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Rejoinder and Response, Himalayan Research Bulletin 17:2 (Solukhumbu and the Sherpa)

Michael Muehlich
Nepal Research Center

Barbara Brower

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Dear Dr. Brower,

With interest I have read the *Himalayan Research Bulletin's* special issue (1997) on Solukhumbu and the Sherpa, available to me only recently while doing research here in Nepal for the past year. It was surprising to me, however, that what was called "A Selected Bibliography of Solukhumbu and the Sherpa" (pp. 43-48) did, in fact, with few exceptions relate only to the works on the Khumbu area. This bias was also reflected in the majority of articles referring to the Sherpa, a selection that seems to stress a view upholding Robert Miller's assertion that Khumbu represents "the home of the great Sherpas" (p. 17) and that the "Nepalized" Sherpa of Solu (p. 18) represent a distortion of that original ethnic setting.

Research on the history of the Sherpa, probably one of the world's most studied ethnic groups, has disclosed in various languages, western and Tibetan, an exact history not found elsewhere among traditional societies up to now. In short, the history of settlement of the Sherpa in the area that lies today within the borders of modern Nepal does not begin in Khumbu, which was only settled after Solu. Later, as local traditions have it, the climate changed so that the tillable earth in Khumbu was no longer under prolonged periods of frost. Similarly, viewed from the point of social structure, the differences between Solu and Khumbu settlements of Sherpa are too well known to justify concentrating on the Khumbu area as "the home of the great Sherpas."

What has been proven by genealogies collected by Oppitz (1968) shows that Khumbu was primarily settled by the newer clans as well as by Tibetans of the border regions, who adapted to, or were assimilated by, the Sherpa as members of their relatively egalitarian society. Until now, however, no research has shown in a comprehensive way, how this process of ethnogenesis played out in Khumbu, apart from some incidental observances made by Fisher (1990) and some perhaps useful comparative information to be drawn from the work of Clarke (1985, 1991). As for Solu, we know that in contrast to Khumbu (where we may witness what are loosely to be termed mixed settlements) we can trace pure clan-villages, on the one hand (Oppitz 1968), and what should be termed residential moieties (Muehlich 1996), on the other. We can furthermore relate these differences within Solu to enduring aspects of the social structure that were probably already existent in the original home of the ancestors of the Sherpa in Kham-Salmogang (East Tibet) more than 450 years ago, and were handed down by the Sherpa lama and researcher Sangye Tenzin and made available to interested researchers by Macdonald (1971) and Ehrhard and Macdonald (1992). As I have tried to explain from the data of my research (Nov. 1991 - May 1993) in Solu, this difference within the Sherpa's social structure is probably related to different ways of subsistence, an agricultural, settled way of life and a nomadic-pastoral way of life. These contrasting ways of life have survived up to the present in the two groups' value-orientations in regard to their concept of the household and neighborhood (Muehlich 1994) as well as in their concept of gender (Muehlich 1995).

In conclusion, the current bias of research on the Sherpa shown in the *Himalayan Research Bulletin* could be overcome by seeking out holistically contrastive perspectives. This would also surely lead to a better understanding of culture in general. A process could thereby be uncovered that does not limit itself to imitation but is creatively engaged in adhering to and protecting the collective and communicative aspects of cultural memory.

Michael Muehlich
c/o Nepal Research Center
Kathmandu, Nepal

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Dear Michael Muehlich,

I'm delighted by your response to our Khumbu-centric issue of *Himalayan Research*. I only regret that we did not reach you earlier, in our two years of accumulating material for the issue. Tenzing Gyazu Sherpa's plea for work on Solukhumbu and the Sherpa did bring forth two pieces on Solu, Lhakpa Sherpani's story and a piece on pilgrimage by Eberhard Berg held over to the next issue, but no one answered our request for references except those noted in our "limited and arbitrary" list. When I initially envisioned the special issue I hoped it would be a clearinghouse for the widest possible array of information, and I was disappointed when, after waiting almost two years, I had to rely substantially on my own Khumbu-centered sources. We are happy to have your additions, and would welcome the chance to consider some of your own work in a future issue.

I am particularly intrigued by the scope of your research. I began my own foray into Solu in 1990. While the work remains incomplete, I did publish a short paper comparing Junbesi and Thami (1996), and hope to do more.

You may be interested at the dissertation research currently underway by Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa (Forestry, University of Washington). He assembles evidence that challenges the Oppitz reconstructions we've all taken for granted about the timing and location of initial Sherpa settlement in Nepal.

Thanks for your comment. I look forward to further contributions that balance out our portrayal of the Sherpa world.

Barbara Brower, Editor

Himalayan Research Bulletin invites comments from readers. The Editors welcomes responses to the journal, and will endeavor to publish those that we receive.

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