

Han'gŭl Nationalism in 20th Century Korea

Thorsten Traulsen (Ruhr University Bochum)

글은 말을 담는 그릇이니, 이지러짐이 없고 자리를 반듯하게
잡아 굳게 선 뒤에야 그 말을 잘 지키나니라.

주시경, 한 나라 말, 1910

*"Writing is a vessel for holding language; only after it has stood firm and square,
without chipping, can it preserve language properly."*

Chu Si-gyŏng, 'The Language of the Han nation', 1910
(translation quoted from King 1998:48)

When Chosŏn-Korea at the very end of the 19th century finally followed the Japanese Meiji model and officially adapted to the Western 'nationalistic' world view in the *Kabo*-reforms of 1894-96 (*kabo kaehyŏk* 甲午改革) the 'independent nation' became the structure of reference for socio-political thinking, along with the image of a Social-Darwinist 'struggle of nations' and an aesthetics of physical and technical strength. The edicts of the *kabo* reform drastically departed from social life of the late Chosŏn dynasty by introducing - at least by edict - social equality among castes and gender, decentering China in favor of the West.

Korean intellectuals from now on were busy not only composing 'patriotic songs' (*aeguk ka*) in Korean to be published in newspapers but also filling out the imported framework of the 'narration of a nation'. The elements of this narration comprise many aspects known from religion and reflect the nature of 19th century European Nationalism as a **belief-system** rather than a **political ideology** with the latter showing more focus on socio-political issues as e.g. how to legitimate leadership, how to distribute resources, or how to achieve a more social balance, issues hardly addressed by Nationalism.

The most common elements of this 'narration/myth of the nation' are: **(i) a traditional homeland** belonging to the people by some natural law (for Korea as a peninsula the main issue in this respect is the Northern border, in particular to China); **(ii) a very long history** proving the naturalness of the people (in Korea we hear of 5.000 years, i.e. a few hundred years before Tan'gun's 檀君 reign starting in 2,333 BC); **(iii) a Golden Age and Kingdom to Come**: a classic epoch in which one's own culture was blooming but of which one was deprived due to unjust events in the times since then. This Golden Age does not only serve as indication of ancient greatness but its resurrection in the near future also as an national utopia (in Korea the Silla kingdom with its outstanding cultural artefacts like the *Sōkkuram* 石窟庵 cave was praised in this respect, especially in art history and along with president Park Chung Hee's 朴正熙 (1917-1979) 'hwarang spirit' ideology); **(iv) a legendary progenitor** from which all members of a people are said to have descended; (in Korea the Tan'gun myth served this function at least since late Koryō times); **(v) a cultural hero** who brought fire, writing or other cultural inventions to mankind / the people (in Korea this role was attributed to the 11th century BC Chinese *Jizi* 箕子 (kor. *Kija*) but being of non-Korean ethnicity his role was downplayed or ignored during the Colonial period and its stronger focus on ethnicity); in a less mythological understanding the cultural hero can be understood as a *messiah* who recently *did* lead or in near future *will* lead the people to next cultural/political climax; **(vi) historical freedom fighters/martyrs** whose collective commemoration in form of events, statues, pictures, novels, etc. keeps the idea of the nation alive; (in Korea in particular General Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣 who died 1598 in the last battle against the Japanese fleet in one of his ingenious 'turtle boats' served this function at least since Sin Ch'ae-ho's 申采浩 biopic (1908) and especially under Park Chung Hee); **(vii) an ancient vernacular national epos ('sacred text')** reflecting the virtues of the ethnic community; (in Korea the Old Korean vernacular poetry (*hyangga* 鄉歌) from the 'golden' Silla times and dealing mostly with the warrior elite *hwarang* could have fulfilled that role to a certain degree; however, no matter how much president Park Chung Hee promulgated a *hwarang* spirit for building the nation, as a 'sacred' text to cultural nationalist the *hyangga* remained second to the han'gŭl 'birth certificate' *Hunmin chōngŭm* 訓民正音 of 1446 - see below); **(viii) a sense of mission**: 'let the world benefit from our greatness!'

These believes are embedded and consolidated in society by a commemorative culture comprising *national symbols* (a flag; an official anthem but possibly also an unofficial song known by everybody; a national food, a national sentiment/character, etc.), *historical sites* of important events in the history of the nation, *ceremonies and rituals* (turning into national

holidays), *oral or written legends* of national heroes, *art & artefacts* representing the national history, etc.

A further element, if not key element - **language** - is differing from the others in two important aspects and its role for nationalism is often not given its fair share:

(i) while most narrative elements of nationalism - historical person's and events - can be discussed upon and their outcome negotiated, changed or even fortified to a certain degree, the mother tongue of the people defies drastic measures without stirring grudge and resistance in large parts of the addressee. The ubiquity of language in everyday life, the age limit to become a native speaker of certain language (around age 12), and the increasing unease with other languages from there on makes language one of the most important carrier and signifier of identity. In fact, it can be argued that the success of Nationalism in the 19th century Europe (and many cases thereafter) is also due to the fact that it was appealing to the linguistic sentiments of a larger non-elite population (depending on the extent of linguistic minorities in the nation to be constructed). Accordingly early nationalistic endeavors by intellectuals often cover the compilation of dictionaries, the writing of grammar books, the collection of folk literature and the study of the history of the vernacular language including the celebration of its most outstanding authors and oldest transmitted texts.

(ii) language, in particular the vernacular language as opposed to some imported 'high-variety' (Latin, Classical Chinese, High Arab, French) in a diglossic setting is not only a symbol of the nation and its people but the medium of nationalism itself. Only through the vernacular language these images and narrations are communicated and distributed to a wider audience, i.e. to the people. Benedict Anderson ('Imagined Communities', 1983) stressed the role of vernacular print capitalism for the rise of nationalism in the 19th century.

