

# **The Relationship between National Development and Mother Tongue Education in South Korea**

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## **I. Introduction: An overview of South Korea**

A national development depends on the factors such as politics, diplomacy, economy, education, culture, and national security. It is clear that the national development of Korea is also influenced by such factors. Considering that the education factors for developing and fostering human capital in a national development are various, e.g. mother tongue education, humanities education, vocational education, technical education, civic education, and art education, the importance of education cannot be emphasized enough. The present article investigates what mother tongue education has contributed to the development of Korea.<sup>1</sup> All eyes have been on South Korea's socioeconomic development. The world has been curious about the secret behind its success, asking especially how its mother tongue education has contributed to national development. To answer this question, let us first have a look at the key milestones of South Korea's development:

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1 Refer to Lee Young Hoon (2007), Sohn Ho-min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013), and Kim Choong Soon (2014) for detailed discussion.

## **1. Language**

1) Number of Korean speakers: Korean is the world's 13th most spoken language following Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish, Hindi, Bengali, Portuguese, German, Arabic, Japanese, French, and Italian.<sup>2</sup> The language is spoken by 50 million South Koreans, 23 million North Koreans, and 7.5 million overseas Korean residents.

2) Growth in immigration: South Korea is home to 1.6 million immigrants and foreign nationals, with 150,000 of them being immigrants married to Korean citizens, 80,000 studying, and the rest working in the country. Transnational marriage immigrants are from China (40.5%), Vietnam (26.8%), Japan (8.2%), and the Philippines (7.1%) (Korea Immigration Service, 2014).

3) International language of publication: On September 27, 2007, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) officially adopted Korean and Portuguese as new international languages of publication at its 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly held in Geneva, Switzerland (KIPO, 2007). The UN agency's decision increased the number of international languages of publication under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) to ten from eight (i.e. English, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic). South Korea is the world's fourth largest patent applicant and the fifth largest PCT applicant.

## **2. Education**

1) PISA academic performance: On December 3, 2013, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

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<sup>2</sup> Cited from [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)

announced the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for the year 2012. PISA makes triennial international comparison of mathematical, reading, and scientific achievements for 15-year-old students around the world. In PISA 2012, South Korea was one of the top performers among 34 OECD member states, ranking first in mathematics, first/second in reading, and second to fourth in science. It remained in the top list even among the entire 65 countries surveyed, getting the third to fifth places in mathematics and reading, and the fifth to eighth places in science (OECD, 2013).

2) College education: The OECD educational statistics for 2014 indicate the educational standing of 34 OECD member states and 10 non-members. As of 2012, 66% of young South Koreans aged 25–34 completed college education and 98% had high school diplomas, compared to the OECD averages of 39% and 82%, respectively. South Korea has held the top spot among OECD countries in college graduation for six consecutive years and in high school graduation for two years in a row (OECD, 2014).

### **3. Economy**

1) Economic growth: \$82 per capita income in 1961 and \$26,000 in 2013. (Hyundai Research Institute, 2014).

2) Trade: Since 2011, South Korea has had one trillion dollars in trade each year (i.e. 0.5 trillion dollars in export and another 0.5 trillion dollars in import). It is the world's ninth largest trader following the United States, Germany, China, Japan, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

3) 30–50 Club: There are only seven countries in the world that have reached 20,000 dollars in national income with the population of

50 million or above. South Korea was the seventh to join the 20–50 club in 2012, following Japan (1987), the United States (1988), France, and Italy (1990), Germany (1991) and the United Kingdom (1996). South Korea is expected to join the 30–50 club in 2015 achieving \$30,000 (Hyundai Research Institute, 2014). The country made this achievement with the smallest population of all the members.<sup>3</sup>

## **II. Key contributors to South Korea's national development**

A combination of various factors multiply acts on a national development. Among the factors, the national qualities and the leadership of a number of presidents are regarded as the most important factors; politics, diplomacy, national security, economy, education, culture, and religion are followed. Below are key factors that have contributed to South Korea's socioeconomic development and ethnolinguistic vitality:<sup>4</sup>

### **1. Human resources**

1) Citizens: Outstanding resources; public–private cooperation for self–reliant national defense and economic growth; promotion of military spirit (i.e. team spirit) through obligatory military service; diligent workers; patriotic bureaucrats; dedicated educators.

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3 Refer to Sohn Ho–min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 309–334) and Kim Choong Soon (2014: 251–279) for detailed discussion.

4 Refer to Sohn Ho–min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 133–362), and Kim Choong Soon (2014: 104–279) for detailed discussion.

2) Leadership: Dedication of the previous presidents; commitment of social elites to the community; entrepreneurship of businessmen.

## **2. Political, economic and diplomatic factors**

1) Diplomacy and National security: Focus on economic growth on the basis of the rock-solid security alliance between South Korea and the United States.

2) Politics: Realization of liberal democracy and a democratic, peaceful change of power.

3) Economy: Successful land reform after the liberation from Japan and immediately before the Korean War (1949–1950); promotion of export-driven and heavy/chemical industries; success in agricultural improvement and the *Saemaul Undong* (New Community Movement).

## **3. Educational, cultural, and religious factors**

1) Language: Monolingual community, high literacy, high vitality<sup>5</sup>, and high linguistic nationalism.<sup>6</sup>

2) Education: Promotion of national identity through Korean language and history education; patriotic, humanitarian education; high educational zeal.

