

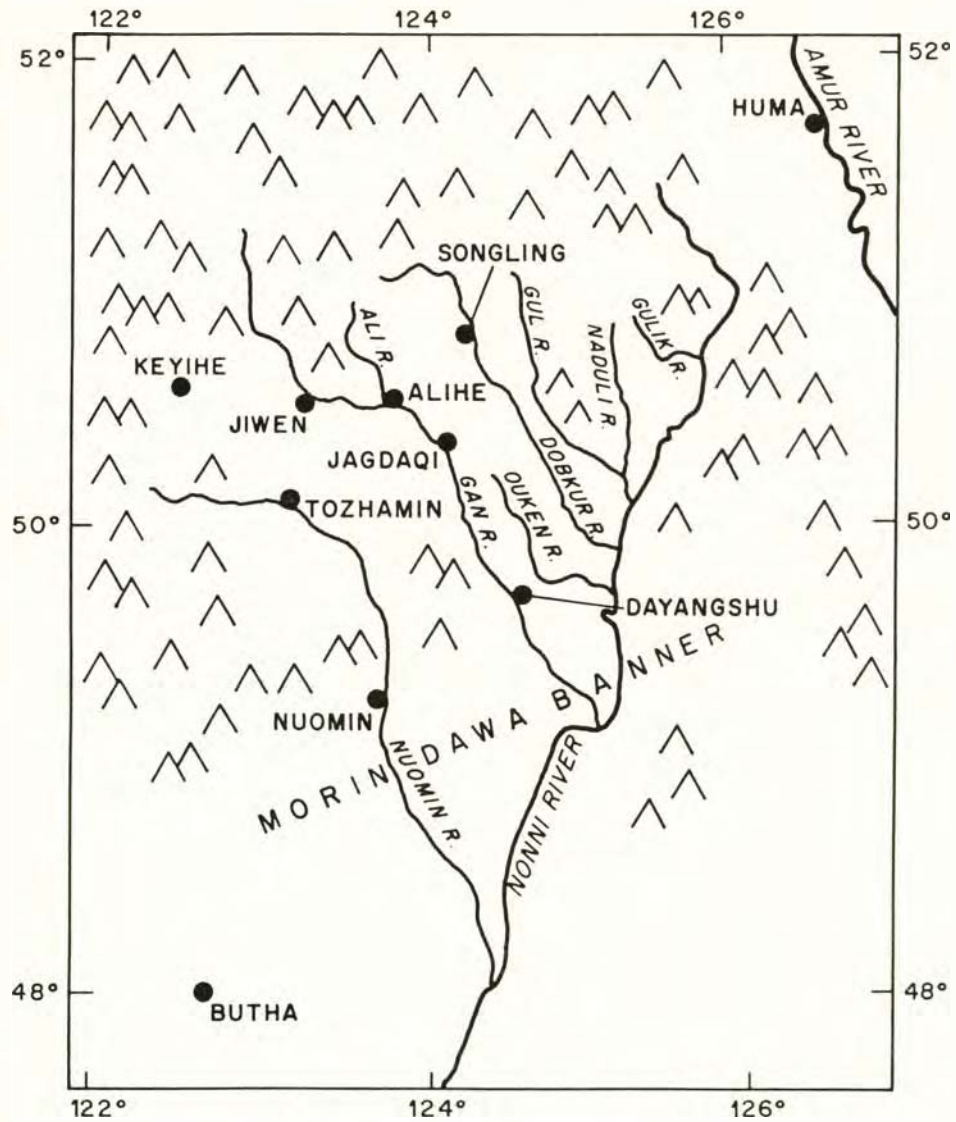
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Oroqen

Size and Location

The earliest population estimate made, during 1915-17, showed 4,111 Oroqens 鄂伦春 living in China. In 1933 the Japanese reported only 3,700 and in the following year, 2,876 Oroqens.¹ The low point was reached in 1953 when the population had declined to 2,262.² Since then, it has steadily increased, to 2,400 in 1957³ and 4,132 in 1982.⁴ Most Oroqens live in Hulunbuir league of Inner Mongolia, especially in the Oroqen autonomous banner (see Map 16), and in Butha banner, Morindawa Daur autonomous banner, and in Huma 呼玛, Qike (Xunke 逊克), Aihui 爱辉 'Aigun), and Jiayin 嘉荫 counties of Heilongjiang.

