

# Nationalism and Globalism in Transliteration Systems: Romanization Debates in Korea

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## 1. Introduction

All nations have some sort of document – a book, a stone tablet, or a piece of parchment – that defines their national identity. The United States has the Declaration of Independence; Mongolia has *The Secret History of the Mongols*; and Thailand has the Ramkamhaeng Tablets. In Korea's case, the defining document is the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* of 1446. In this short book, King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) described the principles behind his new alphabet that is now known as *han'gŭl*. The preamble reads as follows:

The sounds of our country's language are different from those of the Middle Kingdom and are not confluent with the sounds of characters. Therefore, among the ignorant people, there have been too many who, having something they want to put into words, have in the end been unable to express their feelings. I have been distressed because of this, and have newly designed twenty-eight letters, which I wish to have everyone practice at their ease and make convenient for their daily use. (Ledyard, 1966: 124)

Koreans today believe that the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* is their greatest accomplishment because it created the world's most scientific writing system, which distinguishes Korea from its powerful and often aggressive neighbors. Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *han'gŭl* has been one of the strongest symbols of Korean national identity and pride. Attacks on *han'gŭl* are perceived as an attack on the sovereignty and pride of the Korean people. Chu Shigyŏng (1876-1914), the leading linguistic nationalist during this time, stated:

Therefore, since time immemorial powerful nations have respected their languages, written them down, and subjected them to controls. ... Ever

since Tan'gun founded our nation, a sacred orthodoxy has been handed down over more than 4000 years – our own, special, indigenous Korean language. The genius sage King Sejong was concerned that our Korean language had no appropriate writing system, and invented the 28 letters of the Korean alphabet. ... This is our own, special, indigenous Korean script (quoted from King 1998).

Chu's students in early opening years of the twentieth century carried on his legacy by advocating the elimination of Chinese characters from the Korean writing system. The Han'gŭl Society (Han'gŭl Hakhoe) today is the descended of the various Korean language organizations founded by Chu and his students.

Despite the strong appeal of nationalism in debates on the Korean writing system, tradition and internationalism have weighed heavily on two orthographic issues today: the use of Chinese characters with *han'gŭl* in a mixed-script writing system and the issue of transliterating Korean into Roman letters. Debates on these issues invariably bring a number of strong emotions to the surface that reflect the historical dilemma of Korean nationalism: how to maintain national identity amid powerful influential neighbors. In the late twentieth century, this debate has changed into the issue of how to maintain national identity amid the growing pressures of globalization. Korea is not alone in facing these dilemmas, so how Korea comes to terms with these issues is relevant to other nations facing the same questions.

Of these two, the romanization debate is particularly interesting because it reveals important and often contradictory perceptions of the current Korean orthography that reflect the construction of Korean linguistic nationalism in the twentieth century. In the mid-1990s, a variety of events came together to spark a renewed debate over how best to transliterate the Korean language into Roman letters. The current system of romanization, which is based on the 1939 McCune-Reischauer system, has come under attack from three perspectives: technological, phonetic, and, most strongly, nationalistic. In response, a variety of new proposals have been put forth to solve the perceived problems with the current system.

## 2. The Korean Language and Writing System

### 2.1. General Introduction and Genetic Background

Korean is one of the most important languages in Asia. It has about 70 million native speakers on the Korean peninsula and another five million native speakers, mostly in China, Japan, North America, and Central Asia. Smaller communities of Korean speakers exist in Western Europe, South America, and Oceania. South Korea's economic development since the early 1960s has contributed to the linguistic vitality of Korea by supporting a thriving mass media and publishing industry. Thus, in terms of number of speakers, international status, and amount of material published in the language, Korean ranks only behind Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and Russian in Asia.

Linguists have yet to prove a genetic affiliation between Korean and another language, but it is generally agreed that the language is a member of the Altaic language family that includes Turkish, Mongolian, and Manchu. Like these languages, Korean word order is SOV with a large number of agglutinating verbal endings. Vowel harmony plays an important role in determining the type of vowel that appears in the various suffixes that are added to the verb stem as it does in the Altaic languages. The relationship with Japanese is problematic because the syntax and morphology are very similar, but the phonology is quite different. Korean has a large number of CVC combinations, creating about 1,100 possible syllable combinations. Japanese, with its strict CV (except for final phoneme /n/ and its allophone /m/) phonological structure, has only about 120 possible syllable combinations. Japanese also has no vowel harmony, and there is little evidence that older forms of the language had. Intuitively, however, many scholars and language learners believe that Japanese is the closest major language to Korean (see Shibatani 1990 for a detailed discussion of the genetic relationship between Korean and Japanese).

