

Comments on naming the “Siddham” encoding

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Anshuman Pandey has recently submitted a preliminary proposal (L2/12-011) for the encoding of the “Siddham” script in the UCS. There are several alternate names for the proposed script. This document intends to arrive at a suitable name for the script encoding.

“Siddham” is the common East Asian name of the proposed script (Salomon, 1998, p. 39). It probably derives its name from the word “*Siddham*” (𑖀𑖩) frequently seen as an invocation in manuscripts and inscriptions. The script seen there is merely the East Asian variant of the mainland Indian script which is sometimes called as “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” in texts on Indian epigraphy (Salomon, 1998, p. 39). Based on its appearance it is also called “*kuṭila*” (Skt. curved/bent) (Ojha, 1971, p. 62).

The earliest available record of the Indian variant of the script being referred to as “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” comes from the Arabic traveler Al-Biruni circa 10th century (Salomon, 1998, p. 39). In all probability he was only recording the name as given by the Indians of his time. It is also interesting to note that even in the 19th century, the invocatory verse “*om namaḥ siddham*” written before learning the alphabets was called as “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” or “*siddhākṣarasamāmnāyaḥ*” in some parts of India (Bühler, 1898, p. 30).

The term “Siddham”, on the other hand, does not seem to appear in any of the Sanskrit sources. The Chinese sources, however, refer to the script by the name “Siddham”, even when referring to the Indian usage. A Chinese monk Chih-kuang records that “Siddham is the script of India” in one of his works (Gulik, 1967, p. 22).

The terms “*Siddham*” and “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” referring to the script are synonymous. *Māṭṛkā* is the Sanskrit term for “alphabet”. Hence, “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” literally means “Siddham Alphabet”. It is similar to the word for script viz *Lipi* used with the names of the various Indian scripts such as *Nāgarī Lipi* (Nagari Script), *Grantha Lipi* (Grantha Script) etc. In the same vein the Siddham script in India was known as “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” (Siddham Alphabet).

The East Asian variant of the script is highly ornamental and calligraphic compared to the Indian variant. But essentially, they are the same script albeit with different styles, due to the difference in the writing implement. The Indian variant was written using a reedpen, while the Chinese used a brush (Gulik, 1967, p.55). Thus, both the mainland Indic “*Siddha-Māṭṛkā*” and the East Asian “Siddham” should be considered as two written styles of the same script.

It is not customary for Unicode to include the word “Script” to any of the script blocks. Even the Indic blocks do not contain the localized word “Lipi” along with the name of the scripts. Likewise, the word “Matrika”, which is essentially the same as “Lipi”, is also better left out of the official name of the script encoding.

Also, the short name “Siddham” is the more popular name for the script compared the elaborate “Siddha-Matrika”. The materials with the script-label as “Siddham” are quite enormous compared to those which are labeled as “Siddha-Matrika”.

Considering all these factors it is recommended to label the block and encode the script by the name of “Siddham”. The alternate epigraphic terms such as “Siddha-Matrika”, “Kutila” etc may be added as aliases to the block’s name (such as Tai Tham being annotated with the additional names “Lanna” and “Old Tai Lue”).

References

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4. Ojha, G.H. (1971): *Bharatiya Prachin Lipimala*. (3rd ed). New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.