

Menchukha notes

These pages and the accompanying files contain some initial information regarding the history, ethnography, ethnobotany and language of the Menchukha valley in West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

This information was collected between November 7th and 10th 2017.

List of accompanying files

file name(s)	file type	description
menchukha circle map	.jpg	official map of Menchukha circle
speech	.jpg	written transcript of speech MEMB081117B in Memba
MEMB081117A	.wav	short 14 minute discussion between three people in Memba
MEMB081117B	.wav	short speech by Pema Tsewang Kigar in Memba
DSC04576; 04577	.jpg	views east from Menchukha
DSC04578; 04581; 04583; 04597; 04599	.jpg	views south and west from Menchukha, overview of Menchukha town, view towards Tibetan border in the west
vid1; vid2; vid3; vid4; vid5	.mts	views of Menchukha valley
DSC04606; 04607	.jpg	views south towards the ridge separating Menchukha from Upper Subansiri (Nacho) and the Tagin area
DSC04609; 04613; 04616	.jpg	views west towards the Tibetan border
DSC04620	.jpg	preparing the barley field at Durigyap hamlet of Menchukha village on the north bank of the river
DSC04622; 04633	.jpg	Durigyap hamlet
DSC04624; 04625	.jpg	View across the river from Durigyap hamlet
DSC04628	.jpg	Menchukha village
DSC04635	.jpg	Amaranth in Menchukha village
DSC04642		View of the bridge between Menchukha village and Menchukha town
DSC04651	.jpg	Preparing the field for next year's millet by hoeing and burning a dried grass pasture (Pharge village).
DSC04652	.jpg	klu-khañ at Pharge village
DSC04703; 04703; 04705; 04710; 04710; 04733; 04712; 04713; 04717; 04721	.jpg	At padma sel-phug
vid6; vid7	.mts	At padma sel-phug

DSC04737; 04738; 04739; 04740; 04741; 04744	.jpg	plants
DSC04745; 04746; 04750	.jpg	view from the old gonpa
DSC04751; 04816; 04786; 04788; 04778; 04799; 04779; 04780); 04781; 04784; 04785; 04789; 04798; 04790; 04800; 04794; 04795; 04796	.jpg	the old gonpa
DSC04807; 04809; 04811	.jpg	the new gonpa

DOIs of accompanying files

description	DOI
all photo files	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117211
all religious scripture photo files	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117209
all sound files	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117213
all video files	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117215
map and text	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117217

The 23 clans of Menchukha Memba

The Memba of Menchukha are subdivided in 23 patrilineal and patrilocal clans. However, not all these clans are equally represented. Whereas some clans are very common, having many households in many villages, other clans are almost extinct.

For example, there may be only single households of the following clans left: the Goum (Gongmu) clan (Lhalung); the Chombe clan (Galling); the Dabu clan (Galling); the Ongbu (Wangpu) clan (Dechenthang); the Nyajung clan (Lhalung); the Dalgombu (Dalai Gonpa) clan (Lhalung); and of the Nago clan (Thargelling). Furthermore, there may be just four households of the Buru (Budruk) clan (Lhalung); four households of the Maney clan (Dechenthang); two households of the Chena clan (Dechenthang); three households of the Lamsang (Lamatshang) clan (Dechenthang); two households of the Chejung (Chökyong) clan (Lhalung) and three households of the Lobin (Lopön) clan (Menchukha).

On the other hand, clans like Naksang, Goiba, Sharjo, Sona, Chukla, and Philley are common in various villages; whereas clans like Dorsom (11), Gyana (12), Kigar (8) and Onge (7) have quite a number of households, albeit in a limited number of villages. It can be observed that the more common clans are slowly ‘absorbing’ the less common clans through marriage.

