

Title: Introducing the Zolai Script
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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring to the attention of the Unicode Technical Committee (UTC) a writing system called Zolai, which is used by the Zomi-speaking communities of Manipur, India. The present author is in contact with specialists of Zomi languages, history, and culture and with persons involved in the promotion of Zomi heritage.¹ Research is ongoing and a preliminary proposal to encode Zolai in the Universal Character Set (UCS) will be submitted once sufficient information has been gathered.

It is requested that a tentative allocation be made for Zolai in the Supplementary Multilingual Plane (Plane 1) using the information specified below.

2 ‘Zomi’ and ‘Zolai’

Zomi is a collective name by which speakers of the northern languages of the Kuki-Chin subfamily of Tibeto-Burman traditionally identify themselves. The term ‘Zomi’ is also written with syllables transposed as ‘Mizo’, as in the name of the Indian state of Mizoram. The Zomi [zom] macro-linguistic community includes speakers of the Tedim Chin [ctd] language of Myanmar and the Paite [pck] and Vaiphei [vap] languages of Manipur, India. The Zomi also identify themselves as ‘Zou’ in India and ‘Zo’ in Myanmar.

The term *zolai* means ‘script of the Zo’ or ‘script of the highlands’ (*zo* ‘highlands’; *lai* ‘writing’). The name is also spelled as *zo lai*, *zou lai*, *zoulai*, etc. The term *zotullai* (*zotual lai*, etc.) ‘local script of the Zou’ is also used. These names have been generically applied to writing systems for Zomi languages, such as the indigenous scripts associated with Pau Cin Hau² and the Latin-based orthography of J. H. Cope, which were developed in the early decades of the 20th century.

3 Background

The Zolai script described here was developed by M. Siahzathang Zou of Churachandpur, Manipur in 1952.³ Siahzathang appears to be actively involved in the development and promotion of the script. Zolai has received support from Zomi cultural organizations as well as from the state government of Manipur. The user community for Zolai is small, but growing, and there is current usage and development of the script.

Zomi organizations began expressing support for Siahzathang’s script beginning in the 1970s. The United Zomi Organization (UZO) adopted Zolai as its official writing system for Zomi languages in 1976.⁴ Lit-

¹ See zolengthe.net February 3, 2010. ² See Pandey 2010. ³ D. Zou, personal correspondence, February 2010. ⁴ Minthang 2010.

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

Zolai 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).⁵ Most recently, in April 2010, the ZSDS met with experts from the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) to discuss the development of Zomi languages, during which a presentation was given by Siahzathang on the Zolai script.⁶

4 The Script

Zolai is a left-to-right writing system. It is a hybrid alphasyllabic and alphabetic system.

The 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 scripts used on different versions of the emblem of UZO, given in Figure 1. The most recent versions of the script are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

Any genetic relationship between Zolai and other scripts is superficial. It has been suggested that Zolai is simply an "admixture of Burmese and Bengali script".⁷ 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.

4.1 Character Repertoire

Research is still underway on the Zolai character repertoire. The present Zolai appears to have 90 characters consisting of 27 capital letters with corresponding 27 small letters, 16 diagraphs, 8 vowel signs, 1 VIRAMA-like sign, 1 punctuation mark, and 10 digits. Character names are based upon those given in script charts and specimens.

4.2 Character Properties

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

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xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER A;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER BA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER OU;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER DA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER RI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER GA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER HA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER FI;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER NA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;xx001;
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⁵ zolengthe.net October 11, 2009.

⁶ Zo Indigenous Forum 2010.

⁷ Thanglienmang 2009.

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

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

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(a)



(b)

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



Published by : Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl, Churachandpur, Manipur

Figure 2: Chart of the Zolai script published by Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl (from “Zo Lai & Zokuom Tongthai” 2007).

ZOLAI ལྷཱཱཱ

Zolai gomden :-

<p>a=a</p> <p>ཐའ་ འེ འོ འུ འཱ འེ འུ འཱ</p> <p>ab ba da ra ga ha fa na</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>ja cha sha ka Pa kha ma nga</p> <p>སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ</p> <p>sa ta ua va za ya la. (u)</p> <p>i=i</p> <p>བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ</p> <p>bi di ri gi hi fi na</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>ji chi shi ki Pi khi mi</p> <p>སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ</p> <p>ngi si ti vi zi yi li.</p> <p>ཉེ=ཉེ (u)</p> <p>བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ བེ</p> <p>bo do ro go ho fo no</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>jo cho sho ko Po kho mo</p> <p>སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ སྟེ</p> <p>ngo so to vo zo yo lo</p> <p>ལེ=ལེ (u)</p> <p>འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>ba da ri ga ha fa na ji</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>chi shi ka Pa khe mo nga sa</p> <p>སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ</p> <p>ta va za ya la.</p>	<p>འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>ae be de re ge he fe ne</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>je che she ke Pe khe me nge</p> <p>སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ</p> <p>se te ue ve ze ye le.</p> <p>ལེ=e</p> <p>འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>ae be de re ge he fe</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>ne je che she ke ge ge</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>khe me nge se te ue ve</p> <p>ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ</p> <p>ze ye le.</p> <p>ལེ=u</p> <p>འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>au bu du ru hu fu no iu</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>jo chu shu ku ru pu eu khu</p> <p>ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ</p> <p>mu su tu w vu zu yu lu.</p> <p>འེལེ འེལེ འེལེ འེལེ འེལེ འེལེ འེལེ</p> <p>'འེལེ འེལེ: འེལེལེ འེལེལེ'</p> <p>atanga lawtheilo Zolai jemte</p> <p>'net kikoy: chienqa'g'gitdan :-</p> <p>འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>ba da ri ga ha fa na ji</p> <p>ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ ཉེ</p> <p>chi shi ka Pa khe mo nga sa</p> <p>སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ སེ</p> <p>ta va za ya la.</p> <p>ལེ=ལེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ འེ</p> <p>bo do ro go ho fo no jo cho sho</p> <p>ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ ལེ</p> <p>ko po kho mo ngo sa to vo zo yo lo.</p>
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Figure 3: A chart of Zolai consonant-vowel combinations from *Zolai Simpat Bu* (from zolengthe.net April 14, 2010).



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