In **Korea** nationalism and its myth of ethnic-linguistic homogeneity fell on fruitful ground. There was very little contradicting this myth: immigration played a minor role in pre-modern Korea and was not present enough to question a strong feeling of identity based on 'blood' in society. Besides Korea had the all prerequisites to prove as one of the most fervent adapters to language/script nationalism: a strong linguistic homogeneity once Classical Chinese is abolished - dialectal variance appears to be low in comparison to the diglossic split of Classical Chinese vs. vernacular Korean. More apt for nationalistic glorification, however, was the Korean han'gŭl alphabet for three reasons: (i) since only Korean is written in han'gŭl (apart from textbooks for foreign languages like Manchu or Japanese) it served as a visual symbol for

the national language. Furthermore, since glossographic writing (*hundok* 訓讀)¹ in Korea had been given up already in early Koryŏ 高麗 (918-1392) native Korean words can only be written in han'gŭl (while Sino-Korean words can be written in han'gŭl or in Chinese characters *hancha*). Or the other way around: any move towards more native Korean instead of Sino-Korean words - a common topic on a language nationalistic agenda - also strengthens the position of han'gŭl and entails an increase in its usage even in mixed *hancha-han'gŭl* writing; (ii) han'gŭl's high degree of 'alphabeticity'², i.e. the possibility to liken it to the efficient and successful Western alphabet, made it stand out in East Asia and clearly contrasted with the Chinese or the Japanese case; (iii) the linguistic background of the historically transparent origin of han'gŭl in 1443/4 made han'gŭl appear even better than the Western alphabet.

Along with decentering the 'Middle Kingdom' (*Chungguk* 中國) culturally and degrading it to simply 'China' (*China* 支那), Classical Chinese (*hanmun* 漢文) and the derived 'clergy script' (*idu* 吏讀) were targeted by some Korean reformers as the official medium for governance, administration and intellectual life. The *genbun itchi* 言文一致 ('unification of written and spoken language') discussions in Japan during the 1880s addressing this problem of the traditional diglossia Classical Chinese vs. Japanese (and its various written styles) was not going unnoticed among the reform oriented and pro-Japanese Korean intellectuals of that period. They started their own discussions for a Korean *ŏnmun ilch'i* 言文一致 style to overcome historical diglossia already in the 1880s. At the core of this discussion was the question how this new written language should look like: pure Korean (now referred to *Kungmun* 國文, 'national text style' instead of the traditional term 'vernacular text style' (*ŏnmun* 諺文) or a mixed Hanmun/Korean style (*Kukhanmun* 國漢文). However, China's dominance of the peninsula after the Kapsin-Coup (*kapsin chŏngbyŏn* 甲申政變) of 1884 and the flight of the reform intellectuals to Japan or in the U.S. postponed any further achievements until 1894 and the kabo reform.

¹ in glossographic writing logographic (rather: morphographic) Chinese characters are used to write a native Korean word with the same meaning, e.g. the Chinese character 心 SIM 'heart/mind' for writing the Korean word 마음 *maim* 'heart'.

² the only elements that distinguish han'gŭl from a prototypical alphabet are the principle of writing in syllable blocks and the zero initial ㅇ.

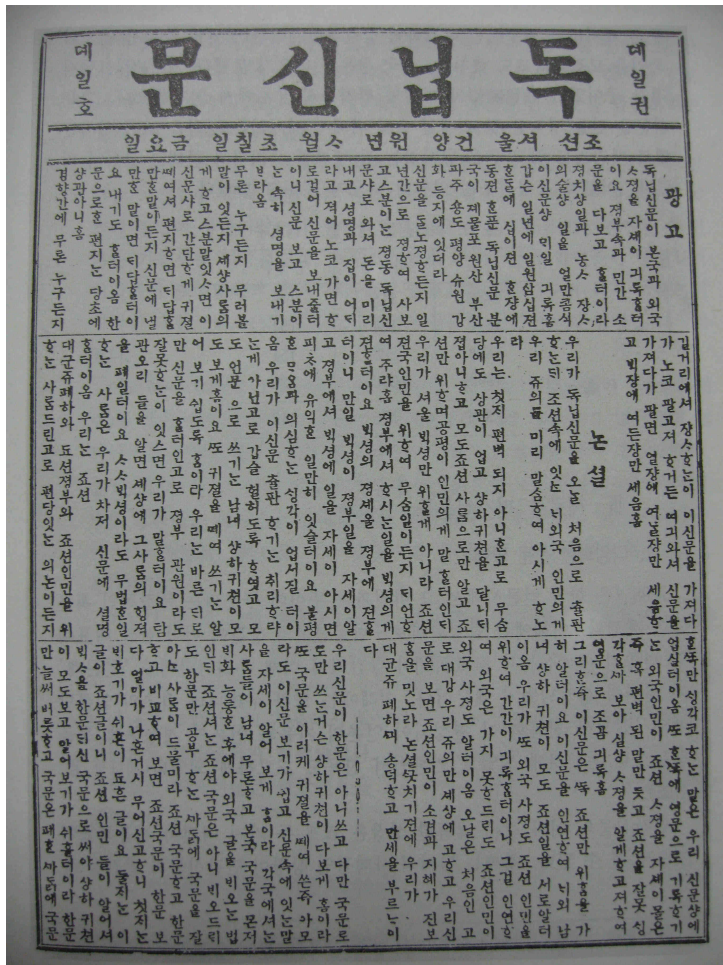
The language related passage from the *kabo* edicts reads as follows:

法律勅令總之國文爲本漢文附譯或混用國漢文

"All laws and edicts should have kungmun [i.e. pure Korean] as their base; one may attach a translation in *hanmun* [i.e. Classical Chinese] or mix *kungmun* and *hanmun* together."

(quoted from King 1998:37)

The first beacon of the new elevated status of the vernacular, now 'national text style' (*Kungmun* 國文) Korean is the often quoted case of the *Tongnip sinmun* 獨立新聞 ('The Independent', 1896-99), founded by Sö Chae-p'il 徐載弼 (aka Philip Jaihson, 1864-1951). Although short-lived its radical han'gŭl-only approach (*han'gŭl chŏnyong* 한글전용) and the involvement of the genius linguist Chu Si-gyŏng 周時經 (1876-1914) as co-editor bestowed a reputation upon it that lingered throughout the 20th century.