3) Culture: Traditional culture; contemporary pop culture widely known as the Korean Wave.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Korea has high ethnolinguistic vitality in terms of demographic capital (language population), political capital, economic capital, and cultural capital. Refer to R. Landry & R. Allard (1992) for the ethnolinguistic vitality.

6 Refer to Sohn Ho-min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 203–243) for detailed discussion.

7 Cited from The Economist, South Korea's soft power: Soap, sparkle, pop (August 9, 2014). Refer to Sohn Ho-min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 509–537), and Kim Choong Soon (2014: 251–279) for detailed discussion.

4) Religion/morality: Buddhist culture of non-possession; family-oriented Confucian culture of loyalty, filial piety, and fidelity; Puritanism based on the ideas of equality for all and vocational calling; harmony and mutual respect between religions (i.e. spirit of the March 1 for Anti-Japanese Independence Movement).

### **III. Cultural elements in South Korea's mother tongue education**

Language education inherits the traditional spiritual culture of a language community through its mother tongue. In the Korean language education in South Korea, such inheritance is pursued in three different directions: The country has provided Korean language education that promotes identity, morality, and humanity in an endeavor to ensure its national, moral, and linguistic legitimacy. Reminding citizens of their personal and national identity, the notion of identity here is associated with patriotism. Morality translates into moralism as it promotes the ethicality of individuals and the state. Humanity promotes the linguistic sophistication of individuals and the state's refinement in humanities, giving rise to humanitarianism. These three directions are taken in the functional (i.e. language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing), literary and grammar domains.

Under the 6-3-3 school system (i.e. six years of elementary school, three years of middle school and three years of high school), South Korea's Korean language curriculum has gone through 10 changes since its liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the beginning of the U.S. military rule. Western curricula for language education are

typically structured around the four functional domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, so such a functional curriculum from the United States was transplanted into South Korea from the era of U.S. military rule (Aug.1945 – Aug.1948) through the 1970s. Since the Fourth Curriculum introduced in the 1980s, however, a new focus was placed on literature and grammar as independent domains from functional ones, as opposed to the sub-elements of the functional domains as in the past. The major goals of Korean language education have been: (a) developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; (b) appreciating and creating literary works; and (c) promoting grammatical knowledge and linguistic sophistication.

In developing textbooks for South Korea's educational curriculum, it has been encouraged to use: (a) writings that promote national identity, covering such topics as the Korean nation, patriotism, reunification, anti-communism, national security, and globalization; (b) writings that help develop morality, environment, human rights, and equality; and (c) writings that contribute to linguistic sophistication by exploring the uniqueness of *Hangeul* as the Korean writing system, national language refinement, and language etiquette.

Korean language education aims to nurture human beings with established identity, morality, and linguistic sophistication (i.e. patriotic, moral, and refined humans) under the banner of *Hongikingan* (홍익인간, humanitarianism).

## **1. Mother tongue education for national identity: Legend of *Dangun***

Korean is widely seen as one of the Altaic languages, together with Turkish, Mongolian, Manchu, and Japanese (NIKL 2010a). One of the



few monolingual communities in the world, South Korea has had better conditions for national development as its national integration has been quicker than its multilingual/multicultural counterparts. Korean language education in South Korea talks about the rich history of the Han nation from early on to boost national identity and pride. A case in point is the story of the *Dangun* (檀君) *Legend* covered in Korean Language courses at elementary school.

In the Heaven is a god called *Hwanin* (桓因), whose son, *Hwanung* (桓雄), descends to Mount *Taebaek* with the philosophy of humanitarianism and builds the *City of God* (神市).

With the purpose of becoming humans, a bear and a tiger went through the test of eating a sack of mugwort and 20 cloves of garlic, and staying out of the sunlight for 100 days. The tiger gave up, while the bear endured and became a woman named *Ungnyeo* (熊女).

*Ungnyeo* as *Hwanung's* wife gave birth to a son named *Dangun* who found the nation of *Choseon* (朝鮮, i.e. Korea) and ruled its people by *Hongikingan* (弘益人間, humanitarianism).

Portraying the origin of the Han nation, the Legend of *Dangun* shows where the nation's identity comes from and what the goals of *Hongikingan* or humanitarian education are. The legend contributes to establishing national identity, serving as a prime example of identity education. Other key stories taught to establish national identity include: (a) the biography of Admiral *Sunsin Lee* (李舜臣) who defeated the Japanese Navy during the Japanese Invasion of Korea (1592–1598); (b) the story of *Gwansun Yu*, a 17-year-old girl who played a symbolic role in the March 1 Anti-Japanese Independence Movement; and (c) the activities of other great patriots who defended the nation in times of crisis. Of course, students are encouraged to read a wide range of literary and non-literary works in order to establish their personal

identity (e.g. setting their respective life goals).<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Mother tongue education for morality: Traditional religious cultures**

In South Korea, mother tongue education plays an instrumental role in education on the nation's spiritual culture, which then is closely associated with education on its religious cultures for fostering morality. Likewise, language education in Korea had long been structured around the recitation of Buddhist or Confucian scriptures, so the traces of such a tradition are still found in today's Korean language education.

