We Are What We Eat: A Sherpa Cookbook

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We Are What We Eat: A Sherpa Cookbook

This study is an analysis of food in Sherpa culture. It contains an overview of Sherpa recipes and methods for food preparation as well as an exploration of the role which food plays in different sectors of Sherpa life. The goal of this study is to facilitate a wider knowledge about Sherpa cuisine and the Sherpa people as a whole. The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Solukhumbu, specifically the villages of Junbesi and Sallerie, from November 6, 2001 to December 1, 2011.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Recipe Quick Guide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements 3</td>
<td>Meat Mo-Mo’s 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A note on language 4</td>
<td>Tsampa 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction 6</td>
<td>Thukpa 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Origin of the Sherpas 8</td>
<td>Shakpa 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where The Sherpas Live 13</td>
<td>Dough 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Sherpas Earn a Living 37</td>
<td>Kur 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 44</td>
<td>Te Mo-mo 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Sherpas Value 47</td>
<td>Rildhuk 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Sherpa Religious Beliefs 51</td>
<td>Kaksir 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dal Bhat 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syan 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phalghi 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homi Yari 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tibetan Tea 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chaang 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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I would also like to thank his son, Mr. Pasang Rinzi, for his tremendous assistance in helping me to obtain the Sherpa spellings which are featured in this project. In addition, I must thank him for providing me with my own quiet corner to write in when I was most in need of a silent space to work.

And finally I would like to thank Mr. Dendi Sherpa, without whom my travel to Solukhumbu would never have been possible.
A Note on Language

The Sherpa language is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in Nepal, Tibet, and India. According to the 2001 Census in Nepal there are 130,000 Sherpa speakers in Nepal. While it is possible to write Sherpa in either Devanagari or Tibetan script, most native Sherpa speakers do not recognize a written form of the Sherpa language. It is predominately a spoken language with various dialects and little standardization. Written Sherpa language is a modern creation. In December of 2003 the Sherpa Society, deemed Tibetan script as the official script of the Sherpa language when they made the decision to print Sherpa elementary school textbooks in Tibetan script. This decision was made in spite of the fact that most native Sherpa speakers cannot read or write Tibetan script. On the other hand, many Sherpa speakers can read and write in Devanagari because they speak Nepali which also uses Devanagari script. However the decision was made in reverence of the Sherpa people’s Tibetan heritage and strong connection to Tibetan Buddhism.

During the interview process for this project I interacted with many native Sherpa speakers but none of them knew how to read or write in Tibetan script. Therefore, in the pages to come, all Sherpa words will be written in an English transliteration reflecting the proper pronunciation followed by a transcription in parenthesis representing their proper spelling in Devanagari script. In addition a glossary of terms is provided in Appendix A.
“Our foods define us: as a people, a culture, and oftentimes a nation… Who we are is how we eat”

-Richard Ragan, The Life of Food in Nepal”
1. Introduction

**Everybody eats.** This is a basic fact of life; that all people, given that they have the means, consume some type of food on a daily basis. Although this is a common factor which on some level may unify us all as one people, the food produced and consumed by any given individual, or culture as a whole, divides us by who we are and where we come from. Food consumption is more than just an act of survival and within our eating habits lays greater meaning than purely sustenance. Eating is a form of expression shaped by history and limited by present circumstance. What we eat, how we eat, and when we eat, can tell an intricate story about the type of life we lead.

I originally set out on this project because of my love for food and interest to study something new. In the several leading Nepali cookbooks, Sherpa cuisine, although the Sherpa people are a popular ethnic group in Nepal, receives zero representation. For some, this may be an understandable oversight, given the limited variety of Sherpa food in comparison to the diversity which is produced from Thakali and Newari kitchens. But for others it is an invitation to delve into the greater meaning which lies behind this simple food.

For this project, I spent three weeks doing field work in Solukhumbu. I lived primarily in the villages of Junbesi and Sallerie so that I would have access to the Saturday market in Sallerie. I conducted one on one and group interviews with Sherpas of different ages, sexes, and occupations, and spent as much time in as many kitchens as possible. What I found was that some of the most interesting pieces of information I received where given by informants when I just happened to be around rather than when I was asking direct question. Once community members learned of my interests they were eager to point out tidbits of information whenever they came to mind.

As I began conducting my research, I realized the niche that exists for this type of work. Each year thousand of tourist and trekkers flock to Solukhumbu with only a vague conception of the people who live there. The vast majority of foreigners who I encountered in Solukhumbu came to the region with Shangri-la notions about the Sherpa people and Solukhumbu as a whole, but with little actual knowledge. This void did not necessarily represent a lack of interest, many people were inquisitive and eager to sample the local cuisine once the topic was breached. But previously they were under the impression that dal bhat was the main staple of Sherpa cuisine, when in fact dal is only a recent introduction. It is my hope that this may be a guide for anyone interested, and it is for those who have a genuine interest in the people of the mountains and not
just the mountains that I am completing this project. The structure of the project reflects this notion in that each chapter is organized around what the food can tell you about the people. It is my hope that it may be a delicious learning experience for all involved.

In general, Sherpa food is a combination of a few basic ingredients which can be readily grown in Solukhumbu and a large portion of its tastiness is created by the freshness of the ingredients. In addition, there are a few main staple dishes which are recognized as “Sherpa” but no written recipes or specific ingredient amounts. Sherpa children learn to cook at a young age by watching their parents and slowly taking on kitchen responsibilities. They do so by acquiring a feel for how to create different dishes and the food is frequently sampled during the cooking processes to allow for adjustments by adding different spices. Of course inaccurate cooking measurements will vary from person to person, but similarly the tasting preference and quantity able to be consumed will vary from person to person. Because there are no measuring cups or specifics in a Sherpa kitchen, I will make little attempt to quantify the ingredients used based on foreign standards. Instead I will try only to describe the ingredients and their quantities based on Sherpa interpretations. In some cases this may lead to confusion, but rest assured even experienced Sherpa chefs make misjudgments which can lead to mealtime catastrophe. In almost all cases, the food is consumed anyways but only after several jokes have been made at the cook’s expense and they have learned a valuable lesson for their next attempt. It is a cuisine that is easily tailored to the eater’s preferences and one which provides room for experimentation and personalization. With that in mind, when trying to cook any of the recipes presented in this book it is best not to be overly concerned with quantities and specific instructions. One potato too many will not ruin a meal and almost any dish can be rectified with a little extra chili or salt. The best advice that I can give is that trying to obtain a general notion of what the meal is that you are cooking will help you determine how much of each ingredient you should add, and always remember to taste test often. If you do happen to make a blunder, take solace in the fact that you have just joined the inner ranks of Sherpa cooks, who have all made mistakes in the past, and you’re next attempt will undoubtedly be better.
2. The Origin of the Sherpas

It may seem ironic to begin a Sherpa cookbook with momo’s, a Tibetan food item, but the integration of several traditionally Tibetan dishes into the Sherpa cuisine indicates the origin of the Sherpa people. While there are no specific records, it is widely known that Sherpas are the descendants of Tibetan Khampas who first came to Solukhumbu in the late 15th century because of ideological disputes with neighboring Tibetans. According to one tradition, the Sherpas travelled out of Tibet east of the Rolwaling Himal into Solu and later migrated again to Khumbu. However, according to another tradition the Sherpas migrated directly into Khumbu via the Nang La Pass. The word Sherpa, or Sharwa as they are also sometimes called, means “Easterner”, a name which they acquired when they arrived in Solukhumbu from Tibet. Most Sherpas recognize eighteen different clan names, although a detailed study in the 1970’s revealed that there are actually twenty one, “Chiawa, Chusherwa, Gardza, Gole, Goparma, Jongdomba, Khambadze, Laksindu, Lama, Lhukpa, Mende, Munming, Nawa, Paldorje, Pankarma, Pinasa, Salaka, Shangup, Sherwa, Shire, and Thaktu”. The discrepancy in number is because some clans are so closely related that they are actually widely recognized as being the same. When the Sherpas migrated, naturally they brought many Tibetan foods with them such as mo-mos (steamed or fried dumplings), tsampa (roasted barley), and thenduk (noodle soup). These dishes have become fully integrated into the Sherpa cuisine and Sherpas place little to no importance on distinguishing between which foods are originally Tibetan and which foods are Sherpa.
Meat Mo-Mo’s

(D. mah mah)

**Ingredients**
Flour, Warm Water, A heaping tablespoon of crushed ginger, garlic, and salt, Finely Chopped Onion, Ground Meat, Cooking oil.