### 2.2. The Korean Writing System

The Korean system is a masterpiece of linguistic engineering. The Korean script, *han'gŭl*, is a phonographic script in which 24 (originally 28) graphs depict the points of articulation of all of the phonemes in the Korean language. These graphs are then combined together into units that usually

correspond with syllable boundaries in Korean. Diphthongs are also made by combining the graphs for pure vowels together. *Han'gŭl*, was invented in 1443 (promulgated in 1446) specifically for the Korean language independently of existing scripts in the world at the time. Before the invention of *han'gŭl*, the Korean writing system used Chinese characters, or logographs, exclusively. *Han'gŭl* became the dominant form of writing only in the twentieth century, and *hanja* (Chinese logographs) continues to be used in South Korea, mainly in academic writing and newspaper headlines, but has been eliminated from official orthography in North Korea (Hannas 1997). *Han'gŭl* orthography, however, has been the subject of much controversy because the Korean language includes a number of morphophonemic constraints that cause one *han'gŭl* graph to be pronounced differently according to the phonological environment. The current *han'gŭl* orthography, which was standardized in 1933, is based on morphological boundaries, many of which originate in the pronunciation of Chinese logographs. This means that many words are written differently from how they are pronounced. The rules that govern phonological changes in Korean are regular, but, as with English spelling, they need to be memorized. Until the twentieth century, *han'gŭl* orthography followed more surface-level phonological rules rather than the deeper morphological structure (Sampson, 1985; Lee, 1963). The following tables, adapted from Kim-Renaud (1997) give a list of the 24 *han'gŭl* graphs in current use and a summary of contemporary orthographic conventions.

Table 1. *Han'gŭl* Graphs in Current Use

Consonants					
	Labial	Coronal	Palatal	Velar	
Laryngeal					
Tense ob.	ㅍ/p'	ㅌ/t'	ㅊ/c'	ㅋ/k'	
Asp. ob.	ㅃ/p <sup>h</sup> /	ㅆ/t <sup>h</sup> /	ㅈ/c <sup>h</sup> /	ㆁ/k <sup>h</sup> /	ㅎ/h/
Obstruent	ㅂ/p/	ㄷ/t/	ㅅ/c/	ㆁ/k/	
		ㄴ/s/			
Nasal	ㅁ/m/	ㄴ/n/		ㅇ/-ŋ/	
Liquid		ㄹ/r/l/			

Vowels			
Nonback		Back	
Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
ㅣ /i/	ㅑ /ü/	ㅡ /ɨ/	ㅜ /u/
ㅓ /e/	ㅕ /ö/	ㅗ /ə/	ㅝ /o/
ㅗ /ɛ/		ㅓ /a/	

Note: The lost vowel · /ʌ/ has been revived for use in company names.

Table 2. Current Korean Orthographic Conventions

#### Syllable and Word Formation:

consonant + vowel + consonant = syllable → word

ㅎ + ㅣ + ㄴ = 한 + ㅍ + ㅓ + ㄹ = 글 → 한글

Other types of syllables:

양 /yaŋ/ (Western, yang) 닭 /tak/ (chicken)

#### Example of Sentence-Level Orthography:

프랑스는 역사가 긴 나라입니다.

*p'ūrangſŭ nŭn yŏksa ga kin naraimnida*

'France has a long history'

#### Examples of Phonological Changes:

독립문 (獨立門) tok-lip-mun → /toŋnimmun/

전라 (全羅) con-la → /çəlla/

### 2.3. History of Korean and Early Korean Writing Systems

The history of the Korean language mirrors the history of conflict, invasion, and political consolidation on the Korean peninsula over thousands of years (see Lee 1972 for an overview of the history of the Korean language). Korean linguists generally divide the history of the language into four periods: Old Korean, Middle Korean, Early-Modern Korean, and Modern Korean. Old Korean dates from ancient times through the languages of

three kingdoms that vied for power on the Korean peninsula from the first century B.C. to the seventh century A.D. and ends with the collapse of the Shilla state in the tenth century. Chinese characters first entered Korean with Chinese Buddhist texts in the fourth century and spread with Buddhism throughout the peninsula. Literacy in classical Chinese and Chinese characters spread among the elite in the Unified Shilla Kingdom (668–932). This period also saw the rise of two other types of writing that borrowed Chinese characters: *idu* and *hyangga*. *Idu* used certain Chinese characters to mark Korean grammatical structure and morphological endings as an aid to reading a classical Chinese text; *hyangga* mapped the sound of certain Chinese characters with Korean pronunciation to create a semi-phonetic system of writing, which was mainly used in poetry and song.

