

Food Puzzle 1

In the mountains of China's Yunnan Province, there is a surprising smell in the air—it is cheese. The Bai people start their daily work, changing milk into pretty curled, thin slices. In Chinese, they call these Rushan, which means "milk fans" (Wu and Cheung 78). Many kilometers away, on Mongolia's big grasslands, nomad herders make Byaslag cheese. This cheese is as strong as their ancestors' way of living. These special milk products, made in very different places with different traditions, show how food changes to fit different cultures (Kindstedt 215).

The Bai people in Yunnan make a cheese called Rushan. This cheese shows the local cultural matrix. In most of China, many people cannot digest dairy well. But in Yunnan, the Bai people use dairy in their food. They change it to be good for their health and taste (Grainger 680). The way they make Rushan is interesting. They teach it to everyone in their community. First, they make the milk hot with vinegar until it becomes thick. Then, they do something special. They put the cheese on bamboo sticks to dry in the sun. Yunnan's weather is very important for this. After drying, people can eat the cheese in different ways. They can eat it fresh, or fry it to make it crunchy. They can even fill it with sweet things! This shows how the Bai people make their cheese to fit what they need and what they have around them (Civitello 342).

Different from Rushan, Byaslag is made in the windy grasslands. It shows how Mongolians adapt their food to their cultural matrix. The nomad herders use milk from yaks or cows to make Byaslag. They heat the milk slowly over a small fire. Then, they add something special called a curdling agent. This can be whey or yogurt. It makes the milk separate into parts. After this, they take out the solid part and wrap it tight in cloth or put it in a cotton bag. Then, they put heavy things on top to squeeze out the extra liquid ("Byaslag Cheese").

Byaslag is very important for Mongolians. It has many good things for health, like protein and fat. These are really needed in the cold Mongolian winters. But Byaslag is not just everyday food. It shows how smart Mongolian nomads are at keeping dairy foods good for a long time ("Byaslag or Traditional Cheese"). Mongolians eat Byaslag when they travel, at weddings, or during special events. They also give it to visitors. This shows that Byaslag is part of Mongolian culture and how they welcome people.

Both Rushan and Byaslag are examples of cultural adaptation. The Bai and the Mongolians have changed how they make cheese to fit where they live. In Yunnan, the Bai use the sunny weather. In Mongolia, the herders use what they have to make cheese that lasts through long, cold winters.

These cheese-making traditions are very important. They show how people live and how they teach things to the next generation. In a world where many foods are becoming the same everywhere, these cheeses remind us that cultures can change but still keep their special ways.

From Rushan and Byaslag, we can see how food connects people to their land and history. It tells stories about people and places. These cheeses are more than just food. They show how cultures change, how strong people are, and how people are connected to where they live (Wu and Cheung 92). Our world is changing fast, but these old ways of making cheese remind us why it's important to keep local food practices. They have cultural wisdom inside them that we should not forget.

Key word:

Cultural Adaptation – Transforming the real matter of nature to their usefulness to humans (Brown, Lecture 3, slide 67)

Cultural Matrix – Taxonomies, value, social contexts of eating (Brown, Lecture 3, slide 67)

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