**To Cook**

1. Gradually add water to flour to make a dough. The dough should be firm but not sticky. Knead well for several minutes after the dough has formed. This may be laborious but if the dough is not kneaded well enough the mo-mos will break apart.
2. In a large bowl, combine the crushed ginger and garlic, with chopped onion and ground meat.
3. Sprinkle with salt, turmeric powder, and ground cumin seed, you should use enough to provide a light coating to the entire top of the mixture.
4. Heat cooking oil and pour into the bowl. It should be enough to make all of the ingredients slightly wet but not saturated.
5. Mix with hand. The oil should act as a glue to stick all of the ingredients together.
6. Rip off small segments of the dough and roll flat into round palm sized pieces.
7. Mo-mos can be folded into many different shapes but the most common are crescent moon and round. See next page for instructions on how to fold.⁶
To Fold the Mo-Mo’s

a. To make crescent shape mo-mos: Hold the dough in the palm of your left hand. Place a small dollop of the meat mixture onto the center of the dough. Fold the dough in half over the filling and pinch closed at one end to seal. Keeping your fingers in the pinched position, with your thumb on the back of the mo-mo as a support, reach forward with your forefinger to grab more dough and pinch again. Continuously reach for more dough and pinch with your forefinger forming a crescent half moon shape.

b. To make round mo-mos: Hold the dough flat in the palm of your left hand. Place a small dollop of filling into the center of the dough. Pinch an edge together at any point, using your thumb and forefinger. Reach for more dough with your forefinger and continue to pinch working your way around in a circle until the mom is sealed and you have formed a ball.

Mo-mo Sauce
Preparation a delicious mo-mo sauce is an essential part of making mo-mos. And there are several options depending on personal preference.

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Over low heat, combine two handfuls of crushed, fresh or dry chilies, and a large handful of chopped garlic.
3. Add two heaping tablespoons of flour and 2 tablespoons of salt. Mix well
4. Sprinkle with a good helping of turmeric powder
5. Add hot water, it should be enough to cover the ingredients.
6. Add two large handfuls of boiled, peeled tomatoes ().
7. Continue to cook over low heat and blend until you have achieved a smooth liquid consistency.

If a blender is available, at step six the sauce and tomatoes may be combined and blended in an electric blender to save time.
Tsampa (campā), roasted barley flour, is another Tibetan dish through which Sherpas express their ancestry. Historically, tsampa has been a main staple in the Tibetan diet because it is filling, highly suitable for cold climates, and easy to prepare. In recent years, especially in the face of conflict with China, tsampa has been used as a unifying quality of the Tibetan people. Politically motivated messages have been issued urging the “tsampa eaters” to band together and take action.\(^5\)

Additionally, the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and The New York Times have come out in favor of tsampa's health benefits. In 2006 The Food and Drug Administration announced that “Scientific evidence indicates that including barley in a healthy diet can help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease by lowering bad cholesterol (low density lipo-proteins) and total cholesterol levels.” And The New York Times also concluded that barley-inclusive” diet is ‘reduction of risk for cancer of the stomach and intestine’; ‘reduction of risk of cardiovascular diseases’; ‘reduction of risk of Type 2 diabetes ’; ‘stimulation of the immune system’; and ‘contribution to reduction of the risk of obesity’.\(^7\)

When the Sherpas migrated from Tibet, they brought this nourishing staple with them. And because it grows in the high altitude fields of Solukhumbu equally as well as on the Tibetan Plateau, it is still eaten almost every day.

Preparing tsampa is quick and easy and can be done in a number of different ways, the most common of which are:

*Tsang-gam*, meaning to eat the powder dry. When doing this you can take a handful straight from the bowl and put it in your mouth, but be careful not to inhale even slightly or else the fine powder will become lodged in your throat and cause you to choke.

*Cham-dur*, typically eaten for breakfast is tsampa porridge. Sprinkle some sugar, a pinch of salt and a small lump of butter on top of the dry tsampa. Then add either hot water, black tea, Tibetan tea, or hot milk, depending on your taste preferences. Gently fold the tsampa into the liquid. Add more liquid if necessary to achieve porridge consistency.

*Paag*, a soft, malleable dough that can be eaten in small lumps. You can
make paag by adding the same ingredients that you put in tsampa porridge except add less hot liquid so that the tsampa becomes a soft clay rather than a soupy porridge.\(^8\)

These are the most traditional methods of eating tsampa, but in a modern kitchen anything from peanut butter to honey or cinnamon can be added to suit your preferences.

**Thukpa**

(D. thukpī khuā)

A *simple soup of noodles, vegetables, and possibly meat, Thukpa is eaten frequently by Sherpas either as a snack or as dinner.*

**Ingredients**
- Wheat
- Egg
- Water
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Coriander
- Onion
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Chili
- Cumin seed
- Turmeric Powder
- Salt

**To Cook:**
- Make a dough of wheat, egg, and water
- Roll flat and cut into long strips
- Boil the noodles until they are just slightly undercooked.
- In a pan, heat oil and fry onion until lightly brown
- Add ginger, garlic, chili, cumin seed, turmeric powder, and salt. Stir well and fry for several minutes.
- Add carrots
3. Where the Sherpas Live

The majority of the Sherpa people live in Solukhumbu, a district in the northeast of Nepal tucked within the Himalayan Mountains. They are well known for being mountain people, living amongst some of the world’s highest snow-capped peaks. Although beautiful, life in the mountains can be harsh, and consequently the Sherpa diet is designed to defend against the unforgiving cold. Hot dishes, both in temperature and spice, specifically stews, are frequently consumed to provide warmth from the inside out.

