

Phonetic Romanization of the Tibetan Language

Principles of Practice

This working document records the principles that were employed in creating the recommended column in the table of phonetic word variants for Tibetan person, place, and deity names. This table continues to be edited and treated as a living document. These principles are guidelines based on the understanding that the primary purpose of such a standard word list for Tibetan terms is to capture common usages and intuitive spellings in the English language; a secondary use is to increase the searchability of such terms in online resources. These principles are not scientifically based on a linguistic formula for phoneticizing the Tibetan language (see THL phonetics).

Active contributing institutions to this project include the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, Rubin Museum of Art, and the Treasury of Lives.

Phonetic Principles

1. Use the Roman alphabet to phonetically represent the Tibetan language.
2. Spellings are easy to be pronounced by international English language readers.
3. No diacritic marks or hyphens are employed to represent Tibetan sounds.
4. Follow the Wylie transliteration whenever possible.
5. Spellings are to be consistent and simple.
6. Proper person and place names are capitalized following common English standard.
7. In certain instances, phonetic renderings are to be based on common usage. If a Tibetan word has precedent through its popular usage in English-language print, that popular usage can replace an expected phonetic spelling based on the principles outlines in this document

Phonetics of Vowels

ཀི	ཀུ	ཀེ	ཀོ
KI	KU	KE	KO
ki	ku	ke	ko

Phonetics of Consonants:

ཀ	ཁ	ག	ང
K	KH	G	NG
k	kh	g or k	ng

ཅ	ཆ	ཇ	ཉ
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C	CH	J	NY
ch	ch	j	ny

ᠲ	ᠰ	ᠳ	ᠨ
T	TH	D	N
t	t	d	n

ᠫ	ᠫ	ᠪ	ᠮ
P	PH	B	M
p	p	b	m

ᠰ	ᠰ	ᠳ	ᠰ
TS	TSH	DZ	W
ts	ts	dz	w

ᠵ	ᠵ	ᠠ	ᠠ
ZH	Z	'	Y
zh	z	[nil]	y

ᠷ	ᠯ	ᠰ	ᠰ
R	L	SH	S
r	l	sh	s

ᠬ	ᠠ
H	A
h	a

ᠬ	ᠬ	ᠭ
KY	KHY	GY
ky	ky	gy

ᠫ	ᠫ	ᠪ	ᠮ
PY	PHY	BY	MY
ch	ch	j	ny

ᠬ	ᠬ	ᠭ
KR	KHR	GR

tr tr dr

ᠲᠷ ᠲᠬᠷ ᠳᠷ ᠨᠷ
TR THR DR NR
tr tr dr n

ᠫᠷ ᠫᠬᠷ ᠪᠷ ᠮᠷ
PR PHR BR MR
tr tr dr m

ᠰᠬᠷ ᠰᠷ ᠬᠷ
SHR SR HR
shr s hr

ᠯᠤ ᠬᠤᠯᠤ ᠪᠤᠯᠤ ᠵᠤᠯᠤ ᠷᠤᠯᠤ ᠰᠤᠯᠤ
KL KHL BL ZL RL SL
l l l d l l

Changes from Wylie to Phonetic:

<u>Wylie</u>	<u>Phonetic</u>
c	= ch
th	= t
ph	= p
tsh	= ts
khy	= khy
py	= ch
phy	= ch
by	= j
my	= ny
kr	= tr
chr	= tr
gr	= dr
thr	= tr
nr	= n
pr	= tr
phr	= tr
br	= dr
mr	= m

sr	= s
kl	= l
khl	= l
bla	= l
zla	= d
rla	= l
sla	= l
'o	= o
'od	= o
'	

nil unless it precedes another syllable, in which case it is inflected by the prefix of the following syllable

Principles in Practice:

1. An “a” before “l”, “d” and “n” suffix is represented with an “e”.

Examples:

dpal ldan = pelden
 ral pa can = relpachen
 thub bstan = tubten

Exceptions:

dpal sprul = Patrul (NOT Peltrul)

2. If “ga” is the final letter in a syllable, it is represented with a “k”.

Example:

dwags po = dakpo
 chos grags = chodrak
 dge lugs = Geluk
 phug = puk
 phag = pak

exceptions:

'jigs med = Jigme
 rig pa = rigpa
 rig 'dzin = rigdzin
 spyen ras gzigs = Chenrezi
 rdzogs chen = dzogchen

3. Suffix “ba” is “b”

Examples:

byang chub = changchub

sgrub = drub

sgrub chen = drubchen

4. Final syllable “ba” and “bo” become “wa” and “wo”. First syllables remain “ba” etc.

Examples:

gsang ba = sangwa

jo bo = Jowo

5. Syllables py, phy, by are ch, ch, j

Examples:

spyen ras gzigs = Chenrezi

sbyin dag = jindak

6. Syllable “my” is “ny”

Examples:

Smyong = nyong

7. Syllables with “r” subscripts:

kr = tr

khr = tr

pr = tr

phr = tr

tr = tr

thr = tr

gr = dr

br = dr

dr = dr

Examples:

sgrol ma = Drolma

‘bras spungs = Drepung

‘phrin las = Trinle

Exception:

sprul sku = tulku

8. Syllable “zla” is “da”

Example:

zla ba = dawa

9. Double consonants are kept:

Examples:

gzhon nu = zhonnu

sangs rgyas = sanggye

seng ge = sengge

10. If the Wylie is “z”, then apply a “z”; if the Wylie is “zh”, then apply a “zh”.

Example:

bzang po = Zangpo

kun bzang = Kunzang

blo bzang = Lobzang

gzhan stong = zhentong

zhe chen = Zhechen

11. Words that end in “e” or “as” are represented with “e”.

Examples:

dorje

guge

rinpoche

12. When an *achung* is inflected with a vowel marker, the phonetic is given as a double vowel.

Examples:

byi'u = jiu

be'u = beu

ga'o = gao

rig pa'i = rigpai

13. The letter *achung* is generally silent; exceptions are if it is the prefix of a secondary syllable in a word, then it is represented with an “n”.

Examples:

bka' 'gyur = kangyur

14. prefixes of the second syllable are sometimes pronounced

Examples:

blo bzang = Lobzang

a mdo = Amdo