a tune for religious activity. Folk sings are always impromptu, filled in words off the cuff and written and sung at any time. As far as the dances concerned, they have various forms and lively rhythm, singing while dancing. And the “Black Bear Fight” and “Wood Cock Dance” have something with the bunting life. The Yihanen Dance “danced frequently is group dance.” The Yihenanen Dance is danced when clan meetings is held. And dances for ceremony and religion have little fun.

The festival customs——“Blackening-Face Day”

Affected by the Hans, the Oroqens spend the Spring Festival, the dragon boat festival, the mid-autumn festival, etc. They have family union dinner on the New Year’s Eve; light the bonfire that symbolize the prosperity; see the old year off and the New Year in. In addition, they eat dumplings and set off firecrackers on the first day of the New Year. And people wish the elder a happy New Year and worship the Moutain god, the Sun god, the Fire god, etc. The Oroqens have the custom of blacken faces on the 16th, February according to the lunar calendar. It’s said that it can drive the perverse trend and ghosts away and guarantee the safeness of the whole year to make one’s face black.

The religious belief——Shamanism

Being animist and believing in the omnipresence of spirits, the Orpqens worship all kinds of natural things, totems and their ancestors. The objects to worship, being carefully kept in birch-bark boxes hunt high on the Xierenzhu, are called Maomutie. At the same time, the Oroqens worship the wind god and the sun god.

The Oroqens believe in the Shamanism that there is no systematic doctrine and written scripture. But during the ritual of the shamanism, shamans teach orally a great variety of prayers, words of praise and legends, which, as well as the music and dance they perform,

have special function of keeping the cultural heritage of the minority.