

HOURS

10:00-18:00

*Last admission at 17:30

CLOSED

Every Monday, January 1, Lunar New Year, and Chuseok

ADMISSION

Free

*Reservations are required for groups of 20 or more

ADDRESS

217, Central-ro, Yeonsu-gu, Incheon
(Central Park Station Exit 3)

INQUIRIES

032-290-2000, 2001

MUSEUM FACILITIES

1F Information desk, museum shop, locker, lactation room

2F Cafeteria, walking path

World Writing Systems



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1 Cuneiform | Tablet of Round Ark

Believed to date back to the Old Babylonian period, this clay tablet features a total of 60 lines of cuneiform inscriptions on both sides. It is considered to be an Akkadian version of the traditional flood myth. The common narrative featuring in the flood or deluge myth describes a great flood sent by the gods to annihilate humankind, which the forewarned protagonist survives by building a vessel.

2 Hieroglyph | Shabti

A shabti was a funerary figurine buried with the deceased in ancient Egypt, its name meaning “the one who answers” in Egyptian. The inscription on this figure’s body reproduces Spell 6 from the Book of the Dead, which commands the shabti to answer in place of the deceased when called upon in the afterlife.

3 Latin alphabet | Fragment of Roman marble cinerary urn

Cinerary urns reflect the funerary culture of Rome’s upper class. This piece is thought to have been produced by a wife for her late husband. The sleeping figures of Cupid carved on both sides symbolize the husband, with whom love can no longer be shared. The inscription is written in capitalis monumentalis, the formal Roman monumental script characterized by its square, elegant capital letters and used for monuments and official buildings.

4 Aramaic alphabet | Qur’ān

The Qur’ān is the most sacred text in Islam. It was transcribed in various calligraphic styles, each chapter adorned with rosette motifs shaped like roses and delicate gilded ornamentation. Muslims deemed the act of transcribing the divine words of God contained within the Qur’ān an important religious practice. The Qur’ān also played a pivotal role in the dissemination and development of the Arabic language and script.

5 Writing systems of India and Southeast Asia | Palm-leaf manuscript of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines

The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā) is a sutra composed of 8,000 verses extolling the virtues and teachings of the Buddha. This transcription on palm leaves is believed to be in an early Nepali script. The reverse side exhibits a different notational style, and traces of erasure and rewriting are visible—an indication of India’s strong oral transmission traditions. At the center of the manuscript appears an image of a male bodhisattva.

6 Chinese characters | Rubbing of the Shiguwen

The Shiguwen is the oldest known example of Chinese characters carved in stone. The name “stone drum” refers to drums made of stone and derives from the drum-like shape of the stones. The inscription records a hunting scene. Originally consisting of 10 stones bearing some 700 characters, the inscription has weathered over time, leaving approximately 270 legible characters today.

7 Hangeul | Hunminjeongeum (Haerye version)

The *Hunminjeongeum* explains in classical Chinese the principles and usage of Hunminjeongeum (now known as Hangeul), the Korean alphabet created by King Sejong of the Joseon Dynasty. Composed of 33 sections, the book elaborates on the purpose and philosophy behind the script’s creation; the formation, combination, and pronunciation of the letters; and examples of their use. The only known book in the world to document the principles behind the invention of a writing system, it entered the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 1997.

Permanent Exhibition Guide

English

Civilization and Writing: A Great Journey



A GREAT INVENTION

The human race has always used words and sounds to communicate with each other. In the prehistoric era when there were no writing systems, people conveyed their thoughts and feelings only in spoken word with facial expressions and hand gestures. However, words disappear as soon as they come out of the mouth. The human race, who needed to communicate with others over time and space, found a way to overcome this barrier. The strength of their desire made it possible to invent all kinds of writing systems.

All the thoughts and feelings normally conveyed in speech were recorded using writing systems. Humanity has carried its memories through writing, bridging distances between people and gradually expanding the world of communication. Speech and sound, thoughts and feelings: now all could be captured in written form. Through writing, humanity went on to preserve memory, bridge distance, and expand the realm of communication. The moment writing began, so did a new era of human history.