The Oroqen autonomous banner covers more than 59,800 square kilometers, slightly smaller than West Virginia (which has similar terrain) or Belgium and Holland combined. It is located between longitude 121°55' and 126°10' East and latitude 48°50' and 51°25' North. The northern portion is mountainous with an average altitude of 750 meters while the small lowland area in the southeast has an average altitude of 230 meters. The seven main rivers in the banner are the Gan 甘, Nomin 诺敏, Naduli 那都里, Dobkur 多布库尔, Kandu 罕诺, Gulik 古里, Ouken 欧肯. Only 9.1 percent of the autonomous banner is arable, the rest is covered by forests.⁵



Map 16. Oroqen

History

It is believed that the Oroqens emerged as a distinct nationality from the Bei Shiwei sometime during the period from 420 to 589.⁶ At that time they, together with some Daur, Evenk, Hezhen, and a few Manchus, lived north of the Amur, in an area bordered on the north by the Outer Xing'an range, on the west by the Shilka river and to the east by the Kuyedao river. By 1642 the new Manchu state included this area. Soon thereafter pressure from Russians caused most Oroqens to leave their ancestral lands and move across the Amur to the Greater and Lesser Xing'an region (approximately 122°-131° East and 48°-53° North). In 1691 the Oroqens were enlisted into the eight-banner system while their area came to be administered by a combination of civilian and military officials.⁷

Language and Literature

The Oroqen language belongs to the Tungus branch of the Manchu-Tungus group of the Altaic family of languages. It has several distinct dialects of which Gankui may be tentatively considered the standard.⁸

The Oroqen language has seven vowels, as follows:⁹

<u>a</u> as in <u>algaŋ</u> 'foot'	<u>o</u> as in <u>oɬo</u> 'fish'
<u>ə</u> as in <u>əri</u> 'this'	<u>u</u> as in <u>uləə</u> 'meat'
<u>e</u> as in <u>dolen</u> 'middle'	<u>y</u> as in <u>dzydə</u> 'sweet'
<u>i</u> as in <u>imanna</u> 'snow'	

The nineteen consonants are:

<u>n</u> as in <u>nadan</u> 'seven'	<u>l</u> as in <u>luki</u> 'arrow'
<u>k</u> as in <u>kəmu:k</u> 'pharynx'	<u>m</u> as in <u>məwun</u> 'silver'
<u>g</u> as in <u>gudəə</u> 'belly'	<u>tʃ</u> as in <u>tʃaa:un</u> 'paper'
<u>x</u> as in <u>əxəə</u> 'elder sister'	<u>dʒ</u> as in <u>dʒuga</u> 'summer'
<u>b</u> as in <u>bəj</u> 'person, body'	<u>j</u> as in <u>jalan</u> 'three'
<u>p</u> as in <u>sarpu</u> 'chopsticks'	<u>r</u> as in <u>ərde</u> 'early morning'
<u>s</u> as in <u>salkən</u> 'duty'	<u>f</u> as in <u>dʒafkun</u> 'eight'
<u>ʃ</u> as in <u>ʃodəl</u> 'vein, artery'	<u>w</u> as in <u>waa</u> 'taste'
<u>t</u> as in <u>təhar</u> 'earth, dirt'	<u>ŋ</u> as in <u>ənkan</u> 'year'
<u>d</u> as in <u>dilatʃaa</u> 'sun'	

There are also five long vowels, as follows:

<u>aa</u> as in <u>aawan</u> 'right-hand'	<u>oo</u> as in <u>mo</u> 'tree'
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əə as in əəku 'hot'
ii as in iigen 'elbow'

uu as in ənuunən 'pain'

Occasionally certain vowels may be substituted, e.g., the word for horse is pronounced both morin and moren, the word for middle can be dolin or dolen. Vowel harmony, as in many other Altaic languages, means that the first vowel in a word determines all subsequent vowels, thus nadān 'seven,' eterxén 'bear', gurún 'country, nation', Vowel harmony extends to all suffixes, e.g., the suffix for past tense is tʃa in náutʃa 'hit the bull's eye' but tʃe in génetʃe 'went'.

