

# Stories of Little Tibet

Aneta and Luboš Pavel / Stories of Little Tibet. Past, Present and Future

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Past, Present and Future

*Aneta and Luboš Pavel*





Spring Dales Public School in the village of Mulbekh provides education to children and adults alike to empower them to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional way of life in Little Tibet. *Stories of Little Tibet*, a book by the region's inhabitants themselves, is one of the roads through which they have gained greater awareness of their own values.



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### *The 14th Dalai Lama:*

*“I am a co-financer for the development of the Spring Dales Public School. The current donors have my deepest thanks, and I would like to call other friends and sympathizers to join in on this support.”*

*July 2011, Dharamsala, India*

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## *Foreword*

Life is changing rapidly. In places where there was not even a dirt road, dozens of cars now flow in a steady stream along a new road. Big concrete structures are rising next to houses made of clay.

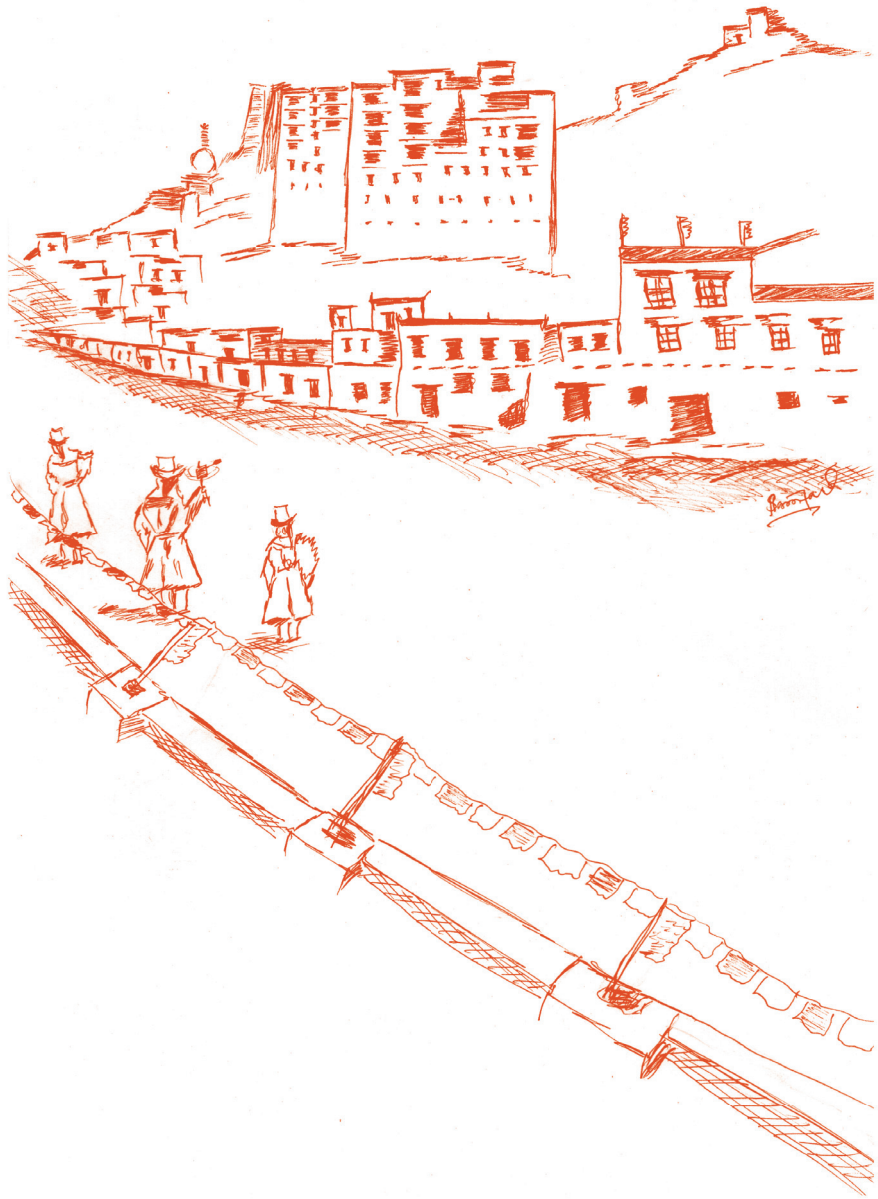
Some stories in this book tell the history of Ladakh, while others tell the stories of the people with whom I had the opportunity to speak. Finally there are also stories which embody wishes and visions of the future. Together they form a kind of collage, which reveal in a new way, the current life of the people of Ladakh. Ladakh is also known as Little Tibet, and the stories herein also reflect the tradition from which these well known Buddhist fairytales spring.