The front page of the inaugural edition of 'The Independent' (*Tongnip sinmun*), 7th April 1896)

In 'On Korean Writing' (국문론, 22 & 24 April 1897), his first editorial for the *Tongnip Sinmun* about one year later, Chu Si-gyǒng emphasized the superiority of the Korean alphabet and praised its efficiency:

"[...] As for the Korean script ..., the manner in which it was made to combine the consonant and vowel graphs is more elegant and reasoned, and it is much easier to learn; thus, in our view, the Korean script is the best, most well thought out (*hangmun i innŭn*) [i.e. scientific] script in the world. [...] Let us not waste vital, precious time like this to learn isolated pictures; the script created for us by our Great Sage is both easy to learn and easy to write. Let us record all our written affairs with it, so that all might gain more time in their youth, strive after knowledge useful for practical enterprises ... and thus become the pillars and foundation stones for Korea's independence." (quoted from King 1998:43-44)

While particularly Japan embarked on a 'Eastern Ways, Western technology' (*Tongtǒk Sǒgi* 東道西器) ideology stressing the aesthetic and spiritual contribution of 'The East' to world culture, Korea was able to contribute to the scientific side of this equation as well - if only by its script. Chu Si-gyǒng's arguing along the causal connection 'scientificness > efficiency > strength > national independence' reappeared over and over again during the decades to come.

So, with all pieces in place - reform politics in favor of the vernacular language, a nationalistic sentiment, and the existence of a fully-functioning indigenous alphabet - what could have stopped the banning of Chinese characters and the exclusive usage of han'gŭl from the (at least official) linguistic landscape?! ...

... but it did not happen.

It is tempting to blame the Japanese Colonial period (1905/1910-1945) with its Korean language policy and the influence of Japanese with its strong dependence on Chinese characters for the failed alphabetic revolution of han'gŭl. The everyday presence of the Chinese character based writing system of Japanese as the powerful variety in the linguistic landscape may have overridden the alphabetic prestige associated with the Western world. But let's take a look at the 'Newly Revised Standard Elementary Learning' (*Sinjǒng Simsang sohak*, 1896), one of the new textbooks that have been produced in course of the kabo reforms years before the Japan-

Korea Protectorate Treaty (1905) and its use of language: While setting off with an introduction to han'gŭl by means of the traditional *ka-kyā-kō-kyō*-table the text continues in mixed script heavily relying on Sino-Korean lexic and phrases like 者 | *CHA-i* 'as for ...'.

자	차	카	타	파	하	과	화
자	차	카	타	파	하	과	화
저	처	커	터	퍼	허	과	화
저	처	커	터	퍼	허	과	화
조	초	코	토	포	호	과	화
조	초	코	토	포	호	과	화
주	추	쿠	투	푸	후	과	화
주	추	쿠	투	푸	후	과	화
지	치	키	티	피	히	과	화
지	치	키	티	피	히	과	화

世宗大王께서 말씀하시대 세계各國은 다 國文
 이有하야 人民을 開曉하되 我國은 홀노 업
 다스 特別히 訓民正音을 지으스 民間에
 廣布하심은 婦孺와 輿僮라도 알고 세 닷기
 爲은 緣故라 卽今 萬國이 交好하야 文明
 의 進歩하기를 힘쓰는 즉 教育의 一事가 目下
 의 急務라 玆에 日本人 補佐員 高見龜와
 麻川松次郎으로 더불어 小學의 教科書를
 編輯하되 天下 萬國의 文法과 時務의 適用
 者를 依樣하야 或物象으로 譬喩하되 或
 畫圖로 形容하야 國文을 尙用함은 여러 兒
 童尋常小學序

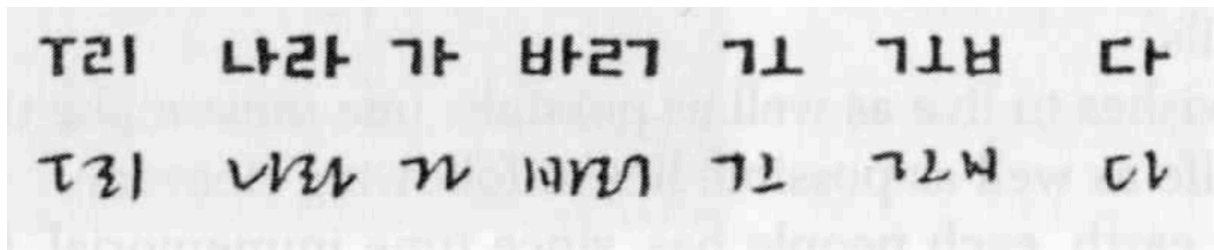
Sinjōng Simsang sohak (1896): "To study is not exclusively to revere Classical Chinese and study the Old but also to account for contemporary matters and reevaluate the Korean language, to study the Now too and broaden one's knowledge. Our "King Sejong the Great" said: 'All the countries in the world have their own script that educates the people, only we have not.' This is the reason why he created the *Hunmin chōngŭm* and spread it among the people in order to let all people, women and children, slaves and servants, easily learn and get educated [...]."

In fact, most texts - newspapers, books, journals - from the enlightenment period (*kaehwagi* 開化期, 1894-1910) period favor a mixed script and text style even when discussing patriotic and national themes. This situation continues throughout the whole Colonial period and han'gŭl-only writing remained an exception in most newspapers, journals and books. Only in the realm of literature it became more prominent but this is also due to the fact that authors, especially poets, used less Sino-Korean vocabulary.

It was in the 1920s during the 'cultural administration' (*bunka seiji* 文化政治, kor. *munhwa chŏngch'i*) of the Japanese government in Korea when Korean linguists and intellectuals worked out a trinity of script related issues that dominated the discussions for the next decades, all of them based on ideas associated with Chu Si-gyŏng.

(i) at the core of han'gŭl movement stood the **abolition of Chinese characters**. Technically this proposal does not need to be 'worked out' and han'gŭl-only had been done before even in Chosŏn times. The only innovation that came along with han'gŭl-only writing was word spacing in the fashion of the 'The Independent' to facilitate reading.

(ii) Besides, the idea of Korean '**on-line writing**' (가로쓰기 *karo-ssŭgi*)³ instead of traditional syllable blocks grew more and more attention. This ideas are strongly linked to the legacy of Chu Si-gyŏng and can be dated back to a proposal he made in 1909 stating that this is "smoother for the flow of pronunciation, also convenient pedagogically, and important for type casting" (Traulsen 2012). His example 우리 나라가 밝고 곱다 ("Our country is bright and beautiful") in on-line writing reads as follows:



³ Nowadays the term 가로쓰기 *karo-ssŭgi* 'horizontal writing' denotes the writing from left to right in horizontal lines and does not entail the resolution of syllable blocks which is now referred to as 가로풀어쓰기 *karo-p'urŏ-ssŭgi* 'horizontal resolved writing' and which I label here 'on-line writing' following Ross King (1997). Nevertheless, all proposals for 'on-line writing' took a horizontal writing from left to right for granted.

