

Title: Introducing the Zou Script
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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring to the attention of the Unicode Technical Committee (UTC) the Zou script, which is used by the Zou community of Manipur, India. The present author is in contact with specialists of Zou language, history, and culture.¹ A preliminary proposal to encode the script in the Universal Character Set (UCS) will be submitted once sufficient information has been gathered. An allocation for the script should be made in the roadmap to the Supplementary Multilingual Plane.

2 Background

The Zou [zom] language is spoken by fifty-thousand people in the adjoining regions of Chin State, Myanmar and Manipur, India.² It belongs to the Northern branch of the Kuki-Chin subfamily of Tibeto-Burman languages. Zou is a recognized language for secondary education in Manipur.³ Speakers of Zou belong to the ‘Zomi’ macro-ethnic community, which also includes speakers of the Tedim [ctd] language of Chin State and the Paite [pck] and Vaiphei [vap] languages of Manipur, among other groups. The name ‘Zou’ is the spelling used in India, while ‘Zo’ is the preferred form in Myanmar.

The Zou script is known indigenously as *zolai* ‘script of the Zo’ or ‘script of the highlands’ (*zo* ‘highlands’; *lai* ‘writing’). The name *zolai* has been generically applied to various writing systems for the Northern Kuki-Chin languages, such as the indigenous scripts associated with Pau Cin Hau⁴ and the Latin-based orthography of J. H. Cope, which were developed in the early decades of the 20th century. It is also spelled as *zo lai*, *zou lai*, *zoulai*, etc. The term *zotuallai* (*zotual lai*, etc.) ‘local script of the Zo’ is also used.

‘Zolai’ is also the formal indigenous name for the Zou script described here. The script was developed by M. Siahzathang of Churachandpur, Manipur in 1952 for writing the Zou language. Siahzathang appears to be actively involved in the development and promotion of the script. Zolai has received support from Zou cultural organizations as well as from the state government of Manipur. The user community for the script is small, but growing, and there is current usage and development of the script.

Zou organizations began expressing support for Siahzathang’s script beginning in the 1970s. The United Zou Organization (UZO) adopted the Zou script as its official writing system for the Zou language in 1976.⁵ Literary organizations instituted working groups to manage the development and promotion of the script. In the 1990s, the Zou Laimal Sai Pawl (‘Zou Literature Society’ [ZLS]) in Churachandpur began to promote the script by forming the Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl (‘Zou Script Development Society’ [ZSDS]). The ZSDS has

¹ See zolengthe.net February 3, 2010. ² Lewis 2009. ³ Government of Manipur. ⁴ See Pandey 2010. ⁵ Minthang 2010.

published books to provide instruction in the script. The *Zoulai Sinna* ('Zou Script Self-Instructor') was published in 1999 and, more recently, the *Zolai Simpat Bu* ('Zou Script Primary Book') was published in October 2009.

The Zou script has received support from the Manipur state government. The Manipur State Kala Academy acknowledged the work of Siahzathang by presenting him with awards in 1984 and 1991. In November 2009, the ZLS hosted an event for the public release of *Zolai Simpat Bu*, which was attended by L. Jayantakumar Singh, the education minister of Manipur (see picture in Figure 4).⁶ Most recently, in April 2010, the ZSDS met with experts from the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) to discuss the development of the Zou language, during which a presentation was given by Siahzathang on his 'Zolai'.⁷

The Zou script appears to have changed significantly over the years. The character repertoire has been expanded. The original script developed in 1952 consisted of 25 characters, while the present version of 2009 consists of 90 characters. Glyph shapes have also changed, as may be observed in the Zou text used on different versions of the emblem of the United Zou Organization, given in Figure 1. The most recent versions of the script are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Any genetic relationship between Zou and other scripts is superficial. It has been suggested that Zou is simply an "admixture of Burmese and Bengali script".⁸ It does appear that some glyphic elements resemble those found in other scripts, but the semantic values and functions of the characters are not similar.

3 The Writing System

3.1 Structure

Zou is a hybrid system that possess features of alphasyllabic and alphabetic scripts. It is written left-to-right.

3.2 Character Repertoire

A stable character repertoire for Zou will be determined once additional information is obtained. The available script charts suggest a repertoire of 90 characters, which consists of 27 capital letters with corresponding 27 small letters, 16 ligatures, 8 vowel signs, 1 VIRAMA-like sign, 1 punctuation mark, and 10 digits. Character names are based upon those given in script charts.

3.3 Character Properties

Tentative properties for Zou characters are given below in the Unicode Character Database format:

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xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER A;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER BA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER OU;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER DA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER RI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER GA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER HA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER FI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER NA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER I;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
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⁶ zolengthe.net October 11, 2009.

⁷ Zo Indigenous Forum 2010.

⁸ Thanglienmang 2009.

