

TIBET SPECIAL



A community official (far left) offers service to a Hui ethnic family in Wapaling, Lhasa. Wapaling is a neighborhood home to about 10 ethnic groups including Tibetan, Han, Hui, Bai and Uygul people. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Former performer from Inner Mongolia appreciates life and work in Tibet

Like the name of the river Kyichu, which means "Happy River" in the Tibetan language, the life of a Tibetan-Mongolian couple is a happy one.

Tsering Nyima, the husband, is a Mongolian, and Kalzang Yangdron, his wife, is a Tibetan. They have been living in Lhasa, capital city of Tibet autonomous region for nearly two decades, with love, happiness and harmony.

Once a guest was invited to their home. He was treated with great hospitality, with the wife offering greasy butter tea, and the husband serving chunks of boiled mutton and yak meat. The guest said the friendliness of the family was as warm as the plateau sunshine.

The table was also laid with Mongolian cheese and Tibetan yak jerky. The guest was warmly reminded to enjoy the delicacies from time to time.

Like most of the Tibetan households in Lhasa, apparently, the household is decorated in a classic Tibetan style. But there is no lack of Mongolian cultural elements, demonstrated by the colors and patterns.

Just like the home decoration and lifestyle, this family has a harmonious mixture of Tibetan and Mongolian characteristics.

Tsering Nyima, 47, was originally from Ar Horchqin Banner of Chifeng city in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and Kalzang Yangdron, 43, is a native of Doilungdechen district in Lhasa.

In the eyes of their neighbors, Tsering Nyima is courageous, unconstrained and easygoing, while Kalzang Yangdron is sweet, open-minded and passionate. Both are passionate people, and



Tsering Nyima and his wife Kalzang Yangdron have a meal at their home. The husband enjoys life in Tibet as the local food is similar to that in his hometown in Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PALDEN NYIMA / CHINA DAILY

they were both gifted with voices.

Their love story dates back to 1997, when they met in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, as performers in ethnic cultural shows in the China Folk Culture Village.

"Shenzhen is stunningly beautiful," the couple almost blurted out their compliments of the city simultaneously.

"It was great fun to work in that folk culture village where we met people from all the 56 ethnic groups of the country, and we could feel the charm of the unique culture of every ethnic group," said Tsering Nyima.

The man recalled the happy days of hanging out with friends of different ethnicities for drinking, shopping and sightseeing, and that's how he became familiar with Kalzang Yangdron.

After working together for two years in Shenzhen, they returned to Lhasa together in 1999. They got married and then worked in different fields to create a better future,

including farming, singing in different song and dance troupes, and operating restaurants and guesthouses.

After 20 years of hard work, Kalzang Yangdron now works in the Lhasa Song and Dance Theater, while Tsering Nyima works in a local urban construction company.

Kalzang Yangdron is invited every year to perform in domestic cities and abroad. Tsering Nyima is also invited to the performances in addition to his work in the company.

The couple has a 9-year-old daughter, who was given the Tibetan name of Kalzang Lhamo and the Mongolian name of Pekal, which mean "Nature" in Mongolian language. The girl is currently in fourth grade of primary school in Lhasa.

The couple said communication was a problem sometimes in the early days after their marriage. As they were not familiar with each other's language, they had to communicate with poor Putonghua, or Mandarin.

"Now we can communicate smoothly with Mandarin, but we can use Tibetan and Mongolian sometimes while talking," said Kalzang Yangdron, adding she also knew some basic Mongolian language.

"The pronunciation of both languages is kind of similar. It's easy to learn," she added, saying that in the aspects of diet and hobbies, they have many things in common.

"Tibetans drink butter tea and Mongolians drink milk tea — both teas are acceptable for us," Kalzang Yangdron said. With a landscape and customs different from his hometown, Lhasa seemed strange to Tsering Nyima at first when he arrived. But he learned fast to fit in this new place, and now Lhasa is home for him.

Tsering Nyima said some Mongolian names were picked from Tibetan Buddhist scriptures and most of his fellow villagers are believers of Tibetan Buddhism.