1) *Jecheon* (祭天): The idea dates back to the *Dangun* Legend and the era of tribe nations, and is often explored as a folk belief and worshipping god by harvest ceremony.

2) Buddhism: The religion is characterized by fatalism (e.g. concept of reincarnation), nihilism that highlights the frailty of human life, and the philosophy of non-possession. The spirit of patriotic Buddhism laid the groundwork for the unification of three ancient Korean kingdoms led by Silla. The import of the Chinese versions of Buddhist scriptures via China led to the development of the character borrowing system in Korean (i.e. using the sound and meaning of Chinese characters to write the Korean names of people, geographic locations and government positions).

3) Confucianism: Aimed at benevolence (仁), the philosophy of moderation (中庸), and rule by virtue, the teachings of Confucius and Mencius had a huge impact on the educational and political systems of

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to Kim-Renaud Young-Key (2010: 171–198) for detailed discussion.

Korea. The core element of Confucianism is *Samgangoryun* (三綱五倫, Three Bonds and Five Relationships)<sup>9</sup>, an ideology for producing loyal subjects, devoted sons, and virtuous women. Under the Confucian philosophy, commemorative rites are held for ancestors, as it is believed that only those families sincerely serving their ancestors will be blessed.

4) Catholicism & Protestantism: Imported from China in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Catholicism came into conflict with Confucianism, with a large number of Catholics dying martyrs. Western missionaries who came to Korea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century spread the idea of God-given human rights where everyone men and women alike is equal. Protestantism is characterized by the Puritan view that all occupations are equally honorable. Korean churches contributed to fighting illiteracy by translating the Bible into Korean and teaching *Hangeul*.

These moralistic religious cultures have coexisted in South Korea, constantly merging and reinventing the continental civilizations of India and China (i.e. Buddhism and Confucianism) with the oceanic civilizations of Japan and the United States (i.e. Christianity, parliamentary democracy, and liberal market economy) and contributing to the promotion of morality.<sup>10</sup>

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9 The three bonds and the five moral disciplines in human relations:

- ① The subject should keep moral rules for the sovereign.  
The son should keep moral rules for the parent.  
Wives should keep moral rules for their husbands.
- ② Integrity should be kept between the subject and the sovereign.  
Father and son should keep a close relation each other.  
Husband and wife are kept properly distinctive.  
Younger brothers should yield to older brothers.  
Confidence should be maintained between friends.

10 Refer to Sohn Ho-min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 133–168), and Kim Choong Soon (2014: 193–224) for detailed discussion.

### **3. Mother tongue education for humanity: Creation of *Hangeul* and linguistic sophistication**

In South Korea, mother tongue education is the core element of humanity education, where it is quite essential to foster linguistic sophistication. With this in mind, the Korean language education curriculum set great importance on grammar and mentioned the following points regularly: (a) the Han nation is a monolingual community; (b) the creation of *Hangeul*, a superb writing system, contributed to national development; and (c) there were people who sacrificed their lives to defend the Korean language when it was in danger of being obliterated during the colonial era. Cautions were taken against the misuse of Korean and the excessive use of foreign languages to stress the importance of national language refinement; the prevention of linguistic violence and education on language etiquette were also emphasized.

Such a focus on linguistic sophistication reflects the tradition of scripture—centric language education, as both the East and the West put a great emphasis on scripture education, whose very first step was to learn the grammar of the language in which those scriptures were written. In fact, in the process of translating Buddhist, Confucian, and Christian scriptures into Korean, the comparative linguistic analysis between Korean and the original languages helped elaborate the Korean grammar and thereby contributed greatly to the development of Korean orthography.

## IV. Character, writing style and educational revolutions in Korea

### 1. Character revolution of *Sejong* the Great

Found in world history are several examples of language policies or writing system reforms contributing to national development. The Lutheran Reformation and translation of the Bible, for instance, was the driving force of today's European civilization as the Bible was translated from Latin to laymen's languages like German, English, and French, and thereby enhanced their value.<sup>11</sup> It would be also noteworthy that *Hangeul* fought the predominance of Chinese characters, and became the basic writing system for the Korean language, lowering the country's illiteracy rate and thereby contributing to national development. It is often said that what made the Miracle on the Han River possible was *Hangeul* as an easy-to-learn writing system. In this sense, South Korea provides a vivid illustration of how mandatory education for eradicating illiteracy brings development and happiness to individual citizens and the country as a whole.

Until *Sejong the Great* (世宗大王, 1397–1450), the fourth king of the Choseon Dynasty, created *Hangeul* in 1443, Koreans borrowed Chinese characters to write their language as they did not have their own writing system. For bureaucrats and intellectuals, knowledge in Chinese characters and literature was the very basic requirement. The discrepancy between the spoken and written languages having to use the Chinese characters for writing which has a totally different structure

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11 Luther, himself, described, printing as God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward." (Eisenstein, 2005: 304).

from Korean led to huge discomfort and inconvenience.

It was against this backdrop that *Sejong the Great*, after many years of effort, created a phonetic writing system called *Hunminjeongeum* (訓民正音, Correct/Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People) so the Korean language can be written as it sounds. Here *hunmin* (訓民) means fighting illiteracy to educate and enlighten people; *jeongeum* (正音) is aimed at standardizing the pronunciations of Sino–Korean words. The name *Hunminjeongeum* was replaced around 100 years ago by *Hangeul*, which means *Han Nation's* script, great script and one script.

