

King Sejong's Leadership and the Politics of Inventing the Korean Alphabet

Yoo Mi-rim

King Sejong the Great invented *hangeul* and called it *hunmin jeongeum* as a part of his ruling strategy to practice his national management plan. It is clearly shown that the series of linguistic and cultural products driven forward during the King Sejong period are related to both human resources and the maintenance of policies. The Korean alphabet was intentionally invented from the beginning for the purpose of making it possible to implement linguistic and cultural policy. The invention of the Korean alphabet was necessary and accelerated for realistic needs such as the extension of enlightenment, replacing the criminal code with the Korean alphabet, and the publication of a Sino-Korean rhyme dictionary. For the invention of the Korean alphabet, most of all, Sejong's consciousness was strongly based on his self-assertion that the system should be made to meet the cultural climate and characteristics of the Joseon people.

King Sejong showed his leadership to persuade his cabinet members who did not agree with him when propelling his national management plan. His leadership was also shown in having initiative at the stage of implementing the invention of the Korean alphabet and a series of cultural policies like the publication of a rhyme dictionary. He intended to minimize objections by promoting a closed-door or secret approach with few participants when he promoted his policies. He also intended to show initiative by securing moral cause and justification in the process of persuading them even though some of his cabinet members were against his policies. At that time, he chose a discussion method based on reason and moral obligation. He intended to pursue justification along the lines of the concept of Confucian justice by pointing out that his subjects' opposite logic had no moral cause, and by displaying an ideology of "loving the people" in his policies. In addition, he chose a way that brought the opposing powerful group under his control by turning them into political victims if necessary.

King Sejong made *Yongbi eocheon ga* (Songs of Flying Dragons) using the Korean alphabet. From the view that its contents were a eulogy rationalizing both illegitimacy and immorality of the dynasty establishment, it is clearly found that his linguistic policies, including the Korean alphabet, were related to the way to ultimately maintain the national system by securing the justification of the dynasty.

Keywords: *Hunmin jeongeum*, *hangeul*, national management plan, leadership, the ideology of “loving the people,” political legitimacy.

Introduction

A variety of studies have been carried out on the scientific feature and creativity of *hangeul* (the Korean alphabet), the so-called *hunmin jeongeum*, and on the cultural accomplishments of the Joseon dynasty that flourished by virtue of *hangeul*. And few studies seem to have been carried out on the invention of *hangeul* connected with the national management plan of the monarch. In other words, few studies have been extended into examining how the leadership of King Sejong had worked in the process of inventing the Korean alphabet.

Until now, most studies on *hangeul* have focused on the intention of King Sejong who invented it, and his ideology of loving the people (except linguistic studies relating to the literal system). They aimed at revealing the fact that *hangeul* had been made because of King Sejong’s deep love for the people. They urged that the invention of *hangeul* made it possible to put *Yongbi eocheon ga* (Songs of Flying Dragons) and the criminal code into *hangeul* and to publish *Unseo* (Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary), contributing to the enhancement of the authority of the state and the royal family. Yet, this discussion may open the door to mistaking the cultural results from the invention of *hangeul* for its byproducts. Moreover, when the invention of *hangeul* is explained only on the basis of King Sejong’s democratic ideology of loving the people,¹ it also leaves something

1. Most of the researchers on the Sejong period have explained Sejong’s political ideology and the invention of *hunmin jeongeum* on the basis of his democratic ideology for the people. As the

unsatisfactory in explaining the political and ideological background that brings forth cultural policies, including *hangeul*. Thus, a counterargument has been brought forth that *hangeul* was not invented to enhance the authority of the state or royal family and that the results of the invention of the Korean alphabet were only historical ones and not intentional products that had such value from the beginning. It is said that it will be a one-sided understanding without regard to the then political conditions to take King Sejong's ideology of loving the people as the background for his invention of the Korean alphabet (Yi Geun-su 1996: 17).

Supplementary researches refuting these arguments have focused on the political background whereby such a linguistic policy as the Korean alphabet had been pursued at the beginning of the dynasty's establishment. But a viewpoint that the then political situation had forced King Sejong to pursue such a linguistic policy put an emphasis on only the intention of the invention; therefore, it cannot fully reveal the ideological attempt of King Sejong to carry out a series of cultural policies.

When reviewing the cultural policies and accomplishments of the King Sejong period, it can be seen that personnel organization had very close connections with ultimate goals. They were the policies for King Sejong to carry out the national management plans, which were to be pursued in serial order from the very beginning. Among them, *hangeul* was given priority over the most essential political tasks. This fact can be seen very clearly in the process of a series of cultural policies in the King Sejong period. First of all, there was *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* that had motivated him to invent the Korean alphabet, which was published in the 14th year of King Sejong. The Korean alphabet resulted ten years after *Samgang haengsildo* (Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations) on December 30th in the 25th year of King Sejong. In February of the 26th year of King Sejong, just after the invention of the Korean alphabet, *Unhoe* (Chinese Phonology) was ordered to be translated, and ten volumes of *Songs of Flying Dragons* were published in April of the 27th year of King Sejong. In September of the 28th year of King Sejong, "Haeryeseo" (Explanation and Examples) of *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* was pub-

ruling theory of Confucianism was based on "*minbon*" (democratic) ideology, it is of no meaning to urge that King Sejong's ideology and policies were based on the ideology of loving the people. Instead, it is more important to grasp King Sejong's intention and plans for the various tasks he carried out.

lished, and *Dongguk jeongun* (Korean Rhyming Dictionary) was completed a year later. Translation of *Hongwu zhengyun* (Ming Rhyming Dictionary) began in the 27th year of King Sejong, and translation of the Buddhist scriptures *Seokbo sangjeol* (Life of Sakyamuni in Detailed Sections) and *Worin cheongang jigok* (Song of the Moon Shining on a Thousand Rivers) were completed in the 31st year of King Sejong. During this period, there were occasional discussions on the translation of *Daemyeongyul* (Criminal Code of Ming) into the Korean alphabet.

As stated above, those cultural policies had direct or indirect connections with the invention and use of the Korean alphabet and above all, most of them were written in the Korean alphabet. In this respect, the invention of the Korean alphabet was not the end in itself. And the Korean alphabet had close relations with other policies in the field of human resources. In this respect, it is difficult to conclude that the Korean alphabet was invented simply by King Sejong's ideology of loving the people or his interest in *Unhak* (Study on Chinese Phonology). After all, a variety of cultural policies in the King Sejong period were pushed forward not separately but very closely with long-term plans, which seems to have been the real intention of King Sejong. This fact also provides us with a clue as to the background of various cultural policies and his political intention in every respect during the King Sejong period. Not only the purpose of inventing *hangeul* but also his plans for statecraft and style of rule can be explained from the viewpoint of leadership through the process. This article aims to review the leadership of King Sejong as shown in the process of inventing the Korean alphabet, which was developed as a policy of his statecraft.

Social Background of the Invention of the Korean Alphabet

Joseon was a political system or dynasty based on Confucian governance ideology. The maintenance of a dynasty seemed to be possible when rulers were developing a righteous government following previous sacred kings. Righteous government also meant having stabilized and civilized social customs that people could live up to without being aware of being ruled. To do this, the moral culture of a ruler was absolutely necessary, which would lead to the next stage of enlightening the people. That is, the Joseon period was under the spirit of the age whereby the moral culture of a ruler would lead to a stabilization of the people's livelihood and perpetuity of the state. King Sejong was also a ruler who respect-

ed this Confucian governance ideology and followed it faithfully.

Soon after his inauguration, King Sejong pledged to play the role of a sacred king (August 11, 1418).² Such measures as the reduction of taxes, the enforcement of relief works and the social relief system allowing three months of maternal leave to nominated female servants, and the prohibition of a master to put his/her servants to death (Jeong Gu-bok 1998: 18) were positive measures for benevolent government. Though King Sejong accepted a proposition that people should be the mainstay of the state, the enforcement of these policies was only the means for stabilizing and enlightening the people's livelihood but could not be the final aim of governance. The final aim of King Sejong was to make Joseon a kind of Confucian state whereby civilization and the system of the state should be organized under Confucian ideology. It was King Sejong's ambition to have Joseon reach the civilized state of Sino-centrism. King Sejong accepted Neo-Confucianism as an ideological cornerstone to accomplish this. The early period of Joseon was not so much a period of regulating the whole government under orthodox Neo-Confucian ideology as it was a period of pushing forward the establishment of a civilized system based on Confucian ideology in every field. Therefore, it was the stage of accepting original Confucianism from China and spreading it to the public. In case of the legal system, the *Criminal Code of Ming* was based on the Chinese system and was accepted and enforced without change.

