

[Macintosh Pioneers Asian Language Breakthrough](#)

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Within the past year the impact of computer technology has hit the non-Roman alphabet academic world full force. It is all the doing of Apple Computer Company's versatile Macintosh, a machine that finally broke the ethnocentric limitations. Until Macintosh no microcomputer of reasonable cost could handle Devanagari, Japanese, Tamil or Telugu, and even costly systems wouldn't show the actual script on the screen. As David Wyatt of Cornell University noted, "Asianists have been slower than others to embrace this useful [computer] tool, their reluctance stemming from the perception that engineers that designed microcomputers have little understanding of the special needs of those who work with non-Roman scripts."

The problem derived from the engineering preference to "bum" the roman alphabet into the ROM or Read Only Memory, limiting the machine permanently to that script. Printers were handled the same way, making it impossible to print out Asian text even if a computer could generate it.

Apple's Macintosh is truly different, much to the growing delight of Sanskrit scholars, Bengali buffs and Gurmukh gurus. The Macintosh can handle ANY script, displaying it on the CRT and printing it out with equal ease, so long as the alphabet does not exceed 240 characters. This now includes even more exotic languages which read from right to left, like Hebrew and Arabic. Not only that, the MAC can freely mix different scripts in the text, change styles from bold to italic and generate some fancy fontwork: outline, shadow, etc.

Why is the MAC uniquely capable to achieve this? From the start, Apple wanted to have flexibility that would allow it to become an international chine, not one serving the Western nations only. Fonts for the MAC are loaded from floppy discs just like programs and files; that is, they are software, not hardware or firmware. Not only that, the MAC is designed to allow for the easy (really!) creation of user-defined fonts. Thousands of people are developing non-Roman fonts. Mr.

Wyatt observes, "Within the past four months I have seek Khmer (Cambodian), Thai, Lao, Burmese and Shan fonts of good quality, and I have heard others speak of Devanagari and Singhalese."

For further information on how the Macintosh might help your Asian studies, research or hobby: INDIWRITE, 735 W. 183rd St. 2A, NY, NY 10033. Wheels for the Mind, Boston College, 430 Chestnut Hill, MA 021167. Devonian Intl Software, Box 2351, Montclair, CA 91763.