

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 Zou script in the Universal Character Set (UCS) will be submitted once sufficient information has been gathered. An allocation for the Zou script should be made in the roadmap to the Supplementary Multilingual Plane (Plane 1) using the data given in Section 3.

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 Chin [ctd] language of Myanmar and the Paite [pck] and Vaiphei [vap] languages of Manipur, India, 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 *zotullai* (*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 Zolai 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 Zolai 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

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

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* (‘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 Zolai.⁷

3 The Writing 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 Zolai 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 Zolai and other scripts is superficial. It has been suggested that Zolai 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.

3.1 Structure

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

3.2 Character Repertoire

A stable character repertoire for Zolai 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 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;
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⁶ zolengthe.net October 11, 2009.

⁷ Zo Indigenous Forum 2010.

⁸ Thanglienmang 2009.

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xx000;ZOLAI CAPITAL LETTER NA;Lu;0;L;;;;N;;;;xx001;
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 LIGATURE IE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE UO;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE PH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE TH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE GE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE VO;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE LH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE FU;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE TL;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE KE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE HR;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE TIA;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE AI;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE IA;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE BE;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;

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xx000;ZOLAI LIGATURE JH;Lo;0;L;;;;N;;;;;
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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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 as the normalized name for the script in the UCS?
2. Does the latest version of the script distinguish between capital and small letters?
3. How should the *akaihuoyte* letters shown in Figure 2 be treated? Are they atomic characters or ligatures?

Insight into these issues will assist the development of an encoding for Zolai. Comments may be submitted to the present author at the email address 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 Zolai 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 Zolai published by Zou Laiteng Sai Pawl (from “Zo Lai & Zokuom Tongthai” 2007).

ZOLAI ၵᄃᄃᄃ	
Zolai gomden :-	
a=a ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ab ba da ra ga ha fa na ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ja cha sha ka Pa kha ma nga ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ sa ta va va za ya la. (u)	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke Pe khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
i=i ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bi di ri gi hi fi na ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ji chi shi ki Pi khi mi ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ngi si ti vi zi yi li.	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
u=u ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bu du ru hu fu nu iu ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ju chu shu ku ru pu eu khu ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ mu su tu w vu zu yu lu.	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
o=o ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bo do ro go ho fo no ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ jo cho sho ko Po kho mo ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ngo so to vo zo yo lo	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
l=l ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bo do ro go ho fo no ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ jo cho sho ko Po kho mo ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ngo so to vo zo yo lo	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
u=u ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bu du ru hu fu nu iu ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ju chu shu ku ru pu eu khu ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ mu su tu w vu zu yu lu.	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
o=o ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bo do ro go ho fo no ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ jo cho sho ko Po kho mo ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ngo so to vo zo yo lo	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.
l=l ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ bo do ro go ho fo no ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ jo cho sho ko Po kho mo ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ᄃᄃ ngo so to vo zo yo lo	ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le. ae ae be de re ge he fe ne je che she ke ge ge khe me nge se te ue ve ze ye le.

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 *Hmasawwna Thar* 2009).