To be a Confucian state, above all, the diffusion of Neo-Confucianism was absolutely necessary. Accordingly, *Seongni daejeon* (Complete Collection of Zhu Xi) and *Saseo daejeon* (Complete Collection of the Four Books) were brought into Joseon and published in the first year of King Sejong as royal gifts of Emperor Yongle, the 3rd emperor of Ming.³ In the 14th year of King Sejong, the *Complete Collection of Zhu Xi* began to be lectured at the royal lecture (February 6, 1432) and was sent to a local school annexed to the Confucian shrine of Jeju Island in the 17th year. However, in spite of the incessant efforts to diffuse Neo-Confucianism and its governance ideology, such religions as Buddhism, Taoism, and shamanism remained prevalent; so anti-Confucian cus-

2. *Sejong sillok* (Veritable Records of King Sejong) August 11, the year of ascension to the throne. From now on, these will be abbreviated as (August 11, 1418). In case of a leap month, “#” will be attached in front.

3. The order of publication was given in the seventh year of King Sejong (October 15, 1425) and printing was completed in the 9th year (July 18, 1427).

toms were still extant. Therefore, social order and discipline sadly went into confusion. Moreover, immoral and disorderly behaviors did not decrease.

In the King Sejong period, the murder of one's relatives, robbery, rape, and theft did not decrease, and serious social disorder continued. Consequently, King Sejong faced the establishment of public morals as an imminent problem. King Sejong considered his role as the enlightenment of public morals and gave priority to the correction of social disorder, resulting in the publication of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*. King Sejong thought malfunctioning government was caused by his insufficient and unsatisfactory enlightenment of the people. The publication of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* began in the 13th year of King Sejong who wanted to spread it to the public to follow exemplary conducts.⁴ But there was a basic limit to the enlightenment because this book was intelligible only to intellectuals. That is, it was useless for illiterate people. Thus, King Sejong took charge of another task to entrust the intellectuals with the enlightenment of the people.

Accordingly, this situation might force King Sejong to pursue a way to carry out rule effectively. He must have thought that the stability of the governed was absolutely necessary for the stability of the state and that there would be no better way than the enlightenment of the governed. The idea of inventing *hangeul* occurred to King Sejong since he felt a strong need for a method of enlightening the people.

It is difficult to conclude when King Sejong realized the necessity for *hangeul*. Considering that King Sejong had made understanding easy by adding Korean exemplary behaviors and pictures to the existing *Hyohaengnok* (Records of the Filial Piety) when publishing *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*, it is not likely that he drew up the idea of inventing *hangeul* at the same moment he was mapping out *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*. Even in the 16th year of King Sejong when he distributed *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*, the ruling classes including the king relied on leading the intellectuals to enlighten the people. However, *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* had no immediate effect on the government; consequently, King Sejong had to devise another plan. *Hangeul* must have been a device for this. Moreover, when applying a law to a criminal case against

4. *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* was diffused to royal kinsfolk, subjects and provinces in November the 16th year of King Sejong.

morality, the absence of *hangeul* caused many problems and highlighted its necessity. King Sejong kept various effects of *hangeul* in mind, which could accelerate the invention of *hangeul*.

Concerning the concepts of the law in the King Sejong period, it has been said that he based his ideas on legalism, equality, and judicious punishment, had warned against the abuse of punishment, and had emphasized the importance of disclosing the truth (Kim Un-tae 2002: 50). This was possible only in case of general principles but was not always apparent when applying the law in reality. In particular, when applying criminal law, the situation caused many problems because the law had not been put into *hangeul*. When applying the provisions of the law, it was susceptible to the arbitrariness of an interpreter. A provision of the criminal law was applied by reference to various existing rules. But as these rules were written in Chinese characters and *idu* (Korean written in Chinese characters), it has been indicated that even a civil vassal could not understand and apply them easily (October 27, 1426). In particular, when deciding on a punishment according to the *Criminal Code of Ming*, “it was very difficult to understand the meaning and mistakes were likely made in judgment of the punishment in comparison with criminal law” (June 22, 1431). Therefore, a question was raised within the court that criminal law should be put into easier language in order to be understood easily. Accordingly, *hangeul* was devised primarily due to the need to educate the masses and the realistic need to apply the law. And when China guaranteed the autonomy of domestic politics of Joseon, Joseon had to also distinguish between worshipping powerful China as diplomacy and establishing domestic politics.

To invent the Korean alphabet meant to substitute Chinese characters for Joseon ones that had been used until then. In this process, King Sejong wondered if there would be any diplomatic problems with China. This made some of his subjects oppose the plan. After all, the invention of the Korean alphabet primarily aimed at accepting *Chinese Phonology*. Meanwhile, there would be no problem because *Chinese Phonology* meant to accept Chinese civilization.

Joseon was a state with a strong inclination towards China, primarily taking Chinese civilization as its model. At the beginning of the dynasty, Joseon tried to find the models and policies to solve the problems of the times and followed the Chinese system and civilization. Moreover, the tendency to worship China went in gear with the ideology of “the worship of the powerful,” resulting in the extreme worship of the powerful in diplomacy. At this time, the concept of “the worship of the powerful” originally derived from realistic power politics. In the

meantime, as Ming was an authoritative state in China, “the worship of the powerful” did not remain simply as foreign policy but was attached to the ideology of “Sino-centrism.” In the course of time, this worship of powerful China became an invariable “cause” and the extreme worship of the powerful by King Sejong also became much more strengthened because of this worship of China.

King Sejong conducted the diplomatic worship of the powerful earnestly and practiced the policy of worshipping China, establishing Cheomsawon (Office in Charge of General Affairs) in imitation of Cheomsabu (Council in Charge of General Affairs) in China (July 28, 1442) and naming *Korean Rhyming Dictionary* in imitation of *Ming Rhyming Dictionary*. King Sejong thought that the primary object and content Joseon should learn about and from was China itself. Thus, from the beginning of his enthronement, he had read the classics of Confucianism and history books. As history stands together with the study of the classics of Confucianism, it is natural to read Chinese history books. Nevertheless, there was a tendency for most Confucian scholars to take the classics of Confucianism primarily and history secondarily. On the contrary, King Sejong put an emphasis on the classics of Confucianism and history together and made every effort to learn both. In the meantime, it would be meaningful to King Sejong only when Chinese history could be applicable to the history of Joseon. It can be said that King Sejong’s order to improve and publish *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo Dynasty) (September 19, 1419) was due to this intention.⁵ Considering that it was not the intention of King Sejong but that of Kim Jong-seo and Jeong In-ji to replace “Bongi” in *History of Goryeo Dynasty* with “Sega” and that King Sejong fired Byeon Gye-ryang who had adhered to the cause of the worship of the powerful in the process of compilation (Jeong Gubok 1998a: 33), it can be seen that King Sejong did not want to match his historical consciousness to that of the worship of the powerful. He thought that the most important thing in historical records was facts. Accordingly, he distinguished between correcting the names of things and changing the cause between China and feudal states in describing history.

As King Sejong distinguished between the diplomatic “worship of the powerful” and domestic politics, he did not think that the diplomatic worship of the powerful would hinder the autonomy of domestic politics. Thus, King Sejong

5. King Sejong was dissatisfied with *History of Goryeo Dynasty* written in frank language by Jeong Do-jeon and ordered it to be improved.

took it for granted that the systems of Joseon should be adjusted to the customs and geographical conditions of Joseon. From King Sejong's ideological point of view, he thought that to accept the ideology and culture of China, and to adjust them to the reality of Joseon and to rule the state would be quite different from "the worship of the powerful." The invention of characters could become possible and justified due to this dual recognition. King Sejong thought that extraordinary autonomy should be secured within domestic politics because the worship of the powerful was limited to foreign relations such as reception of Chinese envoys and giving tribute and reports on Japanese invaders. As was shown in the anti-memorial to the Throne of the subjects, including Choe Man-ri, there was a worrying tendency for the subjects rather than the king to match the "the worship of the powerful" as a basis of foreign policy to domestic politics.

