

Hunmin-jong.um Language Policy and Emergence of Korean Hangul

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Abstract

The Han character sphere, including Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Singapore and China, adopted Han characters and classical Han writing as the official written language before the twentieth century. However, the advent of the twentieth century brought along great changes. In Korea, Han characters were finally replaced by Korean Hangul after World War II. Hangul is a phonemic writing system invented by King Sejong in the fifteenth century. Although Hangul was invented by King, it was regarded as a vulgar writing after King Sejong's death. The vulgar status of Hangul was not changed until 1948 when the Korean people achieved independence. The Korean government adopts Hangul as the official writing system. Moreover, the government has tried its effort to promote Hangul to the international communities. For example, the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize was established in 1989 to commemorate King Sejong. In short, Korea is one of the cases to replace Han characters with phonemic writing system in Asia. This paper examines Korean orthographic transition in terms of literacy and nationalism. The survey reveals that both internal and external factors have contributed to the successful promotion of Hangul. Internal factors include the general public's demand for literacy and anti-feudal hierarchy. External factors include the political relationships between Korea and China.

Keywords: Korean, Chosengul, Hangul, phonemic writing, Korea, Hunmin-jong.um