Middle Korean dates from the tenth century to the sixteenth century, which includes the creation of *han'gŭl*. The Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392) built its capital in Kaesŏng, about 50 kilometers from modern Seoul. This shifted the center of power from the southeast to the center of the country and made central dialects of Korean the language of the court and of power for the first time. Literacy in classical Chinese spread in Koryŏ period, leaving a rich body of historical documents and literature in that language. The *kugyŏl* writing system, which used abbreviated versions of Chinese characters to indicate Korean grammatical structures. Although the *kugyŏl* system was similar to *idu*, it is interesting because some of the abbreviated characters are the same as the abbreviations in Japanese that form part of the *katakana* system. No historical records exist, however, which indicate relationship with Japan.

The Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) turned away from Buddhism of the Koryŏ period and made Neo-Confucianism its ruling ideology. The switch to Neo-Confucianism promoted the study of Chinese classics and placed China at the center of Korea's world view, which had a strong effect on the fate of *han'gŭl*. Shortly after its promulgation in 1446, King Sejong sponsored that writing and translation of a number of texts in *han'gŭl*. This gave scholars and court scribes the chance to practice the new system. Sinocentric Confucian scholars, however, did not take well to the system because they thought that only "barbarians" used indigenous writing systems. By the end of the fifteenth century, *han'gŭl* had fallen out of public use, and it was banned in 1504. The ban was later lifted, but *han'gŭl* almost never used in official documents for the rest of the Chosŏn period. It remained a private script of diaries, notes, and, later in the Chosŏn period,

popular novels.

Early-Modern Korean dates from the sixteenth century until the early years of the twentieth century. This eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed significant social turmoil in Korea as the rigid class system of the early years of the Chosŏn dynasty broke down. The growth of commerce and money economy stimulated the movement of people around the peninsula, which caused different dialect groups to come into contact with each other. Popular entertaining literature centering on the marketplace stimulated the growth of a readership and publishing industry. Many of these popular commercial works were written in *han'gŭl* (Kim 1997 [1986]). Thus, after having gone into hiding for a couple of hundred years, *han'gŭl* returned to the public eye in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as part of a new digraphia in which classical Chinese remained the official written language of government and education.

Modern Korean dates from the late nineteenth century when Western and Japanese notions of language entered Korea. The strength of the Confucian tradition and resistance to Western and Japanese imperialism hindered efforts to create a vernacular written language using *han'gŭl*. Yu Kiljun, the first Korean to study overseas and an early language reformer, advocated a mixed system of Chinese and *han'gŭl* (see King 1998 for a detailed discussion of turn-of-the century language reformers). He was interested in uniting speech and writing, as was being done in Japan at the time, rather than in choosing one writing system over another. So Chaep'il, another early language reformer, was influenced by English and advocated *han'gŭl* only with clear word divisions. Chu Shigyŏng, the language reformer with the greatest impact, was the first to link *han'gŭl* closely with national identity. Chu advocated a morphophonemic *han'gŭl*-only orthography and, shortly before his death, the adoption of a side-by-side segmental orthography.

Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945 greatly affected debates on the writing system. The Japanese colonial government developed a phonemic orthography that represented surface-level pronunciation, which caused many language activists to harden their stance in favor of Chu's morphophonemic orthography. With the Confucian tradition in repute and phonemic orthography associated with the colonial oppressor, *han'gŭl*-only morphophonemic orthography took on strongly nationalistic connotations. The Korean Language Society, predecessor of the Han'gŭl Society, adopted the Unified Han'gŭl Orthography in 1933, which, except for relatively minor changes, has been the basis for Korean orthography in both Koreas ever since.

Doubts about the Unified Orthography and residual interest in side-by-side segmental orthography have surfaced in both Koreas since 1933. In South Korea, cultural conservatives and *han'gŭl*-only forces centering on the Han'gŭl Society have been in conflict since the early 1950s. Each attempt to eliminate Chinese characters has brought on a torrent of criticism from cultural conservatives (Hannas 1997). In recent years, internationalists who view Chinese characters as an asset in learning Chinese and Japanese, two important languages for Koreans, have joined in opposing the elimination of Chinese characters. As things stand now, closer relations with China and improved computer software make it unlikely that Chinese characters will disappear, unless China or Japan move to eliminate them first. North Korea eliminated Chinese characters soon after its foundation in 1948, but it started teaching them again in the 1960s and currently teaches about 2,000 characters, more than South Korea or Japan, by the end of senior high school (Hannas 1997).