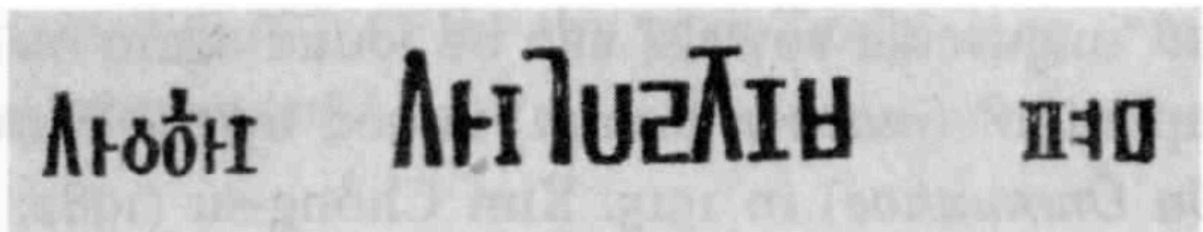
A third element of han'gŭl language thinking strongly associated with Chu Si-gyŏng that later became politically discussed is **morphophonemic spelling** by means of 'new finals' (새 받침, first mentioned by him in 1897). This is the present way of spelling in which words are always spelled according to the same lexical 'deep structure' shape ignoring phonological changes by added suffixes and thus not following 'surface pronunciation'. This is in fact a modernist approach to spelling and most linguists and language politicians favor it. It corresponds better to how skilled reading is processed, namely by recognizing word shapes and not by stringing together individual sounds represented by letters.

phonemtaic vs. morphophonemic spelling

stem	+ suffix	phonematic	morphophonemic
맞- <i>mach-</i> 'be correct'	+ -고 <i>-kwo</i> 'and'	> 맞고 <i>mas-kwo</i>	맞고 <i>mach-kwo</i>

These three topics became staples in the discussion of value and potential of han'gŭl during the Colonial period and thereafter. While han'gŭl-only writing was more a political than a linguistic matter (as mentioned above no proposals had to be worked out), on-line writing of han'gŭl triggered a string of proposals many of them going far beyond the point of technical improvement (Traulsen 2012).

In Shanghai exile the Chu Si-gyŏng disciple and later Chairman of the Worker's Party of North Korea (*Pukchosŏn Rodongdang* 북조선로동당) **Kim Tu-bong** 金科奉 (1889-1958?) published an "Amended and Extended Korean Grammar" (깁더 조선말본, 1922) - a revision of his 1916 grammar - in which he argued in favor of han'gŭl-only writing, morphophonemic spelling and on-line writing.

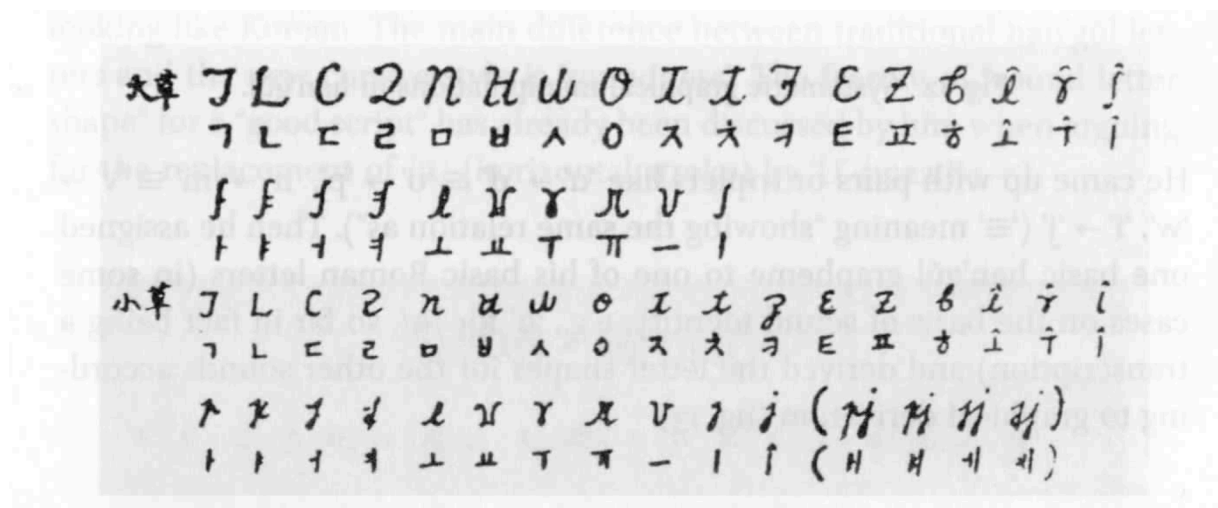


on-line writing with capital letters from the cover of Kim Tu-bong's "Amended and Extended Korean Grammar" (깁더 조선말본, 1922)

It is interesting to see that from early on post-Chu Si-gyǒng scholars tried to adopt features of Roman letters - here capital vs. non-capital letters - to 'the best alphabet in the world' (see also below).

In Korea itself the **Korean Language Society** (lit. 'Research Society for the Korean Language' *Chosǒn ǒnǒ yǒn'guhoe* 朝鮮語研究會) was formed in 1921 as a successor to the *Kungmun yǒn'gu so* (1907). In 1931 it changed its name to 'Academic Society of the Korean Language' (*Chosǒnǒ hakhoe* 朝鮮語學會) only to become the 'Han'gŭl Society' (한글학회) in 1949 after the liberation of the country.