Of course, this domestic autonomy was not secured only by the efforts of Joseon. It was nothing more than restricted autonomy permitted within the scope of the political worship of the powerful in relations with China. China granted to Joseon the autonomy of domestic politics within the principles of tribute, the recognition of a king or a queen, and the worship of the powerful, which was the keynote of Chinese foreign policy. As it was stated to "Observe native customs in etiquette and old provisions in the law" (June 7, 1446), China demanded that Joseon should observe the customs of Joseon in ceremony, dress and ornaments, and punishment but did not force Joseon to follow the laws of Ming. Accordingly, Joseon followed the *Criminal Code of Ming* in principle but could judge within its discretion or add new provisions to the law (Park Byeong-ho 1998: 18). The *Criminal Code of Ming* was mainly applied to crimes (Park Byeong-ho 1998: 20). Without borrowing any regulations from the *Criminal Code of Ming*, the laws of Yuan or Tang were applied. In this process, when the customs of Joseon collided with the law, the authoritative judgment of the king had priority. It was the king's responsibility to ponder over the characteristics of Joseon and its basic morals, which was sometimes reflected in and had an influence on judgment. This autonomy was not limited only to the law. King Sejong seems to have taken advantage of this situation; therefore, the invention of the Korean alphabet became possible within such autonomy under the powerful leadership of the king.

The invention of *hangeul* was not only the result of a consciousness to worship Chinese civilization and achieve the same civilization but also the product of the will to reveal the identity of Joseon. King Sejong recognized China as an object of the worship of the powerful and Sino-centrism, but did not recognize

and follow the customs of China unconditionally. And he clearly understood the differences of customs and systems derived not merely from those of the people but from those of natural features. Thus, he took it for granted that China and Joseon differed in music, language, and dietary habits, etc. The positive recognition of King Sejong must have resulted in a series of projects accomplished during his reign such as a study on old systems, the arrangement of laws, the publication of *History of Goryeo Dynasty*, the preparation of geography and maps, the arrangement of the system for farmland, the production of a rain gauge, and the establishment of court music, etc. (Kang Shin-Hang 1984: 4). At the same time, such arrangements of traditional culture as *Nongsa jikseol* (Straight Talk on Farming), *Paldo jiriji* (Geographical Description of the Eight Provinces), and *Hyangyak jipseongbang* (Compilation of Native Korean Prescriptions) were the result of such recognition.

On the other hand, the King Sejong era was the period of establishing the ruling standards of Neo-Confucianism, encouraging and strengthening the Confucian standards positively based on *Juja garye* (Family Rites of Zhu Xi) and the *Complete Collection of Zhu Xi* (May 14, 1437). Accordingly, in Joseon the Confucianization of etiquette became strengthened in proportion to the enhancement of Neo-Confucianism. But it is difficult to conclude that these Confucian systems as ruling standards prove that Joseon sought its identity in the process of adapting itself to China. Of course, it was true that the deeper the social Confucianization became, the more deeply the worship of the powerful toward Ming became strengthened on the level of governance ideology. It proves that Joseon took “Sino-centrism” as a model of government. From this point of view, it may well be recognized that Joseon showed its limit in seeking its national identity. But “the worship of the powerful” and “the cherishing of China” in Joseon were a kind of tactic for survival considering its dynamic relations with China. The national system chose them voluntarily as a way of governing the state. The King Sejong era was not only the period of carrying out a policy of “cherishing China” on the one hand but also the period of recognizing and systemizing the peculiarity and individuality of Joseon on the other. Accordingly, it is difficult to conclude that the fact Joseon accepted Chinese civilization is equal to the complete loss of its national identity.

As stated above, King Sejong’s governance ideology was to establish an ideal Confucian state. In the process, he carried out his diplomatic policy of the worship of the powerful and tried not to cause complication between Joseon and China. While accepting Chinese civilization in his social system, he tried to

match it to the natural features of Joseon to reveal the identity of Joseon. Thus, it occurred to King Sejong that the Korean alphabet would be the most effective method to realize this. He made it clear that in the process of inventing the Korean alphabet, the characters necessary to enlighten the people and apply the law should be made according to the temperament and natural features of Joseon. Finally, King Sejong's ultimate goal in inventing *hangeul* was to civilize all the people, that is, to make Joseon a Confucian state.

The Invention of *Hangeul*

1. Political Effect of the Invention of the Korean Alphabet

Until now, the research has surveyed the background of inventing *hangeul* on two different levels. As stated above, one was research on the motive for the invention on the basis of King Sejong's ideology of loving the people. That is, the invention of the Korean alphabet was an expression of his democratic, cultural, and national ideology, and was also the result of his pure expression of loving the people.⁶ The other research focused on the social background of the necessity of the Korean alphabet, and argued that the Korean alphabet had been devised on the national political level to grasp the trend of the public or that the self-consciousness of the public had resulted in the Korean alphabet.⁷ Moreover, there is another opinion that the nationalistic mind (Heo Wung 1976: 334) to escape the reign of China became the background of the invention. Then, what was the direct motive behind King Sejong's invention of *hangeul*? This would be the problem connected directly with the aim of inventing the Korean alphabet.

6. The research of Kang Shin-Hang, Yu Chang-gyun, and Park Jong-guk are applicable in this case.

7. The thesis of Nam Yun-gyeong (2001: 3-4) has arranged existing research. According to this thesis, the research of Yi Wu-seong (1976) maintained that the invention of the Korean alphabet resulted from the political consideration to grasp the trend of the public, while that of Kang Man-gil (1978) maintained that the self-consciousness of the public caused the invention of *jeongeum*. He has also indicated that both areas of research derived from the inadequacy of the research of Kang Shin-Hang (1984). There is another opinion of Heo Chun-kang (2000) in that *jeongeum* derived from the worry over the division of the social classes due to the written language.

The first materials we should approach to find out the motive for inventing the Korean alphabet may be the preface written by King Sejong and “Explanation and Examples” by Jeong In-ji. In the preface, King Sejong revealed his intention behind inventing *hangeul* as follows: “Although foolish people have something to say, most of them cannot express their opinions clearly. This is a shame. I’d like to provide these uneducated people with a writing system.” According to his explanation, the primary motive of inventing characters must have derived from his consideration for the people who had no means to express their opinions. Meanwhile, this motive of “loving the people” must be nothing more than rhetoric. Accordingly, from another point of view, it can be assumed that King Sejong came to recognize the necessity for communication with the governed and to devise more efficient methods of government as a result. In spite of his recognition of the necessity for communication with the governed, such would not necessarily lead to the invention of a writing system. Now, we can recall the “capability” and leadership of King Sejong. That is, the important recognition by the King of an impending problem caused the invention of the Korean alphabet; moreover, he was a ruler with leadership capable of practicing this recognition. Now, let us review this process in every respect.

From the time King Sejong had compiled *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*, he had already known of the necessity of enlightening the people (Preface of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*, June 9, 1432). The direct motive of a strong necessity for enlightening the people was inspired by the grim reality that the spread of murdering relatives and the increase of crimes that went against basic morals were destroying ethics and order. In the middle of his reign, when royal authority seemed to be stabilized to a certain degree, the news Kim Hwa living in Jinju had murdered his father (October 3, 1428) shocked King Sejong. Because of this murder case, King Sejong summoned his subjects and discussed how to promote filial piety and brotherly love and strengthen morals. The result was to take advantage of *Records of Filial Piety*. But after *Records of Filial Piety* came out, crimes did not decrease. The appearance of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*⁸ resulted from this situation. King Sejong thought that the best way to enlighten the people was to imitate model filial sons. Thus, *Picture of Behavior for Basic*

8. King Sejong ordered Seol Sun, deputy chief official at the Hall of the Worthies, to write this book and Gwon Chae, a chief official, wrote the preface.

Human Relations came to contain the filial sons of Joseon that were not found in *Records of Filial Piety*. He wanted people to imitate the filial sons of Joseon “nearby” rather than those of foreign countries “faraway.” This is another example where King Sejong’s view of self-conformity mentioned above has also worked. But immoral crimes were not eradicated by the publication of *Records of Filial Piety* and *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations*. And as the punishment for criminals became an impending problem, another solution had to be devised. As a result, King Sejong positively implemented the Korean alphabet that had been devised as a realistic method together with calculated side effects.

