# SUMMARY OF PROPOSED REVISIONS TO TIBETAN ROMANIZATION TABLE

August 25, 2014 (corrected December 2, 2014)

The following is a summary of proposed revisions to the ALA-LC Tibetan romanization table:

GENERAL

1. The romanization of Tibetan words would continue to be based on how they are written (orthography), but modified to accord with the "Wylie Transliteration" system which was developed in 1959 and has served internationally as the leading publishing norm in Tibetan Studies for the past three decades.

2. It is suggested that the table be rearranged to reflect standard presentations of the Tibetan alphabet and divided into four sections for the ease of catalogers: Consonants; Vowels and Diphthongs; Other Letters or Diacritical Marks Used in Words of Non-Tibetan Origin; and Consonant Clusters with Non-Joiner to Disambiguate.

CONSONANTS TABLE

1. It is suggested to romanize ཁ as ng instead of ṅ in order to accord with the Wylie transliteration system and user expectations.

2. It is suggested to romanize ཉ as ny instead of ñ in order to accord with the Wylie transliteration system and user expectations.

3. It is suggested to romanize ཞ་ as zh instead of ź in order to accord with the Wylie transliteration system and user expectations.

4. It is suggested to romanize ཤ་ as sh instead of ś in order to accord with the Wylie transliteration system and user expectations.

5. It is suggested to continue romanizing འ་ with an alif and not an apostrophe, since the current use of the alif is not causing problems for users. However, this convention should be explicitly stated in the Table and the instruction to use an apostrophe removed. This recommendation is made after careful thought and testing, and a more comprehensive discussion of the issues is in order:

    a. In actuality, Tibetan catalogers in the LC-Delhi Office (since 1993 at least, and reportedly prior to that as well) have consistently used an alif to render the *'a-chung* ( འ་ ), even though the Table prescribes an apostrophe.  The Table should be revised to reflect actual practice, with the alif mapped to U+02BC in keeping with the LC revision of March 2005.

    b.  Although Wylie Transliteration uses an apostrophe instead of an alif, searches using the apostrophe are still successful since catalog systems ignore diacritical marks. In this case, consistency with past records is deemed desirable since the input-norm is Wylie-compatible.

    c.  An apostrophe (or single quote) can be especially problematic for Tibetan. Unlike Japanese and Korean, where the apostrophe appears only between two consonants, in Tibetan the *'a-chung* frequently appears at the start of the syllable. An apostrophe in the initial position can cause difficulties in some software and

bibliographic tools. When creating Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, for example, the

initial apostrophe can be automatically deleted.  Also, there are many circumstances

(e.g. preparing a document in Microsoft Word) where the apostrophe is changed to

a "smart" version and encoded as a different character.

d.  A change to the apostrophe is not sensible in the larger scheme of supporting

robust searching.  In Google-type searching, the apostrophe is completely ignored --

it is stripped out of the search string.  Also, by retaining the alif, certain strings with

this more unique character can be retrieved "backstage" by systems staff if

necessary – and not least for the purpose of generating original script for parallel

fields.  Targeted searches for strings with apostrophes might be more difficult to

implement.

e.  The international publishing standard is to use a left-turning apostrophe. Since

the alif effectively has a similar appearance, it does not cause difficulty for users

who want to extract records for a syllabus or bibliography, for example.

f. One cataloger in Europe has urged adoption of "v" to render the *'a-chung*, but this

convention does not reflect the international norm and was largely opposed in the

various fora in which feedback was sought while writing this proposal.

VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS TABLE

1. It is suggested to move the *a-chen* ( ཨ་ ) from the Vowels Table to the Consonant

Table. While there still remain questions regarding the nature of the a-chen, scholars

generally agree that it is a consonant (or "zero-consonant").  Using an "a" to represent

the *a-chen* ( ཨ་ ) reflects that the vowel a is considered inherent in or intrinsically

associated with the consonant. With the addition of vowel markers, then ཨི་ , ཨུ་ ,ཨེ་ , and ཨོ་ are transcribed i, u, e, and o respectively.

2. It is suggested to rearrange the vowels and diphthongs for easier consultation.


OTHER LETTERS OR DIACRITICAL MARKS USED IN WORDS OF NON-TIBETAN ORIGIN

1. The consonant cluster ཛྷ་ (jha) should be excluded from the Table, since it does not appear in Tibetan texts; it was for the same reason first deprecated and subsequently dropped from the Unicode Standard.

2. The avagraha ( ཅ ) should be added to the Table and rendered with a spacing grave accent (U+0060). See the revised Table and related note 7.


CONSONANT CLUSTERS WITH NON-JOINER TO DISAMBIGUATE

1. The current practice of separating "g" and "y" with a modified prime letter in the transcription of གྱ (g'ya) should be continued, but the wording of the instructions should be corrected to accord with actual Tibetan orthography. See note 8 in the revised Table. Whereas the current wording states "when g is preceded by y", in fact, the wording should be "when y is preceded by g." (This can be tested by searching for words like *G'yu-thog* and *g'yag*.) The purpose of the diacritical mark is to disambiguate the letter combination གྱ (g'ya) from གྱ་ (gya), which will also facilitate eventual conversion to original Tibetan script.

2. Two other letter combinations also require a diacritical mark to serve as a distinguishing non-joiner: ཙྪ and ཉྫ . For consistency, use of the modified prime letter is also recommended here. Thus, the respective transliterations would be t'sa and n'ya, to disambiguate these letter combinations from ཚ (tsa) and ཉ (nya), respectively.  It is suggested that ཙྪ and ཉྫ be added to the revised Table in a new section called "Consonant Clusters with Non-Joiner to Disambiguate." See Table and related note 9.

REVISIONS TO "NOTES" SECTION:

1. Remove note about brackets for Sanskrit words, since most of these are now grouped in a separate section. The brackets cause confusion, and the distinction is otherwise not necessary.

2. Move instruction for the *tsheg* (previously in note 3) to a new section for Punctuation.

3. Move this instruction from preface to Notes: "Internal capitalization of base consonants is not to be followed." See note 1 in the Table.

4. In what is now note 3 (previously note 4), replace the word "apostrophe" with "alif" and drop the words "in pre-initial and final position" because this distinction is not necessary. The *'a-chung* is always transliterated with an alif, regardless of position.

5. Add statement regarding the treatment of the reversed form of the letter i. See note 5.

6. Add instructions for transliteration of the reverse-d ( ༌ ). See note 6.

7. Add note to explain transliteration of the avagraha. See note 7.

8. Correct wording regarding the romanization of གྱ (g'ya). See note 8.

9. Add instructions for additional consonant clusters requiring a non-joiner for disambiguation. See note 9.

10. Tibetan numerals should be added to the Table to accord with the guideline of the

Library of Congress which states: "Include a table for numerals if the non-Latin script

uses characters other than Western Arabic numerals."  See note 10.