The district of Solukhumbu is broken into three smaller sections, Khumbu, Pharak, and Solu. Khumbu is the highest, with summer villages sitting above 15,000ft and winter villages at an average of 12,000-13,000ft. Pharak sits slightly lower at altitudes of 8,000-9,000ft with villages running along the Dudh Khosi gorge. And Solu is the lowest, characterized by broad valleys, rhodendrons, and pine forests. Food in Solukhumbu is limited to crops that can grow at high altitudes and it is estimated that 70% of the population in Solu Khumbu does not have enough food due to the difficulty of cultivating crops. The District Agricultural Office in Salleri estimates that 4,072 metric tons of additional food would be needed in order to sufficiently feed the entire population of Solu Khumbu. This estimation does not imply that there is mass starvation in the region, but rather it implies that the majority of people’s diets are not sufficient due to limited production. Of the total land of Solukhumbu, 3,397,676 hectares, only 45,358 hectares is suitable for farming and only 40,631 hectares are actually cultivated.
**Ingredients**
Dried or fresh meat if its available.
- Potatoes
- Carrots
- Spinach
- Garlic
- Onions
- Karela
- A couple chilies
- Turmeric Powder
- Salt
- Flour

**To Cook:**

1. Combine flour and water to make a thick dough and make noodles. See following page for directions.
2. Heat oil in the bottom of a pot or wok.
3. Fry a small handful of chopped onion. Allow to fry for a minute and then add a heaping tablespoon of crushed garlic, chilies and ginger.
4. Add a dash of turmeric powder and a tablespoon of salt.
5. Add meat, chopped into small pieces.
6. Add chopped potatoes and carrots, stirring frequently.
7. Add Karela
8. Once the ingredients have become slightly cooked, add the desired amount of hot water to make a soup. It should be enough to at least cover everything in the pot.
9. Bring the water to a boil. Add noodles. Be sure to let the water boil first, otherwise the noodles will all stick together.
10. Add chopped spinach.

*Shakpa*

(D. syākpā)
*A spicy stew, also known as Shak.*
11. Allow to boil until all ingredients are fully cooked
12. Salt to taste
To make dough:

In Sherpa culture a simple dough of flour and water is used to make noodles for many different types soups.

Put flour in a large bowl. Gradually add water while kneading the dough. Adding water too quickly will make the dough sticky and hard to manage. Continue to knead the dough until all of the loose flour has become absorbed. If you have an egg available you can add it along with the dough and it will make the noodles firmer.
Variations for Making Noodles

Flat, square noodles

1. Pull off a handful of dough
2. Roll flat
3. Fold the dough like an accordion into a single, long log.
4. Cut the log into one inch segments
5. Line up each of the strips you have just created and cut again into small squares
6. Coat noodles in loose flour

Round, thick noodles

1. Pull off a handful of dough
2. Squeeze it into a long snake like shape.
3. Using your thumb and forefinger, pinch a thumb sized piece of dough off of the end of the snake.
Kur
(D. kur)
A flat, thick bread, Kur is a popular Sherpa breakfast.

Preparing Kur requires slightly different dough.

1. Mix a dash of baking powder per large handful of flour.
2. Slowly combine flour with water and knead the dough for several minutes. After kneading let the dough sit for half an hour to an hour before cooking. If you poke the raw dough it should gradually rise after you remove your finger. If it does not rise you did not include enough baking powder.
3. After an hour, roll a small handful of dough flat.
4. Place on a hot frying pan. Cook one side until golden brown and then flip. When cooking the dough will fill with air and expand, as pictured.

You can serve Kur with eggs, or butter and a crushed chili sauce, or with jam if it is available. Kur can also be paired with a potato soup and eaten for dinner.17

Potato Soup

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Fry a handful of onion, a large scoop of crushed ginger, and a pinch of fenugreek seed.
3. Add potatoes and squash
4. Add a small handful of crushed chilies and salt.
5. Add the desired amount of water for soup.18
Te mo-mo
(D. gop gop)

Another dough variation, te mo-mo’s are a fluffy, steamed bread.

1. Combine flour, a scoop of salt, a scoop of sugar, and a heaping tablespoon of baking powder in a large mixing bowl. Using a slightly larger scoop of sugar than salt will produce a better taste.
2. Mix dry ingredients well.
3. Gradually add water and knead well for several minutes to produce soft dough.
4. Cover and let sit for half an hour to an hour. When the dough is ready you should be able to see where the sugar granules have dissolved into the dough.
5. Knead the dough again.
6. Separate the dough into two halves so it is easier to work with. Roll one half flat. The dough should be thick enough that you can pick it up without it ripping.
7. Spread a light layer of cooking oil over the entire surface area of the dough.
8. Use your hands to roll the flat dough into a single log.
9. Slice the log into two inch segments.
10. Fold the te mo-mo (see instructions on opposite page)
11. Place the bread in a steamer and steam until fully cooked, about five minutes.
12. Serve with curry.
**How to Fold Te Mo-Mo**

1. Pick up one of the two inch segments of dough
2. Using both hands, pinch in the center of the dough so that both open ends are facing up. As you pinch, pull the dough so that it becomes slightly wider. (See above)

3. Using your thumb and forefinger of both hands, pinch the inner most layer of each of the open ends.

3. Pull your fingers around the outside of the dough, bringing the pinched portion in your fingers underneath the te mo-mo."
**Raksi**
(D. Raksi)

Another Sherpa defense against the cold weather is the consumption of alcohol. In the evening before dinner, adults typically have at least one cup of raksi (D. ḍrāk), local liquor, or thongba (D. toṅbā), millet beer, depending on what is available. Although often referred to as a wine, raksi is grain liquor that can be made from either rice or millet and it is heated on the stove before consumption. Rice raksi tends to have a smoother taste, while millet raksi has a stronger taste. Thongba is fermented millet which is traditionally placed in a bamboo container but in modern times it is more often served in a plastic cup, and hot water is poured over the millet. The hot water can be refilled several times as Sherpas sip and savor the warmth.

Having large amounts of alcohol in any given village means that season’s harvest was bountiful and there was a surplus to ferment rather than directly consume. Because of alcohol’s warming qualities, it has earned nicknames in Sherpa culture such as “a down jacket” and “a gortex lining.”  

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The Invention of Beer

“The tale is told [] that when the great guru Rinpoche invented beer, he included among the many wonderful ingredients owls’s eye and tiger’s heart. When people get drunk, some get sleepy, while others get belligerent. The former lean toward the owl’s eye side, while the latter lean toward the tiger’s heart side.”

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*Note: The text in parentheses and square brackets is not part of the main content and may represent original editorial notes or annotations.*

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*The Invention of Beer 

“The tale is told [] that when the great guru Rinpoche invented beer, he included among the many wonderful ingredients owls’s eye and tiger’s heart. When people get drunk, some get sleepy, while others get belligerent. The former lean toward the owl’s eye side, while the latter lean toward the tiger’s heart side.”*
Crops in Solukhumbu

The staple crops in Solukhumbu are potatoes, wheat, barley, and corn. In addition, beans, peas, radishes, carrots, squash, greens, garlic, onions, and chilies are grown as supplemental crops. Farmers often grow several different strands of the same crop, each differing in size, color, and taste. In general, the crops grown in Solukhumbu are one hundred percent organic, fertilized with cow dung. But in some cases farmers use a mixture of dung and fertilizer. Typically dung is only used if the farmer does not have enough dung for their fields. In which case, the government of Nepal purchases fertilizer from India and pays for it to be transported to Solukhumbu through a tender system. This chemical fertilizer is then made available to farmers, but the general belief is that while chemically fertilized crops produce a larger, faster maturing output, organically grown crops have a superior taste. Vegetables in particular are always grown organically.

