



China Travel Guide
All Things About China

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Nationalities

There are 56 ethnic groups in China. The Han people form the largest, numbering 1.1 billion and making up 93.3 percent of the country's population. The other ethnic groups, that is the minority nationalities, total 160 million, only 6.7 percent of the Chinese nation.

Of the minority nationalities, 15 have over a million people each; 13 over 100,000 each; 7 over 50,000 each; and 20 have fewer than 50,000 people each.

Han

The Han people live all over the country but their compact communities are in the Huanghe, Changjiang and Zhujiang valleys and the Songhua-Liaohe Plain of the northeast. The minority nationalities inhabit 60 percent of the country's total area, and they live mainly in the border regions.

Manchus

Like the Han people, the majority ethnic group in China, over 70 per cent of the Manchus are engaged in agriculture-related jobs. Their main crops include soybean, sorghum, corn, millet, tobacco and apple. They also raise tussah silkworms. For Manchus living in remote mountainous areas, gathering ginseng, mushroom and edible fungus makes an important sideline. Most of the Manchu people in cities, who are better educated, are engaged in traditional and modern industries. Manchus have their own script and language, which belongs to the Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altaic language family. Beginning from the 1640s, large numbers of Manchus moved to south of the Shanhaiguan Pass (east end of the Great Wall), and gradually adopted Mandarin Chinese as their spoken language. Later, as more and more Han people moved to north of the pass, many local Manchus picked up Mandarin Chinese too.



Korean

The largest concentration of Koreans is in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in eastern Jilin Province. Another community of Koreans lives in the Changbai Korean Autonomous County in southeastern Jilin. The ancestors of the Korean ethnic group migrated from the Korean peninsula from about the late 17th century, mostly peasants fleeing from their oppressive feudal landlords. Especially following a severe famine in the northern part of Korea in 1869, they settled down in large numbers in what is now the Yanbian area. Another wave of migration took place in the early years of this century when Japan annexed Korea and drove many peasants off the land. The Japanese seizure of the Manchurian provinces further served to drive landless Koreans to settle in Northeast China. The Koreans have their own spoken and written language, which is thought to belong to the Altaic family. Their alphabet is a simple, ingenious one, and

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the Koreans are very proud of it.

Hezhe

The Hezhes are one of the smallest ethnic minority groups in China. In fact, poverty and oppression had reduced their numbers to a mere 300 at the time of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Since then, however, they have made speedy advances in their economic life and health care, so that by 1990 the population had grown to 4,300.

They are a nomadic people who live mainly by hunting and fishing in the plain formed by the Heilong, Songhua and Wusuli rivers in Tongjiang, Fuyuan and Raohe counties in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province. Their language, which belongs to the Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altaic family, has no written form. For communication with outsiders they use the spoken and written Chinese language.

In winter they travel by sled and hunt on skis. They are also skilled at carpentry, tanning and iron smelting; but these are still cottage industries.

Mongolian



The Mongolians live mostly in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, with the rest residing in Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Hebei, Henan, Sichuan, Yunnan and Beijing. /Having their own spoken and written language, which belongs to the Mongolian group of the Altaic language family, the Mongolians use three dialects: Inner Mongolian, Barag-Buryat and Uirad. The Mongolian script was created in the early 13th century on the basis of the script of Huihu or ancient Uygur, which was revised and developed a century later into the form used to

this day.

The largest Mongolian area, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region with its capital at Hohhot, was founded on May 1, 1947, as the earliest such establishment in China. This vast and rich expanse of land is inhabited by 21,780,000 people, of whom about 2 million are Mongolians and the rest Hans, Huis, Manchus, Daur, Ewenkis, Oroqens and Koreans.

Daur

The Daur live mainly in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang Province. About several thousand of them are found in the Tacheng area in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwest China. They are descendents of Daur who moved to China's western region in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The Daur speak a language related to Mongolian and used Manchu during the Qing Dynasty as their written language. Since the 1911 Revolution, mandarin Chinese has replaced Manchu.

The biggest Daur community is in the Morin Dawa Daur Autonomous Banner, which was set up on August 15, 1958 on the left bank of the Nenjiang River in Heilongjiang Province. This 11,943 sq. km.-area has lush pasture and farmland. The main crops are maize, sorghum, wheat, soybeans and rice. In the mountains which border the Daur community on the north are stands of valuable timber -- such as oak, birch and elm -- and medicinal herbs. Wildlife, including bears, deer, lynx and otters are found in the forests. Mineral deposits in the area include gold, mica, iron and coal.

