Dzongkha

No romanization systems for Dzongkha have been put forward at the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names or at sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

In 1991 the first phonological romanization for Dzongkha was introduced by the Dzongkha Development Commission. Roman Dzongkha as it was called, was intended to accurately and adequately represent the phonology of the living language and to serve as a standard for representing Dzongkha names and words in the international media. However, the system was not implemented, and later a simplified version of Roman Dzongkha was devised by the same Commission. Bhutan's Ministry of Home Affairs approved the implementation of Roman Dzongkha on May 29, 1997 and made it mandatory for all government institutions to use standardized spellings of geographical names and the guidelines for romanization.

Dzongkha uses an alphasyllabic script (*Uchen*) which occurs in two main forms. The printed or uncial writing (*tshum*) is actually the same as is used in Tibetan. But Bhutanese longhand writing (formal version, *jotshum*, and cursive version, *joyi*) is unique to Dzongkha, making ample use of ligatures. Below only the printed form of characters is presented, for longhand writing one should refer to Dzongkha language manuals.[1] Relationship between script and pronunciation is complex and romanized names cannot be reverted to their original script forms.

System of romanization

The **official romanization (1997)** is as follows.[2]

I. Consonant characters

1 ཀ ka	12 ན na	23 འ a
2 ཁ kha	13 པ pa	24 ཡ ya[B]
3 ག ga	14 ཕ pha	25 ར ra[C]
4 ང nga	15 བ ba, wa	26 ལ la
5 ཅ cha	16 མ ma	27 ཤ sha
6 ཆ chha	17 ཙ tsa	28 ས sa
7 ཇ ja	18 ཚ tsha	29 ཧ ha
8 ཉ nya	19 ཛ dza	30 ཨ a
9 ཏ ta	20 ཝ wa[A]	
10 ཐ tha	21 ཞ zha	
11 ད da	22 ཟ za	

[A] Subscript variant of the character ྭ is not romanized: ཀ *ka*, ད *da*, ཚ *tsha*.

[B] Subscript variant of the character is ྱ, e.g. ཀྱ; for romanizations see Table II.

II. Syllable-initial consonant combinations

The list is not complete. Mainly those romanized differently from general rules are given. See also notes to the main table and note 1 at the end.

1 ཀྱ cha, ka[A]	9 ཀྲ tra	17 ཟྲ dra
2 ཁྱ chha, kha[A]	10 ཁྲ thra	18 ཤྲ shra
3 གྱ ja, gya[A]	11 གྲ dra	19 སྲ sa
4 ཅ cha, pcha	12 ཏྲ tra	20 ཧྲ hra
5 ཆ chha, pchha	13 ཐྲ thra	21 དྭ wa[B]
6 ཇ ja, bja	14 དྲ dra	22 ཊ da
7 དྱ ya	15 པྲ tra	23 ལྷ lha
8 ཉ nya	16 ཕྲ thra	

[A] Palatal variants *ch, chh, j* are generally used before *a, o* and *u*.
[B] Not romanized if followed by any other vowel than *a*.

III. Vowel characters (ཀ stands for any consonant character)

1 ཀ a, e/ay[A]	3 ཀུ u, ue/u[B]	5 ཀོ o, oe/o[C]
2 ཀི i	4 ཀེ e	

[A] Romanized *e* or *ay* if followed by a suffix ད་ ན་ ལ་ ས: སེཕུ *Sephu*, ཨེམིརས *Emiray*.
[B] Romanized *ue* or *u* if followed by a suffix ད་ ན་ ལ་ ས: ལྷུནཙེ *Lhuentse*, སུནྟ་ཏེ *Suntale*.
[C] Romanized *oe* or *o* if followed by a suffix ད་ ན་ ལ་ ས: སོ *Soe*, དོ་ཏེང *Doteng*.

IV. Syllable endings (suffixes)

1 ག *g, k* or not romanized	6 མ *m*
2 ང *ng*, or not romanized	7 འ not romanized
3 ད not romanized, except *thed*	8 ར *r*, or not romanized
4 ན *n*, or not romanized	9 ལ *l*, or not romanized
5 བ *b, p*	10 ས not romanized

Notes

1. Dzongkha words are divided into syllables, separated by a special symbol, e.g. ཐིམཕུ *Thimphu*. A graphical syllable may be composed of several elements, including prefixed, superscript and subscript consonant characters that are used syllable-initially, and suffixed consonant characters (one or more) used syllable-finally. This may result in consonants being stacked up on top of the other, e.g. སྐྱ (transliterated *skya*). As a rule, prefixed

consonants are not romanized: གདུང་ནག *Dungna*, ཨགར་ས *Gasa*. Superscript consonants are not romanized, with the exception of ལྷ *lha*: ནང་སྐོར *Nangkor*, སྟང་སེ་བྱིས *Tangsibji*. Suffixed consonants are romanized or not romanized based on local pronunciation, e.g. དྲུང་ཁག *Drungkhag* (subdivision), དབང་ཕྱུག *Wangchhuk* (personal name), སྟག *Ta* (tiger), etc. Secondary suffixed consonants are not romanized, although there are some exceptions: བར་མཚམས *Bartsham*, དངས་ཆུ *Dangchhu*, but གཞལམ་སྒང *Zhemgang*.

2. Additional characters that are found mainly in words of Indic provenance, are romanized as follows: ཏྲ *tra*, ཐྲ *thra*, དྲ *dra*, ཎ *na*, ཁ *kha*, ཚྪ *chha*.

3. Pronunciation of Dzongkha names may vary according to local usage and there are several exceptions to the present romanization guidelines.

References

1. See e.g. *Dzongkha* by George van Driem with the collaboration of Karma Tshering of Gaselô. Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies. Leiden, The Netherlands 1998.
2. Adapted from *Samples for Geographical names of Bhutan in dzongkha and roman dzongkha with brief Guidelines.* Dzongkha Development Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, June 1997.