When King Sejong invented *hangeul*, it seems that he had already borne in mind the production of *Songs of Flying Dragons*. Taking advantage of the Korean alphabet, he wanted to translate the *Four Books and Five Classics*, *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*, and the *Criminal Code of Ming*.⁹ The fact that *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* began to be published from the 25th year of King Sejong proves that *hangeul* was invented in consideration of its usefulness from the very beginning of its conception. In particular, as *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* was directly connected to the application of the criminal code, it accelerated the necessity for the Korean alphabet. As Jeong In-ji revealed, most of the criminal code was written in Chinese characters and was very difficult for official clerks to interpret and apply. Therefore, with only the criminal code, it was almost impossible to enlighten uneducated people. “Explanation and Examples” in *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* also mentions the difficulties of government without *hangeul*.

The dialects and slang of Joseon were different from those of China. It was very difficult for students of the Chinese criminal code to understand it, and official clerks dealing with criminal cases especially had great difficulties grasping the code’s details. A way to solve this problem was the use of *idu*. But *idu* was not satisfactory for the clerk to grasp a criminal case, making it difficult pass a fair judgment. This accelerated the necessity for the creation of *hangeul*. The necessity of the translation of the *Criminal Code of Ming* resulted from the difficulty of officials passing judgment when dealing with the crimes. Concerning the relations between the criminal code and punishment, Choe Man-ri thought

9. There was a discussion on translating the *Criminal Code of Ming* in the 13th year of King Sejong (June 23, 1431).

that there was no connection between them because punishment was the matter of official clerks dealing with the crimes. This shows the difference of opinion between King Sejong and a subject concerning law and punishment. In reality, the absence of a simple writing system had caused a lot of problems, which King Sejong recognized keenly. Because the invention of *hangeul* was a kind of positive struggle to overcome the situation, it was difficult for the subjects to rashly oppose King Sejong's plan on *hangeul*. It would be also a matter of deserting the cause of a Confucian state. Thus, the plan of King Sejong attained justification and persuasive power; accordingly, the situation to exercise his real leadership arose.

During the discussions concerning the translation of the criminal code, King Sejong provided every justification for his linguistic policy and undertook initiative on. He explained the justification for translating the criminal code according to the Confucian cause. Heo Jo opposed this: "If villainous people know the criminal code, they will evaluate the weights of crimes by themselves and will not be afraid of the law. Therefore, those who despise the law will emerge" (November 7, 1432). King Sejong retorted that it would not be right for the people to commit crimes because of their ignorance.

Thus, King Sejong recognized an evil whereby "there will be no way for falsely accused sorrowful persons to appeal if those responsible for judgment are ignorant of the criminal code and pass an unfair judgment on the accused at will." Accordingly, he showed his firm determination to correct this problem. It can be hardly justifiable for the subjects to oppose a king "loving the people" in a Confucian state. Accordingly, the order for translating the criminal code means not only the victory of the leadership of the king but that of a cause. If people understand the criminal code, the official clerks dealing with crimes cannot help judging according to the criminal code. So, the translation of the criminal code will result in various effects. The effects of translating the criminal code according to *hangeul* did not simply provide the people with characters. That is, the existence of *hangeul* will lead to the correct writing of *idu*, which will also lead to the fair execution of the criminal code. This will reduce crimes and have a preventive effect. It was understood by King Sejong that it would produce real enlightenment. Therefore, he thought the pursuit of a policy that would cause numberless ripple effects. Thus, the pursuit of a highly effective policy offered the opportunities for carrying out political tasks and gaining the verification of his leadership.

The invention of *hangeul* was not just a prelude to the publication of *Sino-*

Korean Rhyme Dictionary related to the application of the criminal code. The translation of Chinese Phonology and the production of *Songs of Flying Dragons* were possible thanks to the Korean alphabet. Considering these are connected with the maintenance of the national system, the effects of the Korean alphabet did not play a simple role as a means of government. On the one hand, it is true that the ideology of “loving the people” was set forth as a premise. On the other hand, it is undeniable that this ideology was adopted as a means of maximizing the effects of government. Therefore, it must be admitted that the Korean alphabet was a creative invention devised in consideration of highly political tactics.

Then, what relations does the Korean alphabet have with *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*? It is said that Shin Suk-ju played a considerable role in publishing *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*. But there is only an article about this in the 27th year of King Sejong according to the *Sejong sillok* (Veritable Records of King Sejong),¹⁰ but the details on the publication of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* were not disclosed. But there is a record on the fact that Shin Suk-ju asked a Chinese scholar for consultation on *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* in *Munchunggong haengjang* (Biography of Munchunggong) written by Kang Himaeng, a supplement to *Bohanjae-jip* (Collected Works of Shin Suk-ju). It is said that Shin Suk-ju had been to Liaodong thirteen times to consult with Hwang Chan.¹¹ According to this record, the governing style of King Sejong can be evaluated. While King Sejong was pushing forward the publication of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*, he chose a reliable subject and entrusted him with full power to take care of the work. King Sejong must have concluded that it would be more efficient and confidential to entrust a few credible subjects with the work. This proves that King Sejong put heavier emphasis on the result than on procedural justification in the process of carrying out policy.

In the process of King Sejong carrying out the policies, another element was involved aside from the effectiveness of the above project. King Sejong had considered the nation and its national identity together. He recognized that while

10. King Sejong sent Shin Suk-ju, Busuchan (an official title) of the Hall of the Worthies, Seong Sam-mun, Jubu (an official title) of SungKyunKwan (National Confucian Academy), and Son Su-san to Liaodong and made them ask about *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* (January 7, 1445).

11. There is also a record of the fact that Shin Suk-ju had been to Liaodong and had been taught in *Veritable Records of King Seongjong* (February 2, 1436; May 27, 1438).

other countries could record their languages according to their own characters based on their phonemes, Joseon could not. And he paid attention to the fact the phonemes of Joseon were different to those of China. That is, he recognized the difference caused by natural features. In the “Royal Preface” of *Correct Sounds to Teach the People*, such recognition was recorded but the policies of various countries on characters were not mentioned. Khitan (920-924), Southern Xia (1,036), Jurchen (capital letters 1,119 and small letters 1,138), and Japan had their own characters, all of which had derived from Chinese characters (Kim Wan-jin 1984: 12). These countries already had their own characters based on their phonemes. Perhaps it was a shock to King Sejong that these countries, despised for being barbarians, had their own characters. This might have stimulated him to give priority to the invention of Korean characters when planning statecraft. Though he had seriously recognized the necessity for publishing *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* in the Korean alphabet for the purpose of the correct use of *idu*, the fact other countries had their own characters must have forced him to hasten the invention of the Korean alphabet.

Moreover, the translation of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* was an important project for Joseon to be a Confucian state. King Sejong wanted to accept Chinese ideology and enter a civilized Confucian state and so needed theoretical studies on accurate phonology and orthography (“Preface” of *Korean Rhyming Dictionary*, September 29, 1447). And the understanding on books of phonology deepened by dealing with the *Complete Collection of Zhu Xi*. King Sejong used as a theoretical background to the justification of inventing the characters of Joseon the linguistic theory of So Kang Jeol that stated human sounds differed according to natural features, and that confusion of a language can be corrected by right sounds and phonemes. Therefore, this theoretical background helped secure the justification for pushing forward the policy.

Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary was necessary for Joseon to carry out the diplomacy of the worship of powerful China smoothly because *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* aimed at writing Chinese language correctly. Regarding the relationship between The Korean alphabet and *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*, the Korean alphabet had to be the first to arrange *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* but was not made only for the arrangement of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*. As stated above, the effects of the Korean alphabet had been exerted on *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* and various other fields, aiming to function as an efficient instrument for a ruler to understand political gains and losses.

The preface of *Dictionary of Proper Korean Pronunciation* (September 29,

1447) contains implications about the political effects caused by the invention of the Korean alphabet. This preface said that sounds are important, because “it is important to grasp the meaning of writing in order to perceive the teachings of a saint and also important to know about sounds and rhymes in order to understand the meaning of the writing.” It is important to record sounds correctly because “notes can be known by sounds, music by notes, and politics by music.” Therefore, a ruler must take care of “sounds” in order to know about the gains and losses of politics. The way to enhance the efficiency of government is nothing more than “to listen to the sounds carefully.” It is a general principle in Confucianism to perceive the interrelations among sounds, music, and politics. King Sejong also studied sounds and rhymes, made music, and studied and connected them to politics. In the process, King Sejong found out the difference of sounds between Joseon and China, the sounds and rhymes of Joseon equal to the four Chinese accents, and invented the Korean alphabet. Nobody could accomplish this except King Sejong. Thus, the greatness of King Sejong does not lie in recognizing the problem but in turning the recognition into reality. Moreover, King Sejong himself took pride in his ability and the subjects also could not but recognize his ability, which provides coming generations with material to analyze King Sejong from the perspective of his leadership.