Ewenki

This ethnic minority is distributed across seven banners (counties) in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and in Nahe County of Heilongjiang Province, where they live together with Mongolians, Daur, Hans and Oroqens.

The Ewenki people have no written script but a spoken language composed of three dialects belonging to the Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altai language family. Mongolian is spoken in the pastoral areas while the Han language is used in agricultural regions. The Ewenki Autonomous Banner,

nestled in the ranges of the Greater Hinggan Mountains, is where the Ewenkis live in compact communities. A total of 19,110 square kilometers in area, it is studded with more than 600 small and big lakes and 11 springs.

Oroqen

People of the Oroqen ethnic minority group dwell in the forests of the Greater and Lesser Hinggan Mountains in Northeast China which abound in deer and other wild beasts the Oroqens hunt with shot-guns and dogs. The Oroqens, who lived in a primitive communal society four and a half decades ago, have leap-frogged several historical stages to a socialist society in the years following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

With no written script of their own, the Oroqens have a spoken language belonging to the Tungus branch of the Manchu-Tungusic group of the Altaic language family. Most of them have learned to read and write the language of the Hans, the biggest ethnic group in China.

The Oroqen population, which stood at 4,000 in 1917, dropped to 3,700 in 1943. A census taken in 1953 showed that their number had plummeted to 2,250. The population has started to grow slowly but steadily since, and the census in 1982 showed that their number has reached 4,100. The 1990 national census showed 7,000.

Most of the Oroqens live in the 55,000-square-kilometer Oroqen Autonomous Banner in the Greater Hinggan Mountains. Others have their home in several localities in Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang Province.



Hui

With a sizable population of 8.61 million, the Hui ethnic group is one of China's largest ethnic minorities. People of Hui origin can be found in most of the counties and cities throughout the country, especially in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Gansu, Qinghai, Henan, Hebei, Shandong and Yunnan provinces and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Dongxiang



People of the Dongxiang ethnic minority live in the part of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture situated south of the Yellow River and southwest of Lanzhou, capital city of the northwest province of Gansu. Half of them dwell in the Dongxiang Autonomous County, and the rest are scattered in Hezheng and Ningxia counties, the city of Lanzhou, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and some other places.

The Dongxiang ethnic minority received its name from the place it lives -- Dongxiang. However, this ethnic group was not recognized as a minority prior to the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The Dongxiangs were then called "Dongxiang Huis" or "Mongolian Huis." The Dongxiang language is basically similar to Mongolian, both belonging to the Mongolian branch of the Altaic language family. It contains quite a number of words borrowed from the Han Chinese language. Most of the Dongxiang people also speak Chinese, which is accepted as their common written language. Quite a few of them can use Arabic alphabet to spell out and write Dongxiang or Chinese words.

The Dongxiangs are an agricultural people who grow potatoes, wheat, maize and broad beans as well as hemp, rapeseed and other industrial crops.

Tu

The Tu ethnic minority, known for their simplicity and industriousness, lives in the northwestern part of China -- to the east of Qinghai Lake and south of Qilian Mountain Range and along the banks of the Huangshui and Datong rivers. It is concentrated mainly in the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County in Qinghai Province, and also in the counties of Minhe and Datong. Others are scattered in Ledu, Menyuan and the Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu Province.



The language of the Tu people belongs to the Mongolian branch of the Altaic language family. Its basic vocabulary is either the same as or similar to that of the Mongolian language, but it is much closer to the languages of the Dongxiang and Bonan ethnic minorities. Quite a number of religious terms are borrowed from the Tibetan language, while a good portion of everyday words, as well as new terms and phrases, come from the Han language, which has long been the medium of communication among the Tus of Datong County. The Tu people do not have a written language of their own; they use that of the Hans instead.

Salar

There have been different theories put forward on the origin of the Salars. The prevalent view held at the moment is that the ancestors of the Salars came from the region of Samarkand in Central Asia during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

Xunhua County, which the largest group of the Salars live, is a mountainous area situated along the banks of the Yellow River in southeastern Qinghai Province. Although it has a mild climate and fertile land crisscrossed by canals, it is handicapped by insufficient rainfall. Before China's national liberation in 1949, farmers here did not have the capability of harnessing the Yellow River, and the county was often referred to as "arid Xunhua." The Salars are mainly farmers, going in for such crops as wheat, Tibetan barley, buckwheat and potatoes. As sideline occupations, they engage in stock breeding, lumbering, salt-producing and wool-weaving.