Morphophonemic orthography faced a strong challenge from President Rhee Süngman in 1954. He proposed a reformed phonemic orthography similar to the Japanese orthography of 1921, but later withdrew this proposal after negative public reaction (King 1996). Phonemic orthography has, much to the concern of linguistic conservatives, taken on a new meaning in South Korea as a sign of intimacy and spontaneity in online chat rooms (Fouser, Inoue, & Lee 1996). In the late 1940s, North Korea, on the other hand, considered a deeper morphophonemic orthography that would have added four new letters and revived two to eliminate irregular verbs. Kim Tubong, the leading proponent of the deeper orthography, was purged in 1958, and his ideas fell into disrepute. North Korea, as King (1996) mentioned, could easily revive these proposals or create new ones if it decided to create a new "independent" orthography to contrast itself with the South.

Another important change in the North Korean proposals of the 1949 is side-by-side segmental writing. Ch'oe Hyönbae (1947), one of Chu Shigyöng's students who later became Chief to the Compiling Bureau in the Ministry of Education in South Korea, advocated side-by-side segmental writing, new letters, and modified *han'gŭl* shapes in his book *Kŭl kwa hyöngmyöng* (Writing and Revolution). Like Chu and Kim Tubong, he argued that Korean should adopt segmental writing because the most "advanced" languages of the West use it. Kim Chöngsu (1982) has advocated a new system of tilting each character in its side so that each



syllable looks like a diamond, rather than a square, on a line of print.

Dramatic change in the *han'gŭl* orthography, however, will depend on what China and Japan do with their writing systems and on the desire in either Korea to distinguish itself from the other. Hannas (1996) argued that reforms of the writing system in East Asia follow a cyclical pattern:

East Asians, for the most part, seem willing to tolerate the inefficiency of character-based writing until a foreign threat causes them to take stock of their social institutions. When the crisis has passed, thanks in part to changes brought about by a more rational orthography, tradition reasserts itself, reform is jettisoned, and retrograde practices creep back in through writing habits of the conservative elite who were dissatisfied with the reforms to begin with, and, in some cases, through those of the new elite who had engineered the reforms but to whom success gave a new perspective (1996: 46).

Hannas is clearly judgmental and perhaps ethnocentric, but his argument of a cycle of crisis-induced reform followed by creeping conservatism certainly helps explain the swings in language policy in Korea since the late nineteenth century.

### 3. History of Romanization in Korea

#### 3.1. Early Romanization Systems

The history of romanization of Korean is much shorter than that of Chinese or Japanese, but it reflects many of the debates over Korean orthography discussed above. Romanization of Korean dates back to 1832, when a German doctor, Philipp Franz J. B. van Siebold, who was serving as an advisor to the Japanese government, developed a romanization system for Korean (see Do 1992 for a detailed discussion of the history of romanization systems). Several other systems were devised in the mid-19th century, but three, the Siebold system (1832), the Dallet system (1874) and the Ross system (1877) exerted the strongest influence on later systems. Do Hyong-su (1992) used the three voiced unaspirated consonants ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ and the two vowels ㅏ and ㅑ to trace most romanization systems back to these three early systems.

The Siebold family of systems uses a “k” for ㄱ, a “t” for ㄷ, and a “p” for ㅂ. To indicate the aspirated versions (ㅋ, ㅌ, and ㅍ) of these unaspirated voiceless consonants, an apostrophe was added (k', t', and p').

The use of the voiceless English consonants (k, t, and p) in the initial position and an apostrophe to indicate aspiration has influenced the McCune-Reischauer system, which is the current official system. Native speakers of Korean continue to be bothered by these points.

The Dallet family of systems uses the same consonants, but indicates aspiration with an h added to each consonant (kh, th, and ph). The use of the "h" continues to this day in the official North Korean romanization system and the Yale system used mainly by linguists. The Dallet system set another precedent with the use of the "e" with another vowel to indicate the two vowels ㅑ and ㅓ, which become "eo" and "eu". Dallet also used the two French accents, grave and acute, over the "e" to indicate different vowels. This was the first use of diacritics in a romanization system.

The Ross family of systems used voiced English consonants for voiceless unaspirated consonants ㅋ, ㆁ, and ㆁ and the voiceless English consonants for the voiceless aspirated consonants ㆁ, ㆁ, and ㆁ. This saved the need for an additional indication of aspiration. The leading descendent of this system is the 1959 Ministry of Education system and the recently proposed ISO (International Standards Organization) system. The distinction between phonetic and phonemic systems (Siebold and Dalley) and morphophonemic systems (Ross) was established in the early years of romanization and has been the main point of contention in debates on Korean romanization ever since. The following table illustrates the differences among these early systems.