2. The Leadership of King Sejong in the Process of Inventing the Korean Alphabet

The first official record revealing the invention of *hangeul* was an article in the *Veritable Records of King Sejong* where King Sejong himself had made 28 characters in December of the 25th year of his reign. But this is unclear and insufficient to explain the details of the invention of *hangeul*. This caused researchers of succeeding generations to guess that the process of inventing *hangeul* was not open and that chroniclers added an article in the 25th year of King Sejong after reading the royal preface from the 28th year (Yi Sung-yeong 1958: 49). As no article on the invention of *hangeul* and no details of the publication of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* can be found in the *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, these questions have increased. Because of the lack of records, it is difficult to know in detail when the invention of *hangeul* started, who participated in it, and why Choe Man-ri actually opposed the plan. In spite of the lack of direct records to answer these questions, other articles in the *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, except the *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, *Collected Works of Shin Suk-ju*,

Seonggeunbo-jip (Collected Works of Seong Sam-mun) and an unofficial history make us induce the details of the invention of *hangeul* and the process of the publication of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*. Also, they enable us to glimpse into the leadership of King Sejong in coping with the objectors to the invention of *hangeul*.

As there were no records on the process of inventing the Korean alphabet in the *Veritable Records of King Sejong*, some scholars of the coming generations often argue that King Sejong pursued the invention secretly by himself. They also argue that the period of the invention was that of the proclamation of the invention of *hangeul* around the 25th year of King Sejong. Meanwhile, there is the opinion that the Korean alphabet was not the sole project of King Sejong. In this case, King Sejong had not pushed forward the project openly large scale with his subjects but had done it secretly with the Crown Prince and a small number of scholars in the Hall of Worthies. Even though King Sejong was an excellent and competent monarch, it seems hard to admit that the monarch pushed forward the project by himself to the exclusion of his subjects under the common politics between lord and subject. On the contrary, it is most likely that King Sejong pushed forward the project with a small number of close subjects. The reason can be induced as follows: King Sejong felt it necessary to promote the circumstances that the Crown Prince could carry out his regency smoothly and to stabilize political power continuously in the latter half of his government. To do this, it was also necessary to protect new scholars in the Hall of Worthies and make them protectors of the Crown Prince in the relations between the conservative subjects and the new scholars. If King Sejong tried to reshuffle the political system centering on the Crown Prince and junior scholars while worrying over the latter half of his government, a counterargument could have been raised that the contrary case might be more effective. In other words, it seems hard to conclude that it would have been unfavorable to the Crown Prince for King Sejong to devise a project with the conservative subjects in order to protect the Crown Prince. Accordingly, it is difficult to know King Sejong's real intention. However, according to the unofficial story, it is more acceptable that King Sejong entrusted a small number of the palace group with the project (An "Epitaph" written by Yi Seung-so in the appendix of "A Real Record of History," *Collected Works of Shin Suk-ju; Collected Works of Seong Sam-mun* Vol. 3).

On the one hand, the reason can be found in the then situation of the worship of the powerful aside from the political relations between lord and subject. It can

be assumed that King Sejong kept the project secret because the subjects adhering to the worship of the powerful would be sure to oppose his linguistic policy. Of course, this assumption makes sense only if it was possible to invent the Korean alphabet without the help of his subjects.

Anyway, it is true that King Sejong faced the opposition of his subjects even after the official announcement, whether he himself had invented the Korean alphabet or not. It is also true that he went through with his planning for statecraft by ordering the use of *hangeul* in spite of opposition from his subjects. This is the point we can think highly of King Sejong's excellent leadership. Why did his subjects oppose the invention of *hangeul* strongly? Considering that nothing was mentioned about this before the official announcement on *hangeul*, it seems plausible that most of the subjects did not know about it. As stated above, this fact disproves the secrecy of the project at first. In the meantime, keeping such a secret would only be possible if the king entrusted a small-scale task force¹² with the project. The fact that the Korean alphabet was kept thoroughly secret before the official announcement under a political system to decide on policies through the discussions between the king and the subjects reveals, in a sense, King Sejong's style of statecraft and, moreover, the very capability of King Sejong. As the official announcement about the Korean alphabet was not an eventual solution, it was natural that the political problem between king and subject should be raised. Also, King Sejong needed the agreement and support of the subjects so that the Korean alphabet might be spread on a national level. All discussion between king and subject ceased, so King Sejong had to face the opposition of the subjects. Coincidentally, subjects did not submit a memorial to the throne against the Korean alphabet immediately following the official announcement about *hangeul* but went in gear when the king ordered the translation of *Chinese Phonology*. This makes it obscure whether the opposition of the subjects was only against the invention of the Korean alphabet or against the translation of *Chinese Phonology*.

12. The figures that seem to have been included in a kind of task force team were Shin Suk-ju, Seong Sam-mun, Yi Gae, Yi Seon-ro, Bak Paeng-yeon, and Choe Hang. The record is interesting that Seong Sam-mun, Shin Suk-ju and Yi Gae had read privately at Bokjeongsan in the winter of the 24th year of King Sejong, a year before the official announcement on *jeongeum*. They are assumed to have worked together according to a special order of King Sejong (Refer to "Annals" of Shin Suk-ju). "A Real Record of History," *Collected Works of Seong Sam-mun* Vol. 3 reveals that there were a group of subjects King Sejong had especially trusted.

Looking into this situation in detail, the formal announcement of the Korean alphabet's 28 characters was issued on December 30th in the 25th year of King Sejong, and the repeal to the throne against the Korean alphabet on February 20 in the 26th year. Meanwhile, King Sejong ordered the translation of *Chinese Phonology* on February 16 in the 26th year, just before the repeal to the throne. And he also ordered the Crown Prince, Prince Yi Yu, and Prince Yi Yong to manage this project. Because of this time difference, there is an opinion that the subjects did not oppose *hangeul* itself but the project on translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* (Yi Sung-yeong 1976: 324). But looking into the contents of the repeal to the throne, it can be seen that an incentive to the repeal to the throne was the order of February 16 but the opposition was not caused only by King Sejong's project of translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*. Rather, it was because the project of translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* would be made possible by the establishment of the Korean alphabet. Accordingly, the opposition to the project of translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* means there was opposition to the Korean alphabet. It is possible that the subjects raised the translation project because it was difficult for them to oppose the Korean alphabet openly. King Sejong must have seen through this. But he tried to confront the repeal to the throne against the Korean alphabet, mentioning not only *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* but also the Korean alphabet and thereby tried to justify his policies. Of course, this process involved the opposition of the subjects on translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* after the invention of *hangeul*; it would be difficult to apply that to the decision process to invent the Korean alphabet, the political relationship between king and subject, and display of royal leadership. In spite of expressing his opinion on the operating policy, visible is a theory for the king to justify his policy. Following this process, we can imagine the style of government and leadership of King Sejong.

The repeal to the throne against the Korean alphabet was issued centering on Choe Man-ri, deputy chief of the Hall of Worthies, the contents of which are classified into six categories (February 20, 1444). First, it warns that the invention of *hangeul* by Joseon, a country that worships the powerful China, would be reported to China and cause many difficulties. Second, the so-called barbarian states of Mongolia, Western Xia dynasty in China, Jurchen, Japan, and Tibet all have their own written characters, and the invention of *hangeul* bring Joseon down to the status of a barbarian state. Third, *idu* enabled Joseon to borrow Chinese characters and use them, resulting in knowledge of characters and contributing to the rise of learning. Fourth, it was wrong for the king to expect that

hangeul would enable people to know about the handling of major crimes and have a fair trial. Fifth, politics meant that all the officials from the top down should discuss and adopt common policies; nevertheless, it is hard to understand the reason to allow ten low level officials study the project and carry it out promptly regardless of many impending affairs of the state. Sixth, it would be useless in politics and a loss in learning for the Crown Prince to study *hangeul* when he should be absorbed in more sage-like learning.