During the Yuan Dynasty, a Salar headman bearing the surname of Han was made hereditary chief of this ethnic minority. With the rise of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), he submitted to the new rulers and continued to hold his position. He had under him a basic bureaucracy which looked after such things as military affairs, punishments, revenue and provisions. Following the development of the economy and the expansion of the population, the region inhabited by the Salars was divided into two administrative areas, i.e. the "inner eight gongs" of Xunhua and the "outer five gongs" of Hualong, during the early period of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). A "gong" included a number of villages, equivalent to the later administrative unit of "xiang" (township).

New organizational setups were introduced during the following years of the Qian Dynasty to step up the control and exploitation of the Salars. During both the Ming and Qing periods Salar men were constantly subjected to conscription, which was an extremely heavy burden on the Salar people. As the Salars were devout Muslims, the villages were dominated by the mosques and the Muslim clergy. Along with the development of the feudal economy, land became concentrated in the hands of the ruling minority -- the headman, community chiefs and imams.

Prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the landlord economy was dominant. Relying on their political power, and feudal and religious privileges, the Salar landlords maintained ownership over most of the land and farm animals, as well as water sources and oil mills. Most of the Salar farmers, on the other hand, were either landless or owned only a very insignificant portion of barren land. They were subjected to crippling land rents and usury, in addition to all kinds of heavy unpaid labor services including building houses, felling trees and doing transportation work for the landlords. As a result, at times there were large-scale exoduses of Salars from their villages, leaving the farmlands lying waste and production at a standstill.

Bonan

The Bonan is one of China's smallest ethnic minorities, with only 11,700 people. Its language belongs to the Mongolian branch of the Altaic language family and is close to that of the Tu and Dongxiang ethnic minorities. Due to long years of contacts and exchanges with the neighboring Han and Hui people, the Bonan people have borrowed quite a number of words from the Han language. The Han language is accepted as the common written language among the Bonans.

The Bonan people, mainly Muslims, are divided into two different sects -- the Old and the New.

A sideline occupation for which Bonans are particularly noted is the making of knives. A cottage industry, the Bonan knives are famous all over China for their beauty and sturdiness.

Naxi



The Naxi ethnic minority has a population of 277,800, most of whom live in concentrated communities in the Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County in Yunnan Province, the rest being scattered in Weixi, Zhongdian, Ninglang, Deqin, Yongsheng, Heqing, Jianchuan and Lanping counties in Yunnan Province, as well as Yanyuan, Yanbian and Muli counties in Sichuan Province. A small number live in Mangkang County of Tibet Autonomous Region.

The Naxi language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family. More than 1,000 years ago, the Naxi people had already created pictographic characters called the "Dongba" script and a syllabic writing known as the "Geba" script. With these scripts they recorded a lot of beautiful folklore, legends, poems and religious classics. However, they were difficult to master, and in 1957 the government helped the Naxi design an alphabetic script. Over the past few hundred years, as the Naxi people have come into closer contact with the people in other parts of China politically, economically and culturally, the oral and written Chinese has become an important means of communication in Naxi society.

Yugur

Nearly 90 per cent of the Yugur people live in the Sunan Yugur Autonomous County, and the rest in Huangnibao area near the city of Jiuquan in western Gansu Province.

Due to historical reasons, this ethnic minority uses three languages: a Turkic branch of the Altaic language family (Raohul) used by the Yugurs in the western part of the autonomous county; a Mongolian branch of the same language family (Engle) by those in the eastern part of the county; and the Chinese language by those in Huangnibao. Chinese is also a common medium of communication among all Yugurs.

Uygur

Almost all the Uygurs are found in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region which covers more than 1,709,400 square kilometers or approximately one sixth of China's total landmass, and is by far the biggest of the country's regions and provinces. It occupies much of the sparsely-populated Northwest. They believe in Islam.



Kazak

The Kazak ethnic minority, with a population of over a million, mainly lives

in the Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Mori Kazak Autonomous County and Barkol Kazak Autonomous County in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Some are also located in the Haixi Mongolian, Tibetan and Kazak Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province and the Aksay Kazak Autonomous County in Gansu Province.