The creation of *Hunminjeongeum* was a big political dynamite that could have put *Sejong the Great's* power at peril, as it was pursued against the resistance of elder statesmen valuing China and Chinese characters. It was a character revolution, and at the same time, a cultural revolution that changed Korea's linguistic culture forever (S.O. Kim, 2007). From an orthographic point of view, *Hunminjeongeum* differs from other writing systems like the Western alphabet and Chinese characters (NIKL, 2008, 2010b; NHM, 2014).

1) For most writing systems, their inventors and the process of invention remain unknown. In the case of *Hangeul*, on the other hand, a book titled *Hunminjeongeum* (1446) clearly explains who invented it and how. The 66–page book has been designated as a documentary heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2) *Hangeul* corresponds to the contemporary theory of structural phonology. *Sejong the Great* investigated the phonological system of the Korean language and invented a set of phonograms with no discrepancy between the written and the spoken language as modern structural linguists or morphologists.

3) *Hangeul* was structured systematically and economically on the basis of scientific and philosophical principles. The five essential consonants – ㄱ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㄹ, and ㅇ – were modeled after how they are pronounced and how they look. ㄱ and ㄴ resemble the shapes of a tongue bent to pronounce those sounds; ㄷ, ㄹ, and ㅇ are pictographic symbols representing the mouth, a tooth and the throat, respectively. Strokes were added to the five consonants to create ㅋ, ㆁ, ㅌ, ㄷ, ㅍ, ㅊ, ㅌ, ㅍ, and ㅎ; these single consonants were laterally attached to produce double consonants like ㄲ, ㄸ, ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅈ, and ㅊ.

For vowels, ㅏ, ㅓ, and ㅗ were created as front, middle and back vowels. These three essential vowels took the shapes of the heaven, the earth and the human being, which are viewed in Eastern philosophy as three components of the universe. Then the three vowels were combined to form complex vowels such as the following: ㅗ, ㅜ, ㅛ, ㅝ, ㅟ, ㅡ, ㅣ, ㅥ, ㅦ, and ㅧ.

In short, *Hangeul* was created under scientific and philosophical principles, modeling its consonants after the vocal organs and vowels after the three key components of the universe. It employs an economical number of characters that were built systematically by adding strokes, writing identical consonants laterally attached, and putting different consonants together.

4) *Hangeul* is an equal, practical and democratic writing system that people of any class can learn easily. *Sejong the Great* was the only king in the world who created a writing system for his subjects, instead of the ruling class. While his decision faced strong resistance from intellectuals revering the Chinese writing system, the king went ahead with creating *Hangeul* with immense dedication and love for his people while suffering from diabetes, hypertension, oculopathy and other disorders. The spirit of *Hangeul*'s inventor was summarized as

self-reliance, love for people, and pragmatism in the preface of *Hunminjeongeum*, a book portraying how the new writing system for Korean was created.

Since the phonological system of Korean is different from that of Chinese, the Chinese characters that describe both Chinese and Korean cannot be used in communication. Accordingly, there are many among the general public who cannot express themselves in Chinese characters even though they have something they want to say. Feeling sorry for this, I have newly created twenty-eight letters because I want our people to learn them easily and use them conveniently everyday.

– The preface of *Hunminjeongeum* (1446)

The above preface represents Sejong the Great's affirmation of Choseon's autonomy, as his release of *Hunminjeongeum* can be understood as a declaration of independence from the Chinese character-driven cultural order in East Asia. Even the loyal elders opposed the creation of *Hangeul*, as this was a daring challenge for a country that had pursued Sino-centric diplomatic policies. The king, however, was adamant, putting his loyalists into prison to push on the creation of *Hangeul*.

To ensure justice for everyone requires having a fair and just judicial system in place, so Sejong the Great created a set of phonograms with which people can write what they have to say just as it sounds. UNESCO today asserts that fighting illiteracy is the very first step of upholding human rights; *Sejong the Great*, who created the easy-to-learn phonograms at a time when Chinese characters alone were considered a great writing system, is a king who put UNESCO's spirit into practice out of his love for the people.



## 2. Stylistic revolution of the Enlightenment Party

*Hangeul* was a practical writing system, but its use was generally limited to letters, poems and novels as the predominance of Chinese characters prevented it from being widely used across the whole spectrum of society. Up until 30 years ago, *Hangeul* was not a major writing style in the domains of education, academia and media as the mixed writing style of *Hangeul* with Chinese characters still prevailed. *Hangeul* was often disdained as *Eonmun* (諺文, Korean language) or *Amkeul* (language for women), while Chinese characters were perceived as a means of success in career. Four writing styles coexisted in Choseon society at the time: Chinese writing style, *Idu* (吏讀) / *Gugyeol* (口訣) writing style, mixed writing style of *Hangeul* with Chinese characters, and *Hangeul* writing style (H. S. Min, 1994; H. C. Kim, 1997).

