



བྱ་ཤིས་བདེ་ལེགས། བུ་ཕུ་བཞོན་པ།

TIBETAN LANGUAGE

Tibetan language is the mother tongue of peoples throughout Tibet and Tibetans in exile. Tibetan is also spoken in the Himalayan regions of India including Ladakh, Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti, Sikkim, Tawang and Bomdila areas of the State of Arunachal. Tibetan is also the basis of Bhutanese mother tongue. It is also the language of many ethnic groups including Sherpa and Mustang in the high Himalayan regions of Nepal. It is narrowly known but Tibetan is also language of people of Baltistan in the northern part of Pakistan. In Mongolia, Tibetan is widely known as the classical language of Buddhism. The spoken Tibetan comprises a very large number of dialects. The dialect of Tibet's capital city, Lhasa, now also known as Central or Standard Tibetan, serves as a lingua franca (a language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different), and also forms the basis for the exile dialect.

Tibetan language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group, a sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Contemporary linguistic scholars classify Tibetan as a member of the Trans-Himalayan language. In the seventh century, Thonme Sambhota, a minister of the Emperor Songtsen Gampo created Tibetan alphabet and composed grammar texts based on Sanskrit. The script evolved through the centuries and today Tibetan is written in a few different types of scripts but the two most common are U-chen and U-me, respectively used for printing books and handwritten. Ink and paper as well as technology of publishing texts using woodblock printing came from China.

Tibetan is the major language in terms of translation works of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit. Despite the lost originals, whole set of the Buddha's teachings and their commentaries by the ancient Indian Buddhist scholars are still preserved well in Tibetan in form of translation. Thus today, Tibetan language is indispensable for learning Buddhism especially Vajrayana in its entirety.