

Why Ladakhi must not be written – Being part of the Great Tradition: another kind of global thinking¹

Bettina Zeisler

Globalization is generally understood as the increasing links across all parts of the world via modern means of transport and communication, and more particularly the increasing integration into the capitalist market economy. On the cultural plane, it is understood as an increase in the levelling of cultural and linguistic differences under the dominance of American language and (non-) culture, known also as Westernization or even “MacDonaldization”.

Looking at India, and particularly at the Himalayan regions, one may observe that Ladakh, situated in the north of Jammu & Kashmir, instead suffers from “Bollywoodization”, i.e. from the cultural impact of India’s pop culture, which, although inspired by the American model, has developed its very own unmistakable style. Besides, western pop culture has for some time drawn quite a few inspirations from Indian spiritualism. Particularly Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhism continues to attract people of the western world who are dissatisfied with a merely materialistic life style. Accordingly, Ladakh’s tourist industry benefits from the Westerner’s misconceptions and idealizations of the Buddhist world.

Globalization, thus, is not a one-way affair, nor is it solely a phenomenon of the past decades. Mahāyāna Buddhism, e.g., fostered by the rising Tibetan empire, was a global attractor in Central Asia in the 7th–9th centuries, leading to the Buddhization and Tibetanization of the Indo-European (Dardic) population of Ladakh and Baltistan (Pakistan). It is still an important global factor in Ladakh, competing with modern materialism on the one hand, and Shia Islam on the other. The Tibetan monastic tradition has a very strong impact on the self-conception of the Buddhist elites, and has until now hampered any development of literacy and literature in Ladakhi.

From a villager’s perspective, one may further observe that there are quite different concentric as well as overlapping “globes” or spheres of economic or cultural integration, starting with the local centres (monasteries and masjids, villages with middle and higher level schools, etc.) leading to the local political centres, the two district towns, Leh and Kargil, and further beyond to the next economic and political centres, Jammu and Srinagar, and finally to Delhi.

On the religious plane, these centres include Mecca and the great Buddhist monastic institutions, formerly in Central Tibet, although now mostly located in South India. Depending on one's actual location and use of media, all these centres create their own sphere of influence. The lower ones may moderate or channel the influence of the higher ones and one might observe a greater sense of resistance towards the influences of the centre at the periphery.

Like any minor language, the Ladakhi language or *Ladakse skat* and its dialects, spoken by about 180 000 speakers in Ladakh,² is under strong pressure from the official state language (in this case, Urdu), the language of higher education (English), and the languages of mass media (Hindi and Urdu). The situation in the Leh district as described by Zeisler (1998) has not dramatically changed, but the trends have been re-enforced.

In the nineties, the strongest impact on the language came from education. Originally, teaching at governmental schools should have been through the medium of the local language up to the fifth class, followed by Urdu, and then by English after the eighth class. But since there were almost no Ladakhi or Tibetan textbooks, children merely learned the Tibetan alphabet, and otherwise had to rely on textbooks in Urdu or English without having any adequate training in these languages. I could witness students in their tenth year of school mechanically memorizing the content of their textbooks, obviously without much understanding. Most students would fail the exams, or would pass only by cheating.

The way out of this misery was demonstrated by the private schools in Leh, by starting with English medium from the first class (again, mostly based on mechanical reproduction). Two schools offered non-compulsory classes in *Budik*, the Tibetan script. There was virtually no further education in the Ladakhi *phalskat* (the spoken language), though there might have been classes in *choskat* (i.e. Classical Tibetan). Most students, however, preferred to have additional classes in Hindi, as this was more beneficial for their professional careers. This means that the younger generation did not get any formal training in its own mother tongue, and further did not learn Ladakhi words for modern concepts, be they political, social, or ecological. As a result, the use of Ladakhi is more and more restricted to the domain of traditional lifestyle and family affairs.

Even though the quality of the governmental schools has drastically improved in recent years, particularly through better teacher training and the involvement of the villagers in education committees, as well as through switching to English as the medium language from the first class, the tendency of sending children to private schools remains unbroken. The fees for the private schools³ are usually beyond the means of an otherwise well-off

family. The foreigner, who is rich by definition, sees herself confronted repeatedly with the moral obligation to sponsor the education of at least one child, and the demand comes not only from poor families but equally from families who just completed the building of a new house, or just bought a new car or perhaps even a bus. With an equal reliance on foreign generosity, several Buddhist organisations have meanwhile established private schools in the villages with classes for *choskat*.

Children at private and governmental schools in Ladakh get at least some explanations in Ladakhi, but more and more families tend to send even small children to schools in other parts of India where this is simply impossible, not to speak of learning the Tibetan alphabet. Not only do the parents believe that the schools in Chandigarh, Jammu, or Srinagar are better than those in Ladakh, but they also believe that if they invest so much money in their children, they would feel a stronger moral obligation to study well, than they might do in Leh or at local schools.⁴ While it is generally true that many more students are getting a much better education than only some years back, and that some of them may develop a growing interest in Urdu or English written media, most of them are illiterate or merely alphabeticized in their own language.

For a long time, the Ladakhi program of All India Radio which was broadcast from the Leh radio station was the main modern and far-reaching medium of information throughout both the Buddhist dominated Leh district and the Muslim dominated Kargil district. The dialects spoken in Leh and its vicinity became influential everywhere in Ladakh, even in the Kargil district (and to some extent also in Baltistan). The Leh pronunciation was also promoted through the education system (as many teachers had either been to a higher secondary school in Leh or its vicinity, or at least had teachers that had been to school in Leh). Nowadays, the impact of the Leh dialect might be reduced by the upgrading of schools and civil services in remote villages, the installation of a second radio station in Kargil, and the switch to more fashionable media.