The cursive village names in the table below represent the main home village(s) of the respective clan.

common	Memba/Tib.	actual	origin	main village(s)
Naksang	nag-saṅs	Naksang	Mon Tawang Ugyenling	Bomjipangsa, Barangang, Kadasila, Tachingpanga, Pharge, Thargelling, <i>Dechenthang</i> , Dorjeeling, Chorling, <i>Lhalung</i> , Sekar
Gyana	rgya-nag	Gyanak	Tibet Kongpo Gyanak	<i>Pharge</i> , <i>Lhalung</i> , Sekar
Goiba	rgod-pa	Göba	Tibet	<i>Gause</i> , Bomjipangsa, Barangang, Tachingpanga, <i>Pharge</i> , Menchukha, Dorjeeling, Chorling
Chukla	gtsug-lag	Tsuklak	Tibet Basum Tshokor	<i>Manigong</i> , <i>Pharge</i> , <i>Singbir</i> , Yorni, Thargelling, Dorjeeling, <i>Lhalung</i>
Onge	dbaṅ-rgyal	Wange	?	<i>Dechenthang</i>
Phillee	ḥphel-les	Phele	?	<i>Segong</i> , <i>Dechenthang</i> , Galling, Dorjeeling,
Sona	so-nag (mtsho-sna)	Sonak	Tibet Tshona (mtsho-sna)	Bomjipangsa, Barangang, <i>Pharge</i> , Yorni, <i>Galling</i> , <i>Lhalung</i> , <i>Singbir</i>
Kigar	skyid-dkar	Kyigar	Tibet ṅos-ḥbul skyil	<i>Pharge</i> , <i>Menchukha</i> , <i>Dorjeeling</i>
Sharjo	śar-phyogs	Sharchok	Tibet ṅos-ḥbul śar	Bomjipangsa, <i>Menchukha</i> , Dorjeeling, <i>Chorling</i> , Sekar
Lobin	blo-dpon	Lopön	?	<i>Menchukha</i>
Dorsom	rdor-sems	Dorsem	Druk Trashigang	<i>Thargelling</i> , <i>Lhalung</i>
Nago	na-sgo	Nago	Tibet	<i>Thargelling</i>
Maney	Ma-Ni	Mani	Druk Trashigang	<i>Dechenthang</i> , <i>Lhalung</i>
Lamsang	bla-ma-tshaṅ	Lamatshang	Tibet	<i>Dechenthang</i>
Goum	dgoṅ-mo	Gongmu	?	<i>Lhalung</i>
Dabu	bdag-po	Dakpu	Tibet Dakpo (dwags-po)	<i>Galling</i>
Chombe	nor-bu tshem-bas (nor-bu chos-ḥphel)	Norbu Chömbe	Tibet	<i>Galling</i>
Nyajung	ña-byuṅ	Nyajung	?	<i>Lhalung</i>
Buru	bu-ḥbrug (bu-drug)	Budruk	Tibet Tshona (mtsho-sna)	<i>Lhalung</i> , Yorni
Chejung	chos-skyoṅ	Chökyong	Tibet	<i>Lhalung</i>
Dalgombu	zla-laḥi dgon-pa	Dalai Gonpa	Tibet	<i>Lhalung</i>
Ongbu	dbaṅ-po	Wangpu	?	<i>Dechenthang</i>
Chena	?	?	?	<i>Dechenthang</i>

Villages in Menchukha valley (for id numbers refer to the map with DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117217>).

As the accompanying map shows, the Memba area started from the red line onwards. To the south, across the ridge lies the Tagin area of Upper Subansiri. To the southeast of the Memba villages lie the Ramo villages, Ramo also inhabit the villages of Yorku, Dorjeeling and Sekar. To the north, in Monigong circle, live the Bokar. Menchukha town is a town with a large Memba population, but also many Tagin, Bokar, Ramo and other people.