There are many festivals in Tibetan culture, and the Tibetans are fond of celebrat-

ing festivals. By sharing two cultures in a family, the couple said they are even happier than their neighbors because they have more festivals to celebrate.

"I enjoy two New Year festivals every year, I wear Tibetan clothes when spending the Tibetan New Year, and Mongolian garments for the Mongolian New Year," Tsering Nyima said proudly.

"I live in Lhasa, but I cannot forget my own traditions."

For Tsering Nyima, the most interesting Tibetan Festival is the Losar New Year and the Yogurt Festival. Both events are full of fun and delicacies.

"I liked riding horses, wrestling, and archery as a boy, so my favorite Mongolian festival is Nadamu — a festival full of ethnic sports, I felt a little sad that I get less time for them because of my work," he said.

Nadamu is also Kalzang Yangdron's favorite Mongolian festival. Apart from enjoying the grassland, she also likes to watch wrestling and horse racing.

As a hobby, the couple regularly goes for picnics in the summer with their daughter and friends. Every time, their friends expect a Mongolian song from Tsering Nyima, which is his special treat.

In 2017, Tsering Nyima and Kalzang Yangdron's family was awarded "the Best Family of the Year" by the city government of Lhasa.

"The award means a lot to us. I feel it's important to have harmonious and peaceful relations among multiple ethnic groups in the country," Tsering Nyima said.

"It's important to learn from each other, respect each other, and help each other."

— DAQIONG AND PALDEN NYIMA

Mixed ethnic couple going strong after 17 years of marriage

Whenever Migmar Yangkyi sees her husband, Chen Jianmin, cutting meat in the kitchen as she returns home from work, she knows that he is going to cook her favorite beef noodle.

He tells her not to help him in the kitchen. Instead, she boils hot water and then helps her young daughter with homework.

When the noodles are done, Chen presents the first bowl to Migmar Yangkyi's mother Tabasang as a gesture of respect. The next two bowls are for the couple's two kids. Finally, Chen serves the last two bowls to his wife and himself.

Chen is Han from Central China's Henan province, and his wife Migmar Yangkyi is a local Tibetan in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet autonomous region. They met and got married in 2004 in Lhasa.

Back then Chen operated a grocery store and Migmar Yangkyi always came to the shop to buy things. That is how they met and where their story began.

From the beginning, language was not a barrier for

their communication, because Migmar Yangkyi is fluent in Mandarin.

Chen said Migmar Yangkyi is open-minded, which also made communication easier and helped them overcome cultural differences over the years.

"I had a hard time at first. But I was quick to learn and adapt, so I enjoy life here in Lhasa," Chen said, adding that "it's important to learn the local culture when living in a Tibetan city".

Like locals, he drinks Tibetan butter tea and eats tsamba — roasted barley flour — for breakfast. He often goes to Tibetan restaurants to order dishes in Tibetan language.

The Tibetan-Han couple regard responsibility, care, love and respect of each other's culture the most crucial part of a family with different ethnic backgrounds.

"Since the day when we received our marriage certificate, he promised me that he would cook for me for the rest of his life," said Migmar Yangkyi with a big smile.

She added that Chen has

kept the promise so far. He not only makes Henan-style noodles, but also learned to cook different Tibetan dishes.

"We have never had any problems from growing up in different cultural environments," she added. "We respect each other's customs and beliefs."

They celebrate both Tibetan festivals such as the Tibetan Losar New Year and the Shoton, and Han festivals including Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival.

Migmar Yangkyi always sends gifts and makes phone calls to her husband's parents in Henan during the Han festivals.

Migmar Yangkyi said kindness is the best quality she found in him.

"He treats the neighbors with respect and care at all times," she said. "And he always loves to help elderly people."

The couple are excited for their upcoming 17th wedding anniversary and are also proud of having two children, both of whom are now in school.

— DAQIONG AND PALDEN NYIMA



Top: Chen Jianmin cooks for his family in Lhasa. Above: Chen Jianmin helps his daughter dress up for a performance on the Children's Day.

LU WENJING / FOR CHINA DAILY