Chinese writing style	海東六龍飛 每事天福
<i>Idu/Gugyeol</i> writing style	海東六龍亦 飛爲賜 每事天福敎是尼
<i>Hangeul</i> writing style	해동육룡이 닳르샤 일마다 천복이시니
Traditional mixed writing style ( <i>Hangeul</i> -Chinese)	海東 六龍이 닳르샤 일마다 天福이시니

The Chinese writing style was used as a dominant style in historical records, education and public administration, while the *Idu/Gugyeol* writing style was utilized by bureaucrats and the aristocratic class for business purposes and reading classical literature. The traditional mixed writing style of *Hangeul* with Chinese characters was widely used in the translation of scriptures or poems/verses; it remained a representative writing style for media and academic settings up until the 1980s. The presence of many different writing styles during the *Choseon* (조선, 朝

鮮) era served as an obstacle to national development.

Traditionally, the *Hangeul* writing system had been employed in letters, novels, metrical poetry (*Gasa*), and educational books for women and children, until it was actively leveraged by Christian reformers during the *Enlightenment Period* (開化期) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the translated Bible, newspapers and textbooks as a means of eradicating illiteracy.

Since its establishment in 1948, the South Korean government has maintained a *Hangeul*-only policy for public documentation. As a result, the *Hangeul* style has now become a dominant writing style in administrative settings. The introduction of word processing software in the 1990s made it easier to use the *Hangeul* writing style, which has since established itself as a predominant norm across all domains.

The character revolution of *Sejong the Great* planted the seed of *Hangeul*, but its success in a genuine sense came as late as in modern times thanks largely to the *Hangeul*-only writing style revolution led by Christian reformers during the *Enlightenment Period* and the computer revolution that took place a century later.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Literacy movements led by churches and newspapers

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western missionaries were the first to discover and leverage the values of *Hangeul*. Horace G. Underwood (1859–1916) transformed *Hangeul* into a writing style for communicating modern knowledge by publishing a Korean grammar book, English–Korean and Korean–English dictionaries, and a *Hangeul*-based Christian newspaper. He also took the lead in the translation of the Bible, contributing significantly to the proliferation of the *Hangeul*

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to National Hangeul Museum (2014) for detailed discussion.

writing style.

There also was one Korean man *Jaepil Seo* (徐載弼, 1864–1951) who realized the value of *Hangeul*. With the vision of enlightening the general public, he published a *Hangeul*-based newspaper named *Dongnip Sinmun* (獨立新聞, The Independent). Intended to trigger a bottom-up reform movement, his decision to use *Hangeul* in this newspaper contributed greatly to the propagation of the *Hangeul* writing style for media purposes.

At *Baejae School* (培材學堂) founded by American missionary Henry G. Appenzeller (1858–1902), *Jaepil Seo* enlightened young Koreans with his teachings on Christian democracy of the West. One of his students was *Syngman Rhee* (李承晚, 1875–1965), who established the Republic of Korea 40 years later and legislated the policy of using only *Hangeul* in public documentation. Another student of his, *Sigyeong Ju* (周時經, 1876–1914), worked as an editor at the *Dongnip Sinmun* and dedicated his life to studying the Korean language.

With the aim of facilitating Bible study, churches became a stronghold of *Hangeul* education and led the fight against illiteracy. They arranged Bible study sessions and evangelistic revival meetings to spread the gospel and enlighten the people. Having 300,000 believers or less than 2% of Korea's total population of 17 million back then, churches played a central role in the country's independence and modernization movements.<sup>13</sup>

Another key actor in the Literacy Movement was the newspapers. Korea's illiteracy rate at that time amounted to 80–90%; Imperial Japan was reluctant to improve public education in Korea, which was already long underdeveloped, as it hoped to leave its colony unenlightened.

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13 Refer to Korea Bible Society (1993, 1994) for the contribution of the translation of the Bible to the development of the Korean style.

Schools founded by foreign missionaries and Korean patriots went on to offer quality education for Koreans, but the illiteracy rate remained extremely high as the number of people enjoying such education was very minimal. For this reason, from the late 1920s through the 1930s, major Korean newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* (東亞日報) led a Korean version of the *Narodnik* movement in Russia, while another newspaper, *Chosun Ilbo* (朝鮮日報), printed and distributed Korean language textbooks under the slogan of Learning is the only path to progress and encouraged young students to take the lead in the eradication of illiteracy and the enlightenment of rural communities.<sup>14</sup>

These writing style revolution and literacy movements during the Enlightenment Period can be likened to the Renaissance and the Reformation in the West that started from two reading movements: classic reading and Bible reading, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, *Hangeul* education in Choseon gave rise to active campaigns to read books on modern civilizations and the Bible. The failure of Confucian politicians to reform themselves led to a Korean version of the Reformation: Breaking with Confucianism for the conversion to Christianity. Rejecting the Confucian culture based on the Chinese writing system, which was equivalent to the Latin language in the West, Korean Christians translated and distributed the Korean Bible in a laymen's language and conducted media activities in the *Hangeul* writing style.

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14 Refer to Heo Jae-Young (2004: 580–588) for detailed discussion.

15 "The elements which go into the making of 'modernity' may be seen...first ...in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some historians attributed the change to the liberation of men's minds during the Renaissance and the Reformation. (Eisenstein, 2005: 683)

#### 4. Anti-Japanese movement of Korean language promotion by *Sigyeong Ju* and the *Choseon Language Society*

*Sigyeong Ju* first got interested in studying the Korean language and *Hangeul* when he met *Seo Jaepil* at *Baejae School*. Working as an editor at the *Dongnip Sinmun* first issued on April 7, 1896, he dedicated the rest of his life to Korean language studies. He wrote two Korean grammar books titled *Korean Grammar* (國語文法, 1910) and *The Sound of Language* (말의 소리, 1914).<sup>16</sup>

He coined purely Korean terms on grammar and pushed for the use of a *Hangeul*-only writing style. After the nation's fall to Japanese imperialism, he planned and worked on creating a Korean dictionary titled *Malmoi* (말모이, a purely Korean word for dictionary), which was left uncompleted due to his premature death at the age of 38.