One of the first achievements of the society was the introduction of the *ka-kya-day* in 1926 (*han'gŭl day* since 1928) to commemorate the alphabet on the 29th day of the 9th month of the lunar calendar (this date changed a couple of times until it was fixed on October 9th in South Korea and January 15th in North Korea). On this occasion Ch'oe Hyǒn-bae 崔鉉培 (1894-1970), another of Chu Si-gyǒng's disciples, proposed his form of on-line writing. Although on-line writing does not come with many issues to be worked out⁴ once again the lure of the Roman alphabet was strong. Ch'oe Hyǒn-bae changed the letter shape more and more mimicing Roman and Cyrillic letter shapes:



Ch'oe Hyǒn-bae's proposal for letter shapes for on-line writing

⁴ the key issues are the treatment of the zero initial (keeping or abolishing), digraphs for tensed sounds (as two letters, e.g. ㅃㅃ/ㅅㅃ or together as one ㅃㅃ/ㅅㅃ), syllable or word spacing. All proposals agreed on the latter solution in each case.

The next year 1927 saw the inaugural issue of the 'han'gŭl' journal (한글 = ᄒᆞᆫ글 = ᄒᆞᆫ글 = ᄒᆞᆫ글) by the Korean Language Society in which language and script related issues were discussed (and many more on-line writing proposals released). Nevertheless, the journal heavily relied on Chinese characters for writing Sino-Korean words.



cover page (top part only) of the han'gŭl journal

The greatest achievement of the Korean Language Society was the **Unified Han'gŭl Orthography** (한글맞춤법통일안) of 1933 which was radically modern in favoring morphophonemic writing as well as adjusting traditional spelling, above all abolishing the vowel letter · /o/ all together and writing tense consonants with double letters e.g. ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, etc. instead of the *s*-prefixed digraphs ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, ᄒᆞᆫ, etc. respectively. These ideas were also opposing Japanese language policy in Korea and thus received an additional symbolic value for language/script nationalism. Right after liberation 1945 Unified Han'gŭl Orthography was adopted as official standard.

(It should not go unmentioned that not all linguists agreed with Chu Si-gyōng's ideas. The most representative figure from the opposing camp was the lawyer and linguist Park Sŭng-bin 朴勝彬 (1880-1943) who in 1931 formed the Korean Linguistic Research Society (*Chosŏn ōhak yŏn'guhoe* 朝鮮語學研究會) with its journal *Chŏngŭm* 正音.)

When the more and more oppressive Japanese **assimilation policy** resulted in a ban of Korean language from public life in 1938 various scholars from the Korean Language Society finally started the compilation of a monolingual Korean dictionary. However, in 1942 the manuscript was confiscated and the involved scholars including Ch'oe Hyŏn-bae sent to prison. With the

ban of Korean language from private life as well in 1943 the fate of the Korean language and script seemed to be doomed.

The suppression during the Colonial period - in particular during the assimilation policy - and the work of the cultural nationalists and linguists in combination with the sentiment with which one's mother tongue is perceived have contrived a 'han'gŭl myth' with elements reminiscent of those of the 'narration of a nation' as described above:

King Sejong the Great (*the cultural hero*) with his ingenuity created the *Hunmin chŏngŭm*, the best and most scientific alphabet in the world for the love of his people but elites suppressed its full blossoming sticking to Classical Chinese. The scientific greatness of this creation is well documented in the text *Hunmin chŏngŭm haerye pon* (*sacred text*) which was rediscovered in 1940. A complete reprint of the bilingual Classical Chinese/Middle Korean *Hunmin chŏngŭm ōnhae pon* in the appendix of books on han'gŭl later became a staple. Besides the vernacular version of the text's introduction is memorized by many like a form of catechism.

Kim Man-jung 金萬重 (1637-1692; *the freedom fighter*) saw the vernacular potential and authored the most prestigious pre-modern Korean novel "Nine Cloud Dream" (*Kuunmong* 九雲夢) on par with Western novels in Korean/han'gŭl.

In the modern age it was **Chu Si-gyŏng** (*the messiah of the contemporary age*) who had never left Korea revived the belief in the power of han'gŭl (and giving it its new name) first during his tenure with '**The Independent**'. His ingenuity anticipated structuralists' language thinking resulting in his proposals for **morphophonemic** spelling by means of his 'new finals'.

After his early death his disciples continued to fight for his achievements which were above all **han'gŭl-only writing**, morphophonemic spelling and on-line writing. They succeeded partly with their **Unified Spelling Proposal** (1933) which became standard after liberation.

During the Japanese assimilation policy members of the **Korean Language Society** risked their lives at the task to finally compile a monolingual dictionary in order to save the Korean language from extinction before they were imprisoned by Japanese authorities (two of them died in prison).

It goes without saying that most of these elements can and must be modified if not outwardly wrong: King Sejong did not create the alphabet on his own, but in cooperation with other scholars like Sin Suk-chu 申叔舟 (1417-1475), etc.; the ingenuity of the invention is often strengthened by stressing the difference between logographic (rather: morphographic) Chinese

writing and phonographic writing while ignoring the existence and knowledge of other East Asian phonographic writing systems at that time, above all the Mongolian 'Phags-pa and the Indian Siddham script; the 'people' King Sejong is talking of must be specified and most likely does not correspond to a 20th century nationalist's or socialist's understanding of the term; the full bloom of han'gŭl was hindered by Koreans themselves and not by foreign powers; Kim Man-jung most likely wrote the *Kuunmong* not in Korean but in Classical Chinese; 'The Independent' already used han'gŭl-only writing before the involvement of Chu Si-gyŏng. (Nevertheless, the historically correct version of this narration is still impressive and never fails to fascinate linguists including me to this day.)

So, with the liberation in 1945 all pieces were in place - an independent state in favor of the vernacular language, a nationalistic sentiment elaborated during the Colonial period, and the existence of a fully-functioning indigenous alphabet (han'gŭl) - what could have stopped the banning of Chinese characters and the exclusive usage of han'gŭl from the (at least official) linguistic landscape?! (and what about on-line writing and morphophonemic spelling which are on the plate now too?)

Once again, it did not happen, at least not in the South.

While Korea's triangular modernity during the Colonial period was determined by the poles of the 'Modern' (the West), the 'National' (Korea) and the 'Colonial' (Japan) the liberation brought with it a new conflict that led to a divided 'nation' and a brutal war (1950-1953). Once again Korea's modernity was caught in a triangular relation: both Koreas now had to prove that they are the authentic and legitimate representative of the Korean people and culture on the one hand while following modernization within their respective system - Communism in the North, Capitalism in the South - on the other hand.