Considerable substitution of consonants is caused by dialectal differences. A few examples are sāren ~ ʃāren 'to know', ʃodel ~ sotel 'blood vessel'; ʃi ~ tʃi 'you', atʃikon ~ aʃikan ~ adʒikon 'small, few'; tukʃu ~ dukʃu 'cloud', tejʃ ~ dekʃ 'bird', orokuto ~ olokuto 'grass', dʒebti ~ dʒekti 'food', xomxan ~ xomkan ~ komkan 'stag', and baktʃa ~ baxtʃa 'attained'.

Sometimes the final n of a word is nasalized, as in iniŋ 'sun', niŋ 'who', biʃiŋ 'there is'. The consonant r in the suffix for the infinitive -ren is changed to l or t if the stem ends in either l or t, as in déillén 'to fly', tettén 'to wear'.

As is the case with all other minorities in China, the number of Chinese loan words in the Oroqen language has been steadily increasing since the early 1950s. Examples are ʃintʃtʃi 'week', meigüe 'America', and fen 'a minute'. There were hardly any Chinese loan words before the Communist takeover, but a handful of European (via Russian) loan words, some of which are still being heard. An interesting case involves two closely related words, 'mechanism' and 'machine', where the former is expressed by the Chinese loan word dʒiguan and the latter by the European loan word maʃin.

The Oroqens of China do not have their own script but use Chinese.

Although the Oroqens constitute one of the smallest nationalities in China, their oral tradition is extraordinarily rich. Only a small portion has so far been recorded. Fairy tales and myths, including at least two versions of the Oroqens' origin, are the oldest forms of Oroqen literature. One fairy tale, named after the girl Ayijilun and the boy Lunjishan, relates their battle with the demon king whom they defeat with the help of natural forces.¹⁰ In the story about the white-robed sorceress, a hunter and his family are poisoned by the demon king and die but the sorceress revives them. Two creation myths are the story of the deluge and the legend of Gaxian Cave and Kulong Mountain which revolves around Maokaodai Khan, the presumed progenitor of the Oroqens.¹¹ Among the presently available major collections of Oroqen traditional literature, the most important are the Oroqen minjian gushi ji and the compendium of Oroqen folk literature by Zhang Fengzhu and Cai Bowen.¹²

By contrast, modern literature is still relatively little developed. Only a few writers and poets have made their debut in the pages of literary journals.¹³

Society¹⁴

The oldest and largest social unit among the Oroqens is the mokun, meaning clan or surname group. At the time the Oroqens moved south across the Amur in the seventeenth century, they were organized into seven mokun. Today there are at least nine. Three mokun are native to the area of the Oroqen autonomous banner: they are Kerteyir, Baiyir, and Aqigechayir. Other mokun, some of whose members migrated into the banner, are Maniyayir, Wukarkang, Gewoyir, Gulayir, Weilayir, and Mowayir.

Each mokun had its own ancestral god, called an ajiaorufurukan, and its common cemetery. A mokun had its own unwritten laws such as customary laws, taboos, moral guides, and marriage regulations. It also had a definite structure. The mokun assembly was the highest decision-making body. In normal times it would meet once every ten years. It had four powers. First, it elected or dismissed the mokunda, its leader, who was usually an elder with much experience in hunting and a reputation for fairness in handling affairs. Second, it added to the clan genealogy. This was a very important, special meeting, held once every three years. Because clan members were not allowed to call out their ancestors' names, an outsider was brought in for the occasion and asked to recite the clan genealogy while all adult clan members sat on the ground and listened. Such an assembly was presided over by the clan's shaman. After the genealogy had been read, the mokunda would explain some points in the genealogy, and at the end circle the names of persons who had died during the preceding three years and add the names of the newly born. Third, the assembly formally accepted new adult clan members and approved the adoption of foster sons by clan members. Fourth, it punished members who had violated customary law. Clan assemblies were always followed by banquets and entertainment.

The mokunda's responsibilities were (1) the safekeeping of the clan genealogy and the recording of births and deaths; (2) presiding over wedding and funeral rites; (3) the managing of daily clan affairs; (4) representing the clan at external functions; and (5) in emergencies, he had the power to convene a special clan meeting. The mokunda received no compensation nor special privileges. Moreover, if he seriously violated customary law, mokun members could call a meeting at any time and decide on his case.

