

THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE

The Tibetan language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan (ST) language family, one of the largest in the world, with the two major branches Chinese and Tibeto-Burmese, spoken in hundreds of languages by millions of people in Southeast Asia and the Himalaya states.



Tibetan historiography tells us that in 632 AD. Tibet had become a great power under the monarch *Songtsen Gampo*. The small principalities had united and neighbouring countries - beyond the Tibetan highlands on the Silk Road - were under the political influence of Greater Tibet. This expansion was unique in Tibetan history. *Songtsen Gampo*, a clever diplomat, married a daughter of the Chinese emperor, a daughter of the Nepalese king and a daughter of the king of the ancient West-Tibet kingdom Shangshung. With the creation of a central imperial administration, Tibet opened itself to the cultural and intellectual influences of the high cultures of India and China. In an effort to give this Central Asian empire a unifying religion and culture, *Songtsen Gampo* sent his minister **Thonmi Sambhota** to Kashmir, the stronghold of scholarship in ancient India. On the basis of the late Gupta script, which is also the basis of the Devanagari of Sanskrit, he developed the Tibetan alphabet in order to be able to write Tibetan sounds that had no equivalent in Sanskrit. The orthography and the Tibetan grammar were created on the model of traditional Sanskrit grammars with the aim of enabling translations of the extensive body of Buddhist scriptures in India to Tibetan. Unfortunately, six of the eight volumes of Tibetan grammar originally burned. The two volumes that have been preserved in the original text are called "Thirty Verses" (sum-tchu-pa) and "Introduction to the Signs" (rtags kyi 'jug.pa). The first volume deals with the alphabet and the particles and the second volume mostly deals with the verbs.

The Tibetan language is a syllable language.

The most complex string
of consonants and vowels in one syllable
in the form of a ligature:



brGyugs

phonetics: gjug

past tense of རྒྱུག། gjug - to run