Over the past five years, the problem of food insecurity in Solukhumbu has been exacerbated by global warming. The 2011 Food Security Bulletin produced by the World Food Program declared Solukhumbu as “moderately insecure”. Sherpa families who have been farming the same land for generations and have learned how to interpret the weather for the optimal time to plant and harvest crops have been bewildered by changing weather patterns. In particular global warming has shifted the onset and retreat of monsoon season as well as the number and frequency of extreme precipitation events. This has the additional effect in that it changes the amount of water able to be taken in by the soil. In the winter of 2008/2009 one of the most severe droughts in Nepal’s history destroyed crops and decreased national wheat and barley production by 14.5 and 17.3 percent respectively.
The Potato

Introduction of the Potato:

The Potato is the main staple of the Sherpa diet. Many Sherpas insist that the potato has always been grown in the region and was eaten by all of their ancestors, but in fact the potato is a relatively recent introduction. There are no official records of the introduction of the potato but first hand accounts and travel journals place its introduction around the middle of the 19th century and accredit its arrival to either European gardens in Darjeeling or a British garden in Kathmandu.27

Potato crops allowed for there to be a surplus of food for the first time so Sherpas could afford to spend time doing activities other than farming. The introduction of the potato corresponds with large increases in art and religion by the Sherpa people.28
**Rildhuk**

(D. Rildok)

*A mashed potato soup, rildhuk is often eaten in the summer time because it is light and does not have the warming qualities of heartier Sherpa stews.*

The following recipe is for rildhuk with a tomato broth.

**To Cook:**

**Tomato Broth:**

1. Heat oil in a pot.
2. Fry onion until slightly brown
3. Add crushed garlic and tomato and chili
4. Add the desired amount of water to make your soup
5. Bring to a boil

**Potato dough**

2. When cool, place the potatoes in a ___ and beat for several minutes until the dough becomes sticky and there are almost no lumps or only very small lumps. Do not try to beat while the potatoes are hot.
3. Dip your hand in water and scoop the entire dough out of the ___ and place it on a plate. Picking up a handful of dough at a time, squeeze small lumps of potato into the broth by, pinching between your thumb and forefinger.
4. Sprinkle with a handful of chopped coriander.
5. Allow the soup to simmer on low heat for several minutes.***
Corn
(D. Licia)

Corn is a main staple of Sherpa food but it can only be grown at altitudes below 10,000ft. Dzemu, a village in Solu, is the highest village where corn can be grown and just two miles north in the two of Phungmo, corn cannot grow.30

Left: This corn is being dried in the sun. When it is completely dry it will be beaten against the ground to remove the kernels so that the dried kernels can be taken to the mill and ground. Once the corn is a powder it can be made to make Sherpa dishes such as kaksir (see following page).
**Kaksir**

(D. Kaksir)

*A thick paste made from ground corn which can be eaten with curry and/or soup.*

**Ingredients**

Finely ground corn, Onion, Cumin seed, Potato
Greens, Tumerec Powder, Salt

**To Cook:**

1. Boil ground corn using approximately twice as much water as corn. After about ten minutes the paste will begin to thicken. Stir frequently, and continue to boil until there is no water left. The corn should form a very thick textured, grainy paste which easily sticks to itself.

**Potato Soup**

1. Heat oil in a pan.
2. Fry onion and a pinch of cumin seeds until lightly brown.
3. Add potatoes, salt, and turmeric powder. Stir frequently
4. When potatoes are half cooked, add the desired amount of water for soup.
5. Add greens.
6. Salt to taste

You eat kaksir in the same manner that you would syan, by using the paste as a spoon for the soup. For details see page 40.
The Life of Milk

For Sherpas, the milk from a cow, or zhum, is highly advantageous because of its ability to be used for many different purposes.

When a cow is milked, a strainer made from leaves is placed on top of the bucket catching the milk. The thin milk will drip through the strainer but any thick cream will be caught. The thick substance caught in the strainer is known as Shosheem (D. Syosim), and once any excess cow hair has been removed it can be used in soups and sauces. Sherpas will then boil the milk in the bucket to pasteurize it. This milk can be drunk immediately, or more commonly, a portion can be used to make curd. After boiling, the cream on the top of the milk is saved and collected in a separate pot. Once the collection has become large enough, the cream can be beaten to create butter. The buttermilk remaining after churning is collected and saved and it can be drank straight or used in cooking meals such as tsampa porridge. If the buttermilk is boiled it will make a white paste known as sercum (D.Serkam), which is also used in soups and sauces. And if sercum is stored in a dark place in a plastic container for two to three months it will create somar (D. Somar), which is used for the same purposes but has a yellow color and a strong odor. Many Sherpas do not like somar because of its odor. And finally, if the original butter is boiled, creating a oily liquid, and then stored in a dark place it will create ghee, which is desireable because it can be used for all of the same purposes as butter but it can be preserved and used for a longer period of time.


Food for the Cow

Because Sherpa kitchens do not contain refrigerators, storing leftovers can be problematic. In the wintertime, the house is cold enough that food can be stored for a day or two after being cooked. And in many cases leftovers from dinner, especially te-mo mo and any soups or stews, are eaten for breakfast the following morning. But after that point, or anytime in the summer, leftovers are given to the livestock. In addition any cooking scraps such as potato peels or rotten cabbage is fed to the animals as well.

A mixture of rotten vegetables, potato peels, kitchen scraps, flour and water which will be fed to the cow.
Known by many different names, the Sherpas refer to this “mountain pepper” as airmong (D. yarmañ). It is a species of Sichuan pepper that is widely grown across Asia and specifically valued by the Sherpa people because it is one of the few spices able to be grown in Solukhumbu. Despite being labeled a pepper, it does not have the hot or spicy taste of associated with standard black or white pepper. Instead it has a unique taste with slight lemon overtones and it produces a tingling, numb feeling in the mouth.\(^\text{31}\)

Although it is frequently consumed, airmong is never added directly into a cooking pot because the taste is so unique that many people do not prefer it. Typically, Sherpas will offer airmong on a small serving dish so that only those who wish to may add it to their meals.

\(^1\)The tree that airmong grows on, easily recognizable because of its large thorns.
Cooking in a Sherpa Kitchen,

Kitchens in Khumbu feature stoves made of metal wire frames. But in Solu, stoves are traditionally made from a white mud which can be collected locally. Stoves are built individually by a member of the household or by a friend who is particularly good at the craft. This provides for some level of diversity. The complexity of the stove can vary from a simple square in less elaborate kitchens, to a larger unit with two burners in more well off homes. As it is used, the mud on the stove will turn black from smoke and a new layer of mud will need to be applied in order to clean the stove repair any minor cracks or chipped areas.

In a Sherpa home, the hearth is typically the only source of heat, so during the winter season the kitchen becomes an inner space where family members gather to stay warm. Out of respect, the seat closest to the hearth is reserved for the male head of the household. And even if he passes away it is appropriate to honor his memory by leaving that seat open.46

In addition, although it is acceptable for both men and women to cook in Sherpa culture, the male is the head of the household is always served first during mealtimes. The only exception is a guest of high importance who may be served before the male house owner. In which cases guests and males will eat first together and after they have been served seconds, females and children will eat.
Cooking at High Altitudes

The Pressure Cooker

During the Maoist Insurgency, the sale and transport of pressure cookers was banned in Nepal because Maoists frequently utilized them as bombs by packing their insides with explosives and timers.

These improvised explosive devices ranged in level of sophistication. In February 2002 two pressure cookers were used to bomb Lukla Airport in Solukhumbu. The result was damage to several windows and the destruction of the airport’s roof.\(^{32}\)

The ban on pressure cookers meant that Sherpas and other high altitude dwelling families could no longer quickly prepare food and in many cases food was consumed half cooked.

Because the air is thinner at higher altitudes, water boils at a lower temperature. This means that food is consistently being prepared on lower heat so it will take significantly longer to fully cook. (See Appendix C for chart of boiling points at high altitudes.)