Table 3. Comparison of Consonants in Early Romanization Systems

Siebold (1832)			Dallet (1874)			Ross (1878)		
ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ
k	t	p	k	t	p	g	d	b
ㅋ	ㆁ	ㆁ	ㅋ	ㆁ	ㆁ	ㅋ	ㆁ	ㆁ
k'	t'	p'	kh	th	ph	k	t	p

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of romanization systems had emerged based on English, French, or German phonology. In addition to these systems, several other interesting systems were proposed

in the 19th century and years of Japanese colonial rule from 1910–1945. Most Japanese scholars of Korean, such as Ogura Shimpei, built on the phonetic systems of Siebold and Dallet. Japanese suppression of the Korean language intensified from the mid-1930s, and use of Korean was banned from 1938 until the Japanese were defeated in 1945. During this time, many members of the Korean Language Society were put in prison for their activities concerning the Korean language (King 1996). The Korean Language Society’s romanization system (see Table 4), which was appended to the Unified Orthography, was never widely used, but it was the first strictly morphophonemic system developed by Koreans. The first romanization system developed by a Korean, which illustrated in the second section of Table 4, appeared in 1936. It followed most of the letter choices from the Ross system, but used an apostrophe for the vowels ㅓ, ㅗ, and ㅜ (o', u', and e'). It also used different letters to note syllable final pronunciations that differ from syllable initial pronunciations.

Table 4. Romanization Systems Developed by Koreans during the Japanese Colonial Period (1910–1945)

**Unified Han'gŭl Orthography System (1933)**

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ		
g	n	d	r	m	b	s	ng	z	cz	k	t	p	h	gg	dd	bb	ss	zz		
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ
a	o	u	u	i/yi	e	oe	ui	wa	wi	w'e	w'o	we	ya	y'o	yo	yu	y'e	ye		

**Examples:** 독립문: Dogribmun 전라: Zŏnra

**Jung (1936)**

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ		
g	n	d	r/l	m	b	s/d	ng	z/d	tch/d	k/g	t/d	p/b	h	gg/g	dd/d	bb/b	ss/d	zz/d		
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ
a	o'	o	u	u'	i	e'	e	oe	u'i	wa	wi	w'e'	w'o'	we	ya	y'o'	yo	yu	y'e'	ye

**Examples:** 독립문: Dogribmun 전라: Zo'nra

3.2. Post-1945 Systems

Liberation from Japanese rule was replaced the growing conflict between U.S. sponsored forces in the south and Soviet sponsored forces in the north. This eventually led to the creation of two states in 1948 and the Korean War in 1950-1953. After the end of the war, Koreans on both sides of the division turned their attention to language issues. Romanization was a minor concern compared with the need to improve literacy, but it became necessary because both Koreas were tied closely to one of the cold-war superpowers.

North Korea was the first to come up with a new romanization system. The current system of Romanization in North Korea dates from 1956 and was modified slightly in 1986. It combines features from the Dallet (1874) system and the 1933 Unified Orthography system. The use of voiceless consonants “k,” “t,” “p,” for ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅍ and the breve for the vowels ㅏ and ㅑ make the system difficult for South Korean linguistic nationalists to accept as was evident in the series of ISO romanization meetings. Table 5 gives a summary of the North Korean system.

Table 5. North Korean System (1986)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	가	ㄷ	ㅅ	ㅆ		
k	n	t	r	m	p	s	ng	ts	tsh	kh	th	ph	h	kk	tt	pp	ss	tss	
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ
a	ǎ	o	u	ũ	i	ai	e	oi	üi	wa	wi	wai	wǎ	we	ya	yǎ	yo	yu	yai

Examples: 독립문: Tokripmun 전라: Tsǎnra

Controversy over romanization, meanwhile, has raged in South Korea since the 1960s. In 1959, the Ministry of Education (MOE) developed a system, summarized in Table 6, which was the center of much controversy (and the butt of some mean-spirited jokes). The 1959 system was designed to represent each *han'gŭl* graph, or “letter,” with one Roman letter. This was practical because it allowed Koreans, who “think in *han'gŭl*,” to produce accurately romanized Korean without having to spend time worrying about the many phonological changes that cause Korean pronunciation to deviate from the orthography. What caused the controversy was the system’s choice of letters, which appear as voiced consonants in English and many other

Roman-alphabet languages, to represent Korean consonants. From an English point of view, this made sense because voiced consonants in English are closer to the unaspirated voiced consonants in Korean than are voiceless English consonants. The problem with using voiced English consonants was that it led to a series of unsightly and sometimes humorous combinations that looked like English words (for an overview of these issues, see Klein 1979; *Chosŏn Ilbo* 1997; Kim 1997). Jokes about “dog ribs” from Dogribmun (독립문) and “Mr Bag” (Mr. 박) abound. Despite the jokes, however, the use of “eo” for ㅐ and “eu” for ㅔ is still popular because the breve used over “o” and “u,” respectively, for these letters is so inconvenient for many people.