The Kazak language belongs to the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family. As the Kazaks live in mixed communities with the Hans, Uygurs and Mongolians, the Kazaks have assimilated many words from these languages. They had a written language based on the Arabic alphabet, which is still in use, but a new Latinized written form was evolved after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Kirgiz

The Kirgiz ethnic minority, with a population of 143,500, finds 80 per cent of its inhabitants in the Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture in the southwestern part of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The rest live in the neighboring Wushi (Uqturpan), Aksu, Shache (Yarkant), Yingisar, Taxkorgan and Pishan (Guma), and in Tekes, Zhaosu (Monggolkure), Emin (Dorbiljin), Bole (Bortala), Jinghe (Jing) and Gonliu in northern Xinjiang. Several hundred Kirgiz whose forefathers emigrated to Northeast China more than 200 years ago now live in Wujiazi Village in Fuyu County, Heilongjiang Province.

Xibe

The Xibe ethnic minority, with a population of 127,900, is widely distributed over northern China from the Ili area in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in the west to the northeast provinces of Jilin and Liaoning.

The Xibe people in northeast and northwest China have each formed their own characteristics in the course of development. The language and eating, dressing and living habits of the Xibes in the northeast are close to those of the local Han and Manchu people.



Tajik

Standing at China's west gate in the eastern part of the Pamirs on the "roof of the world" is the Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County in Xinjiang, a town built up since 1950s. It is the place where the ancient Tajik ethnic group has lived generation after generation. Most of the 26,500 Tajiks live in compact communities in Taxkorgan, and the rest are scattered over areas in southern Xinjiang, including Shache, Zepu, Yecheng and Pishan. The Tajiks in Taxkorgan live alongside Uygurs, Kirgizs, Xibes and Hans.

For centuries, the Tajiks have been engaged in animal husbandry and farming by making use of the luxuriant pasturage and abundant water resources. Every spring, they sow highland barley, pea, wheat and other cold-resistant crops. They drive their herds to highland grazing grounds in early summer, return to harvest the crops in autumn and then spend winter at home, leading a semi-nomadic life.

Ozbek

The Ozbek ethnic minority, with a population of 14,800, is scattered over wide areas of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Most of them being city dwellers, the Ozbeks live in compact communities in Yining, Tacheng, Kashi, Urumqi, Shache, and Yecheng.

Russian

The ethnic Russians in China living in Ili, Tacheng, Altay and Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

They first began moving to China from Tsarist Russia after the 18th century. More entered various parts of Xinjiang after the 19th century, and even after the October Revolution in 1917.

They speak Russian, their customs and clothing are almost identical to those of the Russians in Russia, and most of them believe in the Orthodox Eastern Church.

Tartar

There are about 5,100 Tartars in China, most of whom live in Yining, Tacheng and Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Most Tartars in cities live in flat-roofed mud houses equipped with flues for heating. They like to hang tapestry inside their homes, which are usually very clean and tidy. Courtyards planted with flowers and trees have the appearance of small gardens. The Tartars in pastoral areas have adapted to a nomadic life, and live in tents.

Tibetan



The Tibetans with a population of 4,593,100 mostly live in the Tibet Autonomous Region. There are also Tibetan communities in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. The Tibetan language belongs to the Tibetan sub-branch of the Tibetan-Myanmese language branch of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. According to geographical divisions, it has three major local dialects: Weizang, Kang and Amdo. The Tibetan script, an alphabetic system of writing, was created in the early 7th century. With four vowels and 30 consonants, it is used in all areas inhabited by Tibetans.

Moinba

The Moinbas are scattered in the southern part of Tibet Autonomous Region. Most of them live in Medog, Nyingch and Cona counties.

They have forged close links with the Tibetan people through political, economic and cultural exchanges and intermarriage over the years. They share with the Tibetans the common belief in Lamaism and have similar customs and lifestyles.

Their language, which has many dialects, belongs to the Tibetan-Myanmese language family, and many of them can speak Tibetan.

Lhoba

The 2,300 people of the Lhoba ethnic minority have their homes mainly in Mainling, Medog, Lhunze and Nangxian counties in southeastern Tibet. Additionally, a small number live in Luoyu, southern Tibet.

The Lhobas speak a distinctive language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese language family, Chinese-Tibetan language system. Few of them know the Tibetan language. Having no written script, Lhoba people used to keep records by notching wood or tying knots.

Qiang

The Qiang ethnic minority has a population of 198,300 who mostly dwell in hilly areas, crisscrossed by rivers and streams, in the Maowen Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. A small number live with Tibetan, Han and Hui ethnic groups in such localities as Wenchuan, Dali,

Heishui and Songpan.

They occupy a fertile land of mild climate and adequate rain. The mountain slopes are natural pastures. The area abounds in precious Chinese caterpillar fungus, bulb of fritillary, antlers, musk and bear's gallbladders, which are used for medicine. Deep in the forests are such rare animals as giant pandas, golden monkeys and flying foxes. The region is also rich in iron, coal, crystal, mica and plaster stone deposits.