These days, TV, video, and DVD players are widely spread, slowly reaching the remotest villages. The impact of these media is hardly counterbalanced by the one hour long TV magazine in Ladakhi, which has been scheduled three times a week since 2003. Hindi and Urdu, the languages of the media, as well as English, the language of higher education, are associated with high social prestige, so that educated townspeople may refuse to talk Ladakhi with the foreigner, and one may observe two Ladakhi families in Leh handling the matrimonial negotiations basically in Urdu.

The language, thus, is under strong pressure, and may soon reach the stage of endangerment. Unfortunately, the oral tradition of story telling has come

more or less to an end. The children are too much occupied with their homework, and radio, TV, and videos help to bide the time in a more fashionable way. Furthermore, there is no literary tradition in Ladakhi *phalskat* that could slow down the trend, and all efforts to establish it are opposed by the dominant Buddhist scholars as being anti-Buddhist or as lacking in traditional scholarship.

One has to take into account that Buddhist scholars usually do not differentiate between language and script, and that the Tibetan script is in a way inseparable from its use for the Buddhist scriptures. The only “true” Ladakhi language (*asile skat*⁵), thus, is *choskat*, which should serve as a model for the literary language (*ikskat*⁵). This is also the official position of the members of the J&K Cultural Academy, Leh.⁶ For many scholars, *phalskat* is but a deviation or even “rubbish”, not worthy of being preserved, not to speak of being developed.

According to Tibetan historiography, the Tibetan script and the rules of grammar were introduced by a certain Thonmi Sambhoṭa in the first half of the 7th century, mainly for the codification of the sacred texts of Buddhism. From a Western academic perspective, this seems to be nothing but a pious legend, invented in the second half of the 11th century (cf. Miller 1963; Róna-Tas 1985: 183–303; Zeisler 2005), but for Buddhist scholars it has become an undeniable historical fact.⁷ Accordingly, the script and the classical orthography have become sacrosanct, and should not be altered even when used for lay purposes.

The classical orthography reflects the pronunciation and grammar of some Tibetan dialects of the 9th century, but does not conform to the pronunciation and grammar of most modern Tibetan varieties. The nomadic Amdo dialects and the western dialects of Ladakhi, as well as Balti (spoken in Baltistan), come very close to the slightly different Old Tibetan spellings. But the grammar of these varieties, especially of Ladakhi, has considerably changed. To write the modern varieties according to the classical orthography and grammar would be the same as to write Italian or French according to the orthography and grammar of Latin, or to write Hindi or Bengali according to the orthography and grammar of Sanskrit, which simply means that one writes in a language different from that one speaks. Traditionally, only the monastic schools provided a good training in Classical Tibetan, though laymen might have learned the basics from their clerical relatives or friends. Nevertheless, even monks, whether Tibetan or Ladakhi, have great difficulties in writing the classical orthography correctly. The rules are no longer transparent, particularly since many prefixed consonants have become mute in the Central Tibetan dialects as well as in the monastic reading style. As the religious lan-

guage had drawn from different dialectal sources, many *choskat* words do not have an equivalent in one or the other modern variety.

For this reason, new ways of writing have been adopted in Amdo and, most radically, in Bhutan. While the spelling reforms in Amdo have grown naturally, being backed or even initiated by the local scholars in order to spread the religion among the common people,⁸ in Ladakh, unfortunately, the first attempts to reform the orthography seem to have come from outsiders such as Christian missionaries (cf. Bray 2001). This may be one of the many reasons why it has become a non-issue for most of the Buddhist scholars.

These days, the most enthusiastic adherents of a writing reform belong either to the younger generation such as the publishers of the bilingual magazine *Ladags Melong* (*Ladwags Meloy* 'Mirror of Ladakh'), SECMOL, who might easily be accused of not being firm in the classical language, or from some Muslim intellectuals, such as Molwi Muhammad Omar Gutu Nadvi, the Imam of the Leh Masjid, who might again be accused of as representing a non-Buddhist force.⁹ The publishers of *Ladags Melong* promote a writing style for lay purposes close to the *phalskat* of Leh, but are by far not as radical as a linguist might want them to be. Although they are backed by at least one traditional scholar, Gelong Konchok Pande, they have been repeatedly accused (e.g. at IALS XI, the 11th Seminar of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, Choglamsar 2003) of intentionally spoiling the grammar of *choskat*. For the time being, it seems that the Molwi and his translation of the Quran into *phalskat* is better tolerated, possibly for political reasons (the Buddhist political leadership of the Leh district promotes a policy of reconciliation and unity) as well as because of his established reputation as a learned man, which forbids open criticism.