Table 6. The 1959 Ministry of Education (MOE) System

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㅊ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅈ	ㅊ			
g	n	d	l/r	m	b	s	ng	j	ch	k	t	p	h	gg	dd	bb	ss	jj			
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ
a	eo	o	u	eu	i	ae	e	œ	eui	wa	wi	wae	weo	we	ya	yeo	yo	yu	yae	ye	

**Examples:** 독립문: Doglibmun 전라: Jeonla

Complaints about the 1959 MOE system and wide popular use of the McCune-Reischauer system, illustrated in Table 7, caused the Ministry of Education to reexamine the issue in the early 1980s. In 1983, The Korean National Academy of Sciences reopened the romanization debate by inviting three phonologists to investigate the issue. Only Lee Sang-oak (1982), one of the three, supported the change to the McCune-Reischauer system. Independently of these discussions, aides to President Chun Doo-Hwan (1981-1988), who had supported the McCune-Reischauer system, strongly recommended the system as part of preparations for the 1988 Seoul Olympics. From this time, the McCune-Reischauer system became associated with internationalism that linguistic nationalists found hard to accept.

The system put in place in 1984 is, except for a few minor changes, the same as the 1939 McCune-Reischauer system. This system takes the opposite approach from the 1959 system in that it attempts to approximate the Korean pronunciation by representing surface-level phonological changes.

Ideally, each *han'gŭl* graph is therefore represented by one or two Roman letters. The use of three Roman letters is allowed for diphthongs. The system uses the breve diacritic mark above the “o” and “u” to create additional vowels. It also uses an apostrophe to represent the aspirated Korean consonants. The result is a system that gives a rough approximation of the Korean pronunciation, but at the cost of convenience. Edwin Reischauer (1980) lamented this in a letter to Yang Sung Chul, currently a member of the National Assembly: “... we had too much “expert phonetic” advice, which tended to make the system too phonetically precise and therefore too complex” (quoted in Kim 1996). Whereas native-speakers of English found the 1959 system amusing, native-speakers of Korean find the 1984 system confusing because they are not used to representing phonological changes with different graph, *han'gŭl* or otherwise (for surveys critical of the current system, see Do 1992; Li 1996).

Table 7. McCune-Reischauer (1939) and 1984 Ministry of Education Systems

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㆁ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ		
k/g	n	t/dt	l/r	m	p/b	s	ng	ch	ch'	k'	t'	p'	h	kk	tt	pp	ss	tch		
ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㆁ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ
a	o	o	u	u	i	ae	e	oe	ui	wa	wi	wae	wö	we	ya	yö	yo	yu	yae	ye

\* The 1984 MOE system uses a “shi” for ㅅ instead of “si”; divisions in words, when necessary are indicated with a hyphen instead of an apostrophe.

Examples: 독립문: Tongnimmun 전라: Chölla

Though the 1959 MOE system and the McCune-Reischauer system are the most common, many other systems have been proposed over the years. The system developed by Professor Samuel Martin of Yale University in 1968 is known as the “Yale system” (see Table 8). This system follows the trend set by Dallet in 1874, which also formed the basis of the North Korean romanization system. Like the 1959 MOE system, it follows strict morphophonemic principles, but uses the voiceless consonants “k,” “t,” “p,” in the tradition of Dallet system, for ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ. The system is widely used by linguists because it allows readers who know *han'gŭl* to come up with an accurate *han'gŭl* representation of the romanized text. The Yale

system's wide-spread use in scholarship makes it a de facto second system along with the current McCune-Reischauer system.

Table 8. Yale System (1954)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅁ	ㅅ	ㅈ		
k	n	t	l	m	p	s	ng	c	ch	kh	th	ph	h	kk	tt	pp	ss	cc		
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ
a	e	o	wu	u	i	ay	ey	woy	uy	wa	we	way	we	wey	ya	ye	yo	yu	yay	yey

**Examples:** 독립문: Toklipmwun 전라: Cenla

The Yale system has never had much influence beyond linguists for two reasons. First, it is unsightly and fails to give readers an approximate pronunciation. For all its failings, the 1959 Ministry of Education system provides a more approximate pronunciation. Second, it deviates from the principles of *han'gŭl* in its arbitrary ascription of Roman letters to *han'gŭl* graphs. The Yale system thus fails to satisfy the needs of the globalists or the nationalists. In this context, it is surprising that it has endured so long in linguistic scholarship.