id	common	Tib.
316	Monigong	ma-Ni-sgañ
317	Thargelling	dar-rgyal-gliñ
(318)	Yorku	g.yor-sku (not Memba))
319	Lhalung	lha-luñ
320	Segong	ser-goñ
321	Dechenthang east	bde-chen-thañ śar
322	Dechenthang west	bde-chen-thañ nub
323	Singbir	śiñ-bir
324	Galling	dgah-gliñ
325	Gauche	dgah-ḥu-che
326	Mechukha (village)	sman-chu-kha
327	Chorling	mtshor-gliñ
328	Yorni	g.yor-ni
329	Pharge	pha-rgyal
330	Bomjipangsa	?
331	Barangang	?
332	Tachingpanga	?
333	Kadasila	?
336	Dorjeeling	rdo-rje-gliñ
337	Sekar	ser-dkar
346	Sorangdem	?
(348)	Mechukha (town)	sman-chu-kha (mix))

The Tagin people are called *ceb-tañ* in Memba, referring to them usually moving around mostly wearing just a loincloth in the past. Tagin people who were enslaved by the Memba were released at the rate of 500 INR in 1950s by the Indian government, and allowed to resettle in several villages in the Menchukha valley. Many of them are nominally Buddhist and speak Memba, although there are many recent conversions to Christianity, and these people commonly use Arunachali Hindi. Tagin clans include Chije (Dorjeeling), Zama ('Jama') and Eru (mainly Yorni), Paum and Yomre (Singbir), Dolu and Nyogen (Sekar).

The Ramo clan names usually start with Ko-, such as Koje and Kochung, and they were also resettled in several villages in the upper valley, such as the Koje and Kochung clans of Yorku, and the Khoyum and Tamang clans of Dorjeeling and Sekar.

Some Memba vocabulary

gloss	entry
fish	'ná (cf. Tib. <i>ñā</i> 'fish')
takin	kem'ná: (cf. Tib. <i>skyen-nag</i> 'wild forest goat' and Tawang Monket [kempák] 'takin')
goral	'gja (short, cf. Tib. <i>rgya-ra</i> 'goral')
India	'gja: (long, cf. Tib. <i>rgya-gar</i> 'India')
bat	gømtɕ ^h en p ^h aŋŋa: (cf. Tib. <i>sgom-chen pha-waŋ</i> 'bat')
blueberry	siŋsir
willow tree	'laŋma (cf. Tib. <i>lcañ-ma</i> 'willow')
iron	'tɕák (cf. Tib. <i>lcag</i> 'iron')
alder tree	múkɕiŋ
yellow-throated marten	te:le:
weasel	taɕa (cf. Tawang Monket [tɕa ^h a?] 'weasel', not Tib. <i>sre-moñ</i>)
bulrush (<i>Scirpus sp.</i>)	'pí:pɔ (not Tib. <i>gro-ma</i> 'bulrush')
pine tree	go:tsɛŋɕiŋ
vermouth (<i>Artemisia myranthus</i>)	k ^h empɕiŋ (Tib. <i>mkhan-pa</i> 'vermouth')
paper tree (<i>Daphne sp.</i> , <i>Edgeworthia sp.</i>)	ɕugɕiŋ (Tib. <i>śog-gu</i> 'paper')
mithun	ba:min (Tib. <i>ba-men</i> 'mithun')
cow	ba:'láŋ (Tib. <i>ba-glañ</i> 'cow, cattle')
bull	'láŋgo: (Tib. <i>glañ-gog</i> 'bullock')
crossbreed of mithun bull and cow	dy:min
crossbreed of mithun bull and <i>dy:min</i>	garmin
crossbreed of mithun bull and <i>garmin</i>	gartø:
crossbreed of mithun bull and <i>gartø:</i>	ba:'laŋ
beans	ɔɕa: (cf. Tawang Monket, Tshangla [ɔɕa:] 'beans')
potato	k ^h e: (cf. Tawang Monket [k ^h e:] 'potato')
onion	kɔzɔŋ
corn	aɕum (cf. Tib. <i>a-śom</i> , Tawang Monket [aɕum] 'maize')
cucumber	a:gɔŋ
pumpkin	brumɕa: ~ ɖumɕa: (cf. Tawang Monket, Tshangla [brumɕa:] 'pumpkin')
finger millet	tami: (cf. Galo [tami:] 'finger millet')
soybean	ɕɛm (cf. Tawang Monket [grɛp ~ grɛm] 'soybean')
pulse	ɕakp (cf. Tshangla [ɕakpu] and Tawang Monket [ɕakp] 'pulse')
landslide	ɕakpa:
amaranth (DSC04635.jpg)	sók mendo:
oil	'núm (cf. Tib. <i>snum</i> 'oil')
Sichuan pepper	'jerma: (cf. Tib. <i>g.yer-ma</i> 'Sichuan pepper')
what	tɕi (cf. Chocangaca [tɕi] 'what')