The fear that any writing reform would result in a disintegration of Buddhist identity might be explained by the increasing fear of being slowly but steadily outnumbered and overpowered by the fast growing Muslim population of Ladakh. Another factor might be the inherited trauma of the elder generation, who had its traditional education in Tibet, but lost its cultural ties with the Chinese occupation. There might be perhaps a certain influence from the Tibetan exile community or even from Tibet proper, where the need is felt to create a common language to maintain cultural and political identity. While some Chinese scholars have opted to use the language of the oral epic as a base for the common language (Jiangbian Jiacao 1994; Wang 1994), certainly not without political afterthoughts, most Tibetan scholars have agreed to base the common language on the grammar and orthography of Classical Tibetan. The early attempts from the Chinese side to promote and develop the regional dialects were rather seen as an attack on the Tibetan national identity (for an

overview on the ongoing discussion, cf. Prins 2002). One can also constantly hear that, due to the Chinese influence, the Tibetan language is in decline (Lhasa 1994; cf. also Ngawangthondup Narkyid 1992: 615). Developing the Ladakhi *phalskat* as a written language might thus be seen as treachery to the Tibetan cause. The Tibetan elites (including the Dalai Lama) do not appreciate moderate changes in the writing style for the Ladakhi *phalskat*, although Modern Literary Tibetan (the style developed in Tibet proper, as well as the style developed in the exile communities) has integrated quite a few grammatical features of the modern Central Tibetan varieties.

The strongest motivation for the conservative stance seems to be the pride or desire of being part of the Great Tradition. As an example one can take the Balti scholar Abbas Kazmi, who is involved in the revival of the Tibetan script for the Balti language.¹⁰ As he explained to me at the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium in Berne 2002, the Baltistan Cultural Foundation aims at establishing the classical orthography, not an orthography that would be suitable for the local variety, because the Balti people do not want to be just another negligible minority in the Northern Territories of Pakistan. They want to be recognized as one of the legal heirs of the Tibetan empire which once dominated Central Asia, and although they are Muslim, they nevertheless want to be associated with the fame of the cultural achievements of Buddhist Tibet.¹¹

Although this motivation has not been expressed explicitly by the Ladakhi Buddhist scholars, it may be seen behind the claim that only the classical orthography allows inter-Tibetan communication from Ladakh to Bhutan (Chigmet Namgyal, IALS XI, Choglamsar 2003). This view is widely attested,¹² although there does not seem to be much need for communication between an average Ladakhi, Bhutanese, or Tibetan. The Bhutanese government, in particular, has developed a new orthography for Dzongka, the official language. From the point of view of Classical Tibetan, it must appear as *thestor* ‘destruction’, and many people hold that it would be better if the Bhutanese people did not use any script at all (Chigmet Namgyal, IALS XI). Even the most ridiculous statements concerning the Ladakhi language might become more understandable from the perspective of the Great Tradition. E.g., at IALS XI, one of the monks fiercely argued that the Ladakhi people should no longer use the traditional expression *jule*, universally used for greeting, pleading, apology, thanking, and goodbye, as this would be rather impolite and stupid, meaning merely ‘good digestion’ – in Tibetan, perhaps.¹³ He was obviously identifying with a Tibetan perspective. According to many lay or clerical scholars, language change is a deviation from the true origins and should not be accepted.

The pride concerning Tibet's incomparable cultural achievements, particularly the invariant form of the Tibetan letters (in contrast to the modern Indian script that bears hardly any similarity with the script of the Gupta period), as well as the fear of cultural disintegration, was exemplarily formulated by the Amdo scholar Gedun Choephel (1978: 72f.¹⁴) in the late forties, well before the Chinese occupation or the challenges of modern globalization.

1,300 years have evolved since the time writing was introduced in Tibet. Yet, orthography and forms of writing have not witnessed much transformation through the years, and today, those with knowledge of Tibetan can decipher and comprehend inscriptions carved on stone pillars of old. In India, on the other hand, there is incomparable disparity between the Gupta scripts of a thousand years back with the script of the current era.

Book printing systematically gained in popularity from the period of rJe Rinpoche [i.e. 11th century] and it is reputed that the volumes of block prints in Tibet find no parallel in the entire world.

As mentioned above, orthography and literary forms [in the original: "form of the script"] have retained their original structure. Therefore, as long as we adhere strictly to scriptural terminology, the unity of our diverse dialects will be preserved. If a written sample of our script travelled a regional cross-section from mNga-ris to A-mdo, every literate person would be capable of reading and understanding such a presentation. Conversely, if the colloquial languages of Ladakh and the Central provinces were encouraged to channel their growth into the compilation of dictionaries and religious works by a people possessing minimal aptitude in these languages, the unity of the common language would disintegrate, owing to the diversity of the colloquial languages in each province. An adjunct to this process would be the development of 'new ways of thinking' and distinct political characteristics as well as further debilitation of racial and political integration. Even if a new and common [in the original: "such"] colloquial language were formed and developed all over Tibet, there will come a day when our regional dialects and literary language would be limited to surmise, and our voluminous literature, such as the Shastras and Tantras written in scriptural terminology, understood by none. This dangerous trend should be cautioned against and avoided.

Similarly, Ngawangthondup Narkyid from the exile community in Dharamsala writes (1992: 615):

Historically speaking, Bonpos preserved the Bon religion and the Tibetan culture at first. Later, the Tibetan scholars and kings introduced Buddhism into Tibet, and Thonmi Sambota pioneered present Tibetan script. As a result of their great contribution, we Tibetans can proudly show our ancient civilized culture even in this very developed modern world.

