

The Lhob Ethnic Group

The Lhoba steel sword is called “aire’a” with a length of 80 centimeters and a width of 5 centimeters. Being a necessary tool in working a living, it also serves as a kind of adornment. The scabbard and hilt are made of sandalwood, with red copper threads wound around, which make it strong and elegant.



The population and environment

There are 2965 Lhobas living in the Chinese territory, mainly in Luoyu area, southeast Tibet. The most concentrated places are the border counties: Muotuo, Milin, Longzi, Linzhi, Chayu, etc. There are also some scattered in Lahsa city, Shannan prefecture, and other places.

Luoyu area locates in the high mountain and valley area in the southern side of the Himalayas. The mountains in the district follow a south-north direction, and the northern part is higher than the southern part. The rivers go from north to south, with steep banks, many sandbars and swift torrents. Influenced by the topography, the change of temperature and climate is very obvious. The Lhobas have a saying, “Four seasons can be seen in one mountain, and the weather is different ten li away.” Here they have plenty of rain and fertile land, and the wild plants and animals are also multitudinous.

The ethnic origin and the history

According to their legends, folktales, records in Tibetan documents and recent archeological discoveries, we can decide that the Lhoba people is from the integration of ancient tribes in Luoyu area and several ancient tribes in eastern Tibet. The ancestors of the Lhobas and the Tibetans communicated with each other, the earliest written history of which started in the Tufan Kingdom. The Tufan Kingdom established administration in the Lhoba district. Later on, the Tibetan local governments mainly adopted the following ways of ruling: for the northern part of Luoyu, which is close to Tibet, officials were appointed for direct administration. For the central and southern part, the control is strengthened mainly through material exchanges.

The appellation and the language

Before the 1960s, the Lhobas had no unified name for the whole ethnic group. Instead, they called themselves and each other by the names of their tribe, such as “Bogar”, “Jianbo”, “Bengni”, “Bengru”, etc. “Lhoba” is how the Tibetans call them, meaning “the southerners”. In 1965, the Chinese government decided “the Lhoba” as their unified name.

The Lhoba language belongs to Tibetan-Mian language group of Sino-Tibetan language family. The local dialects are very different, and no written language exists. Before the founding of P.R.C, only a few knew the Tibetan language. They carved wood and tied knots on strings to keep a record of events.

The featured housing—the wooden and bamboo house on pillars

The wood and bamboo structured house, called “nanding buza” in the Lhoba language, are popular in



the Luoyu area. There are two kinds, the cottage style and the building style. The former has three pillar by the two walls of mountain rock. On the middle one, which is the tallest, main beams, are built. On the shorter ones, eaves beams are built. Between the beams, long logs are supplied, over which are plantain leaves and thatches as coverings. The walls are thick bamboo sheets, and there is no window, which makes the interior dark. As for the building style, there are 3 floors. The top one is paved with thick bamboo sheets. The

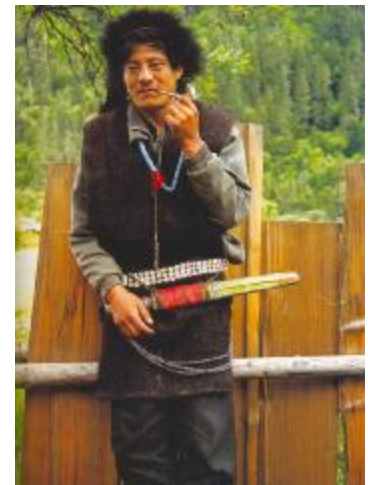
walls and floors of the middle one are made of thick bamboo sheets, with a little window. The door faces the sun, and there is a fire pool in the center of the room, in which the fire is always burning. Wooden pillars, with no windows or walls, support the bottom floor. The top floor is storage of bit and ends. People live in the middle floor, and the bottom is a stock pen.