Yi

The Yi ethnic group, with a population of 6,578,500, is mainly distributed over the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou, and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There are more than one million Yis in Sichuan Province, and most of them live in an area south of the Dadu River and along the Anning River. Traditionally, this area is subdivided into the Greater Liangshan Mountain area, which lies east of the Anning River and south of the Huangmao Dyke, and the Lesser Liangshan Mountain area, which covers the Jinsha River valley and the south bank of the Dadu River. There are over a million Yis in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which holds the single largest Yi community in China. Yunnan Province has more than three million Yis, most of whom are concentrated in an area hemmed in by the Jinsha and Yuanjiang rivers, and the Ailao and Wuliang mountains. Huaping, Ninglang and Yongsheng in western Yunnan form what is known as the Yunnan Lesser Liangshan Mountain area. In Guizhou, more than half a million Yis live in compact communities in Anshun and Bijie. Several thousand Yis live in Longlin and Mubian counties in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.



Most Yis are scattered in mountain areas, some in frigid mountain areas at high altitudes, and a small number live on flat land or in valleys. The altitudinal differences of the Yi areas directly affect their climate and precipitation. Their striking differences have given rise to the old saying that "the weather is different a few miles away" in the Yi area. This is the primary reason why the Yis in various areas are so different from one another in the ways they make a living.

Bai

Of the 1,598,100 Bai people, 80 per cent live in concentrated communities in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, southwest China. The rest are scattered in Xichang and Bijie in neighboring Sichuan and Guizhou provinces respectively.

The Bais speak a language related to the Yi branch of the Tibetan-Myanmese group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. The language contains a large number of Chinese words due to the Bais' long contact with the majority Chinese ethnic group--Han.

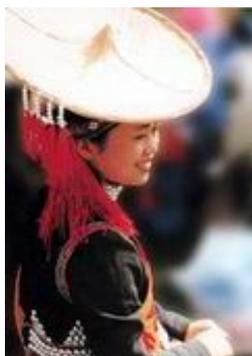


Hani

Most of the 1,254,800 Hanis live in the valleys between the Yuanjiang and Lancang rivers, that is, the vast area between the Ailao and Mengle mountains in southern Yunnan Province. They are under the jurisdiction of the Honghe Hani-Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which includes Honghe, Yuanyang, Luchun and Jinping counties. Others dwell in Mojiang, Jiangcheng, Pu'er, Lancang and Zhenyuan counties in Simao Prefecture; in

Xishuangbanna's Menghai, Jinghong and Mengla counties; in Yuanjiang and Xinping, Yuxi Prefecture, and (a small number) in Eshan, Jianshui, Jingdong and Jinggu counties.

Dai



The Dai ethnic group lives in the southern part of Yunnan Province, mainly in the Xishuangbanna region. The area is subtropical, with plentiful rainfall and fertile land.

Local products include rice, sugar cane, coffee, hemp, rubber, camphor and a wide variety of fruits.

Xishuangbanna is the home of China's famous Pu'er tea. The dense forests produce large amounts of teak, sandalwood and medicinal plants, and are home to wild animals including elephants, tigers and peacocks.

The Dai language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family and has three major dialects. It is written in an alphabetic script.

Lisu

The Lisu ethnic group numbers 574,600 people, and most of them live in concentrated communities in Bijiang, Fugong, Gongshan and Lushui counties of the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in northwestern Yunnan Province. The rest are scattered in Lijiang, Baoshan, Diqing, Dehong, Dali, Chuxiong prefectures or counties in Yunnan Province as well as in Xichang and Yanbian counties in Sichuan Province, living in small communities with the Han, Bai, Yi and Naxi peoples.

The Lisu language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family. In 1957, a new alphabetic script was created for the Lisu people.

Va

The Va ethnic minority, with a population of 352,000, lives in Ximeng, Cangyuan, Menglian, Gengma, Lancang, Shuangjiang, Zhenkang and Yongde counties in southwestern Yunnan Province. Some are found scattered in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture and the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. Ximeng and Cangyuan counties are the main places where the Va people live in compact communities.