North Korea proved to be the better follower of Korean language and script nationalism by making han'gŭl-only writing its official language policy while the South embarked on a zigzag tour of pro- and anti-Chinese characters policies that was to continue for decades. A resolution for han'gŭl-only writing signed by the new president Rhee Syngman in June 1948, a former proponent of this stance, was amended the next day by the passage "For the time being, however, Chinese characters may be used together with han'gŭl." (King 1997:114). Then in particular in the early 1970s several school cohorts were educated with only basic knowledge in Chinese

characters (Reckel 2006:56). North Korea on the other hand stuck to han'gŭl-only policy, however with additional c. 3.000 Chinese characters added to the curriculum not to depart too far from South Korean language practice - so at some time North Korean students were more versed in Chinese characters than South Koreans.

One of the main arguments for the continuing use of Chinese characters brought forward in the South was the participation in the East Asian 'Sinographic' cultural sphere (*hancha munhwagwŏn* 漢字文化圈). Indeed, with China and Japan two of the biggest markets in the world are not only neighboring countries but also members of this sphere. Another one was sticking to traditional knowledge and cultural identity. On a functional level, however, this policy limited the accessibility of newspapers and books to less the educated and the knowledge of Chinese characters served as a strong social marker distinguishing 'elites' from 'the people'.

The next language political issue in which North and South Korean embarked on differing paths for some years concerned matters of orthography. Once again the North was sticking to Chu Si-gyŏng's heritage in form of morphophonemic writing while the South appeared to fall back into pre-modern practices of phonemic writing.

In the North Kim Tu-bong, now president of the Kim Il Sung university, proposed reform ideas concerning morphophonemic spelling by adding six new or reactivated defunct letters to account for alternating finals. E.g., he proposed to use the letter △, originally conceived and used for the voiced sound /z/ in Middle Korean but long out of use by then, to write the morphophonemic alternation t/r (which in Yale transliteration is written with capital T).

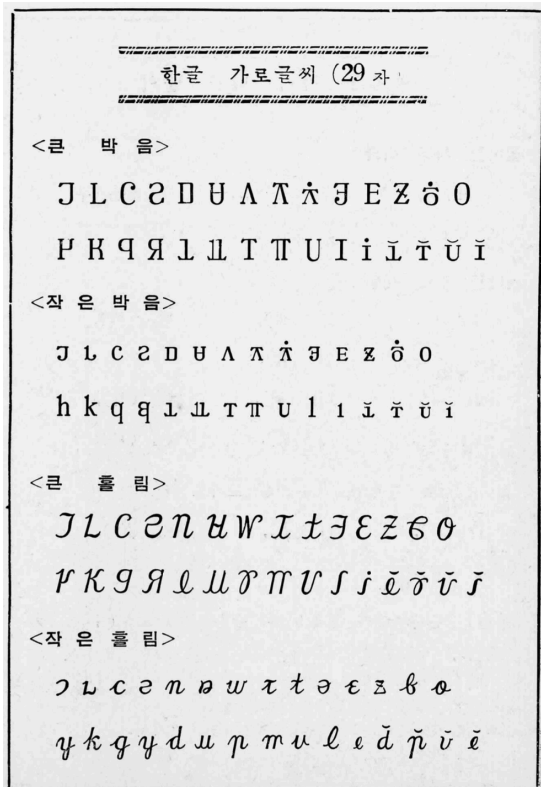
'to hear' + 'and' / converb	phonemic	morphophonemic	Kim Tu-bong
듣- <i>tŭR-</i> + <i>-ko</i> 'and'	듣고 <i>tŭs-ko</i>	듣고 <i>tŭt-ko</i>	듣고 <i>tŭR-ko</i>
듣- <i>tŭR-</i> + <i>-ŏ</i> '(converb)'	드러 <i>tŭr-ŏ</i>	들어 <i>tŭr-ŏ</i>	듣어 <i>tŭR-e</i>
'to remove'			
벗- <i>pŏt-</i> + <i>-ko</i> 'and'	벗고 <i>pŏs-ko</i>	벗고 <i>pŏt-ko</i>	벗고 <i>pŏt-ko</i>

This idea is an extension of the morphophonemic spelling and reflects a sophisticated language thinking. However, these ideas were abolished with Kim Tu-bong's purge in 1958.

In the South, however, a backlash took place. In the *Simplified Han'gŭl Spelling Directive* of April 1953 president Rhee Syngman 李承晩 (1875-1965) replaced the morphophonemic spelling of the *Unified Han'gŭl Spelling* of 1933 in favor of a phonemic simplification and raised the scorn of many scholars above all the Han'gŭl Society. This controversy continued until September 1955 (King 1997:119-123) when Rhee Syngman rescinded his *Simplified Han'gŭl Spelling Directive*.

While both episodes - Kim Tu-bong's hyper-morphophonemic spelling in the North as well as Rhee Syng Man's phonematic writing in the South - can be looked at from a purely ideological point of view it must be kept in mind that all three script related topics (han'gŭl-only usage, morphophonemic spelling, and on-line writing) severely affect the mechanization of Korean writing, above all the development of a Korean type-writer. In fact, it was argued that this was the main impetus of Rhee Syngman's initiative to go back to a simplified han'gŭl spelling (Kim 2017; see also Traulsen 2012).

In South Korea Ch'oe Hyŏn-bae continued his struggle for han'gŭl-only in combination with on-line writing through a string of books, above all 'Revolution of Letters' (*Kulcha ūi hyŏngmyŏng* 글자의 혁명, 1947).



Revised letter shape for on-line writing of han'gŭl by Ch'oe Hyŏn-bae (1947)

With all this reluctance from South Korean governmental side to abandon Chinese character use and push through han'gŭl-only writing it comes to no surprise that the next and more successful attempt was in fact targeted *against* the government. On 15 May 1988 the first issue of 'The Hankyoreh Shinmun' (한겨레 신문, later simply 한겨레 'One Nation') was published. The newspaper was established by former Dong-A Ilbo and Chosun Ilbo journalist who were not willing to accept the strong governmental censorship (or were fired because of it). It was funded by shareholders instead of large capital and was perceived as the mouthpiece of South Korea's democratization movement (*minjung*) in the 1980s.