Following *Sigyeong Ju*'s death, his students formed the *Choseon Language Society* (조선어학회) in 1921. Its journal, *Hangeul*, is recorded as the oldest academic journal in Korea. In 1926, the society celebrated the first *Gagyanal* (가갸날), a day for commemorating the creation of *Hangeul*. To date, the South Korean government is still celebrating *Hangeulnal* (한글날, October 9, *Hangeul Day*) as one of the country's five key national holidays. To realize *Sigyeong Ju*'s dream of creating a dictionary, his students formed the *Korean Unabridged Dictionary Compilation Committee* (조선어사전편찬회, 1929) with 108 initiators. As the groundwork for dictionary compilation, they developed a series of regulations such as *The Draft for Unified Spelling System of Korean* (한글 맞춤법 통일안, 1933), *Standard Korean Vocabulary* (사정한 조선어 표준말 모음, 1936), *Loanword Orthography* (외래어 표기법, 1940), and

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to Kim Minsu (1986) for detailed discussion.

*Korean Romanization* (조선어 로마자 표기법, 1940). These four major rules provided the groundwork for South Korea's post-liberation linguistic regulations and Korean education.

Since the forced annexation of Korea in 1910, Imperial Japan had carried out the policy of assimilating Korea with Japan, teaching Japanese as the first language and Korean as the second. In 1938, it abolished Korean language education and pushed for a full-fledged national obliteration policy, with young Korean men and women being pressed into military service, forced labor, and sex slavery for the military.

Imperial Japan's oppression and exploitation were all the rage on the Korean peninsula. To crack down on the *Choseon Language Society* which was seeking to compile the *Korean Unabridged Dictionary* (朝鮮語大辭典), the Japanese Government-General of Korea arrested dozens of its members on October 1, 1942) and took away the manuscripts for the dictionary. The arrested members underwent fierce tortures. Released from prison upon Korea's liberation from Japan on August 15, 1945, *Hyeonbae Choi*, *Huiseung Lee*, and other pioneers started a new chapter in Korean language education.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Educational revolution in South Korea

South Korea's national language education was successfully restored in the post-liberation era. The liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule marked the very first step for establishing the South Korean government, and at the same time, the rebirth of the national language on its last pins. A survey by the U.S. Military Government Office showed the country's illiteracy rate amounted to 78% at that time (E.

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17 Refer to Choi Kyungbong (2005; 2012) for detailed discussion.

H. Lee, 1974). Immediately after the liberation, the *Choseon Language Society* played a leading role in fighting illiteracy by holding Korean lessons all across the nation.

After the Japanese military pulled out of the Korean peninsula, the U.S. forces entered the Southern part of Korea while Soviet troops controlled the North. By carrying out a Soviet Union–style expropriation of land and nationalizing the land, North Korea went ahead with abolishing the private property system. The adoption of Soviet atheism/communism turned it into a communist country; the Korean–Chinese unit of the Chinese Communist Party became part of the North Korean forces and spearheaded the invasion of the South on June 25, 1950. Landlords, intellectuals, and Christians fled to South Korea, since they could no longer live in the North.

Following the establishment of the South Korean government, President Rhee promulgated Act No. 6, a law concerning the use of *Hangeul* as the only style for public documentation (October 9, 1948). The outline of the act was: Public documents should be written in *Hangeul*, but Chinese characters will be used in parallel for the time being. The government sought to promote the use of the *Hangeul* writing style at least in public documentation, while allowing the parallel use of Chinese characters as the Chinese writing style was still predominant in South Korea at that time. As elementary school was made compulsory in 1948, Korean language education was finally brought back on track. The illiteracy rate, as a result, dropped sharply to the 10% mark, which may be called *Rhee's* educational revolution.<sup>18</sup>

President Rhee's *Hangeul*–only policy for public documentation has been followed by subsequent administrations to date. Nonetheless, the

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18 Refer to Lee Eung Ho (1974), Heo Jae–Young (2004: 589–602) and Yim Song Ja (2014) for detailed discussion.

mixed writing style of *Hangeul* with Chinese characters remained a dominant writing style in academia and the private sector until as late as the 1980s. The *Hangeul* style, however, has gradually gained ground ever since, thanks largely to the government's consistent policy of using *Hangeul* alone in public documentation, as well as to the computer revolution in the 1990s that further accelerated the use of *Hangeul* as the sole writing style.

## **6. Correlation between *Hangeul* and Chinese characters**

The standing of Chinese characters remains a controversy in today's South Korea. As Chinese characters was an East Asian writing system shared by China, Korea, and Japan, the historical basis of one's linguistic sophistication had been his knowledge of Chinese characters and literature.