The Va language belongs to the Austroasiatic family. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, except for some parts of the area where an alphabetic script was used, the Va people had no written language, and they kept records and accounting or passed messages with material objects or by engraving bamboo strips. Each strip ranged from half an inch to an inch in width. Objects used implied specific meaning or feelings. For instance, sugarcane, banana or salt meant friendship, hot pepper anger, feather urgency, and gunpowder and bullets the intention of clan warfare. An alphabetic script was created for the Va people in 1957.

Lahu

The Lahus ethnic minority has a population of 411,500, mainly distributed in the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County in Simao Prefecture, Southern Lincang Prefecture and Menghai County in western Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province. Others live in counties along the Lancang River.

The Lahu language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Most of the Lahus also speak Chinese and the language of the Dais. In the past the custom of passing messages by wood-carving was prevalent. In some parts the alphabetic script invented by Western priests was in use. After liberation, the script was reformed and became their formal written language.



Jingpo

The Jingpos, numbering 119,300, live mostly in the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, together with the De'ang, Lisu, Achang and Han peoples. A few of them are found in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture.

The Jingpos speak a language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese family of the Chinese-Tibetan language system. Until 70 years ago, when an alphabetic system of writing based on Latin letters was introduced, the Jingpos kept records by notching wood or tying knots. Calculation was done by counting beans. The new system of writing was not widely used, however. After 1949, with the help of the government, the Jingpo people have started publishing newspapers, periodicals and books in their own language.

Blang

The Blang people, numbering 82,400, live mainly in Mt. Blang, Xiding and Bada areas of Menghai County in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Yunnan Province. There are also scattered Blang communities in the neighboring Lincang and Simao prefectures. All the Blangs inhabit mountainous areas 1,500-2,000 meters above sea level. The Blangs in Xishuangbanna have always lived harmoniously with their neighbors of both the other minority nationalities and the majority Han. The Blangs speak a language belonging to the South Asian language family. The language does not have a written form, but Blangs often know the Dai, Va and Han languages. According to historical records, an ancient tribe called the "Pu" were the earliest inhabitants of the Lancang and Nujiang river valleys. These people may have been the ancestors of today's Blangs.

Achang

More than 90 per cent of the 27,700 Achangs live in Longchuan, Lianghe and Luxi counties in the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Yunnan Province. The rest live in Longling County in the neighboring Baoshan Prefecture.

Achangs speak a language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese language family of the Chinese-Tibetan system. Most Achangs also can speak Chinese and the language of Dais. Their written language is Chinese.

Pumi



The 29,700 Pumis are concentrated in the Yunnan Province counties of Lanping, Lijiang, Weixi and Yongsheng, as well as in the Yi Autonomous County of Ninglang. Some live in Sichuan Province, in the Tibetan Autonomous County of Muli and Yanyuan County.

The Pumis speak a language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese language family of the Chinese-Tibetan system. Although Pumis in the Muli and Ninglang areas once wrote with Tibetan characters, this was mainly for religious purposes. Gradually the Tibetan characters fell into oblivion, and most Pumis now use Chinese.

Nu

The Nu ethnic minority, numbering some 27,200, live mainly in Yunnan Province's Bijiang, Fugong, Gongshan and Lanping counties, which comprise the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture. Others are found in Weixi County in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

The Nu people speak a language belonging to the Tibetan-Myanmese group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. It has no written form, and, like many of their ethnic minority neighbors, the Nus used to keep records by carving notches on sticks; educated Nus nowadays use the Han language (Chinese) for administrative purposes.

De'ang

The number of De'ang people in China totals 15,500. Small as their population is, the people of this ethnic group are quite widely distributed over Yunnan Province. Most of them dwell in Santai Township in Luxi County of the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture and in Junnong Township in Zhenkang County of the Lincang Prefecture. The others live scattered in Yingjiang, Ruili, Longchuan, Baoshan, Lianghe and Gengma counties. Some De'angs live together with the Jingpo, Han, Lisu and Va nationalities in the mountainous areas. And a small number of them have their homes in villages on flatland peopled by the Dais. The De'ang language belongs to the South Asian family of languages. The De'angs have no written script of their own, and many of them have learned to speak the Dai, Han or Jingpo languages, and some can read and write in the Dai language. An increasing number of them have picked up the Han language in years after the mid-20th century.



Drung

The Drungs, numbering about 4,700, live mainly in the Dulong River valley of the Gongshan Drung and Nu Autonomous County in northwestern Yunnan Province. Their language belongs to the Tibetan-Myanmese group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Similar to the language of the Nu people, their neighbors, it does not have a written form and, traditionally, records were made and messages transmitted by engraving notches in wood and tying knots.