Along with the *minjung* movement came the revival of traditional folk arts as the people's art like mask dance, genre painting and *samul nori* (사물놀이) percussion music. This attitude towards the people's, i.e. non-elite, traditional art & life can be found again in the column "Let's save our language" (우리말을 살리자) running in 17 parts from the Hankyoreh's inaugural edition to 25 August 1988 by the child book author, linguist and activist in the education movement Lee O-deok 李五德 (= Yi O-dŏk, 1925-2003). Lee rails against Chinese language influence including Sino-Korean words linking them to feudal yangban elites and Japanese colonialism. Needless to say (and as mentioned above) that only han'gŭl-only writing is capable to write pure Korean - and needless to say that the Hankyoreh applied a han'gŭl-only policy.

In the course of the 1990s and the 2000s the usage of Chinese characters in newspapers and books declined drastically and South Korea has finally reached a *de facto* han'gŭl-only practice with Chinese characters only used for names or technical terms (added in brackets). The increasing developments in computer technology on the other hand had rendered on-line writing for the sake of easier mechanization of writing (type-writer, etc.) meaningless. If the linguistic landscape in South Korea was to be shattered again it was now by discussions on 'English as an official language' (*Yŏngŏ kongyonghwa* 英語公用化) stirred by the author Pok Kŏ-il (복거일) and his book 'The National language in times of international languages' (국제어 시대에 민족어, 1998). English has replaced Chinese characters and Classical Chinese as the prestigious linguistic import and as the social marker in the field of language.

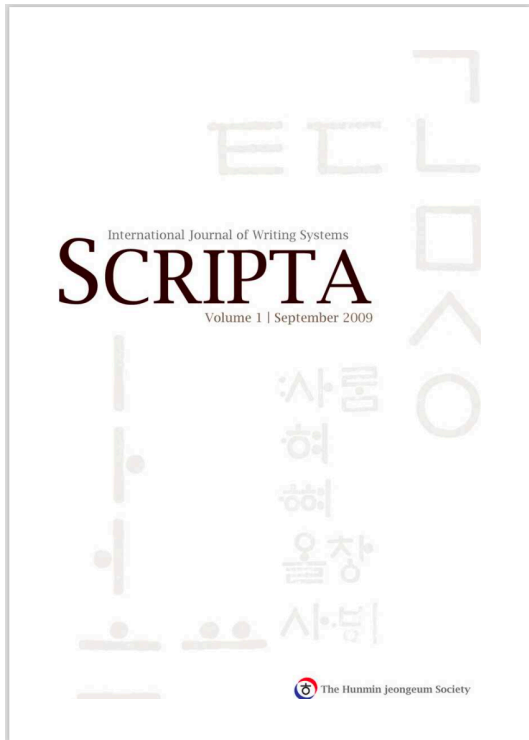
I leave it for discussion for what reasons exactly han'gŭl-only writing finally succeeded on a broad scale since the 1990s: for political reasons (consolidation of democracy)? For technological reasons (pixel limitations in early computer based word processing leaving

Chinese characters too complex)? For linguistic reasons (English replacing Classical Chinese and with it Chinese characters as a 'perceived' high variety in the linguistic landscape)? ...

The success of han'gŭl-only writing in the end - for what exact reasons ever - and the coming age of '**globalization**' (*segvehwa* 세계化) as announced by president Kim Yong-sam 金泳三 (r. 1993-98) in 1995 in accordance with (most of) the rest of the world rendered traditional script nationalism a spent force. Attempts to date back the origin of script on the Korean peninsula as in the case of the so-called *karimt'o* 加臨土 as mentioned in the modern forgery 'Hwandan kogi' 桓檀古記 appear to most Koreans as what they are: relics of belief systems from the first half of the 20. century that are to be left to believers. If han'gŭl nationalism remained active since the 1990s it is less for han'gŭl's symbolic value for the nation as in the Colonial period or for the people as in the *minjung* movement but rather in a more contemporary shape of global recognition. This spirit of post-Cold War culture comprising of human rights movements, culture of remembrance & reconciliation, diversity etc. brought forth a new 'nationalistic' attitude in which the focus shifted from the search of the essence of one's nation soul/spirit/heart to the global recognition of one's nation's cultural achievements. The **UNESCO** with its programs like 'World Heritage Sites', 'Memory of the World' (registration since 1997) or 'Endangered Languages' (since 1996) delivers a platform for this global recognition on which South Korean governmental and non-governmental actors proved to be very active⁵. In 1997 the extant *Hunmin chongum haerye-bon* manuscript was registered within the UNESCO Memory of the World program as one of the first Korean items on that list. In addition a string of books proposing a global spread of han'gŭl was published (e.g. Pak Yang-ch'un 1995, Kwŏn Chae-sŏn 2002). While the more ambitious proposals aimed on a replacement of Roman letters by han'gŭl even for English (Pak 1995) the more realistic approaches planned to make han'gŭl the script for unwritten endangered languages.

For the latter case and as a more recent and visible example let's take a look at the **Hunmin chŏngŭm society** (*Hunmin chŏngŭm hakhoe* 訓民正音學會) founded in 2007 by the retired real estate agent Lee Ki-nam 이기남 (Ch'oe 2009) and the inaugural volume of its English (and fully recommended) journal *scripta* (www.scripta.kr - note the date!).

⁵ With 15 registered items South Korea is leading the list of Asian and Pacific countries (80 together), closely followed by China (12). On a global scale it is second only to Germany (17 + several bi- or tri-national items).

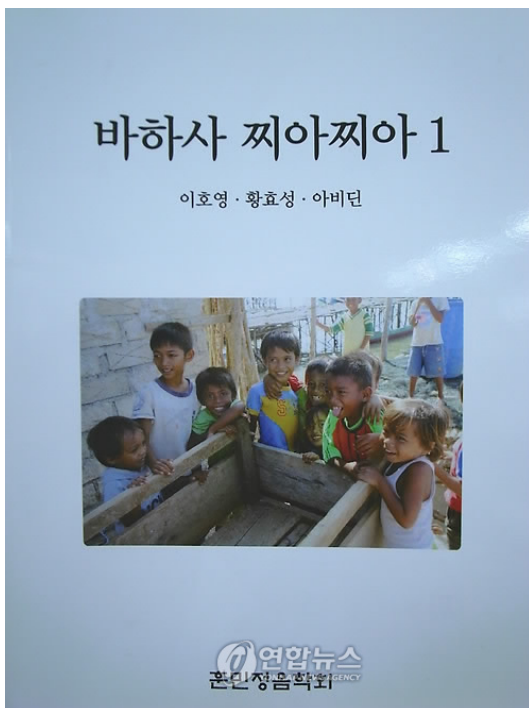


Mission Statement of the Hunmin jeongeum Society

Writing systems have been central to the transmission and development of human cultures. Hunmin jeongeum, or Hangeul, has been recognized as a truly creative, highly scientific writing system by the international linguistics community. It was invented in the spirit of love and compassion for humanity by King Sejong in the fifteenth century. Continuing in the original spirit of the invention of the Korean alphabet, we hereby launch the Hunmin jeongeum Society. We will undertake various activities in support of research on Hunmin jeongeum and other writing systems, and reach out to illiterate peoples to help them adopt a writing system appropriate to their own language.

