In the past few years, spoken Tibetan has become increasingly popular in the Western world. More and more tourists, students, and scholars are traveling across cultural areas both within China and in other Tibetan regions. Living in these regions is rare for Western tourists enjoying a walk along the Barkhor market in Lhasa trying to utter or some quickly memorized Tibetan words and phrases to smiling shopkeepers and amused pilgrims. A well-written and all-round practical textbook is what we were all waiting for.

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By Antonio Terrone

B en from the fortunate collaboration between Nicolas Tournadre, Antoinette Meleisea, Marshall Sahlins, and Joeli Votapka, UNESCO experts include Richard Engelberg, Russell Marshall, Edna Tait, and Mali Voi. Most eloquent among the contributors is the accomplished professor of Buddhist teaching transmission in present-day Tibet, Antonio Terrone. This 567-page manual is divided into four main sections: 'Introduction', 'Lessons', 'Grammar', and 'Annexes', including fourteen pages of colour pictures and maps, and two CDs. The Manual, as the title obviously suggests, is addressed to French-speaking readers. For this reason the transcription system chosen, although 'very readable' (p. 8), can on the contrary be quite misleading even for people familiar with French phonology.

The lengthy introduction (pp. 11–53) provides a comprehensive linguistic description of the Tibetan language focusing on its alphabet, writing system, and pronunciation. Linguists readers will surely find it stimulating and well written. After a brief presentation of the Tibetan language and of other Tibetan dialects, an interesting issue is immediately brought up, namely, the definition of 'Standard Tibetan' (1991 skhol). Indeed, as the authors identify as the language spoken in Central Tibet, Lhasa, and in the diaspora (p. 12).

The plurality of Tibetan dialects is well known, and is itself an hindrance to communication not only between Western travelers and Tibetans, but often even among Tibetans from different regions. Religious and historical circumstances have indeed given Lhasa a central position, and its dialect has become a sort of lingua franca for Tibetans transiting through Central Tibet for business, work, or pilgrimage. However, as far as I know, most Tibetans hardly use this term to refer to any 'common Tibetan language'. 'Tibetan' is one of the many words that cannot be clearly defined. Chinese, and its close relatives, are called by the Chinese (zhòngyú), and common speech (zhòngyú, or common speech

The second part of the textbook (pp. 55–561) is divided into forty-one lessons reflecting a quadruplate scheme: new words, new concepts, and new exercises. The dialogues have been tailored on a true-to-life situation that I find essential in learning a spoken language. Situational dialogues such as 'commodity exchange', 'at the football match', 'the Banaskhol', 'a lhasa house', and 'in the kitchen', in addition to test readings such as A kha ston pa'ang (The Tale of Akon ston pā), lead the reader step-by-step into the world of Tibetan culture and the richness of its language. The authors have included occasional but clever sidebars, called civilisation, which give a very concise but practical overview of some features of the Tibetan way of life.

The third section is devoted to the description of the distinctive characteristics of classical Tibetan, and spoken Tibetan. Herein the student will find rubrics dedicated to the structure of the language, its idioms, and some practical aspects of everyday speech. The fourth part of the Manual, consisting of a pronunciation guide, is presented at a conference held as part of the 2000 World Decade for Cultural Development. The responsibility for implementing this Decade was given to UNESCO. The response of Pacifist member states to this request was a wholehearted yes. The conference was to take place on the agenda of the United Nations, which proclaimed the years between 1988 and 1997 as the International Year for Cultural Identity. The conference was to be devoted to the development of regional exchange networks between neighbouring islands, and the existence of regional exchange networks that tended to merge into another, allowing the diffusion of cultural traits through most parts of the Pacific.

The articles in this volume were first presented at a conference held as part of the World Decade for Cultural Development. The conference was to resolve, at least conceptually, the contradictions between culture and development in order to achieve development goals, such as access to material goods, welfare, and amenities, without sacrificing traditional values that continue to provide their electorate derives a great proportion of its livelihood from the subsistence sector, matters of custom and tradition carry considerable political clout. Most Pacific countries have therefore also legislations that assert national legitimacy in terms of their distinctive cultural traditions. One of the implications of this is that the national economies of Pacific countries cannot be adequately encompassed by standard macroeconomic analyses. For that reason, we need to clearly distinguish the concept of sustainable development from the concept of sustainable development in the Pacific, which means the use of tourist and leisure income to promote sustainable development and to improve the quality of life for the indigenous peoples of the region. In the Pacific, sustainable development is defined as the ability of the region to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition is based on the principle of intergenerational equity, which means that future generations should not be disadvantaged compared to the current generation. Sustainable development also implies considering the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of development.}

The already thick book contains two glossaries (pp. 479–549), both of which are short and present everyday terms. The French-Pan-Pacific glossaries are written in English and cover all of the speech variations. While these readings cover a few pages of each phonetic transcription. It’s size and weight hardly make this book a good travel companion or pocket manual for quick reference on Tibetan travels and tours. However, overall, the Manual is a well-written and complete cutting-edge grammar and textbook, making immediate communication in Tibetan accessible for everyone.

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The islanders of the Pacific refer to their societies both as a region and as a large Polynesian linguistic and cultural area which includes all islands in the Pacific Ocean. The central importance of the Pacific in modern world history is also portrayed in the relatively new concept of the Pacific Rim, which, remarkably enough, decentralizes Asia and America by defining them both in relation to the Pacific. At the same time, this importance is reflected in the increasing amount of investment in the Pacific, both by the US and the Asian economic tigers, especially over the past two decades. The French-Pan-Pacific glossaries are written in English and cover all of the speech variations. While these readings cover a few pages of each phonetic transcription. It’s size and weight hardly make this book a good travel companion or pocket manual for quick reference on Tibetan travels and tours. However, overall, the Manual is a well-written and complete cutting-edge grammar and textbook, making immediate communication in Tibetan accessible for everyone.

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