Chinese character education is losing ground in public education, but it still flourishes in the realm of private education. Chinese words account for 58.6% of Korean vocabulary, followed by pure Korean words (25.9%), loanwords (4.6%), and mixed origin words (10.9%) (H. S. Jeong, 2000); 99% of specialized terms are Chinese words, owing largely to the massive adoption of Sino-Japanese words. Having knowledge in Chinese characters proves helpful in learning specialized terms, so there remains a strong tendency to learn Chinese characters early on. Some scholars still claim that education on Chinese characters should be made compulsory.



## V. South Korea's linguistic policies and Korean language education

Established in 1948, the South Korean government reviewed four key linguistic regulations and decided to reuse *The Draft for Unified Spelling System of Korean* (1933) and the *Standard Korean Vocabulary* (1936), which were developed by the *Choseon Language Society* under Japanese colonial rule. The regulations on *Loanword Orthography* and *Korean Romanization*, however, were newly established in 1958 and 1959, respectively.

Full-fledged revision of national linguistic regulations began in 1970. With the 1988 Seoul Olympics a few years ahead, the *Research Institute of the Korean Language* (국어연구소) was launched in 1984 and worked on amending rules on *Loanword Orthography* (외래어 표기법, 1986) and *Korean Romanization* (국어의 로마자 표기법, 1984, 2000). The institute also set out regulations on the *Korean Spelling System* (한글 맞춤법, 1988) and *Standard Korean Vocabulary* (표준어 규정, 1988).

An arm of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (문화체육관광부, MCST), the National Institute for the Korean Language (국립국어원, NIKL) is currently responsible for (NIKL, 2014):

- 1) Managing four major linguistic standards: The NIKL is managing and revising four major linguistic standards: *Korean Spelling System*, *Standard Korean Vocabulary*, *Loanword Orthography* and *Korean Romanization*, and continuing its work to set out linguistic policies in preparation for the unification of two Koreas.

- 2) Servicing the *Korean Standard Unabridged Dictionary* (표준국어대사

전) online: The NIKL is servicing Korean Dictionary online and developing an extensive online Korean dictionary, targeted to launch in 2016, that will feature newly coined terms, colloquial words, jargon, etc.

3) Refining the Korean language: We are establishing standardized guidelines for refining loanwords. On top of this, we are working to standardize terminologies used in various fields.

4) Correcting language use on the Internet and in broadcasting: The NIKL is striving efforts to refine the language used on the Internet and in broadcasting, two platforms with high potential for language diffusion.

5) Improving the public language: The NIKL provides the public with services to help them use sounder and more refined language. For public servants, publishers, journalists, teachers, and other ordinary citizens, we offer specialized Korean language education programs at the *Korean Language Culture Academy* (국어문화학교).

6) Offering linguistic consultations for the general public: We provide public agencies and other organizations with information to promote accurate use of Korean; *Korean Language Call Center, Ganada Call* (가나다 전화) Tel) 1599-9979 (국어 친구).

7) Formulating multicultural language policies: With an aim to help marriage migrants and foreign laborers adapt to Korean society with fewer difficulties, we are carrying out various projects to provide support for their education and promote their understanding of Korean culture.

8) Expanding the depth and breadth of Korean language education: This research has diverse applications ranging from development of educational curriculum to development and evaluation of teaching materials. Findings are also used in the production and dissemination of online Korean language courses and broadcast programs.

The South Korean government enacted the Framework Act on the National Language (국어기본법, 2005) to lay the groundwork for the development of the Korean language. In order to come up with tailored language policies, the NIKL is researching trends in national language policies at home and abroad, and also engaging in exchanges with the world's leading language policy institutes. Key characteristics of its national language education policies can be summarized as below:<sup>19</sup>

1) Korean Language courses: Under the 6-3-3 school system, South Korea has designated the nine-year program at elementary and middle schools as compulsory education for all citizens. Korean Language is a mandatory subject, taught under the title of separate subjects like Speaking/Listening/Writing and Reading at elementary school from the 5<sup>th</sup> National Curriculum onwards; it is taught as a single subject at middle and high schools, called Middle School Korean Language and High School Korean Language, respectively. High schools used to have Reading, Art of Speech, Writing, Literature and Grammar as elective subjects, but in 2009 they were consolidated into three subjects: Reading and Grammar, Writing and Art of Speech, and Literature.

2) Textbooks: A single, government-designated textbook has long been used for Korean Language. Since 2009, however, more than 10 different textbooks have been developed and authorized for Middle School Korean Language and High School Korean Language, with teachers and school parents working together to decide which textbook to use in the given school. The government-designated textbook system remains in elementary schools. Meanwhile, in the case of subjects like Writing, Reading, Art of Speech, Literature and Grammar, around five

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19 Refer to Sohn Ho-min & Cheon Sang Yee (2013: 169-202) for detailed discussion.

textbooks have historically been developed and authorized by publisher and author until their consolidation into Reading and Grammar, Writing and Art of Speech and Literature in 2009.

3) Teachers: Teachers played a vital role in South Korea's national development; they are now selected and appointed under the teacher certification examination system. As teacher is considered one of the best professions for South Korean women, so a vast majority of teachers is female; 76.6% at elementary schools; 67.5% at middle schools; 48.1% at high schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). Teachers find it increasingly difficult to guide students, as exposure to violence covered in the media has given rise to language violence and bullying in school.

4) College admission: South Korea introduced a national examination called the College Scholastic Ability Test (대학수학능력시험, CSAT) in 1993, but the examination has been criticized as a scheme that reduced school education to test-oriented education designed solely for college admission, stifling the creativity of students and intensifying inhumane competition among them.