Formal education and scholarship in Classical Tibetan is still considered more prestigious than a university degree in the modern sciences. For this reason, even lay people would not admit that they might have difficulties in understanding a classical text or might have experienced difficulties in learning the classical language. They obviously internalize the elitist point of view as expressed by Chigmet Namgyal (IALS XI, Choglamsar 2003) – even if that means admitting that learning *choskat* would be more difficult than learning *phalskat*: if the people do not understand the language of the religious books, it is their own fault, as they simply have not made the necessary efforts. Therefore, there would be no need to start teaching children with written *phalskat* or a simple version of Tibetan before teaching them *choskat*. Obviously, once one has mastered an average level of understanding Classical Tibetan, one tends to neglect the differences between the written and the spoken form. One can repeatedly hear that “*phalskat* and *choskat* are the same” (memo Tondup Tsering, Khalatse 2003).

One scholar, unintentionally, demonstrated the exact opposite to me by reading out a text in *choskat* format, explaining every second or third word by using its *phalskat* equivalent. Most illustrative might be his statement that the classical verb form *byed* ‘does’, which he gave in a pseudo Tibetan pronunciation *cet*, was nothing else than the Central Ladakhi spoken form *coat* (the written form of which could be *bcohad* or *byohad*). His argument proves to be heavily biased, since the Ladakhi pronunciation for the written form *byed* should be *bet*, as in the western dialects, and as in many other cases where written *py*, *phy*, or *by* + *i* or *e* becomes *pi*, *pe*, *phi*, *phe*, *bi*, and *be*, while the combination with *a*, *u*, and *o* yields *ca*, *cha*, *ja* etc. in the central dialects. Accordingly, the written past tense form *byas* would have to be pronounced *cas* (or even *bas* in the western dialects) in contrast to the Central Ladakhi spoken form *cos* (written *bcos* or *byos*). However, any linguistic argument about these features would be blocked as being based on Western concepts not applicable to the Ladakhi reality.

All of the conservative lay or clerical scholars I spoke to admitted that they do not have much or enough knowledge of the traditional grammar, and while their reading ability might be quite sufficient, many feel insecure about the correct spelling when writing. One person even made a fundamental mistake while explaining the difference between *choskat* and *phalskat* to me. Gelong Konchok Pande, on the other hand, who supports the language reform, seems to be one of the very few scholars who have studied the grammatical tradition in detail. He not only enjoyed the meta-theoretical discussion, but also told me frankly that the traditional grammar has certain shortcomings and that the commentary literature is not unanimous, particularly when it concerns the so-called “difficult points”, such as case grammar.

In the context of the introductory remarks, it is quite interesting that scholars from Leh or the Upper Ladakh area generally opt for Classical Tibetan, while most if not all supporters of *phalskat* writing come from Lower Ladakh,¹⁵ i.e. from the westernmost areas, where the dialects show a pronunciation closer to the Old Tibetan orthography than the Leh dialect. It seems that people from Lower Ladakh tend to have a greater awareness of linguistic issues. As Tsewang Tharchin (my informant for the Domkhar dialect in 1996, 2003, and 2004) told me repeatedly, he and other *Domkharpa.s* would often argue with the *Lepa.s* about the correct pronunciation of words like e.g. Classical Tibetan *rta* ‘horse’, *lta* ‘look’, and *starga* ‘walnut’, which are all pronounced as *sta* (-*rga*) in Leh and as *ta* (-*rga*) in the Upper Ladakhi dialects, while speakers from Lower Ladakh differentiate between *rhta*, *lhta*, and *starga*. When I experiment in writing Ladakhi e-mails, he often complains about expressions that are much too formal and *choskat*-like. Similarly, the lay historian, Sonam Phuntsog from Achinathang, does not get tired of opposing all claims of the conservative scholars that particular words or village names should be written according to Tibetan etymologies, arguing that they are of a non-Tibetan origin (IALS XI, Choglamsar 2003, cf. also Sonam Phuntsog 2004: 7). There might be historical reasons for this particular self-estimation and opposition to the “centre”, as it was the king of Lower Ladakh, who reunited the kingdom of Ladakh and established the Namgyal dynasty (the split itself might have been related to an attitude of resistance against the influences from Tibet). People of the westernmost areas also tend to regard themselves as being of “Balti”, i.e. Dardic or Turkic, rather than Tibetan origin (Skarma Namthak from Achinathang).

There are, of course, some linguistically more interesting arguments concerning the writing reform. One point is that once one made a reform, the dialects would further develop so that one would soon need another reform, and so on. There has already been one language reform in the 9th century,¹⁶ and this should be enough: “you cannot revise it again and again” (Chigmet Namgyal, IALS XI). Furthermore, many scholars believe that any change in spelling would lead to a change of meaning. If you write the name *Dbajmo* as *Ajmo*, people will no longer know that it means ‘mighty’ (Nawang Tsering Shakspo).¹⁷ Some scholars hold that by learning only the *phalskat* format, the students would be disabled to understand *choskat*, and, as they would never learn how to write “correctly”, there would be “a lot of problems” (Geshe Konchok Namgyal, leaving it somewhat open as to what the problem was, exactly¹⁸).

Nawang Tsering Shakspo objected that you cannot just create a new (!) language. If you do so, you would need a new dictionary and a lot of text

books, so who would do all the work? According to him, the Ladakhi people are not really interested in linguistic matters, so it would be a waste of time.

The main difficulty in establishing a standardized written *phalskat*, however, is the great diversity of the dialects, which differ in pronunciation as well as in grammar. As everywhere in the world, it seems to be difficult to decide which dialect should be given preference. Any debate on this issue might also enhance the particularistic tendencies and tensions between the Leh and Kargil districts. Many people thus argue that the dispute cannot be solved except by using the already established standard of Classical Tibetan. One response to this is that the most suitable dialects are either the dialect of Leh, because of its central position and, even more, its general prestige, or the dialects of Western Sham and Ciktan-Purik,¹⁹ as it is generally admitted that their pronunciation comes closest to the classical orthography (cf. Thubstan Dpalldan 2002: 237–238). Thus, they would need the least adaptation.

