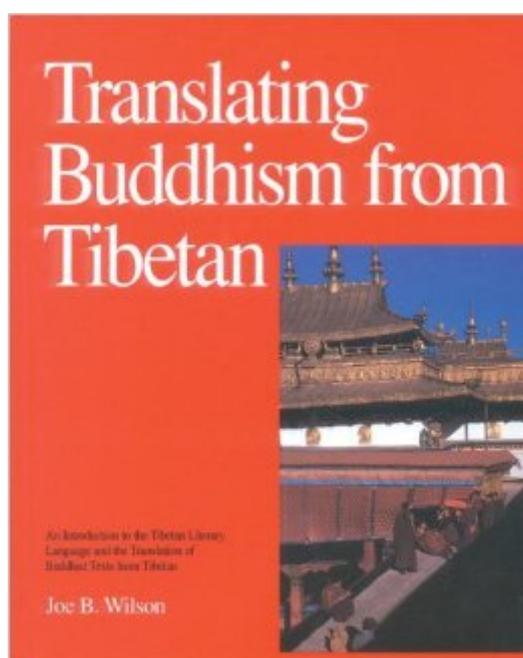


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# Translating Buddhism From Tibetan: An Introduction To The Tibetan Literary Language And The Translation Of Buddhist Texts From Tibetan



## Synopsis

This complete textbook on classical Tibetan is suitable for beginning or intermediate students. It begins with rules for reading writing and pronouncing Tibetan, gradually carrying the reader through the patterns seen in the formation of words and into the repeating patterns of Tibetan phrases, clauses, and sentences. Students with prior experience will find the seven appendices "which review the rules of pronunciation grammar and syntax" provide an indispensable reference. It balances traditional Tibetan grammatical and syntactic analysis with a use of terminology that reflects English preconceptions about sentence structure. Based on the system developed by Jeffrey Hopkins at the University of Virginia, this book presents in lessons with drills and reading exercises a practical introduction to Tibetan grammar syntax and technical vocabulary used in Buddhist works on philosophy and meditation. An extremely well designed learning system, it serves as an introduction to reading and translating and to Buddhist philosophy and meditation. Through easily memorizable paradigms the student comes to recognize and understand the recurrent patterns of the Tibetan language. Each chapter contains a vocabulary full of helpful Buddhist terms.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Joe Wilson's book is an outstanding achievement. Any serious student of literary Tibetan should own a copy, along with Goldstein's Modern Literary Tibetan, Beyer's Classical Tibetan Language, and Erik Schmidt's Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary. Wilson has achieved an effective (though in some

respects unusual, and debatable) synthesis of grammatical approaches based on Latin, English-language and traditional Tibetan grammars. Though expert readers will find much of this information redundant, students in the first three or four years of formal study stand to gain much from this book. Translating Buddhism from Tibetan will be particularly useful for students who wish to read Buddhist scriptures or study Tibetan scholastic commentaries. Most of the examples in the book are drawn from one of these two genres. Students interested in contemporary and secular Tibetan literature should consult Goldstein's book mentioned above; those interested in a more deeply researched, scholarly discussion of Tibetan syntax and morphology, or in archaic forms of Tibetan language, should have a look at Beyer.

This is the first book I bought at the start of my journey into Tibetan. The overall strategy of this book is to build a hybrid Tenglish (Tibetan-English) language, which should gradualise and facilitate the student's approach to Tibetan texts. I regard this idea as essentially flawed and therefore I basically agree with the less enthused reviewers. Still, this is a honourable work and it may be useful for a first, cautious approach to classical Tibetan. If you want to plunge into the real thing right away, I suggest you buy Stephen Hodge's "Introduction to Classical Tibetan" (if you can find it).

I am less enthused about this massive tome than the other reviewers. I have a feeling that the book has failed to make the transition from a very lively university course to a textbook. The approach using all the different 'dimensions' is rather idiosyncratic. The problem is that there are few other choices when it comes to Tibetan textbooks. There is a heavy reliance for examples on the literature of logic. In my opinion more examples from practice-related material would have been useful. Too much reliance is placed on traditional Tibetan grammar for my liking. And that romanisation is unnecessarily complex. Still, it is a very significant work, and in spite of its short-comings, is still the best in this small field.

I have very mixed feelings about this book, but feel compelled to give it 4 stars nonetheless. Why? Because what you can get here, you simply can't get anywhere else. The only other decent introduction to Classical Tibetan that exists (so far as I know) is that by Stephen Hodge, and it is much smaller and will simply not give you the depth of grammatical knowledge or vocabulary that this book can. Some reviewers have complained about the "Tenglish" approach, but I can't really think of any other way to present Tibetan grammar in a comprehensible way. Goldstein does the same thing, though less explicitly, in his "Essentials of Modern Literary Tibetan" (in all the

transliterations) and it works for me. Another reviewer commented that the book is overly pedantic in its detailed explanations and grammatical quibbling - well, what does one expect from a 700-page tome on archaic (more or less) philosophical grammar and vocabulary? You didn't think Classical Tibetan was going to be a walk in the park did you? In any case you can simply skip over the details when Wilson gets a little too in depth. The major problem with this book as I see it is that it is fairly unbalanced. Meaning, in the first 7 chapters or so there are essentially no sentence/vocabulary exercises, leaving you to somehow (by rote, was my method) memorize some 150-200 terms that are introduced (and not easy ones - 'non-associated compositional factors' comes up, e.g.). This improves though, with quite a few exercises in the later chapters. This added context and required practice/effort really helps you to memorize the vocab and understand the grammar better. Presumably these were left out of early chapters so as not to discourage the student or to make it easier, but instead it just means you have lots to memorize without much contextual help - a big mistake, in my opinion. Which leaves me at the final point, which is that this is a necessary book, I think, for anyone interested in Classical Tibetan. The field is simply too small. The only other 'intro' level books really are Craig Preston's "How to Read Classical Tibetan" series (two volumes so far, hopefully more to come), but these really aren't introductions. They presuppose thorough knowledge of how to read Tibetan and an understanding of its grammar, as well a fair vocabulary. He was also a student of Wilson's, so all his terminology and explanations etc. follow Wilson's style and terms. In short: yes there are problems, sometimes it is a bore and overly pedantic, there are not nearly enough exercises for a self-learned... but you need this book if you want to learn Classical Tibetan. So get it and wade through it - it is worth it.

I am presently using Wilson's book as the primary textbook for an intensive Tibetan language course and am about 1/3 through the course. Having a skilled teacher to explain the grammar, syntax, orthography and doctrinal elements, or to expand upon Wilson's explanations of them is a must. (That's no criticism of Wilson's text, just a fact of language acquisition.) Wilson's text is well structured and detailed, and his explanations are quite lucid and accessible. There are audio files available to help with pronunciation recorded by a native Tibetan speaker. For an American English speaker not used to retroflex Ds and Rs, the recordings are indispensable. The text is intended for those who seek to become skilled translators of literary Tibetan Buddhist texts and commentaries. It is not for those seeking conversational Tibetan skills. Paul Hackett's "Tibetan Verb Lexicon" is intended (by Hackett) as a companion to Wilson. Hackett complements Wilson well. Two weeks into my course, I am making good progress. Wilson's text is a large part of my success thus far.

Very useful book for learners with a constructive introduction to Tibetan sentence structure and a useful basic vocabulary for classical Tibetan. Start with this book if you want to learn to read Tibetan and get a good basis. With the next edition please give us a lighter version and add an index!

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