The present-day Japanese writing system is widely recognized as the most complicated system still in use, but very little of what we find in Japanese writing is unique. The cuneiform system used to write the extinct Semitic language Akkadian offers some particularly striking parallels. The Akkadian system was derived from the system invented in the neighboring country of Sumer for writing Sumerian, a non-Semitic language that was typologically quite different from Akkadian. As a result of cultural contact, however, many Sumerian vocabulary items were borrowed into Akkadian, and the parallel between Sumerian/Akkadian on the one hand and Chinese/Japanese on the other is obvious. If we compare the historical development of the Akkadian and Japanese writing systems, we see analogous responses to analogous problems, and the presentation will look at a few selected examples of how the two systems resemble each other and how they differ.

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The talk is open to the public, and light refreshments will be served. For further information, please contact DongKwan Kong (dongkwan@hawaii.edu) or Li Julie Jiang (lijiang@hawaii.edu).