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xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER JI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER CHI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER SHI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER KA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER O;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER PA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER EA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER KHE;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER MO;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER NGA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER SA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER TA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER U;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER VA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER ZA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER Y;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOU CAPITAL LETTER LA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER A;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER BA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER OU;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER DA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER RI;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER GA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER HA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER FI;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER NA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER I;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER JI;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER CHI;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER SHI;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER KA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER O;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER PA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER EA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER KHA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER MO;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER NGA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER SA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER TA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER U;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER VA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER ZA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER Y;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx001;ZOU SMALL LETTER LA;Ll;0;L;;;;N;;;xx000;xx000
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE IE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE UO;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE PH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE TH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE GE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE VO;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE LH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE FU;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE TL;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE KE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE HR;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE TIA;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE AI;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE IA;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE BE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU LIGATURE JH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN A;Mc;0;L;;;;N;;;

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xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN I;Mc;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN O;Mn;0;NSM;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN OO;Mn;0;NSM;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN E;Mc;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN EE;Mc;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN U;Mn;0;NSM;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VOWEL SIGN OOO;Mn;0;NSM;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU VIRAMA;Mn;0;NSM;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU PUNCTUATION MARK;Po;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOU DIGIT ZERO;Nd;0;L;;0;0;0;N;;;;;
xx001;ZOU DIGIT ONE;Nd;0;L;;1;1;1;N;;;;;
xx002;ZOU DIGIT TWO;Nd;0;L;;2;2;2;N;;;;;
xx003;ZOU DIGIT THREE;Nd;0;L;;3;3;3;N;;;;;
xx004;ZOU DIGIT FOUR;Nd;0;L;;4;4;4;N;;;;;
xx005;ZOU DIGIT FIVE;Nd;0;L;;5;5;5;N;;;;;
xx006;ZOU DIGIT SIX;Nd;0;L;;6;6;6;N;;;;;
xx007;ZOU DIGIT SEVEN;Nd;0;L;;7;7;7;N;;;;;
xx008;ZOU DIGIT EIGHT;Nd;0;L;;8;8;8;N;;;;;
xx009;ZOU DIGIT NINE;Nd;0;L;;9;9;9;N;;;;;

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4 Questions

Given below are some questions that require clarification:

1. The indigenous Zou name for the script is ‘Zolai’. In English-language blog articles, the script is called ‘Zou Script’. Should the Zou or English name be assigned to the script in the UCS, ie. ‘Zou’ or ‘Zolai’?
2. Does the latest version of the script retain the distinctions between capital and small letters?
3. How should the *akaihuoyte* letters shown in Figure 2 be treated? Are they atomic characters or true ligatures?

Insight into these issues will assist the development of an encoding for the Zou script. Comments may be submitted to the present author at the email address given at the beginning of this document.

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(a)



(b)

Figure 1: Emblem of the United Zou Organization showing different glyph shapes for Zou letters.

Capital Letters: ZOLAI					
					
A	Ba	Ou	Da	Ly (Ri)	Ga
					
Ha	Fi	Na	I	Ji	Chi
					
Shi	Ka	O	Pa	Ea	Khe
					
Mo	Nga	Sa	Ta	U	Va
					
	Za	Y	La		
Small Letters:					
					
A	Ba	Ou	Da	Ri	Ga
					
Ha	Fi	Na	I	Ji	Chi
					
Shi	Ka	O	Pa	E	Khe
					
Mo	Nga	Sa	Ta	U	Va
					
	Za	Y	La		
Akaihuoyte :					
					
ie	uo	ph	th	gc	vo
					
lh	fu	tl	ke	hr	tia
					
	ai	ia	be	jh	
Numbers:					
					
1	2	3	4	5	6
					
				7	8
					
					9
					
					10

Published by : Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl, Churachandpur, Manipur

Figure 2: Chart of Zou ('Zolai') published by Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl (from "Zo Lai & Zokuom Tongthai" 2007).

ZOLAI ၵᄡᄰᄢ	
Zolai gomden :-	
၁=a ၁၆ ၆၀ ၁၁ ၁၂ ၁၃ ၁၄ ၁၅ ab ba da ra ga ha fa na ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ja cha sha ka Pa kha ma nga ၁၃ ၁၄ ၁၅ ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ sa ta va va za ya la.	၁=e ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ae be de re ge he fe ne ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ je che she ke Pe khe me nge ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ se te ue ve ze ye le.
၁=i ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ bi di ri gi hi fi na ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ji chi shi ki Pi khi mi ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ngi si ti vi zi yi li.	၁=u ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ae be de re ge he fe ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ne je che she ke ge ne ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ khe me nge se te ue ve ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ze ye le.
၁=2 (II) ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ bo do ro go ho fo no ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ jo cho sho ko Po kho mo ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ngo so to vo zo yo lo	၁=3 (II) ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ba da ri ga ha fa na ji ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ chi shi ka Pa khe mo nga sa ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ta va za ya la.
၁=4 (II) ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ bo do ro go ho fo no jo cho sho ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ko po kho mo ngo sa to vo zo yo lo.	၁=5 (II) ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ bo do ro go ho fo no jo cho sho ၁၆ ၁၇ ၁၈ ၁၉ ၂၀ ၂၁ ၂၂ ko po kho mo ngo sa to vo zo yo lo.

Figure 3: A chart of Zou consonant-vowel combinations from *Zolai Simpat Bu* (from zolengthe.net April 14, 2010).



Figure 4: A picture of L. Jayantakumar Singh, the education minister of Manipur, speaking at the release of *Zolai Simpat Bu* in Churachandpur, Manipur on October 10, 2009 (from *Hmasawwna Thar* 2009).