The Hunmin jeongeum Society has two major objectives: Firstly, the society will stimulate worldwide research on human writing systems including Hunmin jeongeum. Secondly, the society will make every effort to accelerate the study of endangered languages lacking an alphabet, and to offer their native speakers a writing system that is tailored to the needs of their languages.

In this new century, on the well-laid foundation of past research, the Hunmin jeongeum Society will strive to share the cultural heritage of Korea with the world and to make a greater contribution to the development of linguistics through promotion of the study of the world's many languages and writing systems.



Bahasa Cia Cia - cover of the textbook.

October 9 (Hangeul Day), 2007

Swimming on the 'Korean Wave' (*hallyu* 韓流) of pop music, soap operas and movies in East Asia the Hunmin chŏngŭm society succeeded in providing the **Cia Cia** tribe in Sulawesi, a 60,000 people ethnic minority in Indonesia, with a writing system based on han'gŭl (not without offering them a substantial amount of money for cultural development (Ch'oe 2009)). This achievement, however, did not last for long and several years later came to an halt.

Another strand of global recognition reached han'gŭl in the field of the **linguistic study of writing systems** which became prominent around the turn of the millennium with publications like Peter Daniels & Richard Wright's 'The World's Writing Systems' (1996), Florian Coulmas' 'Writing Systems - An Introduction To Their Linguistic Analysis' (2003), Henry Rogers' 'Writing Systems - A Linguistic Approach' (2005). In particular Geoffrey Sampson's 'Writing Systems' (1985), one of the first books in this field, devoted a whole chapter on han'gŭl as 'a featural system'. Here Sampson expanded the assumingly evolutionary typology 'logographic writing > syllabic writing > alphabetic writing' of I.J. Gelb's often quoted 'A Study of Writing' (1952/63) by a further step: 'featural writing' - han'gŭl as the next step in the evolution of writing systems? Needless to say that Sampson's book was warmly received in Korea and translated in 2000 as '*Segye ūi Munhwa ch'egye*' 세계의 문자체계 ('Writing Systems of the World').

Summary: The uniqueness and linguistic background of han'gŭl put the Korean script in the focus of many Korean intellectuals and cultural agents right from the beginning of modernity. Pride and glorification in it remained constant, agendas and proposals were adjusted to the given circumstances in a rapidly changing 20th and 21st century. While it took decades to abolish Chinese characters and establish purely phonographic writing in South Korea, this success of han'gŭl did not stop it bestowing attraction to both Korean cultural agents and international linguists.

References:

- Ch'oe, Hyön-bae 최현배 (1947) *Kulcha ũi hyöngmyöng* 글자의 혁명 [Revolution of Letters].
- Ch'oe, Sang-hun (2009) *True Believer Spreads a Korean Linguistic Gospel*. In: 'The New York Times', September 12, 2009. Retrieved 14.03.2019.
- Coulmas, Florian (2003): *Writing Systems - An Introduction To Their Linguistic Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Daniels, Peter & Wright, Richard (1996): *The World's Writing Systems*. Oxford University Press.
- Gelb, I.J. (1952/63): *A Study of Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kim, Michael (2017): *The Han'gŭl Crisis and Language Standardization - Clashing Orthographic Identities and the Politics of Cultural Construction*. In: 'Journal of Korean Studies', Vol. 22.1 (Spring 2017), pp. 5-31.
- Kim, Tu-bong 김두봉 (1922): *Kiptö Chosönö malbon* 깃더 조선말본 [Amended and Extended Korean Grammar]. Shanghai: Saegŭlchip.
- King, Ross (1997): *Experimentation with Han'gŭl in Russia and the USSR, 1914-1937*. In: Kim-Renaud, Young-Key (ed.) 'The Korean Alphabet - its History and Structure.', pp. 219-261. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- King, Ross (1997b): Language, Politics, and Ideology in Postwar Korea. In: McCann, David (ed.) 'Korea Briefing - Towards Reunification', pp. 109-144. New York: Sharpe.
- King, Ross (1998): *Nationalism and Language Reform in Korea - The Questione della Lingua in Precolonial Korea*. In: Pai, Hyung Il & Tangherlini, Timothy R. (eds.) 'Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity'. pp. 33-72. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kwön, Chae-sön 권재선 (2002): *Han'gŭl ũi segyehwa* 한글의 세계화 [The Globalization of han'gŭl]. Söul: Ugolt'ap.
- Pak, Yang-ch'un 박양춘 (1995): *Han'gŭl ũl segye muncha rŭl mandŭlcha!* 한글 세계문자를 만들자 [Let's Make Han'gŭl the World's Letters!]. Söul: Chisik Sanöpsa.
- Pok, Kö-il 복거일 (1998): *Kukcheö sidae e minjkogö* 국제어 시대에 민족어 [The National language in times of international languages]. Söul: Munhakkwa Chisöngsa.
- Reckel, Johannes (2006): *Die chinesische Schrift in Korea - ein Politikum* [The Chinese Script in Korea - a Political Issue]. Göttingen: Peust & Gutschmidt.
- Rogers, Henry (2005): *Writing Systems - A Linguistic Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sampson, Geoffrey (1985) *Writing Systems*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Traulsen, Thorsten (2012): *Han'gŭl Reform Movement in the Twentieth Century - Roman Pressure on Korean Writing*. In: Voogt, Alexander & Quack, Joachim Friedrich 'The Idea of Writing II - Writing Across Borders'. Leiden: Brill.