The above shows that the viewpoint of the subjects was different from that of King Sejong. As a whole, the subjects were accustomed to customs and old etiquette, and opposed the changes in customary practice and lacked an objective consciousness of framing systems, not to mention characters. Moreover, they took the qualities of the people as invariable. King Sejong saw through the thought of the subjects and justified his theory by pointing out the weakness of their theory. In concrete terms, King Sejong depended on a Confucian cause and refuted their theory, which was a way of persuading them.

Taking the process into consideration in detail, King Sejong refuted the viewpoint of the subjects that there would be no problem adapting the customary provisions of the law written in *idu* to the people. The subjects did not understand why the production of *hangeul* and *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* was needed at that time. On the contrary, King Sejong urged that radical reform was required because of the complex Chinese sounds. He also urged that his reforming capability was equal to that of Seolchong and that he was competent for the reform. Moreover, he urged that just as *idu* was made for the people, so *hangeul* was invented for the convenience of the people. He sought justification in the ideology of “loving the people.” Considering the basis of political justification is the people in a Confucian state, such an allusion of King Sejong was fully persuasive. In that case, the opposition of the subjects would be hardly justifiable. King Sejong aimed at this point. Even though this discrepancy between king and subject derived from a kind of power struggle, he took advantage of this to accomplish his goals.

This way of persuasion is shown in King Sejong’s retort against Jeong Chang-son. Jeong Chang-son said that the reason neither loyal subject, nor filial son, nor virtuous woman could be seen after the distribution of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* was due to the qualities of the people and that the people could not always follow *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* after it was translated into *hangeul* (February 20, 1444). King Sejong retorted: “Such a speech is not worthy of a man of virtue. Jeong Chang-son is a

good-for-nothing and a very ignorant man” (February 20, 1444). He drove Jeong Chang-son into a corner, saying he lacked basic qualities as a noble who could enlighten the people. As such a refutation by King Sejong aimed at revealing that the responsibility to enlighten the people depended on the ruling class, the subjects could not raise a counterargument easily. Choe Man-ri stated in spite of his saying, “Your Majesty! Why do you spend so much time and worry yourself about such a non-urgent matter?” he could not compete with King Sejong. In the dynasty, nothing was more urgent than the King’s utmost efforts for the convenience of the people. Therefore, the opposition of Choe Man-ri only provided King Sejong with the possibility to counter well. It was natural that the opposition of the subjects to the invention of *hangeul* should be of no use.

After all, the opposition of the subjects was nothing but a plausible excuse to conceal a practical reason for their opposition. King Sejong saw through their real intentions. The subjects submitted a request for repeal to the throne complaining that King Sejong entrusted the Crown Prince with the project on translating *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*, having new scholars join and conservative elderly officials excluded in the project. The conservative elderly officials who had opposed the regency of the Crown Prince might well think that such a measure by King Sejong would exclude them and rearrange the power centering on new scholars. Among the subjects, Kim Mun, who had agreed with the invention of *hangeul*, took an attitude of opposing the project later on. This made King Sejong realize that the opposition of the subjects derived from a reason other than *hangeul* itself. This gave King Sejong a good cause to attack those who were opposing his project. King Sejong had considered the invention of *hangeul* an important national project and had taken it for granted that the Crown Prince should control such an important project. Of course, the subjects must have known the importance of this project. Seeing that King Sejong had the Crown Prince and a small number of new scholars who were followers of the Crown Prince push forward with the project in the latter half of the regency, the subjects took it as a threat to their power and opposed the project. In other words, the refutation between king and subject was nothing but a struggle for power. Even though the opposition of the subjects was a test to stop a possible rearrangement of the power system, it was not justifiable for them to oppose the theory of King Sejong wherein the Crown Prince had control over administration.

Looking into the personnel organization of the scholars in the Hall of

Worthies at that time, those who joined in the opposition camp to submit a repeal to the throne were Choe Man-ri, Jeong Chang-son, Shin Seok-jo, Kim Mun, Ha We-ji, and Jo Geun, etc.,¹³ who were uninterested in the translation or were excluded from carrying out King Sejong's policies. On the contrary, those who joined in the translation of *Chinese Phonology* were those young scholars such as Choe Hang, Bak Paeng-yeon, Shin Suk-ju, Seong Sam-mun, Yi Seon-ro, and Yi Gae, etc. The origin of the opposition group to submit a repeal to the throne had already begun in the process of uniting the scholars into a new power group centering around the Crown Prince and two Princes through the translation of *Chinese Phonology* just after the discussion of establishing Office in Charge of General Affairs to hand over political affairs after January the 19th year of King Sejong. In spite of their strong opposition, King Sejong oppressed the opposition group with strong leadership and pushed forward the linguistic project. A strategic method to exercise his leadership was to ask and retort based on reason and cause. Besides, he impeached certain subjects for their change of opinion and punished him severely as a scapegoat. Those scapegoats were Jeong Chang-son and Kim Mun; they were accused of changing their opinion and were stripped of their position. King Sejong threw into prison Choe Man-ri, Shin Seok-jo, Kim Mun, Jeong Chang-son, Ha Wi-ji, Song Cheo-geom and Jo Geun and ordered them free the following day. However, such a measure means that he intended to set them free from the very beginning. In spite of his intention, he took a strong measure, meaning that it would be favorable to exercise his leadership by showing off his power.

In the meantime, those who joined in the invention of the Korean alphabet also joined in other projects. Those participants in the projects on *Korean Rhyming Dictionary* and *Ming Rhyming Dictionary* that was pushed forward afterwards were almost the same figures who joined in the publication of *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* in the 28th year of King Sejong. This reveals that *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* was nothing but a process of carrying

13. It is politically calculated that the participation of the Crown Prince and two Princes in the meeting for translating *Chinese Phonology* means that the officials of the Hall of Worthies centering on the Crown Prince were mainly composed of young elites - the most learned or high ranking officials did not join, resulting in their political discontent (Choe Gi-ho 1983: 546-7). But it cannot be evaluated simply by official rank because low-ranking officials such as Ha Wi-ji, Song Cheo-geom, and Jo Geun, etc. joined the opposition group. On the contrary, it is more appropriate that this case meant division into two groups: The one is within the palace power of King Sejong and the other outside.

out the plans for King Sejong's statecraft and the project on the Korean alphabet had been intentionally connected with other projects including *Korean Rhyming Dictionary* from the very beginning. This is supported by the fact that the same pool of elites was mobilized in two projects and the characters involved in the two projects were almost the same. Considering that *Korean Rhyming Dictionary* was completed in September of the 29th year of King Sejong and interpretation of *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* in September of the 28th year, these two projects were carried out almost at the same time (Yi Sung-yeong 1958: 77). Considering *Songs of Flying Dragons* was finished in April of the 27th year, these projects must have been advanced altogether at almost the same time.

Though it is said that *Songs of Flying Dragons* was not a priority project of King Sejong, it could not have been finished without the knowledge of the details of *hangeul* (Yi Sung-yeong 1958: 65). In this respect, *Songs of Flying Dragons* must have been a result from carrying out progressively the plans for King Sejong's statecraft. What were the ultimate goals of King Sejong through these projects? They were to establish the justification of the Joseon dynasty and to ensure lengthy stability. The Joseon dynasty lacked justification in the process of dynasty establishment, and King Sejong knew very well that people would not acknowledge an immoral royal authority because of this lack of justification (Yi Geun-su 1996: 7). Therefore, it can be easily imagined that King Sejong had tried his best to secure the justification of his throne and to stabilize regal power after coming into power. He made effort to justify the seizure of the throne of the first king, Taejo, by means of the ideology of Heaven's decree. It was *Songs of Flying Dragons* that had been planned for the purpose of justification. This can be proven by the fact that *Songs of Flying Dragons* was composed of contents that emphasized and praised the public morality of previous kings. The purpose of its publication is well known by the fact that *Songs of Flying Dragons* was the first book published using the Korean alphabet characters after their invention.