A pressure cooker counteracts this phenomenon by raising the pressure so that water boils at a higher temperature. Pressure cookers are used in almost all Sherpa kitchens at high altitudes. They allow families to prepare meals quicker and eat a larger percentage of fully cooked meals.
The Local Market

The food prepared in Sherpa homes is mostly grown in their own fields and vegetable gardens, or the fields of their neighbors, but local markets allow Sherpas to have access to a larger variety of food.

Each Saturday, weekly local markets occur throughout Solukhumbu, the most predominant of which are in Namache Bazaar, the center of trade in Solukhumbu and Sallerie, the district headquarters of Solukhumbu, located in Solu. Depending on the location of their village Sherpas may have to walk several minutes, several hours, or even several days to get to the nearest market.

The market is an exhilarating event which starts bright and early. The sale of vegetables, the early morning priority, begins even before the other vendors have had a chance to set out their goods. As locals browse to select the freshest, most desirable vegetables, the rest of the market unfolds around them. And soon enough the market is in full swing with rows upon rows of fresh products and swarms of people navigating their way through the narrow pathways.

The market is as much a social event as it is an opportunity to buy goods. Friends from different villages greet each other and numerous smiles and social graces are exchanged. Although a fair amount of haggling and quality assessment occurs, the
market is by no means competitive. There is no pressure to “fight” other customers for the goods needed and Sherpas typically stop several times during their shopping for tea or a quick breakfast with friends.

Portering Food to Higher Altitudes

There are no roads in Solu Khumbu so any food or supplies must be ported by either men or livestock. Food and supplies are driven in trucks to the highest village possible, typically Jiri and then ported to the other villages of Solukhumbu.

With the support of the Himalayan Trust, a road has recently been built which connects Sallerie to Katari a village in the Udayapur District and makes importing food from the Terai much cheaper and quicker.33

The donkey on the left carries two sacks of rice on his back while the donkey on the right carries two jugs of kerosene. The men on the right are carrying packaged goods.
Dal Bhat

Steamed rice served with a lentil soup, dal bhat is a traditional Nepali dish that has become integrated into Sherpa cuisine due to the availability of rice in Solukhumbu. It is commonly eaten for breakfast and/or dinner. There are many different types of lentils but Sherpa typically only consume the black and red varieties. Black lentils are notorious for being tastier but red lentils cook faster. In addition, lentils possess a large quantity of protein so they are an excellent addition to a mostly vegetarian diet.

To Cook:

1. Put lentils in a bowl, cover with water and let soak. After several minutes, dump the water and add clean water. Repeat once more.
2. Combine lentils, a teaspoon a minced ginger, a large pinch of salt, and water in a pressure cooker. Cook until pressure cooker has steamed three times, then remove from heat and stir gently. Allow to sit until beans have doubled in size, if necessary put the pressure cooker over low heat.
3. In a small pan, fry chopped onion, cumin seed, minced garlic, ginger, and chili, and coriander in butter. Once lightly fried immediately pour into the lentils.
4. Stir, cover and let sit for several minutes so that the flavors can develop.

How to Eat With Your Hands

Sherpas and Nepali’s in general will insist that the taste of dhal is enhanced by eating with your hands. It is a skill which if executed correctly is effective, clean, and delicious.

- First, wash your hands. Many Sherpa restaurants and lodges will provide a small sink for this purpose or if not they are happy to let you use their kitchen sink.
- Use only your right hand to eat.
- Using your fingers, push the rice together on the plate so that it becomes compact and sticks to itself.
- Use your thumb to shelp you scoop up a bite size amount of rice onto your other four fingers.
- Bring your hand to your mouth and use your thumb to push the food into your mouth. You can also lightly inhale as you do this.
- Try to avoid getting food on your palm and remember not to pass or receive anything with your right hand once you have begun eating.
- Wash your hands when you are finished.
5. Serve the rice on a plate and the lentil soup in a separate bowl. Greens and a potato curry can be served with the rice as well.

*Scenes from the Saturday Market in Sallerie, Fall 2011*

Bananas, carrots, cauliflower, tomatoes, Korela, and green onion.
Fish, white beans, stinging nettles, and kidney beans
Buying Meat at the Market

Pork, buffalo meat, and chicken are available at the market however, chicken is rarely purchased because of how expensive it is. One kilogram of chicken can cost 1,200 to 1,300 RS.³⁴

Because of their Buddhist beliefs, the Sherpas do not slaughter animals to produce meat. However they are not adverse to eating meat if someone else has already slaughtered it or the animal has died of natural causes. Therefore, if they can afford it, Sherpas often purchase meat at local markets and either eat it fresh or hang it to dry to save for a later date. Butchers, however, are highly discriminated against and considered of a lower caste. Similarly mills are considered dirty and only low caste people operate mills.³⁵
4. How Sherpas Earn a Living

Traditionally, Sherpas made a living working in agriculture, animal husbandry and trade. Today the same occupations still exist but many Sherpas have also become involved in the tourist industry, servicing the many tourists who come to visit the mountains by acting as porters, guides, and opening tea houses and lodges.

The Average Eating Schedule of a Farmer

- Early morning rise, several cups of Tibetan Tea
- 9:00am Large helping of syan
- 2:00pm Boiled potatoes and chili in the fields while taking a short break.
- 7:00pm Dinner of Shakpa, Thukpa, or Phalghi.

A man uses a hoe to break up the ground and move soil in preparation for planting. This method is typically necessary for root crops such as the potato because the plow does not turn the ground deep enough.
Farming

Ploughing the fields using a plough made of wood with an iron tip, pulled by two oxes. Up until the early 20th Century, ploughs were pulled by teams of three or four men.\(^{36}\)

A woman following behind the plough and spreading barley seeds. The job of the sower is traditionally done by a woman.\(^{37}\)

Agricultural Calendar of Solukhumbu

May-June-July: Plant corn and vegetables and buckwheat. Harvest barley and wheat. Laboriously break up soil around base of potato plants

End of Summer: Gather Potatoes

Aug-Dec Harvest garden vegetables and corn

Sept-Oct: Plant wheat and barley

Dec-Jan Plant potatoes\(^{38}\)
The Breakfast of a Farmer

Syan (D. syān)

A thick paste of wheat and water which can be paired with a variety of potato soups, is the meal of choice for farmers who labor in the fields all day and need a filling meal to provide them with energy for their work.

Ingredients:
Roasted ground wheat flour,
Water,
Potatoes, Carrots,
Ginger
Turmeric Powder,
Salt,
Butter

Syan:
1. In a wok, bring water to a boil. Estimate about two cups per person.
2. When the water is boiling, add wheat and allow to boil for a minute. You want to add enough wheat that it is absorbed into the water not sitting in a dry heap on top of the water.
3. Begin mixing with a wooden spoon. This may be a laboriously activity but use the spoon to continuously fold the paste. Slowly add more wheat until you achieve the desired consistency. You would like the syan to be a solid, smooth paste that is softer than a dough and not sticky.
4. Continue to fold for about a minute after you have achieved the desired consistency.

Potato Soup:
1. Heat oil in a small wok or pan.
2. Add shredded potatoes and enough turmeric powder to give the potatoes a nice color. Fry for 1-2 minutes stirring frequently.
3. Add carrots, crushed ginger, and salt. Stir well.
How to Serve and Eat Syan

To Serve:
Place two scoops of sen on a plate. Use your fingers to create a hole in the top of the mound and insert a scoop of butter or ghee.

In accordance with the Sherpa tradition called Nenba, two scoops of any food are always placed on top of each other a plate before serving. Even if a person requests a small portion, they will still receive two small scoops.

