

Timeline of Writing Systems' Graphical Evolution

Modern Era (timescale change)

East Asia

Legend

Hellenic: Scripts derived from Greek

Chinese: Scripts derived from Oracle Bone

Northern Brahmi: Scripts derived from Brahmi in North India

Southern Brahmi: Scripts derived from Brahmi in South India

Semitic: Scripts derived from Proto-Sinaitic

Other: Independently derived scripts (graphically)

Over 10 million users

Over 100 million users

Not in Unicode

Script extinction then revival: - - -

Writing direction

Logograph: Words are distinct characters

Syllabary: Syllables are distinct characters

True alphabet: Consonants are distinct characters

Abugida: Vowels are secondary, usually diacritics

Abjad: Vowels are optional or non-existent

Southeast Asia

South Asia

Central & West Asia

Africa

Europe, Anatolia, & Caucasus

Americas

The diagram illustrates the graphical evolution of writing systems across five major regions: East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central & West Asia, and the Americas. A central timeline from 2000 BC to 2000 AD tracks the development and divergence of various script families.

- East Asia:** Features the Oracle Bone (c. 1200 BC), which leads to the Tangut (c. 10th century AD), Khatan small (c. 10th century AD), and the Chinese family (c. 1st century AD). The Chinese family includes Clerical, Regular/Traditional Chinese (Hanzi/Kanji/Hanja/Chu Han), and Simplified Chinese. Other East Asian scripts include Man'yōgana, Katakana, Hiragana, Hentaigana, and Modern Yi.
- Southeast Asia:** Shows the development of the Mon-Burmese family (c. 5th century AD), including Old Mon, Mon-Burmese, and various regional scripts like Tai Tham, Ahom, and Chakma. It also includes the Kawi script, which branches into many Southeast Asian scripts like Balinese, Javanese, and Sundanese.
- South Asia:** Dominated by the Brahmi script (c. 3rd century BC), which branches into numerous South Asian scripts including Tamil, Grantha, Malayalam, Sinhala, and various Dravidian scripts. It also shows the development of the Gupta script and the Sharda script.
- Central & West Asia:** Features the Sinitic family (c. 1st century BC), which branches into many Central Asian scripts like Old Sogdian, Manichaean, and Avestan. It also shows the development of the Sogdian script and the Saurashtra script.
- Americas:** Shows the development of the Latin script (c. 1st century AD), which branches into many American scripts like Old Italic, Latin, and various regional scripts like Cherokee and Navaho. It also shows the development of the Mayan script and the Cherokee syllabary.

The diagram uses a color-coded system to categorize scripts: Hellenic (purple), Chinese (pink), Northern Brahmi (light blue), Southern Brahmi (light green), Semitic (yellow), and Other (light green). It also includes a legend for script status (Over 10 million users, Over 100 million users, Not in Unicode) and a key for script extinction and revival.