

**Academic Year 2026-2027
Centre of Buddhist Studies
The University of Hong Kong
BSTC2015 Tibetan language I
(6 Credits)**

(The course is open to students from all faculties as an elective course)

Course Description

Tibetan is one of Asia's major literary languages and a vital medium of Tibetan Buddhism, used across an expansive cultural sphere extending from the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayan regions (Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim, Ladakh, and northern Pakistan) to Mongolia and parts of southern Russia (Kalmykia, Tuva, and Buryatia). For centuries it has served in the transmission and interpretation of both exoteric and esoteric Buddhist teachings, preserving not only an immense corpus of translated Indian Buddhist literature but also a vast body of indigenous Tibetan scholarship and commentary. This course provides a systematic introduction to Classical Tibetan, covering its script, transliteration, grammar, syntax, particles, and core nominal and verbal constructions. By the end of the course, the students will be able to read elementary Classical Tibetan, identify and analyze fundamental grammatical structures, and translate simple sentences and brief Buddhist texts into English. No prior knowledge of the language is required to enrol in this course.

Course Assessments

50% Coursework

50% Examination

Offering Semester: First Semester

Lecturer: Dr. Drukgyel Tsering

Office: To be confirmed

Email: To be confirmed

Schedule: To be confirmed

Classroom: To be confirmed

Grade Expectations in Faculty of Arts

https://arts.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/grade_expectations.pdf

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarising is liable to disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on "plagiarism" for details:

<http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

Lesson 1	Course introduction Historical context & literary styles Tibetan alphabet (vowels and consonants) Pronunciation
Lesson 2	Writing Tibetan script Transliteration (Wylie system) Prefixes, Suffixes, and post-suffixes
Lesson 3	Superscripts and subscripts Syllable structure Transliteration practice
Lesson 4	Nouns and adjectives Genitive particle Noun phrase structure Numbers (cardinal and ordinal)
Lesson 5	Copula and its negation Word order (SOV) Compound words Demonstratives Pronouns Conjunctive particles
Lesson 6	Introduction to verbs (past, present, future, imperative) The Agentive particles Terminative particles
Lesson 7	Transitive vs. Intransitive Adverbs
Lesson 8	La particles (Part I): Ablative Objective case Locative Dative

	Adverbs
Lesson 9	La particles (Part II): Time Direction Purpose functions Manner Beneficiary
Lesson 10	Conditional, Concessive, and Causal particles Interrogative particles Interrogative pronouns
Lesson 11	Gerundial particles Emphatic and possessive particles
Lesson 12	Relative pronouns Nominal and diminutive particles

References

Textbook list

1. Bialek, Joanna. 2021. *A Textbook in Classical Tibetan*. London: Taylor & Francis.
2. Hodge, Stephen 2019. *An Introduction to Classical Tibetan*. Bangkok: Orchid Press.
3. Rockwell, John, Jr. 1991. *A Primer for Classical Literary Tibetan*. Vol. 1, The Grammar. Revised ed. Pinecliffe, CO: Samadhi Publishing.

I Dictionaries / Glossaries

1. Das, Sarat Chandra. 1970. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*. Reprint. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
2. Hackett, Paul G. 2003. *A Tibetan Verb Lexicon: Verbs, Classes, and Syntactic Frames*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.
3. Hopkins, Jeffrey. 2011. *Uma Institute Tibetan-Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Charlottesville, VA: UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies.
4. Jäschke, Heinrich August. 1980. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary, with Special Reference to the Prevailing Dialects*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1881. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.
5. Nagano, Yasuhiko. 1997. *A Morphological Index of Classical Tibetan*. Tokyo: Seishido.

6. Rikey, Thubten and Andrew Ruskin. 1992. *A Manual of Key Buddhist Terms: a Categorization of Buddhist Terminology with Commentary by Lotsawa Kaba Paltseg*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
7. Thubten Nyima (Alak Zenkar Rinpoche) & Dr. Gyurme Dorje. *An Encyclopaedic Tibetan-English Dictionary*. Volume 1. The Nationalities Publishing House & The School of Oriental and African Studies.
8. Tsepa Rigzin. 2008. *Tibetan English Dictionary of Buddhist terminology* (Revised and Enlarged Edition). Reprint. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

II Grammar

1. Beyer, Stephen. 1992. *The Classical Tibetan Language*. NY: State University of New York Press
2. Hannah, Herbert Bruce. 1973. *A Grammar of the Tibetan Language, Literary and Colloquial*. Reprint. Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
3. Jäschke, H. A. 1989. *Tibetan Grammar*. Reprint. Delhi: Sri Sat Guru Publications.
4. Miller, Roy Andrew. 1993. *Prolegomena to the first two Tibetan Grammatical treatises*. Vienna: Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 30.
5. Preston, Craig. *How to Read Classical Tibetan*, Vol. I and II. Boston & London: Snow Lion Publications.
6. Tournadre, Nicolas. 2003. *Manual of Standard Tibetan*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
7. Wilson, Joe B. 1992. *Translating Buddhism from Tibetan: An Introduction to the Tibetan Literary Language and the Translation of Buddhist Texts from Tibetan*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

III. Tibetan Script and Translation

1. Cabezón, José Ignacio, and Roger Jackson. 1996. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*. New York: Snow Lion Publications.
2. Halkias, Georgios T. 2004. "Tibetan Buddhism Registered: An Imperial Catalogue from the Palace Temple of 'Phang-thang." *The Eastern Buddhist* 36 (1–2): 46–105.
3. ———. 2014. "Translating the Foreign into the Local." *Translation and Global Asia*. Chinese University Press, 143–166.
4. Laufer, Berthold. 1918. "Origin of Tibetan Writing." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 38: 34–46.
5. Raine, Roberta. 2014. "'Translation Archaeology' in Practice: Researching the History of Buddhist Translation Tibet." *Meta: Journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal* 59 (2): 278–296.
6. Scherrer-Schaub, Cristina. 1999. "Translation, Transmission, Tradition: Suggestions from Ninth-Century Tibet." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1–2): 67–77.
7. Van der Kuijp, Leonard. 1996. "The Tibetan Script and Derivatives." In *The World's Writing Systems*, edited by Peter T. Daniels and William Bright, 431–441. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. van Schaik, Sam. 2011. "A New Look at the Tibetan Invention of Writing." In *New Studies of the Old Tibetan Documents: Philology, History and Religion*, edited by Yoshiro Imaeda, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Tsuguhito Takeuchi, 45–96. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.

9. ———. 2012. “The Origin of the Headless Script (*dbu med*) in Tibet.” In *New Studies of the Old Tibetan Documents: Philology, History and Religion*, edited by Yoshiro Imaeda, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Tsuguhito Takeuchi, 411–446. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa.
10. Verhagen, Pieter Cornelis. 2000. *A History of Sanskrit Grammatical Literature in Tibet. Vol. 2, Assimilation into Indigenous Scholarship*. Leiden: Brill.
11. Wylie, Turrell. 1959. “A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 22: 261–267.

III Other Online Sources

Online Dictionaries

1. Tibetan-English-Sanskrit Dictionary: <https://dictionary.christian-steinert.de/>
2. The Tibetan and Himalayan Library: <https://tth.thlib.org/>
3. Sambhota Dictionary Search: <https://dict.dharma-treasure.org/>

Tibetan Romanization

1. THL Wylie transliteration: <https://thlib.org/terms/#/terms/transliterate>
2. THL Tibetan Phonetics: <https://thlib.org/terms/#/terms/phonetics>

Tibetan Letters Pronunciation

1. https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=2.%09Tibetan+Consonants+and+the+ir+Sounds+