To Eat:

Use your right hand to break a piece of the dough off of the bottom on the mound. Dip it into the butter and squeeze in the palm of your hand to form a ball.

Using your thumb create an indent in the center of the ball.

Use the syan as a scoop to dip into the soup and eat!
A Farmer’s Lunch

Boiled Potatoes and Chilli

The potato in one of its purest forms, this is one of the simplest and tastiest Sherpa recipes.

Ingredients
Potatoes
Chilies
Garlic
Salt

To Cook:
1. Boil Potatoes
2. Crush together chilies, garlic, and salt.

Set the unpeeled potatoes out on a plate to cool. When cool enough to hold in your hand, let people gather around, peel their own potatoes, and dip them in the delicious chili sauce.

Local men gather around a large pot of potatoes as they take a break for lunch, Junbesi

Many Sherpas, who can afford to, pay others to work in their fields. The average rate of pay is 150 Rs per day plus a generous amount of Tibetan tea and chaang, especially during the winter time when the extreme cold makes working more difficult. The laborers can also receive breakfast at the field owner’s house before work but the cost of this is typically subtracted from their pay.
A Farmer’s Dinner

Phalghi

*A thick, hearty stew of corn and beans, phalghi is another Sherpa meal reserved only for the winter time.*

The corn needed to make phalghi is collected during harvest season in early August and then dried and stored until the winter weather sets in. The corn is picked slightly before it is ripe. It is then boiled and the kernels are picked off, peeled, and set out in the sun on a bamboo basket to dry for two to three days. The hard sundried kernels are then stored in a dark place until winter.

**Ingredients:**
Corn, White Beans, dry or fresh meat if available, Onion, Garlic, Radish, Carrot, Potatoes, Salt

**To Cook:**

1. Begin by soaking the corn and beans in separate pots of water overnight. This will allow the hard kernels to become soft again and cook faster.
2. Boil the corn and beans in separate pots. If you prefer to use pressure cookers, only use one for the beans. A pressure cooker will turn the corn into a mushy dhal like consistency. Allow the corn to simmer in a large pot on low heat for 2-3 hours and then add the beans to the corn.
3. If you are using dry meat, cut into cubes and add to the corn. If you are using fresh meat, wait to fry it with the vegetables.
4. In a separate pan, heat oil and fry onion and garlic.
5. Add rashers, salt, and turmeric powder. Allow to fry for several minutes, stirring frequently.
7. Before the potatoes are fully cooked, add the vegetable mixture to the large pot of corn and beans. Simmer slowly over low heat until the potatoes are fully cooked.

Salt to taste.
Animal Husbandry

Historically, animal husbandry has been the most profitable occupation for Sherpas. They raise yak (male), nak (female yak), cow (female) and zhum (female) and zopkio (male) which are the product of a bull (male cow) and a nak (female yak). The male animals, yak and zopkio, are used for portering goods specifically for the salt and wool trade with Tibet, while the females, nak, cow, and zhum, are kept for milk. Sherpas graze their cattle at high altitude pastures (yar sa) in the summer and move down to lower pastures (gun sa) in the winter.40

The zhum, pictured to the right, is the most desirable and the most profitable because it produces the more milk than the nak. And the zopkio is desired because it is a more controllable pack animal than the yak.41
5. Age

Because of the lack of dental care and resulting poor teeth, special food adaptations need to be made for the elderly as well as for young children whose teeth have not developed yet. For both groups, soft, mushy foods are preferred. Some typical favorites include tsampa porridge, rice boiled in hot milk, and homi yari.

Recipe for Homi Yari

1. Make a dough with wheat flour and water.
2. Boil milk
3. Create small round or square noodles (see page 15) and add to the milk.
4. Add salt
5. Continue to boil until the noodles are cooked and the milk thickens. ⁴²
Baby Naming Ceremony

When a baby is born in a Sherpa village, a special ceremony is held to name the child. Parents choose a name and then invite a lama into their home on the day of the ceremony. The parents present the baby with white scarves (katah) for the well being of the body, speech, and mind. Then the child is marked on the forehead with butter and fed a small amount of either honey of butter as a sign of their first food. The lama will then call the child’s newly given name three times, and on the third call the mother will respond for her infant. Finally, prayers are said in honor of the baby and the parents invite friends and family to a party in their home.43
Adaptations for the Elderly

Aside from just eating soft foods, the elderly population also apply special modifications to make chewing easier. When making thukpa, this elderly nun prefers to smush the noodles so that they are thinner and easier to chew than thick doughy noodles. To do this she makes a dough and then presses each ball of dough against her palm to flatten it.\(^4^4\)
6. What Sherpas Value

Shey-Shey (D. Sye Sye)

Sherpas place a high importance on hospitality. Any guest, invited or uninvited, is welcomed into their home with a cup of tea, and a hosts job is to continuously refill this cup. Hosts will present food and drink by saying “Shey-Shey”, literally meaning “please take” And it is often the guest’s responsibility to make a show of politely refusing, only to ultimately give in to the hosts persistent attempts. In some cases, guests will put a hand over their cup or plate, or even remove it from the table, to prevent being given a second helping. This action does not deter the host who unrelentingly holds the pot of tea or serving spoon with a large helping of food on it out to them insisting, “Shey-Shey” until the guest returns their plate or glass to the original place on the table and it can be refilled. Such a show signifies politeness on the part of both the guest and the host and it is a frequent occurrence in Sherpa society. If a guest were to defiantly refuse all offers of food and drink without giving in at all, they run the risk of offending the host or in the very least making them uncomfortable.

As Sherry Ortner suggests, the extensive system of hospitality in Sherpa Culture is intended to cultivate community cooperation and encourage neighbors and friends to help one another because they are indebted to each other.\textsuperscript{45} In this way, Sherpas will help one another because they feel socially obligated to do so.

Serving Order

Although it is acceptable for both men and women to cook in Sherpa culture, Sherpas have a patrilineal system where the male is the head of the household and as such he is always served first during mealtime. The only exception is a guest of high importance who may be served before the male house owner. Guests and males will eat first and after they have been served seconds, females and children will eat.
Tibetan Tea
(D. Su cya)

Tibetan Tea, also known as butter tea or salt tea, is black tea prepared with salt, milk, and butter. It is made in a special tea churn called a dong mo. If you do not have a dong mo on hand, an electric blender will produce a similar result, however Sherpa insist that a blender produces a lesser quality taste.

Ingredients
Tea Leaves
Hot Water
Milk
Salt
Butter
Tsampa

To Prepare:

• Prepare a pot of black tea by boiling tea leaves in hot water.
• Pour the black tea into a dong mo.
• Add a heaping tablespoon of salt, a large lump of butter, a small amount of powdered or fresh milk, and a scoop of tsampa.
• Churn, or blend, until fully mixed.
• Pour the tea into a tea kettle or pot and allow to heat on the stove for several minutes until hot. When pouring, you may need to mix the tea around in the bottom of the churn to make sure you get all of the tsampa out.

When you serve Tibetan Tea, gently stir the pot or kettle before pouring, otherwise all of the butter will settle at the top and pour into the first glass.
Marriage Ceremony

Many rituals in Sherpa society heavily rely on the giving and receiving of food. A perfect example is the traditional marriage ceremony. The Sherpa word for clan, “ru”, literally means “bone”, indicating that they are derived from the same bone or have the same father. Therefore clan members are free to marry whomever they wish except for other members of their own clan; such a relationship would be considered incestuous (Furer Sherpas transformed pg 29).

