A Reassessment on the Significances of the Invention of Hangul

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Abstract

On December 24, 2012 the Cabinet decided to redesignate the Hangul Day as a national holiday with day off. It has been excluded from the national holiday since 1991. It is shame that Hangul Day has been a socio political issue. It was the result that the historical and cultural significances of Hangul are not well recognized.

Socio politically, Hangul made possible that Korea created centralized kingship faster than any other major state around the world in the fifteenth century. Replacing century old Buddhism with Neo Confucianism from China was a major risk Joseon started with. For the political and historical justification, Joseon court needed a communication channel with commoners and Hangul was the major tool for the communication. At the same time, Sejong the Great needed to replace the powerful yangban class who helped the creation of the new dynasty. Breaking the monopoly of power from the domination of use of Chinese characters, Sejong invented a new writing system. A new group of yangbans who were ready to sacrifice the monopoly to support the government made it possible for Sejong to create the sustainable centralized government.

The most significant achievement of the invention of Hangul is the creation of true written tradition of Korean civilization. Koreans began to write their thoughts and emotions with alteration and limitation by using Chinese characters. At the same time, the invention took place at the peak of Chinese cultural influence. With Hangul, Korea was able to create the cultural identity. It is the most important significance of the invention of Hangul. Hangul is the foundation of the Korean culture. At the time of globalization, cultural identity is the key element of the civilized country. Korea became a major country in the world and Hangul made it possible.

Keywords: Hangul, Hunminjeongeum, Sejong the Great, Neo Confucianism, Centralization, Communication, Written Tradition, Cultural Identity.