Another foundation for taking *Songs of Flying Dragons* as one of a series of plans for King Sejong's statecraft is that it had been planned before the propagation of the Korean alphabet. King Sejong revealed his intention to write *Songs of Flying Dragons* in March of the 24th year of his reign. Then, the compilation of the contents of *Songs of Flying Dragons* must have begun before the invention of the Korean alphabet. *Songs of Flying Dragons* put emphasis on the virtuous conduct carried out at the private houses of King Taejo and King Taejong and

the 107 main songs were largely composed of achievements connected with the previous kings such as these: King Taejo (65 songs) and King Taejong (20 songs) (Yi Geun-su 1996: 11-2). This proves that its purpose lay in publicizing public morality to the people but did not lie simply in using the Korean alphabet. In that case, it would be effective only if *Songs of Flying Dragons* was compiled for the purpose of establishing the justification of the Joseon dynasty

The Korean alphabet was propagated in December of the 25th year of King Sejong and the explanatory edition of *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* in September the 28th year. But *Songs of Flying Dragons*, written in the Korean alphabet, was published in April of the 27th year.¹⁴ In other words, the explanatory edition came out in two years or so after the invention of the Korean alphabet, but *Songs of Flying Dragons* came out before the explanatory edition in the 27th year. This proves that the principles on the Korean alphabet had already been provided before the explanatory edition. This also proves that the production of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* had progressed from the very beginning of the invention of the Korean alphabet. Accordingly, these cultural policies were the ones pushed forward from the start. It can be known that *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* and *Songs of Flying Dragons* were devised for the purpose of establishing the justification of the dynasty and making it perpetual. In particular, if it is true that *Songs of Flying Dragons* was not an object for testifying the function of the Korean alphabet as characters and establishing their authority (Yi Geun-su 1996: 15), it proves once again that it was devised to overcome the lack of the justification of the early dynasty and to establish a Confucian state appropriate to the cause.

Depending on these discussions, it can be surmised that the Korean alphabet and other cultural policies were deeply connected with one another. In the discussions on the invention of *hangeul*, the key point has not been its publication but its method, proving clearly that the Korean alphabet had been mapped out for a long time. It can be said that the planning for the Korean alphabet began in the 14th year of King Sejong when *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* was published and that the planning was actually realized after the 16th year mapping out the translation of *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* into *hangeul*. These ten years or so afterwards might be the period in

14. It was finished in April the 27th year of King Sejong, was revised in October the 28th year and was publicized in October the 29th year. It took over six years to complete it.

which King Sejong devised various projects, including the Korean alphabet, with all his ability. Then, it can be seen that the basic system of the Korean alphabet had already been devised before the 25th year of King Sejong and the explanatory edition was published afterwards to reveal the theoretical characters clearly and to increase its supply.

In particular, the primary aim of inventing the Korean alphabet was to reduce crime and to cultivate customs and functioned in the end as an effective method to increase political effectiveness. From the viewpoint of a ruler, the invention of the Korean alphabet must have brought forth the effect to transfer the order system of the state to the infrastructure perfectly and contributed to the establishment of a centralized civil administration (Jeong Gu-bok 1998b: 31). But this effect was only a part of various political results caused by the invention of the Korean alphabet, but was not just an aim in itself. The aim of King Sejong as a ruler was to establish a centralized national system based on Neo-Confucianism. To do this, the communication between king and people must have been an essential element and the Korean alphabet must have served this purpose. Accordingly, from the viewpoint of statecraft, the Korean alphabet was devised as a means of communication, i.e. a means for ruling a country, thus it was not invented for its own sake. In this case, the communication between king and people was not so much interrelated as it was a one-sided transfer of the system of royal order to the people.

The invention of the Korean alphabet was originally planned in connection with the compilation of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*, the necessity of which was raised because of relations with China. Thus, the relation between the Korean alphabet and *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary* represents the close relation between Joseon and China. Accordingly, a nationalistic viewpoint that the invention of *hangeul* resulted from the efforts to secure the independency of a purely new nation is nothing but a fragmentary analysis to the exclusion of the then spirit of the times. In studying *hangeul*, it would be more productive an attitude to analyze the process of invention and the effectiveness of the results in connection with the leadership of the king than to put an emphasis on the aim of invention. In other words, considering King Sejong had not adapted himself to the linguistic policy of China in spite of the then spirit of the age and the circumstances of the worship of the powerful but had tried to invent a linguistic system suitable to the natural features of Joseon, it would be scholastically useful to evaluate his ideological system and leadership but not desirable to overemphasize the national self-consciousness.

Conclusion

As stated above, the primary political effect King Sejong expected in the invention of *hangeul* was that it would be helpful to cultivate customs. On inventing the Korean alphabet, King Sejong translated *Picture of Behavior for Basic Human Relations* in *hangeul* for the people to follow. At the same time, he expected the translation of difficult provisions of the criminal law into easy *hangeul* would make punishment fair and also prevent crime. Moreover, he also expected that the completion of the Korean alphabet would make it possible to show the arrangement of music and words based on the sounds of Joseon, to praise the virtues of the previous kings, and to emphasize the meaning of the dynasty's foundation.

So, King Sejong encouraged its use in every field after the invention of the Korean alphabet. He himself wrote the crimes of censors in *hangeul* and sent them to the Correctional Tribunal and the Royal Secretariat (October 10, 1446; October 13, 1446). He selected talented persons in *Yigwa* and *Yijeon* (December 26, 1446) and had *Correct Sounds to Teach the People* used in an examination for selecting local officials (April 20, 1447). He also had the Four Books (four Chinese classics) translated into *hangeul* (February 28, 1448). Above all, he tried to maximize the effect of the Korean alphabet through music. King Sejong had recognized the interrelations between folk music and politics for a long time (September 12, 1433) and wrote *Songs of Flying Dragons*, had them played at a national reception, and distributed them to his subjects. Of course, this aimed at warning against disloyalty and encouraging loyalty. Considering that *Songs of Flying Dragons* were firstly written in the Korean alphabet and their contents were eulogy songs on the dynasty's establishment to justify it, a variety of cultural policies under the King Sejong's reign must have had connection with establishing the justification of the dynasty and the aim of perpetuating it.

King Sejong faced his subjects opposing his policies in the process of pushing forward his cultural policies with political effect and exercised his leadership in persuading them to his cause. Showing his leadership, King Sejong had taken the initiative not only in inventing the Korean alphabet but also in carrying out a series of cultural policies including the compilation of *Sino-Korean Rhyme Dictionary*. The king of a Confucian state realized public government should be full of confidence in his political vision to carry out secretly his policies in coordination with a small number of close subjects. Thus, King Sejong, with his intellectual appetite, had an extensive knowledge of linguistics and phonology

and everybody recognized this publicly. He tried to push forward his policies rather secretly and carried out practical affairs with only a small number of close subjects. But this caused opposition from the excluded power group. He tried to persuade them on the basis of the Confucian cause. He adopted a dual and double-sided strategy of retorting their theoretical weaknesses and suppressing them by means of his authoritative superiority as king. When retorting his subjects, he sought the political justification for his policies in the Confucian cause by putting forward the ideology of “loving the people” and acting “for the people.” He also exercised a strategy of making political scapegoats, suppressing his opponent’s force on the one hand, and warning other political parties on the other. It seems that this double-sided strategy of King Sejong could succeed because most of his policies were appropriate to a great cause and timeliness. Accordingly, it can be said that the accomplishment of the blueprint of King Sejong’s statecraft was greatly due to his conspicuous leadership.

References

- Bohanjae-jip* (Collected Works of Shin Suk-ju). *Hanguk munjip chonggan* (Complete Works of Korean Literature). Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Chujinhoe.
- Choe Gi-ho. 1983. “Hunmin jeongeum changjee gwanhan yeongu—Jiphyeonjeongwangwa eonmunbandaesangso” (A Study on the Invention of *Hunmin jeongeum*—The viewpoint of the Hall of Worthies and the opposition’s repeal to the throne against *hangeul*.” *Dongbanghakji* (The East Asia Journal) 36-37. Seoul: Institute for Korean Studies, Yonsei University.
- Choe Seung-hi. 1966-67. “Jiphyeonjeon yeongu (sang) (ha)” (A Study on the Hall of Worthies Parts I-II). *Yeoksa hakbo* (The Historical Journal) 32-33. Seoul: Yeoksahakhoe.
- . 1993. “Sejongjo jeongchijibaechungui daeminuisikkwa daeminjeongchi” (The Consciousness and Politics of the Ruling Class toward the People in the King Sejong Period). *Jindan hakbo* (Jindan Bulletin) 76. Seoul: Jindanhakhoe.
- Heo Chun-kang. 2000. “Seong Sam-munui hunmin jeongeum changjewa munhwajeongchaek” (The Invention of *Hunmin jeongeum* and Cultural Policies by Seong Sam-mun). *Hanguk haengjeongsahakji* (The Korean Journal of Administration and History) 8. Seoul: Society of Korean Administration and History.