My wife and I conceived of this project together. We wanted the book to be widely varied. In these pages you will find fairy-tales and folk tales, as well as Buddhist stories, which greatly reflect the beliefs that make up the fabric of the daily life of the inhabitants. The real stories of the people we met are also included. For them, the past, present and future merge into one continuum. You will also find completely new stories that arose from creative writing workshops I led with the children of Ladakh at the Spring Dales Public School, where I worked throughout my stay.

We asked Samfel Tsering, my personal guide, to illustrate the book. I first saw his pictures on the walls of the primary school and I took a liking to them. I am grateful to have been able to be a part of this work, and for all of the lessons I learned from the people of Ladakh during my time there. My thanks also go to my wife, as without her ideas and support, the project would have never begun.

Luboš Pavel





## Searching for a Tibetan King

An old woman from Wakha, a town in the Shargol valley, told us this tale. In ancient times, a man called Lonpo Rikpa Chan lived in the Shargol valley. In the Tibetan language 'Lonpo' means Minister and 'Rikpachan' means wise or intelligent. So his name means Wise Minister. In any case his real name is unknown. The name Wise Minister was given to him later when it became apparent to everyone how insightful and prescient he had been. It was this man who chose the names of villages like Mulbekh, Pachikar, Wakha, Bodh Kharbo, Namikila and Photola.

How was it that he was able to invent the names of villages?

A long time ago Tibet was going through a difficult time. People were poor, the harvests failed and the country faced many problems. The ministers of Tibet were trying to find out why the kingdom had become so poor, and why Tibet was facing such trials. Together the ministers summoned all of the wise men in the country, as well as several wise lamas. They all put their heads together for a few days and then they presented their conclusions to the ministers.

"If our country is to find a new direction and overcome its current problems, then we must find a new king. This man must be wise and just." Then the lamas departed. This seemed like a good idea, as at that time the kingdom had no king. There was only one problem. Where could they find a man who would find solutions to the many difficult challenges the country faced?

The ministers hurried and caught up to the group of wise men. They asked them where they should find such a wise and just king.

One *Rinpoche* looked at the horizon and said, "I see a place that resembles a triangle. It lies between two rivers, where the sun rises earlier than in other places. A young man lives in that beautiful valley. He is suited to being the King of Tibet and will help us through our difficult situation."

"Yes honorable Lama, and in which direction is that place?"

The *Rinpoche* pointed towards the northwestern star. "Your ambassadors should follow this star."

The Ministers reacted quickly. They organized an expedition to find the young man in the triangular valley and to bring him to Tibet. They did all according to the lama's instructions. At that time people travelled either on foot or on horseback. They calculated the distance accordingly. One para was the distance of a day's journey on foot. One would walk a para and then the day was over, or he would ride a horse the length of one para, and then stop to take a break.

The group of men who were sent to follow the star and find the new King of Tibet traveled on horseback for several months. They traveled many para before reaching the Shargol Valley. Shortly after noon they reached a place that resembled the lama's prediction. They set up a camp on the riverbank. On a nearby field a young man was ploughing with his *dzo*. He seemed to be a simple and poor man.