### 3.3. Recent Debates

Complaints about the current McCune-Reischauer-based system grew in the 1990s with the spread of computers and the Internet. Though special fonts for breves and other diacritics exist, they are not widespread. The breve is still not supported in the character sets used for the Internet and the Web. As a result, many computer users abandoned using the breve years ago. Other computer users, mostly in the West, have taken to using the circumflex instead of the breve. For Koreans, whose main exposure to a Roman-alphabet language is English, diacritic marks are confusing. In 1980, participants at a workshop on romanization at the University of Hawaii argued that the breve could easily be replaced by a more common diacritic mark. The group suggested the accent mark from Spanish. The group also suggested that the apostrophe could be replaced by an "h" to indicate aspiration in the voiceless aspirated consonants (Austerlitz, et al 1980).

Another criticism, mainly from native-speakers of Korean, is that the current system is difficult to write and, in fact, does not lead to an accurate pronunciation. Koreans conceive of written Korean as complex-graphs that form words or post-positional particles, not as phonologically accurate writing system. Any system that requires native-speakers of Korean to think about phonological changes forces them to think about these changes – often through sounding out words – as they write. For some Koreans, it is also difficult to read words romanized according to phonological principles. Many native-speakers of Korean also feel that representing initial unaspirated voiced consonants with letters that represent voiceless consonants in English causes non-native-speakers of Korean to add unnecessary aspiration (Kim 1996).

The final criticism comes from nationalistic impulses. To this line of thought, the current system is dubious because it comes from a system developed by foreigners during the Japanese colonial occupation (Kim 1996). Korean linguistic nationalists thus wonder why a people that created *han'gŭl* cannot come up with an effective system of romanization. Others argue that the current system was aimed mainly at helping foreign visitors during the Olympics. More important, however, linguistic nationalists feel that the current system violates the genius of *han'gŭl* by representing allophones and phonological changes with different Roman letters.

#### 4. The 1997–1998 Debate

Although complaints about the current system had been growing since the early 1990s, it was not until 1997 that the government officially considered changing the system. From 1986 to 1995, the two Koreas had held a number of meetings to work out a unified North–South system for the ISO (International Standards Organization). The ISO initiated this debate in 1986 when it requested both Koreas to work together for a unified system (*Hanguk Ilbo* 1995). This series of international conferences failed to produce a clear compromise. By 1995, the worsening economic situation in North Korea and tense relations over North Korea's possible nuclear weapons program made it difficult to maintain the positive momentum needed to achieve a breakthrough.

In 1997, however, government plans to repaint road signs, all of which include romanization, sparked heated debate that raged in the media and on



the Internet “Korean Studies List” during the first half of the year. The South Korean National Academy for the Korean Language, a newly created organization in 1991, announced that it had come up with a new system. At the same time, Kim Bokmoon, a former professor at Ch’ungbuk National University, launched a media campaign to get his system adopted. Both systems caused defenders of the current system to jump to its defense. Once the debate had begun, a number of other small groups that had been working on the issue went public with their proposals. The most active of these groups was the *HanSe* group of a half-dozen linguistic nationalists. Several linguists, mostly phoneticians and Korean-language specialists, also came up with their own proposals. Ironically, the National Academy of the Korean Language and Ministry of Culture and Tourism sponsored no extensive surveys of how Koreans and non-Koreans react to and use different romanization systems. The only group to conduct such a study was the Lingua Koreana Society. The work of this group (Lingua Koreana Society 1998) and that of Klein (1979) are the only data-based studies on romanization.

Taken together, the proposals offered in the mid-1990s can be classified into four broad groupings: conservative internationalists, progressive internationalists, conservative nationalists, and progressive and radical nationalists. The internationalists appealed to the need for a practical system that helps non-native speakers come up with a reasonable pronunciation of Korean. This, they argue, makes it easier for foreigners to travel and do business in Korea. The central issue in these arguments is making romanization convenient for foreigners. The nationalists take the opposite stance by arguing that the current system is too confusing for Koreans to write. Their goal is to develop a system that reflects *han’gŭl* orthographic rules, which will make it easy for native speakers of Korean to use. How foreigners pronounce Korean is a secondary issue.