Jino

Numbering 18,000 in all, the Jinos live in the Jinoluo Township of Jinghong County in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province.

The language of this ethnic minority belongs to the Tibetan-Myanmese group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Its structure and vocabulary have much in common with Yi and Myanmese. Without a written language of their own, the Jino people used to keep records by notching on wood or bamboo.

Miao



With a population of more than seven million, the Miao people form one of the largest ethnic minorities in southwest China. They are mainly distributed across Guizhou, Yunnan, Hunan and Sichuan provinces and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and a small number live on Hainan Island in Guangdong Province and in southwest Hubei Province. Most of them live in tightly-knit communities, with a few living in areas inhabited by several other ethnic groups.

The Miao have a highly diversified culture developed from a common root. They are fond of singing and dancing, and have a highly-developed folk literature. Their songs, which do not rhyme and vary greatly in length from a few lines to more than 15,000, are easy to understand and are very popular among the Miaos.

The lusheng is their favorite musical instrument. In addition, flutes, copper drum, mouth organs, the xiao (a vertical bamboo flute) and the suona horn are also very popular. Popular dances include the lusheng dance, drum dance and bench dance.

The Miaos create a variety of colorful arts and crafts, including cross-stitch work, embroidery, weaving, batik, and paper-cuts. Their batik technique

dates back 1,000 years. A pattern is first drawn on white cloth with a knife dipped in hot wax. Then the cloth is boiled in dye. The wax melts to leave a white pattern on a blue background. In recent years, improved technology has made it possible to print more colorful designs, and many Miao handicrafts are now exported.

Bouyei

Most of China's 2,548,300 Bouyei people live in several Bouyei-Miao autonomous counties in Xingyi and Anshun prefectures and Qiannan Bouyei-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province. Others are distributed in counties in the Qiandongnan Miao-Dong Autonomous Prefecture or near Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou.

The Bouyei language is of the Zhuang-Dai branch of the Zhuang-Dong group belonging to the Chinese-Tibetan family of languages. In the past, the Bouyeis had no written language of their own, and used Han characters instead. After 1949, the government helped formulate a Bouyei writing system based on Latin letters.

Dong

The population of Dong ethnic group in China is 2.5 million. Situated no more than 300 km north of the Tropic of Cancer, the area peopled by the Dongs has a mild climate and an annual rainfall of 1,200 mm. The Dong people grow enormous numbers of timber trees which are logged and sent to markets. Tong-oil and lacquer and oil-tea camellia trees are also grown for their edible oil and varnish. With no written script of their own before 1949, many Dongs learned to read and write in Chinese. Philologists sent by the central government helped work out a Dong written language on the basis of Latin alphabet in 1958.



Shui

There are in China 286,500 Shuis, the majority of whom dwell on the upper reaches of the Longjiang and Duliu rivers that meander across plains and rolling land interspersed with vast expanses of forests in southern Guizhou Province. They live in compact communities in the Sandu Shui Autonomous County and in Libo, Dushan and other counties. Some Shuis have their homes in the northwestern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Shui language belongs to the Zhuang-Dong branch of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. The Shuis used to have an archaic writing script. Some of their words were pictographs, while others resembled Chinese characters written upside down. Except for scores of these ancient words that are still used for religious purposes, the Shuis use Chinese in their daily lives.

Gelo

The 438,200 Gelos live in dispersed clusters of communities in about 20 counties in western Guizhou Province, four counties of the Wenshan Zhuang-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in southeastern Yunnan Province and the Longlin Multi-ethnic Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Only about a quarter of the Gelos still speak the Gelo language belonging to the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Yet, because of close contact with other ethnic groups, their language has not remained pure -- even within counties. There are Gelo-speaking people unable to converse with each other. For this reason, the language of the Hans, or Chinese, has become their common language, though many Gelos have learned three or four languages from other people in their communities, including the Miaos, Yis and Bouyeis. Living among other ethnic groups, the Gelos have become largely assimilated to the majority Han customs.

Zhuang



The Zhuangs ethnic minority is China's largest minority group. Its population of 15.55 million approaches that of Australia. Most of the Zhuangs live in southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which is nearly the size of New Zealand. The rest have settled in Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Hunan provinces.

While sharing many festivals with the Hans, the Zhuangs have three red-letter days of their own: the Devil Festival, the Cattle Soul Festival and the Feasting Festival. The Devil Festival, which falls on July 14 on the lunar calendar (usually in August on the Gregorian calendar), is an important occasion next only to the Spring Festival. On that day, every family would prepare

chicken, duck and five-colored glutinous rice to be offered as sacrifices to ancestors and ghosts.