While these social functions were carried out by the mokun, economic activities were decided upon and carried out by the smaller ulileng (family commune). An ulileng (an Oroqen word meaning descendants) included members of three to four generations, and its members lived in five to a dozen tent-like houses, each housing one nuclear family. Its head was the tadanda.

Soon after the Qing dynasty came to power, the ulileng gradually began to change whereby tools and animals came under the control of individual families. The ulileng was further weakened by the appearance of guns and horses



Illus. 33. Oroqen Costumes



Illus. 34. Oroqen Housing

during mid-Qing. Hunting expeditions were no longer conducted by the ulileng but a new, temporary unit, called the anage, which included three to eight hunters. A further change involved the requirements for membership in the ulileng. Whereas in the past membership had been strictly along consanguinal lines, by the turn of the nineteenth century membership was determined by residence. Thus an Oroqen family could move to another locality and there join a new ulileng. Finally, Qing local administrations also contributed to the ulileng's decline, as the local military official, the zuoling, took on some of the tadanda's powers. By republican times the change from consanguinal to territorial criteria was complete, and some localities no longer called themselves ulileng but gaxin (Manchu for village), ail (Daur for community), or gaolu (Oroqen for river). But while membership criteria changed drastically, some of the ancient ownership practices survived as late as the 1950s. While all other property had long since come into private hands, the hunting grounds were still communally owned, and meat and coarse hides gained from a hunt were still evenly divided.

Recent Developments¹⁵

The Oroqen autonomous banner was established on October 1, 1951. At that time only 778 persons lived there of whom 774 were Oroqen, three Daur, and one Evenk. The establishment of a lumber industry in the Greater Xing'an range and the building of two railroads, totaling 160 kilometers, in the banner led to massive migration, especially in 1958 and 1964. In 1980 the population stood at 410,000 of whom only 1,315 were Oroqen, the rest being Han, Manchu, Hui, Mongol, Korean, Evenk, and Daur. Three hunting communes are located in Gankui, Nomin, and Tozhamin. Seven towns and cities have been built since the late 1950s, namely, Alihe 阿里河, Jagdaqi 加格达奇, Ganhe, Dayangshu 大杨树, Keyihe 可一河, Jiwen 吉文, and Xiaoyangqi (Songling 松岭). Alihe is the administrative seat, with a population of more than 53,000. Before 1951 its location was deep inside one of the forests of the Greater Xing'an range, and its first settlers still had to maintain camp fires at night to ward off wild animals. Now it is a city with electric lights, a theater, hotel, a general store, a party school, and several schools, of which one middle school and one elementary school are reserved for non-Han nationalities. The largest city in the banner is Jagdaqi, located at the junction of the two railroads, with over 100,000 inhabitants.

Notes

¹Qiu Pu 1978, 62.

²Qiu Pu 1981, 2. A majority (1,303) lived in Heilongjiang and the other 959 in Inner Mongolia. More exact locations are found in the text below.

³Jiankuang, v. 1, 47.

⁴Minzu yanjiu 23 (1983), 81.

⁵Oroqen zizhiqi gaikuang, 2.

⁶Op. cit., 12. See also Zhao 1981, 103. An older notion that the Oroqens descended from the Nuzhens is no longer favored.

⁷Qiu Pu 1978, 19-20.

⁸Saxirong, 1.

⁹Examples have been taken from Saxirong.

¹⁰Described in Qiu Pu 1978, 134-136 and, in greater detail, in Qiu Pu 1981, 9-14. See also the recent English translation The Oroqens (Beijing, 1983).

¹¹Qiu Pu 1978, 134.

¹²See their entries in the bibliography. See also the entry on Xiletegen.

¹³See entries in the bibliography for the writer Ao Changfu and the poets He Daixiu and Yuan Lin.

¹⁴The best contemporary source on Oroqen society is Oroqen zizhiqi gaikuang, 27-30. See also Zhongguo, 115.

¹⁵Most information on recent developments can be found in Oroqen zizhiqi gaikuang, 1-11. See also Zhongguo, 110.