

## The Moinba Ethnic Group



“Ba’erxia” is what people in Menyü area in Tibet call their hat. The hat is made of local pulu (a kind of woolen fabric) dyed with red and yellow and woven wool, and it is very popular among the Moinba people and regarded as their daily necessity and ornament.

### The population and environment

The Moinbas have a population of 8923, and they are mainly distributed throughout Medog County in Tibet Autonomous Region and others live scattered in Nyingch, Cona, Milin, Naidong counties and Lhasa City.

Medog, the place where the Moinbas inhabit, used to be called “Baimagang”(White Horse Hill), which means the “holy land of hidden lotus” in Tibetan language, and it lies in the southern slope of the eastern Mt Himalaya. The Brahmaputra River runs through the whole area. There are peaks rising one after another and canyons crisscross. The terrain is very difficult to access. The relief is high in north and low in south. The climate differs from place to place due to the differences of elevation. The climate has a wide distribution from the frigid zone to the torrid zone. The river valley where the Moinbas live features tropical and subtropical climate. The valley is rich in natural resources and products and there are numerous rare animals and plants, and the primeval styles and features remain unchanged.



### The ethnic origin and history

According to folk legends, written records and the analysis in archaeological finds in recent years, the Moinbas originated from the aboriginals in the Menyü area in southern Mt Himalaya and the primitive groups around. Early before the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Moinba people had taken shape. After all parts of Tibet were unified by the Tube Dynasty, local authorities in Menyü area were set up. Menyü officially became China’s territory as part of Tibet in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some Moinbas cherished the illusion of “holy land of lotus” and moved to Medog, which became a compact community as the Moinbas.

### The appellation and the language

“Moinba” is the way Tibetans call them, meaning “people living in Menyü”, and it later became the name Moinbas call themselves. Moinbas in different places have different names. In 1964, “Moinba” was fixed as their ethnic name by the Chinese government.

Their language, which has many dialects such as Dawang dialect, Lebu dialect and Li dialect, belongs to the Tibetan-Burmese language family. They have forged close links with the Tibetan people through political, economical, cultural and religious exchanges. They use Tibetan characters, calendar and coin.

Many of them understand the Tibetan language, from which a number of Moinba words are borrowed.



### **The featured housing ——wooden house on pillars**

The houses for the Moinbas in Medog are mostly three-storey buildings, with herringbone-shaped roof, wood roof or straw roof. The third floor is used for stacking groceries and food, while the second for living quarter and the first for livestock. The second floor is partitioned into main room and side room, and each

of them has their own windows, with the door facing east. There is a hearth against the wall in the south. The hearth is the place for cooking, dining, heating entertaining, resting and sleeping. The houses are made of wood, for example, wooden roof, wooden floor, wooden nails and even wood locks.

### **The costumes and ornaments——calfskin and hopper with sheath**

Because it is very hot in the Medog area, both male and female Moinbas like to wear long or short white-colored gowns made of cotton and linen. Women often wear multicolored skirts and wear their hair in braids with yellow, green and red threads on and wind their hair around the head. Women usually wear few ornaments, but when they go to visit their relatives, they dress up and wear bracelets and necklaces made of red coral, turquoise and silver earrings, They hang around the neck a metal box with Buddhist images. They are used to wearing a piece of calfskin to keep warm and keep out or the cold. It is said that it can repel the devil spirits. Men wear a chopper with sheath, which can be used in working and as ornaments and protection tools.



### **The dietetic customs——dining with pepper**

Their diets differ from place to place. Some eat corn, rice and grains, while some have buckwheat, wheat and highland barley. They like to add pepper to their food. People in Menyü area eat buckwheat cakes. They put a round block in the tripod and then spread out the paste made of buckwheat powder and water on the block and bake into cakes. They spread creams on the cake, then roll it and eat it while it is hot. For the Moinbas in Medog, their food is made of maize pieces mixed with rice and grains. And they cook vegetables with stone pot called “ke” in the Moinba language. The Moinbas are of hospitality and they treat guests with their homemade highland barley wine, rice wine and grain wine. If the guest is drunk, then this is regarded by the hosts as giving respect to them.

### **The arts of songs and dances——the mask opera**

The Moinba people are good at both dancing and singing, and they have composed many beautiful tunes and created simple and dynamic dances, which reflect the moving folk legends. The famous Moinba drama stems from folk dance. When people dance, they wear masks and animals' leather and feather. Accompanied by drum and cymbals, they sometimes sing and sometimes dance. The libretto is in forms of folk songs in loose style. The melody changes as the content and plot freely and smoothly. Regarded as one of the eight Tibetan operas, the Zhuowa Sangmu, is said to be adapted into Tibetan script by a Moinba Lama according to folk songs.

### **Religion——Primitive religions and Tibetan Buddhism**

The Tibetan culture has greatly influenced the Moinbas and their religion is very complicated. They not only believe in Primitive religions but also the Buddhism. The Tibetan Buddhism supported by the government is in the ruling position. But the primitive religion is Popular among the masses. The Moinba people believe that everything has its spirit. Gods are omnipresent, either in heaven or hell, mountains or rivers. The primitive beliefs are closely connected with the Tibetan Ben Religion.

### **The festivals——Moinba's New Year**

Besides the Tibetan New Year and the Wangguo Festival, the Moinbas have their own festivals as well, among which the Moinba New Year is the grandest of all. Their festivals have two forms, one is called Danian, which is observed on the first day and the 15<sup>th</sup> day in the first month of the Tibetan lunar year, while the other called Xiaonian differs from place to place. Before the New Year Festival comes, the Moinbas will prepare abundant food and have a thorough cleaning. At the New Year's Eve, the use wheat paste or highland barley paste to daub all kinds of signs called "badge of luck" on walls, which means wealth and luck. Before the cock crows on the first day, the housewives will carry a bucket on their back to rush for water. It is said that the first one who carries water back is the luckiest in the coming year.

### **The development and changes**

After the peaceful liberation in Tibet, the Chinese government has set up Moinba County in Moinba compact communities. At the same time, the productivity has soared enormously. The Moinbas have changed their backward mode of production, namely, the slash-and-burn farming and developed commodity production. The transportations have been greatly improved. They have built up cable bridges, lanes for the horse and roads successfully. The history of climbing cable and cliff had come to an end. The modernized communication facilities such as postal service, telecom, broadcasting and television etc have been gradually developed. A number of hospitals, primary and middle schools have been built up one after another. The Moinbas also permanently enjoy the free medical treatment and compulsory education. The health-care conditions and cultural levels have also been greatly improved.

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