SECMOL's publications apparently use a compromise between these two options: while phrasing and grammatical markers mainly follow the Leh dialect, the classical orthography is retained as far as it is attested through the pronunciation of the western dialects. As a speaker of German, a language that shows great dialectal diversity, which is, to a certain degree, also reflected in the book language, I would like to add that a certain level of diversity in spelling and grammar may even add to the richness and beauty of the written language. Generally, changes in spelling in accordance to the phonology do not change the meaning any more than different pronunciations do.

Although the general fear that *phalskat* literacy would affect the understanding of *choskat* certainly has to be taken seriously, it is insubstantial, insofar as the two languages already differ to the extent, that ordinary people cannot understand *choskat*. Thus, for the sake of this argument, it would not matter whether they become literate in *phalskat* or not. However, if *phalskat* is not given the status of an official and literary language, and particularly as a written medium of instruction, people will switch to the more prestigious and practically more useful languages of Urdu/Hindi and English sooner rather than later. It goes without saying that education in the mother tongue proves to be more effective than education in any other language acquired at a much later stage. Literacy in *phalskat*, on the other hand, as well as an understanding of its grammar through adequate training in school, may well enhance the understanding of *choskat*, which after all is the younger cousin of Ladakhi and Balti *phalskat*. It could well turn out that at least a certain percentage of the students, once they are well versed in written *phalskat*, may develop a keen interest in the rich *choskat* literature.

This is also the opinion of Bakula Rangdol Nima Rinpoche who wrote a grammar for Ladakhi *phalskat* just because ultimately everybody should learn *choskat*. But he thinks, after all, that only by constructing a “bridge between the Ladakhi colloquial language and the classical literary grammar” one could heal the “weakness in Tibetan language among the younger generation” (Bakula Rangdol Nima 2005: 3).²⁰ This argument, however, is never accepted, perhaps not even understood by the conservative Buddhist scholars. Therefore, a formal congregation paid a visit to the Rinpoche after the release of his grammar in May 2005, humbly asking him to withdraw his grammar, while a more fundamentalist person went through all the bookshops telling the shopkeepers that they should not sell the booklet. At about the same time, the conservative scholars convoked a seminar in the main Buddhist temple where they passed the resolution to ban *phalskat* writing, imposing a fine on future publications. This was obviously directed against SECMOL, who also claim that they have been indirectly threatened with physical violence (cf. Sonam Wangchuk, open letter, Ladags Melong Summer 2005: 21).

While Chigmet Namgyal is one of the most conservative voices, and would probably not accept any compromise, most other scholars are ready for at least minor compromises. Most of the interviewed persons could accept a simplified spelling of grammatical morphemes as propagated by the Rinpoche as well as by SECMOL (e.g. *gi, ni, di, ni, bi, mi, ri, li*, and *si* in accordance to the last consonant of the lexeme instead of classical *kyi, gi*, and *gyi* for the Genitive) or the use of morphemes not attested in Classical Tibetan (such as the markers of evidentiality) while insisting on the “correct” orthography of the lexemes. Some of them would accept *phalskat* literacy if (and only if) *choskat* literacy is promoted at the same time. Geshe Konchok Namgyal, however, holds that it would not be necessary to train the children in *phalskat* writing; once they have learned *choskat* orthography, the ability to write in *phalskat* would come naturally. Most scholars would accept *phalskat* for the primary and pre-primary classes, but hold that *choskat* should be taught from the third class on. Only very few persons could be persuaded during the interviews that *phalskat* might be used in magazines and books on modern topics such as politics or technology, but even those vehemently opposed the use of *phalskat* in books on Ladakhi history.

The general view is that education in *choskat* is necessary to keep the standard of *phalskat* high. Obviously, the ideal of scholarship in the Great Tradition is deeply rooted. For the same reason, one may observe that until now, the issue of *phalskat* vs. *choskat* has been discussed in public only among male scholars, lay or clerical, and female voices are virtually absent (the foreigners Rebecca Norman from SECMOL and the author of this paper,

of course, do not count). Women as well as “the ordinary man” might hide behind the back of the scholars, but if they are shown or read out a genuine piece of written Ladakhi *phalskat*, they might well appreciate it as *ɲati spera* ‘our language’, in contrast to *choskat*, which most of them do not really understand.

At present, it does not seem to be possible to convince the established scholars and elitists who simply do not want to be convinced. The only chance for the further development of Ladakhi (and Balti) *phalskat* is that the younger generation will develop the necessary interest and freedom of thought. Hopefully, the younger generation will understand that being part of the Great Tradition does not exclude being quite particular and, more specifically, that “you cannot sacrifice the welfare of your people for the ideal of some higher unity” (Gelong Konchok Pande).