The Cattle Soul Festival usually follows the spring ploughing, when every family would carry a basketful of steamed five-colored glutinous rice and a bundle of fresh grass to the cattle pen. After a brief sacrificial rite, they would feed the cattle with the grass and half of the rice. They believe that the cattle have lost their souls because of the whipping during the spring ploughing and that the ritual would call back the lost souls.

The Feasting Festival is celebrated only by people who live near the Sino-Vietnamese border. Legend has it that a group of Zhuang soldiers, having repulsed the French invaders in the late 19th century, returned in late January and missed the Spring Festival. To pay tribute to them and celebrate the victory, their neighbors prepared a sumptuous feast for them.

Yao

The Yaos, with a population of 2.13 million, live in mountain communities scattered over 130 counties in five south China provinces and one autonomous region. About 70 per cent of them live in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the rest in Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Jiangxi provinces.

Historically, the Yaos have had at least 30 names based on their ways of production, lifestyles, dresses and adornments. The name "Yao" was officially adopted after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

Half of the Yaos speak the Yao language belonging to the Chinese-Tibetan language family, others use Miao or Dong languages. As a result of close contacts with the Hans and Zhuangs, many Yaos also have learned to speak Chinese or Zhuang language.

Mulam

The Mulam ethnic minority has a population of 160,600, of which the majority live in Luocheng County in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Others are scattered in neighboring counties.

The Mulam language is a member of the Zhuang-Dong language group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family, but because of extensive contacts with the majority Han and local Zhuangs many Mulams speak one or both of these languages in addition to their own.

Maonan

The Maonan ethnic minority has a population of 72,400, living in the northern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The Maonan language belongs to the Dong-Shui branch of the Zhuang-Dong language group of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. Almost all the Maonans know both the Han and the Zhuang languages because of long contact with those people.



Jing

The 18,700 people of this very small ethnic minority live in compact communities primarily in the three islands of Wanwei, Wutou and Shanxin in the Fangcheng Multi-ethnic Autonomous County, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, near the Sino-Vietnamese border. About one quarter of them live among the Han and Zhuang ethnic groups in nearby counties and towns.

The Jing people had their own script which was called Zinan. Created on the basis of the script of the Han people towards the end of the 13th century, it was found in old song books and religious scriptures. Most Jings read and write in the Han script because they have lived with Hans for a long time. They speak the Cantonese dialect.

Tujia

In the Wuling Range of western Hunan and Hubei provinces, at elevations from 400 to 1,500 meters, dwell 5.72 million people called the Tujias. They live mainly in the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Exi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture and some counties in southeastern Hunan and western Hubei. In these areas, the climate is mild but rainy, and the land is well-forested.

About 20,000-30,000 people living in remote areas such as Longshan speak Tujia, a language which is similar to that spoken by the Yis and belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language system. But the large majority has come to speak the Han and Miao languages, now that the Tujias have been largely assimilated. Their clothing and customs are very much like those of the Hans. Old Tujia ways survive only in remote area.

Li



Hainan, China's second largest island after Taiwan, is the home of the Li ethnic group with a population of about 1.11 million. Most of them live in and around Tongze, capital of the Hainan Li-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, and Baoting, Ledong, Dongfang and other counties under its jurisdiction; others live among people of the Han and Hui ethnic groups in other parts of the island.

The Lis had no written script. Their spoken language belongs to the Chinese-Tibetan language family. But many of them now speak the Chinese language. A new Romanized script was created for the Li ethnic group in 1957 with government help.

She

The 634,700 Shes are scattered in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces. They live in villages of several dozen households or live along with Hans. Most reside in hilly country 500 to 1,500 meters high. Rivers have carved out their valleys.

The She language is very close to the Hakka dialect of the Hans, and most Shes speak Chinese instead of their ethnic tongue; a few Guangdong Shes speak a language similar to the Miao.

Gaoshan

The Gaoshan people, about 300,000 in total, account for less than 2 per cent of the 17 million inhabitants, based on statistics published by Taiwan authorities in June 1982 of Taiwan Province. The majority of them live in mountain areas and the flat valleys running along the east coast of Taiwan Island, and on the Isle of Lanyu. About 1,500 live in such major cities as Shanghai, Beijing and Wuhan and in Fujian Province on the mainland. The Gaoshans do not have their own script, and their spoken language belongs to the Indonesian group of the Malay/Polynesian language family.

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