The costumes and ornaments——the brimmed helmet and the Pulu long robe

The Lhoba men often wear the self-made yak skin or goatskin robes, or Tibetan pulu robes. Covering the robe is a big black vest, as big as reaching the wearer's abdomen. The brimmed helmet is made of pressed bearskin, or bamboo vines. On the brim there is a round piece of bear pelt. Bows and arrows are carried along, together with a sword the waist. The women wear short linen jackets, with no collar and tight sleeves. Also tight round skirts reaching

the knees, or some fabric made of grass and palm fiber are common attires. Their calves are covered with a whole piece of covering. Both men and women are barefooted and wear long hair. The front part is cut to the eyebrow, and the rest are kept to the backside. Adornments are applied to all, such as earrings, copper or silver bracelets and colorful bead necklaces.



The dietetic customs——spicy food

The Lhoba food varies according to the places. In the northern part of Luoyu, the staple food is corn or Jizhuagu slob mixed with hot water. They also like buckwheat pie and Daqi pie roasted on stone boards, as well as sweet potatoes and potatoes roasted in the fire pool. In the region close to Tibet, people often eat Zanba and drink ghee tea. The main vegetables are potatoes, pumpkins and cabbages. The meat is beef, mutton, pork, chicken, fish and all kinds of animal meat. Both men and women like to eat peppers, smoke and drink. In days of celebration for great harvest or fruitful hunting, all people get together in the village, drinking and singing, wishing the whole village peace and happy, with everything a good return.

The singing and dancng—the Jiajin tune

The Lhoba is a people good at singing and dancing. In celebrations, banquets, weddings and sacrificial ceremonies, they hold singing and dancing activities all day and night. The tunes are different according to the activities. Low tunes are applied during the chanting and exercising, while high tunes before the soldiers going to battle. The unique “jiajin” is the oldest folk music, popular in all tribes. It is called this because of the exclamation “jiajin jia” after every line. It tells the origin, migration and other history of the nationality with a happy light tune, and is played mainly in drinking gatherings and celebrations.

The religion——”Wuyou worship”

The Lhoba religion deals mainly in worshiping ghosts and gods. They believe that all has a spirit, and that natural beings are dominated by a kind of supernatural spirits. The birth, aging, sickness, death and mishaps are all results of the evil dongs of the spirits. In their religion’s view, gods and ghosts are not distinguished. All elves, spirits, ghosts and devils are called “Wuyou”. The Wuyous have many different kinds and are omnipresent. There are distinctions of good and evil Wuyous, but there is no highest ruling Wuyou. The worshiping ways are many, such as nature worshiping, totem worshiping, ancestor worshiping, etc.

Festivals and customs——the Lhoba New Year

The Lhobas living in the concentrated areas celebrate the traditional holiday “the Xudulong Day”, which is the Lhoba New Year. The date is different in different Lhoba areas. The western part of Luoyu district celebrates it in Febrrrary of the Tibetan calendar, while the eastern part on December the 25th. Before this day, people grind rice, brew wine and slaughter cows and pigs. During the day, the villagers make sacrifices to the ghosts and gods, praying for blessings. The Lhobas in some places hang a bull skull above the door or in the room, as a symbol of diligence and prosperity. All people, men and women, old and young, dress up and go visit friends and relatives. They invite each other and eat each together, singing and dancing.

Changes and developments

After the founding of P.R.C., Lhoba townships and villages are established in the Lhoba settlements. There are several townships, like Xiba Lhoba township in Chayu County, Naiyu Luoba township in Milin County, Damu Lhoba township in Muotuo County, and Douyu Lhoba township in Longzi county.

The Lhoba people have changed the old inefficient way of production, which was burning the grass to plant seeds, cultivating the earth with cutters. The business activities, unlimited by season and places, are becoming more and more prospering. They used to live isolated, traveling by climbing vine ropes and cliffs. Now, steel rope bridges, horse routes and highways are successfully built. Posts, broadcasts, telecommunications, televisions... These modern communication facilities are also being established. The living and working conditions of the Lhobas have undergone great changes.