Notes

1. By “Ladakhi” I refer to the spoken language of Ladakh, *phalskat* ‘common language’, and its various dialects. Ladakhi belongs to the Tibetan (or perhaps better: Tibetic) languages as part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Tibetan as an linguistic or ethnic term is known in India as Bhotia, Bhutia, Bhotiya, Bhoti (with or without retroflex ʈ), Boti, or Bodhi. These designations as well as the Ladakhi word for the Tibetan script, *Budik* (from *bod* ‘Tibetan’ and *yig* ‘letter, script’) have led to the misinterpretation as ‘Buddhist script’ and thus to a certain reservation towards the use of the script in the Muslim community. On the request of various Muslim scholars “to change the name”, as still formulated on the IALS XII, the 12th Seminar of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, Kargil, July 2005, it had been decided by an inofficial Ladakh Cultural Forum in March 2005 “that the spoken and written language of Ladakh region is to be called Ladakhi” (Ladags Melong Summer 2005: 8). The “written language of Ladakh”, as far as it is propagated by the Buddhist scholars, is better known as Classical Tibetan, which will be termed here as *choskat* ‘language of religion’.

I am grateful to all those who, over the years, were willing to discuss the topic of language reform with me. Since the controversy between the traditionalist or elitist and the modernist, reformative stance tends to be very emotional, I will cite statements only when there is no risk that their author might be blamed or ridiculed for it, or if the statements were published or uttered in front of a greater public. Citations without indication of place and year are from interviews and conversations held in May 2004 in Leh, Ladakh in the context of the submission of this article.

2. No reliable data is available. The Indian Census of 2001 (www.censusindia.net) gives the population of the Leh district as 117 637 and that of the Kargil district as 115 227, totaling 232 864. No information is given on the linguistic and ethnic composition, as on the number of Tibetan refugees, army personal, seasonal or permanent migrant workers and employees. Apparently, many people staying

away from their native village have been counted twice, and there seems to be a sort of competition between Buddhists and Muslims and the two districts, respectively, to outnumber each other, leading to the unreasonable high figures.

Projecting the unbelievable growth rate of more than 30% per decade (21.34 % in India) backwards, the total number should have been 135 450 in 1986, but the Mini-Census of 1986–87 on behalf of the assignment of Scheduled Tribe status to the Ladakhis established eight “tribes” numbering altogether 152 035 persons (77 434 Buddhists and 74 601 Muslims). Even more, the Arghon, families of mixed Buddhist/Suni Muslim descent, were excluded from the tribal status and were obviously not counted, cf. VanBeek (1997: 35), so several thousand Ladakhis would have to be added. The home page of the state Jammu & Kashmir (India) (www.jammu-kashmir.com) gives the estimated population of Ladakh as 159 709 for 1998.

Generally, the data concerning the Muslim population seems to be problematic. While the 1981 Census (presented in Warikoo 1996: 189) counts 70 191 speakers of “Ladakhi” (i.e., mainly the Ladakhi Buddhist population), it counts only 46 890 speakers of “Balti” (i.e., the Ladakhi Shia Muslim population). An increase in population of 59% within 10 years (Mini-Census) is unlikely.

Even more confusing is the data given by SIL under www.geocities.com “Languages in Kashmir” and www.ethnologue.com, which count some 170 640 speakers in 1994 (97 000 for Ladakhi, 63 640 for “Balti”, 8 000–10 000 for Zanskari), but at least 311 000 in 1997 (102 000 for Ladakhi, 132 000 for Purik, 67 000 for “Balti”, and 8 000–10 000 for Zanskari, to which an unknown number for the speakers in the Changthang area would have to be added).

3. Up to 2 000 Rs or 40 \$ per month as against an average annual income from agriculture of about 10 000 to 12 000 Rs (in a good year) or a monthly salary between ca. 2 000 and 6 000 Rs for a teacher.
4. Nevertheless, the further away the children are sent, the less control the parents have over their success in school. There is a constant fear and gossip that the children might go astray. Moreover, some of the schools in Jammu are said to be even worse than in Ladakh (Rebecca Norman, Phey). Recently a case of child abuse shocked Ladakh. Ten Ladakhi children had been promised free education in Karnataka but ended up in a self-styled “orphanage”. They were being treated badly and forced to work hard and beg for their living (Ladags Melong No. 21, April 2004: 20–22).
5. Geshe Konchok Namgyal. Note the use of the loan *asila* ‘true’, which is more and more replacing the word *denba* of Tibetan origin.
6. Cf. the statement in the Daily Excelsior, referring to the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium in Berne, 2002 (<http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/02oct29/state.htm>): “Ladakhi participants gave their thrust towards use of classical Tibetan for writing modern Ladakhi”. All in all, there were three Ladakhi participants: apart from the two members of the Academy, Nawang Tsering Shakspo and Gelong Thupstan Paldan, cited by the newspaper, there was also Sonam Wangchuk from SECMOL, Phey, who certainly disagrees with that statement. SECMOL (Student’s Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) is a non-governmental organisation strongly concerned with the improvement of the education system and the promotion of *phalskat* literacy.
7. Bonpo scholars, however, usually claim that since the Bon religion existed prior

to the introduction of Buddhism, there must have been also a script earlier than the time of Srongbrtsan Sgampo (cf. Gedun Choephel 1978: 71), and the more open minded scholars might be ready to accept this claim, even though it has even less historical evidence.