- Heo Wung. 1976. “Sadaejuuie ppajin inmul: Choe Man-rineun *hangeul*changjee bandaehaenna” (A Person Who Believed in the Worship of the Powerful: Did Choe Man-ri oppose the invention of *hangeul*?) *The Monthly Jungang* 103. Seoul: The Jungang Ilbo.
- Jeong Du-hi. 1980. “Jiphyeonjeonhaksa yeongu” (A Study on Scholars of the Hall of Worthies). *Jeonbuhak* (Jeonbuk History) 4. Jeonju: Society of History, Jeonbuk University.
- . 1993. “Joseongeonguk chogi tongchichejeui seongnipgwajeonggwa yeoksajeok uimi” (The Process of Establishing the Political System in the Beginning of Joseon’s Foundation and Its Historical Meaning). *Hanguksa jeonhwangui munjedeul* (Problems of Korean History in Transition). Seoul: Jisik Saneopsa.
- Jeong Gu-bok. 1998a. “Sejongjo yeoksa eusigui gyeseung’e daehan Han Yeong-wuui nonpyeong” (Han Yeong-wu’s Comment on the “Succession to Historical Consciousness in the King Sejong Period”). *Sejongsidae munhwai hyeondaejeok uimi* (Modernistic Meaning of Culture in the King Sejong Period). Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- . 1998b. “Sejongjo yeoksa eusigui gyeseunge daehan Yi Seong-muui nonpyeong” (Yi Seong-mu’s Comment on the “Succession to Historical Consciousness in the King Sejong Period”). *Sejongsidae munhwai hyeondaejeok uimi* (Modernistic Meaning of Culture in the King Sejong Period). Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- Jo Nam-wuk. 2001. *Sejongdaewangui jeongchicheolhak* (King Sejong’s Philosophy of Politics). Busan: Busan University Press.
- Kang Gyu-seon. 2001. *A Study on Hunmin jeongeum*. Seoul: Bogosa.
- Kang Man-gil. 1978. “Hangeul changjeui yeoksajeok uimi” (The Historical Meaning of the Invention of *Hangeul*). *Bundansidaewi yeoksajeok insik* (The Historical Recognition of the Divided Age). Seoul: Changjakgwa bipyeongsa.
- Kang Shin-Hang. 1984. “Sejongjoui eomun jeongchaek” (Linguistic and Literary Policies in the King Sejong Period). *Sejongjo munhwa yeongu 2* (A Study on Culture in the King Sejong Period, Book 2). Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- . 2003. *A Study on Hunmin jeongeum*. Seoul: Seonggyungwan University Press.
- Kim Min-su. 1969. “Hunmin jeongeum changjeui simal—Sejongui gukgwonhwaknipchaekjeul jungsimeuro hayeo” (The Circumstances of the Invention

- of *Hunmin jeongeum*—Centering on King Sejong’s Strategy for Securing National Power). *A Collection of Treaties in Memory of Dr. Kim Jae-won’s 60th Birthday*. Seoul: Eulyumunhwasa.
- Kim Seok-hwan. 1997. *A Study on Hunmin jeongeum*. Seoul: Hansinmunhwasa.
- Kim Un-tae. 2002. “Joseonjo sejongdaewangui minbonsasang” (King Sejong’s Ideology for the People). *Sahoejeongchaek nonchong* (A Collection of Treaties on Social Policies) 14(1). Seoul: Institute for Korean Social Policies.
- Kim Wan-jin. 1984. “Hunmin jeongeum changjee gwanhan yeongu” (A Study on the Invention of Hunmin jeongeum). *Korean Culture* 5. Seoul: Institute for Korean Culture, Seoul National University.
- Nam Yun-gyeong. 2001. *Sejongdae changjedoan hunmin jeongeume daehan yeoksajeok jeopgeun: Choe man-ri deung jiphyeonjeon haksadeului hunmin jeongeum bandaesangsoreul tonghayeo* (A Historical Approach to Hunmin jeongeum Invented in the King Sejong Period: The Opposition’s Repeal to the Throne by the Scholars of the Hall of Worthies Including Choe Man-ri). Seoul: Graduate School, Seogang University.
- Park Byeong-ho. 1982. “Beopjedomyeoneseo bon Sejongjo munhwaui jainsik” (A New Appreciation of Culture in the King Sejong Period Seen from the Viewpoint of Law and System). *A New Appreciation of Culture in the King Sejong period*. Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- . 1998. “Joseonjogi beopjejeonggwa sahoesang” (The Legislation and Social Aspects of the Early Joseon Period). *Guksagwannonchong* (A Collection of Treaties on the Korean Historical View) 80. Gwacheon: Korean History Compilation Committee.
- Park Jong-guk. 1984. *King Sejong and Hunmin jeongeum*. Seoul: Memorial Society for King Sejong.
- Seonggeunbo-jip* (Collected Works of Seong Sam-mun). *Hanguk munjip chonggan* (Complete Works of Korean Literature). Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Chujinhoe.
- Sim Hui-gi. 1998. “Hangukjeok jeontongseonggwa siminjeok deokseong—bumingosogeumjibeopgwa Sejongui gonoe” (Korean Tradition and Civil Virtues—Prohibition Law against Local Suits and King Sejong’s Agony). *Modernistic Function of Culture in the King Sejong period*. Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- The Academy of Korean Studies. 1982. *Sejongjo munhwayeongu* 1 (A Study on Culture in the King Sejong Period 1). Seongnam: The Academy of Korean

Studies.

- Yi Geun-su. 1996. “Hunmin jeongeum changjewa Joseon wangjo” (The Invention of Hunmin jeongeum & the Joseon Dynasty). *Inmungwahak* (Cultural Sciences) 4. Seoul: Institute for the Humanities, Hongik University.
- . 1998. *Joseonjoui eomunjeongchaek yeongu* (A Study on Linguistic and Literary Policies during the Joseon Dynasty). Seoul: Hongik University Press.
- Yi Gwang-ho. 2001. “Sejongui eoneojeongchaekgwa hunmin jeongeumui changje” (The Linguistic Policy of King Sejong and the Invention of Hunmin jeongeum). *Sejongsidaewi munhwa* (Culture in the King Sejong Period). Seongnam: The Academy of Korean Studies.
- Yi Han-wu. 2003. *Sejong, geuga baro Joseonida* (King Sejong, He Is Joseon). Seoul: Dongbang Media.
- Yi Sung-yeong. 1958. “Sejongui eomunjeongchaekke gwanhan yeongu” (A Study on Linguistic and Literary Policies of King Sejong). *Asia Study* 1 and 2. Seoul: Institute for Asian Problems.
- . 1964. “Choe Man-ri yeongu” (A Study on Choe Man-ri). *A Collection of Treaties in Memory of Dr. Yi Sang-baek’s 60th Birthday*. Seoul: Eulyumunhwasa.
- . 1966. “Sejongdaewangui gaeseongui gochal” (A Study on King Sejong’s Character). *Daedongmunhwayeongu* (A Study on East Asian Culture) 3. Seoul: Institute for East Asian Culture, Seonggyungwan University.
- . 1976. “Sejongeul gyeonjehan jikganin: Choe Man-rineun hangeulchangjee bandaehaenna” (A Person of Direct Admonition: Did Choe Man-ri oppose the invention of *hangeul*?) *The Monthly Jungang* 103. Seoul: The Jungang Ilbo.
- . 1981. *Sejongdaewangui hangmungwa sasang—Hakjadeulgwa geu eobjeok* (The Learning and Ideology of King Sejong—Scholars and Their Achievements). Seoul: Asiamunhwasa.
- Yi Wu-seong. 1976. “Joseonwangjoui hunminjeongchaek kwa jeongeumui gineung” (The Enlightening Policy of the Joseon Dynasty and the Function of Jeongeum). *Jindan hakbo* (Jindan Bulletin) 42. Seoul: Jindanhakhoe.
- Yu Chang-gyun. 1993. *Hunmin jeongeum yeokju* (Translation and Annotation of *Hunmin jeongeum*). Seoul: Hyeongseol Publishing Co.

Yoo Mi-rim graduated from Ewha Woman's University with a degree in political thought. He is currently working as a senior researcher at the Korea Maritime Institute.