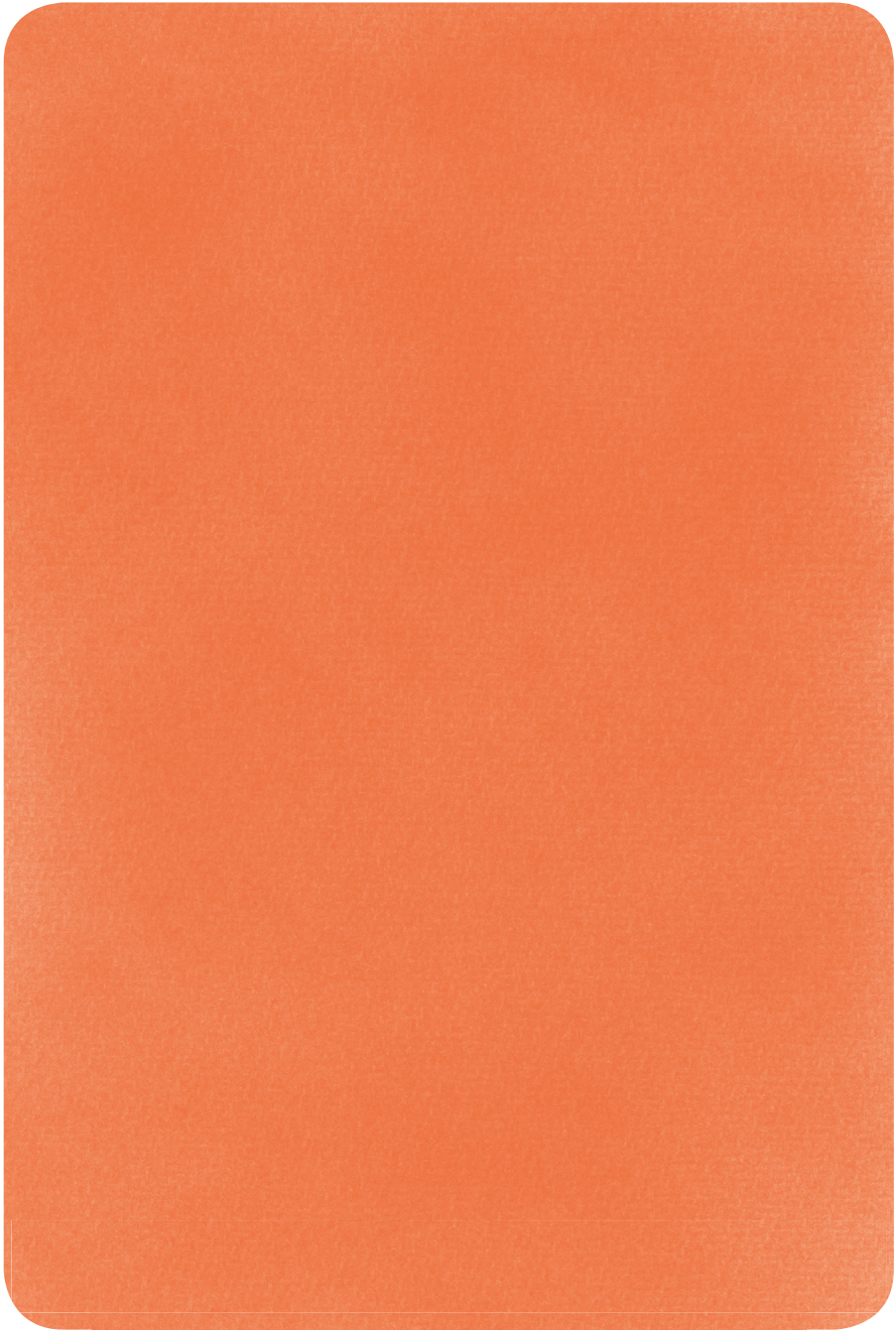
The men taunted him. They asked with a laugh how many times he has to turn around with his *dzo* before he can plough the entire field. That young man was no one other than Lonpo Rikpachan.

He looked at them and said, "I have to turn as many times with the *dzo*, gentlemen, as the amount of para you traveled to arrive here." His bright eyes and clever response suggested that perhaps this boy possessed some wisdom.

The ambassadors stopped laughing and to test him, they asked him more questions. "Youngster, where are your parents?"

He replied: "My mother, dear gentlemen, has gone to catch a dance for the lantern, and my father is tripping over his lips."

Even a Tibetan Minister would not come up with such an answer! The boy spoke in metaphors and sounded as if he were a *Rinpoche*. The ambassadors could guess that the 'a dance for the lantern' meant a fire or



a light, and that ‘tripping over one’s lips’ refers a person who is having too much to drink in the tavern.

They asked the young man a few other things and he always responded indirectly, in parables. The ambassadors had a lively discussion, and then asked him more questions. They wanted to hear more of his answers.

“What does your house look like?”