5) Multicultural policy: Korean language education has been actively provided for the successful settlement of immigrant workers and the immigrant spouses of Korean citizens in South Korea. The National Institute for the Korean Language (NIKL) has published Korean language textbooks for such immigrants. It has distributed Sejong Korean, a Korean language textbook to be used in Sejong Academy in 130 cities worldwide, and offered online Korean courses for free.

6) The objectives of South Korea's recent educational policy are characterized by the following factors: Education that makes everyone happy; Creative talents heralding the future (Ministry of Education, 2014).

① Dream and talent: Happy schools offering quality education that promotes holistic growth; safe and reliable educational environment.

② Creativity: High-quality colleges promoting a creative economy; innovation of colleges in preparation for future society.

③ Challenge: Performance-driven society; career guidance/vocational training; life-long learning in the face of a long-lived society.

④ Hope: Equal educational opportunities for all; eased burden of private education for college admission; educational Korean Wave bringing hope for the era of globalization.

For this purpose, the focus of Korean language education is also placed on: (a) developing the Korean proficiency of low-performing students; (b) reinforcing literacy education for career guidance; (c) promoting in-class debates and discussions (classrooms where questions are asked); (d) encouraging reading as a way of character education; (e) fostering critical/creative writing skills in the digital era; and (f) supporting Korean as a Second Language (KSL) education for children from multicultural families.

## VI. Conclusion

We have so far found that the Korean language curriculum in South Korea with a focus on literature, grammar and reading has contributed to national development by promoting national identity, morality and general culture.

We have also pointed out that the character revolution of *Sejong the Great* who created the easy-to-learn *Hangeul*, the *Hangeul*-only stylistic revolution led by Christian reformers, and the continued

endeavors of *Sigyeong Ju* and members of the *Choseon Language Society* even under Imperial Japan's policy of obliterating national languages in its colonies to formulate a series of language standards and compile dictionaries laid a solid foundation for the development of Korean language education in South Korea. Since its establishment, the South Korean government has consistently pursued the policy of using *Hangeul* alone in public documentation. Especially with the computer word processor revolution in the 1990s, the *Hangeul* style has taken deep root, contributing significantly to national communication and development.

What is equally needed, however, for understanding traditional Korean culture is Chinese character education, which is being offered at school but needs to be further strengthened. We are also facing a number of new linguistic challenges that prove not just in Korea but also worldwide, including:

1) Language at home: Lack of communication in families; restoration of conversations on the dining table that contribute to the development of children's language and emotion; need for the restoration of family communication and paternal authority as the basis of social communication.

2) Language at school: Prevention of linguistic violence, bullying and suicide; reinforcement of debate-based education for producing creative talents; fostering of Korean language skills for low-performing students; support for Korean language education being offered to multicultural families.

3) Public language: Easy and simple policy titles; need for improvement in the public language used in press releases and websites.

4) Media language: Prevention of violent, lewd, incendiary and vulgar

languages from being used on newspapers, TV/radio broadcasts and online media.

5) Visual language: Improvement of and prevention of addiction to visual languages (e.g. youth content, games, movies, drama series, pop songs, video clips).

South Korea's consistent *Hangeul*-only policy for public documentation suggests that efforts to protect a mother tongue in public and academic settings will benefit all citizens of the Philippines. Education is all about respect and love for life and a native language, so the same should be the case for language education. Filipinos should love and promote their beautiful mother tongue; power elites and intellectuals should be the first to overcome a sense of inferiority that they feel about mother tongue in comparison to English. At the same time, the government needs to introduce robust policies on the refinement of foreign expressions and increase the use of Tagalog first in government agencies and public education. I sincerely hope this presentation will serve as a golden opportunity for South Korea and the Philippines to explore their interests in language education together.

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## ABSTRACT

# The Relationship between National Development and Mother Tongue Education in South Korea

Min, Hyunsik

This study investigated the factors of national development by Korean language education in South Korea. We can find the contributory factors such as outstanding human resources, realization of liberal democracy, a democratic and peaceful change of power, successful land reform, promotion of export-driven industries, success in agricultural improvement through *Saemaul Undong* (New Community Movement), promotion of national identity through Korean language and history education, and high educational zeal.

We can find the cultural elements in South Korea's mother tongue education that promotes identity, morality, and humanity in an endeavor to ensure its national, moral, and linguistic legitimacy. Reminding citizens of their personal and national identity, the notion of identity is associated with patriotism. Morality translates into moralism as it promotes the ethicality of individuals and the state. Humanity promotes the linguistic sophistication of individuals and the state's refinement in humanities, giving rise to humanitarianism.

Historically, there has been the *Hangeul* writing revolution of *Sejong* the Great, stylistic revolution of the Enlightenment Party, literacy movements led by churches and newspapers, anti-Japanese movement of Korean language promotion by *Sigyeong Ju* and the *Choseon Language Society*, and educational revolution in South Korea. South Korea's consistent *Hangeul*-only policy for public documentation

suggests that efforts to protect a mother tongue in public and academic settings will benefit all Koreans.

**KEYWORDS** national development, mother tongue education, Korean language education, *King Sejong*, identity, morality, humanity, language policy, ethnolinguistic vitality, writing style