A Memba saying: [tʃaŋki sɔːne: go:kʰji ma pʰɛn, mi tʰuk sɔːne: raŋ tʰuk ma pʰɛn]

In Written Tibetan: spyañ-ki gsos-nas sgo-khyi ma phan/mi phrug gsos-nas rañ phrug ma phan. ལྷན་གྱི་གསོས་ནས་སློ་ཕྱི་མ་པན། མི་ལྷུག་གསོས་ནས་རང་ལྷུག་མ་པན།

Translation: Rearing a wolf won't benefit as much as rearing a domestic dog, raising someone else's child won't benefit as much as raising one's own child.

The Memba write their spoken language in the Tibetan script. This has sometimes been referred to as 'Hikor' (Grewal 1997), but this name could not be verified. As the picture with DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1117217> shows, the spelling of spoken Memba is a mixture of classical Tibetan spelling and improvised (phonologically more consistent) spelling. It is not known how consistent this spelling is across authors.

Translation of the written Memba text:

'Today, at the 18th day of the 9th month of the bird year, friend Sangay Dorji, you arriving at my home, eating food, drinking tea, is it tasty? And then, is this valley of ours good, are our boys and girls and children good or not good? Friend, when will you go back... when going back tomorrow, go eating tea and food... later again come back one time ok. Friend go well. Let's meet again later. Good luck.'

Some notable things: *a-byin* [atʰin] 'friend'; 1st person singular *nyes* [ne:] like Tawang Monkhet [ne:] not Tibetan [ŋa:]; *slas* [lã:] 'to arrive' cf. Tib. *slebs*; question particle *dge* [ge:]; in questions copula *nu* [nu] and negated *ma-na* [ma:na:], cf. Tib *hdug* and *mi-hdug*, Tawang Monkhet [neu] and [mo-nou]; interrogative *ga-dzañ* [gadzaŋ] 'when', cf. Dirang Tshangla [ge:zaŋ] 'how much'; *lo* [lo:] 'to return', Tib. *slog*.

Religious history:

Menchukha falls within the pilgrimage site of *tša-ri gnas*, and is particularly considered to be the *nañ* 'inner' pilgrimage site of *sbas-chags śiñ-ri* (Bechak Shingri, often written as Panchakshri). It is also called *padma śel-ri*. To the North is the *byañ dgañ-ba-gliñ*; to the East is *śar rdo-rje-gliñ*; to the South is *lho rin-chen-gliñ*; and to the West is *nub padma śel-phug*. The pilgrimage site of *padma śel-phug* is located a little distance north of Menchukha. The cave of Pema Shelphuk is thought to have been the meditation cave of *gu-ru rin-po-che* (*gu-ru padma sam-bha-wa*), his female consorts *mkhañ-ḥgro ye-śes mtsho-rgyal* and *mon-mo bkrañ-śis mkheḥu-sgron* and his religious assistant, the Nepalese (*bal-po*) *dpañ-bo ña-hdra arya sa-le*. Their head and body imprints can be found in the cave (DSC04703; 04705; 04710). In 1986, the Sikh regiment posted in Menchukha interpreted the Guru's cave as their Guru Nanak's cave, where he supposedly stayed on his way to Kailash in Tibet, and the basically hijacked the cave, making it into a Sikh pilgrimage site, with any signs of the original Buddhist pilgrimage site being slowly covered up (DSC04710; 04733).

