

The Russian Ethnic Group



The ethnic Russians keep the tradition of worshipping the spirits. In the hearts of the Russians in the Xinjiang region, white pigeon is an ambassador of luck and symbol of peace and quietness in life.

The population distribution and means of livelihood

The population of the ethnic Russians in China is 15609, mainly living in Ili, Tacheng, Urumqi Altay and Jichang, the rest scattering in

Helongjiang Province and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. There is an ethnic county for the Russian ethnic minority.

The ethnic Russians are valiant, industrious and talented. After they moved into Xinjiang, they used ploughshare, horse-pulled planter and harvester as to increase the agricultural productivity. They also introduced planting of potato, tomato and cucumber. Some Russians who are good at horticulture remake fruit trees with Michurin doctrine, producing



delicious lemon fruit; Chinese flowering crabapple and luncheon fruit. They also introduce the well-known Ukraine white pig, Holstein, Alataw bull kept for covering and Sanhe cattle and horse. The Russians excel at business. Those who live in the cities are mostly engage in commerce, handcraft industry, transportation industry and different kinds of repairing trades. In the 30s of the 20th century they held a training class, which produced the first generation of drivers and mechanics of Uygur and Kazak people.

The ethnic origin

The first began moving to China from Tsarist Russia after the 18th century. More entered China from the 19th century to the October Revolution in 1917. At the time the villages they inhabited were called “converted village” and the inhabitants were called “converted people”. In 1949 they were named officially the Russian ethnic minority.

The language

The Russian language belongs to the Slav family of Indo-European languages. The ethnic Russians in China are multi-lingual. They speak Russian and use Russian language when they are at home or communicate with their own people. When they communicate socially they speak Chinese and use Chinese language. Influenced by the Ethnic groups around, some of them learn to use Uygur, Kazak and Mongolian languages.

The housing characteristics—the house with big fireplace and village with nice environment



The ethnic Russians scatter in inhabitation. Those who live in the urban areas, in most cases, cover a street or a small lane in a group of more than ten families. Those who live in rural areas usually form a natural village in a group of less than one hundred families. The ethnic Russians take care of the living environment. They always choose beautiful places with a lush growth of trees and grass for their residence.

The traditional house is generally a single-storey house, which consists of bedrooms, living room and storeroom. In the house there is wood floor and carpet, and also a fireplace and an oven for toasting. Different from the other minorities in the Xinjiang areas, they sleep in bed other than heated brick bed. There is embroidered curtain, napkin and cover on the window, table and bed so that the rooms look simply but tastefully furnished. There is a tapestry and grand oil painting on the wall, and there is also a sculpture of Saint Mary somewhere in the room. Outside the house there is a big courtyard with mud walls, which is full of flowers, grass and trees. On a fine spring day birds sing and flowers give forth fragrance, while in autumn fruits hang heavy on the trees, being full of life.



The dressing characteristics—embroidered-collar shirt and “Platia”

Old people of the ethnic Russians mostly keep the traditional dressing. Most old man wear suit, riding breeches, leather boots and octagonal cap, some of them also like to wear long garment made slit at the back and long trousers with loose crotch. Most old women wear collarless embroidered short coat, self-made long cotton skirt with cotton print belt round waist and square scarf on head. The dressing of middle-aged people is not very different from that of Han people. Young people like wearing

western suit and tie, and also like wearing embroidered-collar shirt that has strong ethnic characteristics. Young women’s dressing is diversified and colorful and they like wearing a long skirt (namely “Bulaji”), some of them wear Western-style clothes and skirt. In summer they put on square scarf on head, while in winter they wear woolen cap or leather cap with feathers on the top.



The dietetic features—bread and smoked sausage

The food of the ethnic Russians keeps the traditional habit. They use knife and fork for meal and use dish as soup container. They have three meals a day. The breakfast and supper are comparatively

simple, for which they have milk tea, cake and “Lieba”(a kind of Russian bread). They take lunch as a big meal and separately eat by dishes, for which they are very particular about nutrition. The main food is the self-made Lieba and cake. Influenced by the Han people and the Uygurs they like eating dumpling, noodle, steamed stuffed bun and different kinds of dishes. They also like eating vegetables with rich nutrition, such as cucumber and tomato. The breads and cakes that they make are diversified and delicious. The smoked sausage and ham that are manufactured by them are fond of drinking. Most families can brew beer and light sparkling wine, which are absolutely necessary at the celebrations of festivals.

The culture and education——step dance and the tradition of taking education seriously

The ethnic Russians have a strong love for life and they are good at singing and dancing. They often hold parties, especially at the festivals. In the parties they dance with the music of accordion, triangle music instrument (a Russian music instrument having a shape of triangle solely) and Banjila (like guitar). Most frequently they dance step dance, all together three forms, solo dance, double dance and tree-person group dance. The dancers’ movements and postures diversify. They sometimes whirl and sometimes squad, looking dazzling. When they dance step dance, the boots step on the ground, rhythmically, as the drum beats. When they dance step dance, the boots step on the ground, rhythmically, as the drum beats. When the women dance scarf dance that they also like very much, one hand waves a scarf, the other lies on the waist, with the dancing steps and formation being changed constantly, the dancers spreading themselves briskly and lightly.

The ethnic Russians have a tradition of taking education seriously. Wherever they stay, they establish schools. Early in 1930, they founded a school for the ethnic Russians in Ili. The ethnic Russians have fairly high cultural quality. In 2000, the number of people who are educated over the level of junior college is 13.94% of the population over the age of six, higher than average level of 3.81% of the whole nation, being the second among all ethnic groups in China. The proportion of intellectuals in the ethnic Russians is comparatively high, who have made great contributions to the construction of the nation.

The festivals, rituals and taboo——Orthodox Church and entertainment of guests with salt and bread

The festivals of the ethnic Russians are closely related with Orthodox Church. They mainly have Easter day and Christmas Day. It is an annual Christian festival celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, held on the first Sunday after the date of the first moon that occurs on or after March 21. For the Russian calendar is different from the Gregorian calendar, their Christmas Day is held on the 1st of January of next year. On the festival night, they have Christmas trees made of cypress and pinaster and hold choirs. And also sumptuous food is prepared for the guests.

The ethnic Russians are of sanguine and humorous disposition, and receive guests courteously. The grandest ceremony is reception of guests with bread and salt, which they hold for receiving bride and distinguished guests, an implication of friendship and kindness

The ethnic Russians are forbidden to eat donkey meat, horsemeat and dog meat. They avoid sending gifts in yellow package and are sensitive to the two digitals-Friday and 13.

The religion—Orthodox Church

Most ethnic Russians believe in Orthodox Church and minority of people believe in Christianity. Those who believe in Orthodox Church pray before and after meals and keep their chapels on Sunday, having choirs and listening to the sermons of priests.