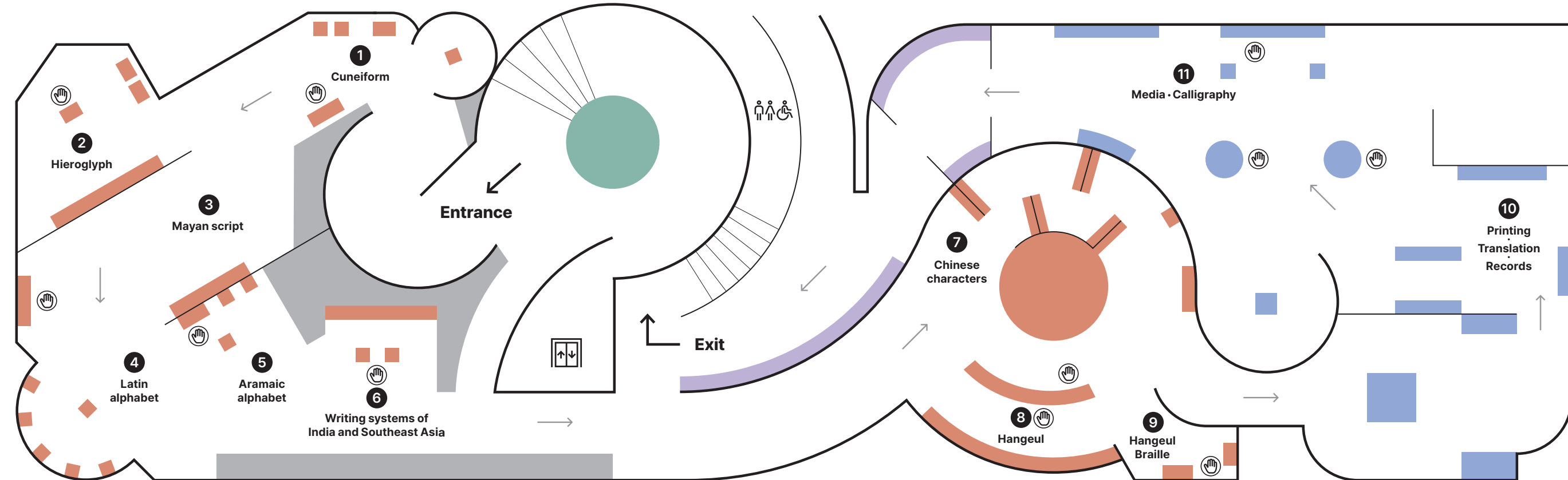


Kim Seung-young, *Tower of Babel*, 2023, photo by Kim Yong-kwan

WRITING SYSTEMS TO BUILD A ROAD

Humans scattered around the world created or adopted their own writing systems suited to their environments. These great inventions have paved the way for brilliant cultures and civilizations. Writing systems were spread across vast regions through political rule and subjugation, with religious faith, and at times through the exchanges of merchants. As a result, Europe used the

Latin alphabet, West Asia used the Arabic alphabet, India the Devanagari writing system, and East Asia the Chinese characters. Humankind has used more than 400 types of writing systems throughout history, yet only about 30 remain in active use today. Writing is a valuable cultural legacy, created and preserved through the shared efforts of humankind.



PROLOGUE: A GREAT INVENTION
PART 1: WRITING SYSTEMS TO BUILD A ROAD
PART 2: WRITING SYSTEM TO CREATE CULTURE
EPILOGUE: WRITING SYSTEMS OF TOMORROW

Works for tactile experience are installed at locations marked with this icon.

For protection of the works, displayed items may be replaced and rotated.

WRITING SYSTEM TO CREATE CULTURE

Writing systems have always been as a bridge connecting the history and culture of humankind. Humans have revolutionized the methods of communication using letters, and constantly reformed social systems based on them. The most remarkable revolution in human communication came from the popularization of text based on printing technology. With the invention of the printing press, books could be reproduced infinitely. As books became a part of people's daily lives, more and more books were written and translated.

There was no longer a place for the authority and privilege of the few. Paper was the invisible helper that supported civilization. The increased demand for books was met solely by paper. In addition, typeface was improved to convey as much information as possible in a limited space and be more readable. Printing led to the popularization of human knowledge; translation, to the spreading and sharing of human knowledge; and records, to the transmission of human knowledge.

The rapid development of information and communication technology has ushered in an era of great transformation. And digital media is at the center of that change. Digital technology has changed the way knowledge is stored and communicated. Today, we speak in moving images, record our words in sound, and convey emotions through emojis. The language and literacy barriers of the world based on race, region,

and history are collapsing rapidly thanks to digital technology. Interpretation and translation technology based on artificial intelligence has encompassed all of humankind within a single border. Meanwhile, writing systems that fail to adapt to technological trends risk fading from use. Now, perhaps, there will be a new "world writing systems" used by all humankind.