8. Already at the beginning of the 19th century, the Amdo scholar Gunthanpa Dkonmchog Bstanpaḥi Sgronme (1762–1823) of Ndzorge (*Mdzoddge*) specified this need in the title of his religious text book: *Rdorjeḥchaydḥaḥ miyi gar rolpaḥi ḥ yab rje Bstanpaḥi Sgronmeḥi ḥalsḥanas ḥ skyebo blodman kungyis go bdeḥi ched ḥ phalskad tshuldu gnaḥbaḥi zabchos bzhugsso ḥ* ‘The Profound Dharma given in the vernacular so as to be well understood by all people of weak intellect. From the words of the honourable father Tenpay Dronme, who is a Vajradhara diverting himself in human form’ (cf. Róna-Tas 1983 and Thubten J. Norbu 1983).
9. The Muslim standpoint seems to have changed over the years. Before the nineties, Muslims apparently experienced some pressure from the fundamentalist Sheiks to give up Ladakhi traditions on the pretext that they were non-Islamic. In this context, *Budik*, i.e. the Tibetan script, was interpreted and rejected as ‘Buddhist script’. It seems, however, that more and more Muslims, due to the politics of reconciliation between the two communities (after the clashes of 1989), a growing sense of Indian nationalism (against the separatist movements in Kashmir), and a growing self-estimation of the Ladakhi culture, are at least willing to perceive *Budik* as what it is: a medium of writing, and the most suitable for the Ladakhi (and Balti) language. However, only a few persons have learnt the script.
10. For some basic information on this revival, cf. Siddharth Varadarajan (2002).
11. There are, of course, also different voices of people who are just “very concerned that Balti should not slowly be replaced by Urdu, that it should be read and written as an aid to preserving the language”. The use of the Tibetan script could be “a nice ideal, but one which neither the government nor the great majority of Baltis are going to approve of”. Particularly, if the original orthography “can’t be of any use for present day spoken Balti [...] it simply won’t be learned by the vast majority and will remain an interesting hobby for a tiny minority.” A convenient Romanisation or a modified Persian/Arabic script would be even preferred as being “helpful to [the] children as they progress to higher education” (Eunice Jones, e-mail communication, December 2005).
12. As a variant of this common topic, Nawang Tsering Shakspo mentioned the need to send a letter to the Tibetan communities in South India. And Geshe Konchok Namgyal added that one could communicate even with the Mongolians, as they would use Classical Tibetan as the language of religion (which is not exactly the case for the common people).
13. Since this “etymology” has been promoted by authorities such as Tashi Rabgyas, it has become a sort of commonly accepted “fact” even for those who identify with the expression. E.g. Nawang Tsering Shakspo (s.a.: 3–4) writes:

Julley is the word which is used by every Ladakhi to greet both acquaintance and stranger alike. It sounds very sweet and literally means “good digestion” although it can have other similar meanings. This word can be used to say welcome, thank you and farewell.

Besides the fact that an utterance has no other meaning than that intended by the speaker, the claimed origin of the expression is a case of folk etymology. As the

word for ‘to digest’ *jucas* ~ *žucas* (Classical Tibetan *hju*ba ~ *žuba*) itself shows, *j* may vary with *ž* in Ladakhi (other examples for this variation are *kharži* for *kharji* ‘food’ and *žomšas* for *jomšes* ‘to overcome, cure’). The people of Kargil as well as the Balti people again use *žu* as a greeting or as a polite interjection. There is another verb *žucas* (Classical Tibetan *žuba*) ‘to request, talk (to a person of higher status)’. This verb is frequently used in Classical Tibetan as a performative verb, i.e. stating or accompanying a speech act, such as a request or any other kind of utterance. Thus, a formal phrase of welcome would have been *byonpa legspar žu* ‘we wish you to have arrived well’, and a pleading or apologizing phrase might have looked like *dgoṅspa stsalbar žu* ‘I request you to give permission/leave’, etc. The use of Ladakhi *ju* (Kargil and Balti *žu*) plus the honorific particle *le* is thus merely a conventionalized abbreviation (independently, Gelong Konchok Pande holds a similar view, Leh 2005). The phrase *in + ju ~ žu* ‘pray, that’s how it is/was’ is commonly used as an affirmative interjection by the audience during the performance of a narration. The narrator him/herself might invite this interjection by terminating a sentence with *lo + ju ~ žu* ‘pray, it has been said so’.

Sonam Phuntsog (2004: 7), on the other hand, suggests that *ju* could be an Indian loan, since one can find a honorific term of address *ju* ‘Sir’ in Rajasthan and Uttarpradesh. This would be an elegant solution to a heated dispute, if only one could prove a closer relationship, e.g. through trade, between Ladakh and Rajasthan or Uttarpradesh. There also seems to be a functional difference between a term of address and the multi-purpose expression in Ladakhi.

14. The Tibetan original is found in Dgebdun Choshphel, ed. 1979: 135ff.
15. E.g. Gelong Konchok Pande (Skyurbuchan-Achinathang) as well as Bakula Rangdol Nima Rinpoche (Lamayuru, originally likewise from Achinathang), to whom one could add the historian Sonam Phuntsog (from the same village, see also below). Achinathang is the last village on the right river bank before the Shina speaking enclave. Sonam Wangchuk’s (SECMOL) native village Uley Trokpo is likewise located in Lower Ladakh, although in the eastern part.
16. Yet it was not a spelling reform, but a standardization of Buddhist technical terminology, see Zeisler (2005). Changes in spelling as attested between the Old and the Classical Tibetan texts must have occurred rather informally.
17. But, of course, they would, as they know the word *aj* (from *dbaj*) ‘power, might’ and the female derivative morphem *mo*.
18. He also referred to Sras Rinpoche of Ridzong monastery as having made a similar statement just some days earlier at the main temple of Leh.
19. The dialects of Kargil and southern Purik are less suitable, as they show many differences in grammar, being more closely related to the Balti dialects than to the central or western dialects.
20. Although he shows a strong interest in linguistics and in the particularities of Old Tibetan as well as of some modern Tibetan varieties, his modifications are rather moderate and concern only the grammatical morphemes. Lexemes should be written in the traditional orthography whether they correspond to the Ladakhi pronunciation or not. At the most, one could use a spelling corresponding to the modern Amdo pronunciation or writing style (discussion on behalf of the draft version, Leh, September 2004).