The young man replied, “Our house definitely stands on the right place. The rooms are always filled with light in the morning. A thousand rays of light enter our rooms, and easily come out again. We also have a barn with a central column, and that column has its supervisor.”

He meant that the house is full of holes and through them the sunbeams can pass, and in the barn there is a pillar with a goat tied to it, which is their only property. In this way he described his family’s poverty. The ambassadors were very impressed with his answers. They no longer had any doubts about who should be their future king.

They wanted to verify everything he said, so at their request he took them home and introduced them to his parents. When the ambassadors left, they crossed the river, waited a while, and after a time they returned. They pretended that they had lost a man who had gone off hunting somewhere in the canyon. They gave the parents of the young man some money and asked them to send their boy to help find their colleague.

The young man left for the canyon. The ministers sent several men to the canyon via another route. These men captured the young man, tied him up and put him on a horse. Then the whole group set off back to Tibet.

As they passed through villages they asked him what each was called. Though the boy did not know their names, he invented them along the way. A village below the mountains, which glowed in a silver shine in the afternoon sun, he named rMuldok. The small r at the beginning of a word is just an accent, so rMul means silver and dok means color. Eventually, the name was changed to Mulbekh.

He invented names for other villages as well, such as Pachikar, which is today Pachikar or Wakha. Wakha means a raceway or a driveway – a narrow flat place that looks like a channel through which water flows to a mill.

Another village he named Photola. Photola is composed of two words, 'photo' which is a bowl, and 'la' which is a hill. The mountains in Photola look like an upside down bowl. This is also the case with Namikila. Nam means 'sky' and 'ka' means pillar. The mountains are so high that their snowy peaks look like pillows on which heaven itself rests.

We do not know for sure whether the boy from Shargol really became the king of Tibet who returned happiness and prosperity to the country. However, as they called him Lonpo Rikpachan or 'Wise Minister', it is likely that he at least became a minister in Tibet.

For many years Lonpo Rikpachan could not forget how the other ministers had kidnapped him. For the first few years he joked around with them. For example, when he was asked how to overcome drought, he sat on a chair with his forefinger resting on his chin and said thoughtfully, "In our village we soaked the seeds in water overnight before planting them. Then we just planted them in the fields. Our harvests have always been successful."

They did as he told them and indeed the harvest was plentiful. The crops however were sterile. The ministers still faced the same problem of how to ensure a successful harvest for the following year. They asked Rikpachan again for advice. This time he advised them to slightly roast the seeds before planting them. The seeds should become hardier after they were roasted. Again the ministers did what he said, yet when harvest time came the crops were again sterile. The third year Rikpachan finally counseled them in earnest and led the country out of poverty and all of their woes.



## The Magical Amulet

*Ladakh*, sometimes referred to as Little Tibet, was once a part of Tibet. The area of *Ladakh* consists of Kargil and Leh districts, and its administrative center is Leh. There are many Buddhists living in *Ladakh*. They enjoy telling stories about Tibet, their ancient homeland. It is hard to say how true these stories are, as storytellers often don't remember if they happened one hundred or three hundred years ago. The details are fading...

Once upon a time in ancient Tibet, or perhaps a little later when the country was already divided into two parts, a King reigned over one part of the country. He had a trusted general, his Minister of Defense, who wore an amulet into battle. The amulet protected him from all injuries. Shots whizzed past him and all weapons bent or broke upon his body. No one could explain how this was possible. The general kept the secret of the amulet to himself. The only other person who knew about it was his wife.

The amulet's protection was so strong and miraculous, that after some time and after many battles, his enemies began to notice. So they assigned some of their best marksman to target him alone. The best horse riders were ordered to chase and kill him with a saber. However none of them were successful.

His enemies began to wonder: "How is this possible? It is incredible! From every skirmish he escapes alive and without any injuries. All arrows miss him and sabers do not hurt him. We need to know what is protecting him."

"The man may have some supernatural powers, or perhaps he is even a *bodhisattva*," one offered up as a possible explanation.

“We do not know that,” replied the commander. “He does not seem to have any greater power than anyone else. All shots simply miss him.”

“I have an idea,” someone said, “Let’s ask his wife.”

“You and your ideas,” everyone replied mockingly, “do you think she is completely stupid? How are you going to ask her?”

“Maybe if we gave her enough money, she will give something away,” said another man.

“No way, she will only become more suspicious.”