Although love marriages are becoming more common, members of the previous generation engaged in arranged marriages which entailed elaborate rituals involving plentiful amounts of food and drink. The several stages and steps of the different ceremonies are imprecise and the length and timing of each can be modified but one unchangeable characteristic is that chaang is essential in each stage (Window).

Steps of a Marriage:

Trichang – Representatives from each family meet to discuss the compatibility of the couple in question.

Pechang- a planning meeting between both families to arrange details for the public engagement ceremony

Longchang- literally meaning asking drink, the groom’s family invites relatives to join them in a wedding procession to the bride’s house where they present chaang to the brides immediate and extended family who are waiting to receive them.

Demchang- The groom’s family gathers in a procession again to accompany him as he fetches his bride. The groom and his procession are welcomed at the bride’s home with food and chaang. The groom and his family are then invited into the homes of the bride’s relatives where they

A wooden ceremonial container used for serving alcohol, called a dojun. It features a slender neck to make it easier to pour from and brass detail work.
receive more food and drinks and the bride receives gifts from each of her family members. A formal ceremony is then held where the bride and groom are blessed by senior members for “long life, sustainability, and happiness”. The bride and groom will then depart and the bride’s family will offer katah and chaang as a farewell gift.

Karma Lowu-The bride’s home visit. Several weeks or months after the marriage the bride may return home to visit her family and collect any belongs which were left behind. The bride and groom will make the visit together and bring chaang as a gift for the bride’s family.48

Recipe for Chaang

*Local rice wine*

1. Cook rice
2. Spread on a large cloth or tray and allow to cool
3. When the rice is room temperature, grind yeast and spread it evenly over the rice
4. Put the rice in a plastic bucket and tightly seal. Store in a cool place for the desired period of time, depending on how strong you would like the chaang to be. Two to three months is ideal for a stronger chaang, but one month is sufficient.
5. When you are ready to drink, open bucket and remove the desired quantity. Mix with cold water and strain well.

Chaang can also be used as a repayment for wrongdoing. In Sherpa culture, a bottle of beer is the appropriate gift to be offered from one male to another as an apology for sleeping with his wife.49
7. Food and Sherpa Religious Beliefs

Food is an integral component of Sherpa religious beliefs. Generally speaking, Sherpas are followers of the Nyngmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism, another legacy of their Tibetan heritage, and there are currently over two hundred and sixty two monasteries in Solukhumbu. Sherpa Buddhist practitioners celebrate three major holidays; New Year (Losar), where the gods are asked to renew their protection of the village, and Dumji and Mani Rimdu, which are both exorcism where lamas re-enact the gods triumph over the demons through costumed and masked dances. The main distinction between these two exorcisms is that the former takes place in the village and the latter in the monasteries. (See Appendix C for note about religion). Although each of these major festivals are different, they follow a similar pattern in that food is utilized to facilitate a relationship between the gods and practitioners. At the beginning of the ceremony food is offered to the gods to win their favor and then the gods are invited to the ritual under the pretense of attending a feast in their honor. At the appropriate time, beer and grain are sprinkled into the air by the monks as a welcome sign to the gods. Demons are also appeased by the offering of food. After the gods have been invited, monks deter the demons from entering by throwing food for them out the monastery’s door so that they can indulge their greediness and be distracted from interfering with the ritual. Only after the gods have feasted and are satisfied, can practitioners do prostrations to apologize for their previous sins and be cleansed. At the conclusion of the ceremony, cooked or edible food, such as rice and biscuits, is placed at the foot of the alter and after being offered to the gods it is immediately consumed by the members of the community in attendance.

The main purpose of these religious rituals is obviously not food, but without food the rituals would not be possible.
Food for the Gods

Making torma is a skill which monks learn through their monastic studies. There are many different varieties of torma and each different color, size, and shape, has a different symbolic meaning. In the photo above, the monks are constructing torma to be used during a funeral puja the following day.

First a thick paste is made by boiling flour and water together and vigorously folding the paste with a wooden spoon. Then the paste is spread out on a bamboo basket and allowed to cool. Once it is cool enough to touch, the monks begin their work. Each has a specific job and they work in silence, only speaking intermittently to ask for instructions or direction. On the table, a small sheet of paper with a picture of the completed torma lies as a guide, and monks check it periodically to assess their work. Two monks sit cross legged around a large wooden board which they use as a sturdy surface to roll and shape the paste. After they have achieved the appropriate structure, they base the torma off to the next monk who is creating the circles of butter. He sits behind a bucket of warm water, methodically shaping small balls of butter between the palms of his hands and then holding them under the water as he presses them into smooth flat circles. He then uses his nail to make a design in the butter
and presses the butter circle onto the torma. Another monk properly identifies each torma by attaching a picture of the appropriate god to the torma with a thin wooden rod. And finally two monks, use water to perfect the shape of the torma and then place them in their proper position on the altar. In more elaborate pujas, the torma would also be colored and ornately decorated according to strict specifications.

In addition, feeding monks is often the responsibility of the community. Anytime monks are invited into the village to do a puja, such as a house puja or funeral puja, it is the house owner’s responsibility to provide all of the monks and continuously serve them tea for the duration of their stay.

In a larger sense, it is also the community’s responsibility to support the monastery as a whole and individuals seeking to earn merit donate money, or food items such as rice, tea, and crackers to the nearest monastery. According to the traditional Buddhist charity system, monks are supposed to beg for their meals. However it is a very rare occurrence for Sherpa monks to beg. According to one lama, “in these evil times people think monks are lazy and so begrudge them food”.52
8. How Sherpas Have Developed Overtime

The food of Solu Khumbu reflects the shifting economy. As more Sherpas have become involved in the tourism industry and trekking, foreign dishes have crept their way into Sherpa cuisine. Sherpas who own tourist lodges have learned to cook different meals in order to please their customers. The standard lodge dinner menu includes widely recognized internal meals such as spaghetti, pizza, and sweet desserts such as apple pie. The recipes were originally learned based on descriptions from foreigners and then were provided for sale only after several rounds of taste tasting.

In addition, as Sherpas become more affluent a larger variety of ingredients have been added to the cuisine. A prime example of this is eggs. In previous generations, eggs were rarely incorporated into the Sherpa diet. However today, if a family can afford to buy eggs, or if someone in the village raises chickens, eggs are eaten both on their own, whether fried or as an omelet, or utilized in the preparation of traditional Sherpa dishes. For example, adding an egg to the dough when making noodles for thukpa or shakpa creates firmer, tastier noodles. Also in the preparation of rikikor (see opposite page) an egg adds to the quality of the batter.

Having the money, time, and ability to purchase eggs is a luxury enjoyed by contemporary Sherpas that their ancestors did not have.
**Ingredients**
- Potatoes
- Egg
- Flour
- Onions
- Garlic
- Chilies
- Green Onions
- Salt
- Butter

**Rikikur**  
(D. Riki kur)

*A potato pancake served with butter and chili sauce.*

**To Cook:**

1. Peel potatoes and shred them using a grater. This will turn the potatoes into a mush.
2. Next, prepare the desired sauce because the pancakes are best when eaten right away.
3. Add an egg and a little bit of flour to the potato mush to thicken it. The egg is not necessary but it will provide a better flavor. Flour should be added gradually to avoid making the batter to thick. (Before adding the flour and egg, remove a scoop of potato to use in the chili sauce)
4. Heat oil in a pan
5. Place a large heap of batter onto the pan. Using the back of a metal serving spoon spread the batter out into a flat pancake. It is best to apply pressure in a circular motion, starting in the center and working your way toward the outside.
6. Flip after one side has browned.
7. Serve with butter and chili sauce spread on top of the pancake.

