

**Location:** The Sherpa, despite being a relatively small group, are one of the most well-known peoples of Asia. Approximately 50,000 Sherpa live on both sides of the Himalayan Range. In Tibet, the exact Sherpa population is uncertain. Various publications have listed “a mere 400 in China’s territory,”<sup>1</sup> “800 speakers in China,”<sup>2</sup> and “no more than 1,000.”<sup>3</sup> The Sherpa in Tibet inhabit parts of Dinggye, Tingri, and Zhangmu counties. Tingri County is directly on the road from Katmandu to Lhasa, a route frequented by many tour groups during the summer months.

**Identity:** The Sherpa in Tibet have been officially included as part of the Tibetan nationality. The Chinese are conducting an investigation to see if they should be classified as a distinct group. The name *Sherpa* means “eastern people.” “They are distinguishable from Tibetans in part because their faces are smaller and they wear a colorful apron on their backside rather than the front.”<sup>4</sup>

**Language:** Because the Sherpa language is related to Tibetan, most can communicate in a simple form of Tibetan.<sup>5</sup> Few of the 20,000 Sherpa in the Darjeeling area of India are still able to speak the Sherpa language.<sup>6</sup>

**History:** It is believed that all Sherpa once lived in Tibet before their descendants migrated west in the fifteenth century. “At that time, a Mongol King attempted to force them to convert to his sect of Buddhism. The people fled to the Khumbu

region.”<sup>7</sup> A Chinese account states, “They believe themselves to be descendants of Tibetans from the Kangba region in Sichuan Province. Many, many years ago, their ancestors, returning from a pilgrimage to Buddhist temples in India and Nepal, settled down here.”<sup>8</sup>

**Customs:** To many, the name Sherpa is irrefragably linked to the mystique of Mount Everest, the highest mountain on earth. The first men to climb Mount Everest were New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. Numerous Sherpa guides have since led foreign climbing teams up the world’s highest peak. The Sherpa charge around US\$2,000 per expedition, making them one of the wealthiest groups in Nepal.<sup>9</sup> The Sherpa in China cremate their dead, as opposed to the Tibetans who practice wind burial. The Gyawa Festival takes place 49 days after the death of a loved one. The Sherpa eat as much food as they can during the festival, believing the food will nourish the loved one who has died.

**Religion:** The Sherpa are Tibetan Buddhists, although “with far less piety than the Tibetans. To have... a



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Buddhist statue and to recite or chant scriptures is all they do by way of religious practice.”<sup>10</sup>

**Christianity:** In 1985 a Sherpa boy in Nepal had a vision where he was visited by Jesus. The boy’s conversion was followed by the gradual conversion of his extended family and several families in his village. The boy later went to Bible school and returned to pastor the local church in his village.<sup>11</sup> There are reported to be a few dozen Christian Sherpas around the Mt. Everest region in Nepal.<sup>12</sup> Despite this wonderful breakthrough, there are no known Sherpa Christians in China. They are politically and geographically isolated from contact with their counterparts in Nepal.<sup>13</sup>



**Population in China:**

800 (1994)  
910 (2000)  
1,120 (2010)

**Location:** Tibet

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism

**Christians:** None Known

## Overview of the Sherpa

**Countries:** Nepal, India, China

**Pronunciation:** “Sher-pah”

**Other Names:** Sharpa, Sharpa Bhotia, Xiaerba, Xiarba, Serwa

**Population Source:** 800 (1996 B. Grimes – 1994 figure); Out of a total Tibetan population of 4,593,330 (1990 census); 29,000 in Nepal (1993 P. Johnstone); 21,000 in India (1995)

**Location:** *S Tibet:* Dinggye, Tingri, and Zhangmu counties in Xigaze Prefecture

**Status:** Officially included under Tibetan

**Language:** Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodic, Bodish, Tibetan, Southern Tibetan

**Dialects:** 0

**Religion:** Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism

**Christians:** None known

**Scripture:** Portions 1977; Work in progress

**Jesus film:** None

**Gospel Recordings:** Twerpa #04242  
Sherpa: Solukhumbu #00673  
Sherpa Helumbu #02708

**Christian Broadcasting:** None

**ROPAL code:** SCR00