In addition to the cave itself, there are various other pilgrimage places, namely:

- the *bar-do grol-lam* 'way through the intermediate stage between life and death' also called *myal-baḥi thar-paḥi lam* 'way that releases one from hell' (DSC04712; 04713). Passing through this crevasse is supposed to make sure one does not get reborn in hell, or will have a good reincarnation.

- the *di-bu dkar-nag hdu-sa*, a small but deep hole in the rock next to the river filled with water (DSC04717). There used to be black and white and variegated pebbles inside, and people used to make a wish and then pick a pebble from the hole. A black pebble meant the wish will not be fulfilled, a white one meant it will be fulfilled, and a variegated one is ambiguous. People, instead of returning the pebbles to the hole, have been taking the pebbles along, so now one has to first fill the hole with pebbles oneself.
- The *gu-ru hkhrus-chu* or *rdo-rje gnam-hdzom hkhrus-chu*, a waterfall thought to have been the bathing place of Guru, one passes behind the waterfall and supposedly gets cleaned of sins (DSC04721).

The old gonpa 'temple' of Menchukha (DSC04816) was maintained and further expanded (including most of the clay statues hand-made) by the Bhutanese Nyingmapa lama *kun-bzañ bde-chen ran-grol* (16th reincarnation, DSC04786; 04788), who hailed from *dgon-pa dkar-po* in *sku-ri-stod*.

Statues in the old gonpa made by him include Guru Rinpoche (DSC04778; 04799); Guru Dorji Drolö (DSC04779); Chenrezi Chaktong Chentong (DSC04780); Chenrezi, Buddha, Guru (DSC04781); srung-ma (? DSC04784); srung-ma (? DSC04785); ? (DSC04789; 04798); Rahula, Chana Dorji, Lumo Karmo (DSC04790); Sengdongma (DSC04800). Masks made by him are depicted in DSC04794; 04795; 04796.

A new gonpa is under construction at a pilgrimage site below the old gonpa (DSC04807), but the construction was halted due to a conflict over the land. Ruins of an even older gonpa (DSC04809), including Guru Rinpoche's seat (DSC04811), can be found there as well.

Religious manuscripts:

Two religious scriptures of which photographs were taken in Menchukha. These are in the possession of Pema Tsewang Kigar and belong to the Nyingmapa community of the valley.

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Manuscript 1: handwritten scroll manuscript on 11 pages of traditional paper in *dbu-med*. Copy of a copy of the original scroll manuscript written in *dbu-med* in *dnul-yig* and *ser-yig* on traditional paper with a brocade silk border. This original scroll was reportedly taken by the Chinese in 1962, after the local religious practitioners quickly made a copy.

Manuscript 2: Handwritten leather-bound manuscript of 21 folios of traditional paper in *dpe-tshugs* script probably called *sbas-yul-gyi dkar-chag hkhrul-med bzhugs-so* 'Here within contained the genuine exegesis of the hidden land'.

Note: Anyone who can read and type both manuscripts in *dbu-can* in the computer is kindly requested to do so and send the word file to timintibet@hotmail.com; the owners of the original manuscripts would like to have a soft copy to preserve in case something happens to the hard copies. Also, anyone who is willing to translate the manuscripts into English, or knows of an existing English translation, is kindly requested to contact in the same email address. Thank you for your cooperation.

Ethnobotany:

Some native names of trees and plants in Menchukha

photo id	name	use
DSC04737	tɕ ^h usin dɛrmo:	medicinal
DSC04738	para:	kindle fire
DSC04744	siŋsir	edible berries
DSC04739	lamba:çiŋ	fruits used to extract oil
DSC04740	çudak	fruits used to extract oil
DSC04741	ɬaçuçiŋ	white flower called [ɬaçime: mentɔk] used for <i>jinsreg</i> purification ceremony