To eat: Rip of portions of the pancake and dip in the sauce or roll the pancake into a log and then rip pieces off of the end.

**Sauces for Rik-ki-kor**

There are many different possibilities and combinations for sauces to top rik-ki-kor. The following is the most common.

1. Heat oil in a small saucepan.
2. Brown chopped onion and crushed garlic  
   Add a spoonful of the shredded potato
3. Combine and crush chilies, green onions, and salt.
4. Add the chili mixture to the saucepan and fry for a few minutes, stirring frequently.

For another variation, add somar instead of chilies and green onions in steps 4 and 5. This will create a thicker, cheesy sauce. Or a simple mixture of crushed chilies, garlic, and salt can be used to top rik-ki-kor.
### Appendix A

#### English and Sherpa Food Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Sherpa Pronunciation</th>
<th>Sherpa (Devanagari Script)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Container</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Dojum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
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<td>Syāu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aubergine</td>
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*For dishes were there is no standard English translation, an English version of the name was not provided.*
## Appendix B

### Nutritional Facts

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**Recorded from the District Agricultural Office in Sallerie**
Appendix C

Religion
This project is not intended to present a comprehensive review of Sherpa faith or the intricacies of Tibetan Buddhism. Rather it is brief overview detailing the importance of food in prominent religious festivals and practices. Many studies have been conducted on Sherpa religious rituals. To reconstruct and evaluate those studies would be a larger undertaking than feasible in this project. For an in-depth analysis of Sherpa religion see “Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders” by Christophe von Furer-Haimendorf or “Sherpas Through Their Rituals” by Sherry Ortner.
### Approximate boiling temperatures of water at various altitudes

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<td>10,000 ft.</td>
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Suggestions for Further Research

• The adaption and development of Sherpa food outside of Nepal, specifically in the US where there are many Sherpa immigrants.

• The origin of the potato in Solukhumbu.

• The health effects of Su-cha at high altitudes versus low altitudes.

• An analysis of cheese and cheese factories in Solukhumbu.

• The role of food in monastic life and religious rituals
List of Interviews

Pasang Lama
A Sherpa man in his late forties, Mr. Pasang Lama is the owner of Ang Chokpas lodge in Junbesi. His is married and has three daughters in their twenties. In addition to owning the lodge, Pasang Lama also owns land in Junbesi which he pays other non Sherpa member of Junbesi to farm.

Candi Lama
A Sherpa woman in her early forties, Candi Lama is the wife of Mr. Pasang Lama and the financial and culinary manager of Ang Chokpas lodge. She also spends a considerable amount of time working in her vegetable garden and tending to the family’s livestock.

Dolma Lama
A 29 year old Sherpa woman, Dolma Lama is the daughter of Pasang and Candi Lama. She works in the lodge, preparing food for guests and teaching the three younger children who stay with the family how to cook. She was born in Junbesi and educated in Kathmandu.

Badrey Lama
Interviewed on 11/19/2011 in Junbesi
A Sherpa man in his late thirties, Mr. Badrey Lama is a native of Junbesi. He is the owner of a lodge and is well known for his rilduk. He and his wife have a two year old son.

Lhamo Lama
Interviewed on 11/12/2011 in Junbesi
A Sherpa woman in her early thirties, Lhamo Lama is the wife of Badrey Lama. She spends most of her time tending to their son and cooking for the family and guests.

Kharma Lama
Interviewed on 11/15/2011
A Sherpa man in his early thirties, Mr. Kharma Lama is a native of Junbesi. He is married with two young children and he works as an elementary school teacher about an hours walk from Junbesi. His wife is responsible for tending to their fields where they grow potatoes, wheat, and vegetables.

Ang Chorti Sherpa
Interviewed on 11/11/11 and 11/14/2011 in Junbesi
A Sherpa woman in her early fifties, Ang Chorti Sherpa is the owner of the Sherpa guest house in Junbesi. Her lodge does very little business and she spend most of her time updating herself and the comings and goings of the village.

Dorjee Sherpa
A Sherpa man in his mid forties, Mr. Dorjee Sherpa is a native of Junbesi. He still owns a home there despite the fact that he currently lives in Kathmandu with his wife and children. He visits stays in Junbesi while doing work for the Poverty Alleviation Fund of the Himal Yeti Club.

Pasang Kami Sherpa
Interviewed on 11/20 in Junbesi
A Sherpa man in his early twenties, Pasang Kami is trekking guide in Solu Khumbu. He was born in Phortse and still lives there when he is not trekking or doing business in Kathmandu.

Ngawang Choden
Interviewed on 11/20 in Thubten Choling
Ngawang Choden is a 61 year old nun at Thubten Choling Monastery. She was born in the Dongpa region of Tibet and escaped into Nepal when she was a young child.

Mr. and Mrs. Jane Doe
Mr. and Mrs. Jane Doe live in the two house village of Phorteng. They own the Everest View Guest house, a frequent rest point for trekkers and a well known place to delicious Shakpa to porters and guides.

Narendra Thapa Magar
A magar man in his early forties, Mr. Narendra Thapa Magar is the owner of the Moonlight Hotel in Sallerie, a local lodge known for its Tibetan mo-mos. Many community members frequently come to eat during the day but very few guests ever stay the night. Narendra Thapa is married with two sons and he recently became a grandfather. In his spare time he volunteers for the red cross.

Mrs. Thapa Magar  
The wife of Mr. Narendra Thapa Magar, Mrs. Thapa Magar is a mager woman from a small village five hours south of Sallerie. Her marriage with Narendra was arranged by the couples parents and she spends her time preparing all of the food for the lodge and family.

Mr. John Doe II  
Interviewed on 11/22/2011 in Sallerie  
A Sherpa man in his mid fifties, Mr. John Doe II is a farmer in Sallerie. He was born in the village and was a vital recourse on farming methods.

Jiku Sherpa  
Interviewed on 11/23/2011 in Sallerie  
A Sherpa man in his mid forties, Jiku Sherpa was born in Phaplu and still owns a home there. He is the son of Lakpa Sherpa.

Lakpa Sherpa  
Interviewed on 11/23/2011 in Sallerie  
A Sherpa man in his early sixties, Mr. Lakpa Sherpa was born and still lives in Phaplu. He is the father of Jiku Sherpa.

Ram Bahadur Kurumbang  
Interviewed on 11/24/2011 in Sallerie  
Chief District Officer of Solu Khumbu

Taula Sunuwar  
Interviewed on 11/24/2011 in Sallerie  
Assistant to the District Development Committee.

Dawa Sherpa  
Interviewed on 11/24/2011 in Sallerie  
Employee of the District Agricultural Office in Sallerie.
Ang Pema Sherpa  
Interviewed on 11/24/2011 in Sallerie  
A Sherpa woman in her mid forties, Ang Pema Sherpa is a local resident of Sallerie. She is married and has two sons. She comes from a wealthy family and is well known for her generous hospitality and culinary skills.

Mr. and Mrs. Nyima Sherpa  
Interviewed on 11/25/2011 in Sallerie  
Ang Sherpa couple in their mid sixties, Mr. and Mrs. Nyima Sherpa currently live in Sallerie and own a large

Mr. Som BDR Tamang  
Interviewed on 11/28/2011  
A 52 year old Tamang man, Mr. Som BDR Tamang is a mountain and trekking guide in Solukhumbu. He was born in a village two hours north of Lukla. When we met he had just recently finished a trek and was on his way to jiri.
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