

Tibetan culture reimaged

Design team turns iconic symbols and everyday items from Xizang into collectible plush toys

By **PALDEN NYIMA** and **DAQIONG**
in Lhasa

Now you can hug your favorite traditional food from the high-altitude Xizang autonomous region. That is right, food. You can even take it to bed with you.

It is a new cultural brand called Shapaley, which uses the Tibetan word for “meat pie” to connect with ordinary life on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. It is turning some familiar flavors and other iconic symbols into cuddly keepsakes and winning hearts on Chinese social media.

Developed by the Xizang Performing Arts Company, the line of plush toys reimagine Tibetan icons — noodles, for example — as huggable friends that make traditional culture playful, portable, and relatable.

In the first two weeks since the

launch of the first series, around 1,500 units have been sold across China, with orders coming mainly from short-video platform Douyin’s shopping section and co-branded pop-up events.

“Tibetan noodles are a familiar taste in the everyday life of Xizang, so we wanted to spin this ordinary flavor into a portable memory. We want it to become a warm new Tibetan specialty in people’s hearts,” said Fu Shiyu, head of the company’s product development department.

The concept taps into a nationwide craze for culturally resonant plush toys, following the lead of brands such as Jellycat and the growing trend of city-themed cultural products.

“When we saw the cultural and tourism sector across the country launching toys based on iconic local symbols, we felt Tibetan culture had huge untapped potential,” Fu said.



A plush Shapaley “meat pie” toy.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Because no one had yet ventured into this space, we decided to start with the foods we know best.”

The rollout of products features familiar objects in fun forms. For instance, a plush Shapaley “meat pie” replica doubles as a coin purse. A thought-provoking “flowers on cow dung” toy reflects Tibetan humor. A Potala Palace-shaped

plushie has quickly become a must-have souvenir for visitors.

The 10-member design team, most of them local employees, is committed to giving Tibetan culture a fresh and hip look. Their main sales channel is Douyin, while they partner with cultural and creative shops for on-site consignment sales.

They also stage interactive events. At a recent outdoor picnic, for example, staff members dressed as tea house owners staged playful noodle-cooking scenes. The immersive approach makes the beloved real-life products come alive, Fu said.

“Many people have said they’re happy to finally have a cultural product that represents Tibetan lifestyle, and they’re urging us to design more,” she said.

Tenzin Sherab, a Tibetan employee, said cultural symbols from everyday life resonate. “The first series of Shapaley products

takes a new approach, and it’s quite a good one; but it’s also a significant challenge,” he said, adding that the team hopes to steadily improve the products.

The company has produced plush versions not only of Tibetan noodles, but also of butter tea churns and tea bowls. Each design reflects a familiar aspect of Tibetan lifestyle, recast in a charming, portable, and collectible form.

Encouraged by the strong positive feedback, the team is already working on a second series and promises new designs blending creativity with the roots of Tibetan culture.

“We hope to keep improving and innovating,” said Tenzin Sherab. “This is just the start of a journey to make Tibetan culture warm, friendly, and easy to share.”

Contact the writers at
palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese goats to transform Ugandan farms

Breed will support agriculture modernization as part of a South-South cooperation program

By **SHARON NAKOLA**
in Entebbe, Uganda
sharon@chinadailyafrica.com

As the evening sun dipped behind the gentle hills of Entebbe in Uganda, a small herd of Jianzhou big-eared goats recently imported from China grazed quietly on fresh pasture, their distinctive floppy ears swaying gently in the breeze.

These are no ordinary goats — they are the latest addition to Uganda’s drive to transform its livestock industry, in a bid to boost meat production, improve breeding stock, and strengthen the livelihoods of rural farmers.

Uganda has welcomed a new chapter in its agricultural modernization drive with the importation of nine Jianzhou big-eared goats, part of a broader South-South cooperation program aimed at enhancing livestock productivity and farmer incomes.

The goats — a crossbreed of British Nubian and local goats from Jianyang, Sichuan province, in China — were procured through a partnership among China, the Ugandan government under the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Known for their rapid growth, large body size and adaptability, the breed is expected to support



Jianzhou big-eared goats under quarantine in Entebbe, Uganda, earlier in August. SHARON NAKOLA / CHINA DAILY

Uganda’s push to commercialize agriculture by increasing meat yields, introducing new breeding technologies, and expanding market opportunities.

“This is not a donor-recipient arrangement — it is mutual benefit,” said Julius Twinamasiko, program coordinator for the Uganda-China agricultural cooperation. “We want to add superior livestock breeds that will help farmers earn more through meat, milk, and trade. China gains investment, and market ties, while Uganda gains

technology, genetics, and capacity building.”

The introduction of these goats is expected to play a key role in tackling food insecurity and increasing meat production, especially in arid and semi-arid parts of Uganda, where traditional cattle and goat herding has become increasingly difficult due to prolonged dry spells.

Twinamasiko said the project reflects growing agricultural ties between China and Uganda, underpinned by the principles of South-South cooperation. Chinese

experts, he said, have provided technical guidance on breeding, disease control, and pasture management of the new breed to Ugandan experts. “This is more than just a livestock project — it’s a knowledge exchange.”

The goats are being held in quarantine as part of research and breeding programs, including a proposal to use artificial insemination in the new breed of goats — a first for Uganda. The goal is to increase the number of these goats, cross-breed them with indigenous kinds,

and eventually give better stock to small-holder farmers all around the country.

Rose Ademun, Uganda’s commissioner for animal health, said the Jianzhou big-eared goat is “a superior meat breed known for its rapid growth, high carcass yield, and adaptability to various agro-climatic conditions”. She said that through crossbreeding, the Ugandan government aims to ensure that farmers get offspring that are resilient, productive, and capable of thriving even under drought conditions.

The FAO coordinated the procurement process, ensuring health checks, quarantine procedures, and on-the-ground knowledge transfer. Chinese livestock experts have been working alongside Ugandan veterinarians to adapt the goats to local feeding regimes and climate, while training local staff in breeding and husbandry practices.

“This cooperation goes beyond livestock. It’s about building lasting capacity, fostering innovation, and creating income opportunities in rural areas,” said Martin Ameu, FAO program associate and South-South project coordinator in Uganda.

With the goats now set to be out of quarantine and thriving on Ugandan pastures, the project is ready to begin breeding trials — a step policymakers said will mark the start of a long-term transformation in the country’s livestock sector.