“Well,” said the one who offered up the suggestion in the first place, “it’s obvious that you know nothing about women. Let me handle it. I’ll get you the information.”

Because the man who came up with this plan was otherwise a good soldier and well respected for his bravery, the others finally agreed. He was sent to question the general’s wife. The others waited to see what would come of it.

The man disguised himself and traveled to the capital where the Minister of Defense lived. He found the Minister’s house, and at an opportune time, he approached the Minister’s wife. She was working in the garden. He began to flatter her and to chat with her about everything except her husband.

After a while he said, “You have such a great man.”

“Yes, I do. Do you know him?”

“Yes, I know him a little. I know he has been a general for many years.”

“For twenty-five years,” she said proudly.

“It is so unusual to see a general fight on the front line, but your husband is always on the front line, and he fights fearlessly.”

“Oh, yes, he is very brave,” agreed the woman.

“You really love him, don’t you?” said the man.

“Sure, as much a wife can love her husband.”

“And you are never worried about him? I mean...you know...after all, one day, perhaps, he might not be so lucky and get injured, or God forbid...”

“No, I’m not worried,” she said cheerfully.

“But I can’t understand that. You do not worry about your husband?” The man looked so confused and surprised, that the woman started to laugh.





“That’s easy,” she said, “my husband has a powerful protective amulet. It will protect him from any shot or blow.”

“Unbelievable!” the man shouted. “Are, you telling the truth? Can there be an amulet with such powers? Where is it hidden?”

The woman was so affected by the man’s spontaneity and the way he expressed his surprise that without thinking she replied: “It is hidden in his cap.”

When the spy finally heard what he wanted to hear, he thanked the woman for an interesting conversation and left. He told his friends

everything as they sat together. They planned how to steal the general's protective amulet.

"That's easy," one of them said. "From now on we will focus on his hat, and we will just shoot it down."

The second man slapped his forehead. "How do you want to shoot his cap off? I mean, this amulet is so strong that it protects against any shot."

"We will sneak into his house at night and steal his hat," suggested another one.

"That is so stupid. I can't even believe you're suggesting it! They will capture us all. He is after all a general, remember?!"

"We can ask his wife to help us," said the man who previously had spoken with her.

Everyone just stopped and stared at him. If he had not just returned from a successful mission, they would tell him to go to hell. But now they asked, "What do you mean? Are you kidding?"

"How would you manage that?" one of them said cautiously, "I mean – it's his wife."

"Don't worry. I can see you know nothing about women. I will get the job done."

He did not disappoint them before, so they trusted him again this time. He traveled to the neighboring part of Tibet to speak once again to the wife of the Minister.

She greeted him as she would an old friend. How good it was to chat together! The last time they laughed so much!

"Tell me, how is it living with the general, the Minister?" he asked. "I mean, he is always somewhere else defending our country, but he is almost never at home."

"You're right," she said, "He is always in briefings and meetings, or in the case of war, he is gone for years."

"Don't you feel lonely?"

"You can imagine," she said shyly.

"Surely the amulet you told me about is the cause of his absence. If he did not have it, he would no longer be Minister of Defense."

This frightened the woman: "But my *devas*! What would he do?"

“Anything. Something much safer for sure.”

“He is so valued and respected as Minister of Defense,” said the woman.

“Is that all you need to be happy?” the man asked.

“No, but...”

“There are other ministerial posts after all. And your husband has worked long enough. Everybody would understand if he did not want to be a general anymore.”

“I know, but what can I do? If I say something to him...”

“Don’t tell him anything. Men are proud and have their own ideas. I can make it happen. Just bring me his hat. I’ll do a little magic with it and I’ll bring your husband back home forever.”

These words were an intoxicating song for the general’s wife. Without hesitation she went into the house and brought out her husband’s hat. The man took the hat from her and muttered some words above it while spinning it around. He managed to steal the amulet by distracting the woman with the movement of the hat. She thought the man must have been a lama to be able to move a hat in such a way.

It is not however advisable to trust strangers blindly, and generals should be careful what secrets they entrust to their wives. As you can imagine, the general was killed immediately in the next battle. His enemies threw his magic amulet into the river so it could never be used again. There was no sense in anyone else trying to use it, as such an amulet only helps the person for whom it was made.