References

- Bakula Rangdol Nima
 2005 *Ladwagssi brdasprod bžugsso. A Ladakhi Grammar*. Achinathang, Leh: Cultural Preservation & Promotion Society.
- Bray, John
 2001 Christianity in Ladakh: The Moravian Church from 1920 to 1956. In *Ladakh Himalaya occidental. Ethnologie, écologie. Colloque organisé à Pau en janvier 1985 par Patrick Kaplanian et Claude Dendaletche. Recherches Récentes sur le Ladakh N° 2A / Recent Research N° 2A. Seconde édition entièrement revue, corrigée et augmentée par Patrick Kaplanian*. Patrick Kaplanian (ed.), S.l., s.a. [Paris 2001]: published by the editor.
- Dgebdun Choshphel (Mkhaspaḥi dbaṅpo Mdosmadpa)
 1979 *Bod chenpoḥi sridlugsdaṅ ḥbrelbaḥi rgyalrabs debther dkarpo žes bya* [The Genealogy Related to the Dominion of Great Tibet, Called the White Annals]. Dhasa Bodgšun Šesrig Parkhaṅ. Dharamsala: Tibetan Cultural Printing Press.
- Gedun Choephel
 1978 *The White Annals*. Translated by Samten Norboo. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.
- Jiangbian Jiacao
 1994 <King Gesar> and Tibetan dialects. In *Current Issues in Sino-Tibetan Linguistics*, Hajime Kitamura, Tatsuo Nishida, and Yasuhiko Nagano (eds.), 1018–1026. Osaka: The Organising Committee.
- Miller, Roy Andrew
 1963 Thon-mi Sambhoṭa and his grammatical treatises. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83: 485–502.
- Nawang Tsering Shakspo
 S.a. *Notes on mask dance (cham) Ladakh*. Ayu Sabu [2004]: Center for Research on Ladakh Studies.
- Ngawangthondup Narkyid
 1992 A proposal: refinement of the Tibetan language and standardization of its writing system. In *Tibetan studies. Proceedings of the 5th seminar of the International Association for Tibetan studies, Narita 1989*, Shōren Ihara, Yūshō Miyasaka, Shigeaki Watanabe, and Shōkei Matsumoto (eds), 615–623. Narita.
- Prins, Marielle
 2002 Toward a Tibetan common language. Amdo perspectives on language standardisation. In *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and Culture in the post-Mao Era. PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 9th seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, Toni Huber (ed.), 27–51. (Brill's Tibetan studies library, 2/5.) Leiden: Brill.
- Róna-Tas, András
 1983 Linguistic notes on an Amdowa text. In *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture*, vol. 1, Ernst Steinkellner, and Helmut Tauscher (eds.), 243–280. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien.

- 1985 *Wiener Vorlesungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte Tibets*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien.
- Siddharth Varadarajan
2002 Tibetan script makes a comeback in Pak. *The Times of India News Network* <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>>. Thursday, March 28, 2002 12:26:40 AM (accessed).
- Sonam Phuntsog
2004 *Ladwags debther. Ladakh annals*. Part two. *Šesbyaḥi baṅmdzod. General knowledge*. S.l.: published by the author. 3rd edition.
- Thubstan Dpalldan
2002 *Ladwags*. [Leh]: published by the author. 2nd edition.
- Thubten J. Norbu
1983 Gungthangpa's text in colloquial Amdowa. In *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture*, Vol. 1, Ernst Steinkellner, and Helmut Tauscher (eds.), 221–242. Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien.
- VanBeek, Martijn
1997 The importance of being tribal. Or: The impossibility of being Ladakhis. In *Recent Research on Ladakh 7. Proceedings of the Seventh Colloquium of the International Association of Ladakh Studies, Bonn/Sankt Augustin, 12–15 June 1995*, Thierry Dodin, and Heinz Rätther (eds.), 21–41. (Ulmer Kulturanthropologische Schriften, 9.) Ulm.
- Wang, Xingxian
1994 Scientific value in the study of the language used in Tibetan oral version of Gesar. In *Current Issues in Sino-Tibetan Linguistics*, Hajime Kitamura, Tatsuo Nishida, and Yasuhiko Nagano (eds.), 1027–1033. Osaka: The Organising Committee.
- Warikoo, K.
1996 Language and politics in Jammu and Kashmir: Issues and perspectives. In *Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh: Linguistic Predicament*, P.N. Pushp, and K. Warikoo (eds.), 183–221. New-Delhi: Har-Anand.
- Zeisler, Bettina
1998 Borrowed language: the impact of school education and mass media in Ladakh (Jammu & Kashmir India). In *Education in the North. Ways of Preserving and Enhancing Indigenous People's Languages and Traditional Knowledge*, Erich Kasten (ed.), 229–252. Münster: Waxmann.
2005 On the position of Ladakhi and Balti in the Tibetan language family. In *Ladakh in Regional Perspective – History*, John Bray (ed.), 41–64. (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, 9.) Leiden: Brill.