

Universal Multiple-Octet Coded Character Set
International Organization for Standardization
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Title: Response to L2/22-049, on Western Cham Resolution Meeting

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Executive Summary: This document is a response to L2/22-049, a document that presents the minutes of a meeting that took place on June 18, 2021 between some of the parties concerned with the encoding of Western Cham in Unicode. Document L2/22-049 misrepresents the position of Leb Ke regarding L2/20-061R3. Leb Ke, a scholar of Western Cham script and representative of the CLAC, opposes L2/20-061R3. This document seeks to clarify Leb Ke's position and comment on the position of other parties.

I shared an earlier version of L2/22-049 with Leb Ke on July 8, 2021. That document includes the minutes of a meeting he attended with the Ong Knur and other members of his group (the Ong Knur is the religious authority of the Kan Imam San sect of Islam in Cambodia), who are pushing for the approval of L2/20-061R3. The main point of contention has been the desire of the religious leadership to prevent the use of certain characters that appear in some manuscripts, have been included in fonts, and have been used in published Western Cham textbooks and other materials since 2012. After reading the minutes, which he had not seen before, Leb Ke stated the following:

1. Leb Ke did not agree to support L2/20-061R3 at any point.
2. Leb Ke said in the meeting that if the Ong Knur did not wish to use certain characters in his village, the Ong Knur was within his rights to do so, but that could not be a rule imposed at the national level. Leb Ke also said that all Cham groups in Cambodia should be respected.
3. Leb Ke's signature in the document only reflects his attendance to the meeting, not his approval of the minutes (which did not exist at the time of the signature) nor of any purported agreement.

To this I would like to add that, in spite of the misrepresentation of Leb Ke's position (which was clearly stated in L2/20-285), the Minutes included in L2/22-049 are still an important document, to the extent that they very candidly represent the position of the current Kan Imam San leadership. I would like to highlight the following:

- a) There is no argument regarding the existence of what L2/22-049 refers to as "extra characters". Those characters are found in old manuscripts and have also been used in print for a decade.

The argument is whether they are “necessary”, by which the Ong Knur means they are found in a particular set of documents and books he takes as reference.

- b) The religious leadership is seeking to impose a particular spelling system (one of several traditional ones found in manuscripts in the Ong Knur’s village).
- c) The Ong Knur’s support for L2/20-061R3 stems from a desire to prevent the usage of existing alternative spelling systems.
- d) The Ong Knur is not interested in the preservation of old texts beyond his reference set, or in their academic study.
- e) In spite of any disagreements, the Ong Knur and the Kan Imam San do regard Leb Ke as their foremost expert in Western Cham script, as shown by the fact that he has been commissioned by the Ong Knur to produce the textbooks the Kan Imam San plan to use to teach the script.

As Leb Ke says, the Ong Knur is within his rights to use or promote whatever spelling system he sees fit. It is however unfortunate that he seems to believe that promoting his spelling system requires the elimination of all other existing traditions. It is also unfortunate that his leadership does not seem to understand the role of Unicode fonts beyond their potential to be used to impose spelling conventions. The so-called “extra characters” are necessary to transcribe old manuscripts Leb Ke has identified, as well as to allow for different spelling traditions to continue to exist. Even in the case that the Ong Knur’s preferred spelling becomes the standard spelling used in future textbooks and other materials, there is no reason to deliberately prevent transcription and printing of old manuscripts from other traditions.