



# The Blacksmith Brothers

*Lhoba People – Tibet, China*

Long, long ago, in the region of Lhoyü, on the sunny slopes at the foot of the Himalayas, there lived two brothers who were sons of Shijin, the Earth. Their names were Pusudadong and Luomadadang.

The brothers barely survived with the little they could grow in the forest clearings and with the animals they hunted. Their tools were no good, neither for cultivating the land nor for hunting. At that time, the use of iron had not yet been discovered, and their tools and weapons were all made of wood and stone, so they soon lost their sharpness or broke.

The two brothers turned in their hearts to their mother, Shijin, telling her that many nights they went to sleep with empty stomachs because they had nothing to eat, and asked her to tell them what they could do to improve their lives above ground. That same night, Pusudadong had a dream.

He dreamt of dark stones scattered on the ground, and saw them melting in the fire and turning into a thick, red, burning fluid. And then he saw his brother Luomadadang cooling the red liquid with the water of a river, and beating the resulting black, ductile mass with a stone mallet, shaping it into different forms, according to the tools they might need.

When Pusudadong woke up, he told his brother:

‘Our mother has given me a dream and explained to me how we can make long-lasting tools. But first we will have to find the stones she has showed me.’

So, that very day, the two brothers set out to explore the Lhoyü region, looking for the stones that Pusudadong had seen in his dream and, a week later, they found them by a river. Nearby they sought shelter from the weather under the rocks and began to prepare the tools necessary to do all that Pusudadong had seen in his dream.

Not many days later, a bluish smoke began to rise in the little valley formed by the river between the mountains, and other villagers from the area came to see what was happening there. When they arrived, they saw Pusudadong and Luomadadang busy and sweaty, moving through the flames and the smoke as they carefully worked with a strange red fluid. After a time, they saw Luomadadang drawing out the red liquid now turned into a glowing rod, and they saw him strike the rod with a great stone mallet, shaping it into something resembling a long knife. By the end of the day, that long knife had ceased to be black and was glowing brightly in Luomadadang's hand.

A few days later, the two brothers were making all kinds of tools and hunting weapons, and had begun to share them with all the people who approached them out of curiosity.

But Luomadadang also thought that they could make small tips out of that metal for the bamboo arrows used by everyone in the region. Thin, sharp bamboo sticks could pierce the skin of many of the animals they could hunt, but they could hardly pierce the skin of wild boar, and wild boar were very dangerous when they felt attacked and turned to charge. Many men in the area had been killed or badly injured after being attacked by one of these huge animals.

So Luomadadang also made arrowheads from that metal to attach to the end of bamboo arrows, and his idea was very successful in the region. They even came from other regions in search of the arrowheads that the two brothers were forging, and they all said that now they could feed their families more easily.

Unfortunately, one of those who came in search of the arrowheads of the brothers was the hunter Abinkenri, a descendant of the Heavenly

Father and the Earthly Mother, but heartless to the extreme, for he did not hunt only for what he needed to sustain himself, but hunted for the pleasure of hitting with his arrows and, why not say it, for the pleasure of killing. Pusudadong and Luomadadang did not know him, so they gave him all the arrowheads he asked for, not knowing that he would shoot his arrows left and right as soon as he caught a glimpse of prey.

Abinkenri shot so many arrows and shot so many animals that the river by which Pusudadong and Luomadadang had invented iron ended up carrying in its waters many of the small, sharp points that the brothers had forged. And, one day when they came to the place to make new tools for everyone in the region, Pusudadong and Luomadadang arrived so tired and thirsty that they began to drink eagerly from the river, not noticing that, with the waters, a few arrowheads were passing down their throats.

The following day, when the villagers went to look for the brothers by the river to ask them for new tools and hunting weapons, they found the two brothers dead. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda and Xueping Luo (2024).

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## Comments

The earliest written record of this Lhoba story that we know of is from 1989, having been collected by one NA Dong and edited by YU Naichang (Yao, 2014).

The Lhoba are the smallest minority of the 56 cultures in the People's Republic of China, with 2,965 Lhoba people remaining in 2017 according to the official census (SCIO, 2017). However, a number of researchers offer higher figures.

Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages, but they have not developed writing, so their tradition is purely oral. They are mostly animist, with a minority following Tibetan Buddhism, but retaining many of the ancestral animist practices.

The name given to this ethnic group, 'Lhoba', comes from Tibetan, meaning 'southerners', because they live in the south-eastern corner of Tibet, which is close to the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. According to Chinese government sources, the Lhoba were marginalised and oppressed by the Tibetan majority, to the extent that intermarriage was banned (SCIO, 2017; Hays, 2022).

## Sources

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## Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 6: Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.

## Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 2a: Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Principle 5f: Manage the extraction and use of non-renewable resources such as minerals and fossil fuels in ways that minimize depletion and cause no serious environmental damage.

Principle 6c: Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

Principle 6d: Prevent pollution of any part of the environment and allow no build-up of radioactive, toxic, or other hazardous substances.

Principle 8c: Ensure that information of vital importance to human health and environmental protection, including genetic information, remains available in the public domain.