#### 4.1. Conservative Internationalists

The conservative internationalists want to maintain the system and muster some impressive body of evidence in their favor. Their strongest argument is that the current system has the fewest problems compared with the alternatives. It allows non-native speakers to come up with a fairly accurate pronunciation without creating letter combinations that look awkward in English (e.g., Kim 1997). They argue that, although difficult for

Koreans to write at first, the consistency of the system makes it easy to use once the rules have been learned. From a practical point of view, many conservatives argue that the cost of changing to a new system does not warrant the benefits because all of the proposed systems have serious faults. Some conservatives are willing to consider a new system, but only after substantive research has been conducted on the issue to show how native and non-native speakers of Korean react to the various systems under consideration. Of all groups, the conservatives remain most open to persuasion through research or a broad national "consensus" for change (*Chosŏn Ilbo* 1997, Lee 1997). Because they support the McCune-Reischuer or the current 1984 Ministry of Education system as presented in Table 7 above, they are generally reticent about developing their own alternative systems.

#### 4.2. Progressive Internationalists

Another system that has received a good deal of media attention is the system developed by Professor Kim Bokmoon (Kim 1996). Professor Kim spent years developing his system, which is described in Table 9, and has led a sustained crusade to get it adopted as the official romanization system. Professor Kim has argued tirelessly that his system reflects Korean pronunciation best and is easiest to use because it follows English phonological principles. The use of the "h" after "a" and "o" to indicate ㅏ and ㅑ, for example, does yield a pronunciation close to the Korean pronunciation. The problem with the system, however, is its inconsistent and excessively large number of letters that make it difficult to distinguish syllabic units. His use of "ur" for ㅓ may create serious distortions because the "r" sound is pronounced strongly in many varieties of American English and as a trill or uvular fricative in most major European languages. Thus, the system's romanization of 낙성대 as "Nahksurngdae" has more consonant clusters than the McCune-Reischauer "Naksongdae." It is easy to imagine how a speaker of American English, French, or Spanish would pronounce the "r" in the middle syllable. In conclusion, the Kim Bokmoon system is important in broadening the range of the debate, but fails to achieve a workable breakthrough in creating an effective system of romanization. His system also represents one of the few conceptually new systems of romanization developed since the late nineteenth century.

Table 9. Kim Bokmoon's System (1996)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ		
g	n	d	r	m	b	s	ng	j	ch	k	t	p	h	kk	tt	pp	ts	tj		
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅢ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ	ㅪ	ㅫ	ㅬ
ah	ur	oh	oo	uh	ee	ae	eh	weh	ui	wah	wee	wae	woh	ooeh	yah	yur	yoh	yoo	yae	ye

**Examples:** 독립문: Dogribmoon 전라: Jurnra

#### 4.3. Conservative Nationalists

Conservative nationalists could easily be termed reactionary because they want to adopt a system similar to the 1959 MOE system. This group argues that the voiced consonants “g,” “d,” “b” are closer to Korean pronunciation and should be used to represent ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ, regardless of the orthographic associations with English words. They argue that how English speakers react to a romanization system should influence the debate because native speakers of English are not the only foreigners who use a romanization system and that, among them, not all speakers of English will react that same way. The Han’gŭl Society, one of the major advocates of linguistic nationalism in Korea, has continued to promote a system similar to the 1959 MOE system. Some conservative nationalists also argue that the current system is tainted because it was developed by foreigners during the Japanese occupation.

The system proposed in 1997 by the National Academy for the Korean Language has much in common with the 1959 MOE system, particularly in the consonants (see Table 10). Many opponents of the system quickly jumped on the similarity to the 1959 MOE system to argue that the government was about to repeat the same mistake again. Many supporters of 1959 MOE system, however, also attacked the proposal because they are dissatisfied with the romanization of the vowels ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, and ㅕ. A number of the leading conservative nationalists are members of the Han’gŭl Society whose system is similar to the 1959 MOE system.

Table 10. National Academy of the Korean Language System (1997)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ			
g	n	d	r/l	m	b	s	ng	j	ch	k	t	p	h	gg	dd	bb	ss	jj			
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ
a	eo	o	wu	u	i	ai	e	oi	ui	wa	wi	wai	weo	we	ya	yeo	yo	yu	yai	ye	

Examples: 독립문: Doglibmwun 전라: Jeonra

#### 4.4. Progressive and Radical Nationalists

The progressive and radical nationalists differ from conservative nationalists in that they want a new system that reflects *han'gŭl* orthography more faithfully than the 1959 MOE system or the National Academy of the Korean Language's proposal. One of the most radical proposals has from the *HanSe* group (see Table 11). The goals of this system are simple: to recreate as many aspects of *han'gŭl* orthography as possible in Roman letters. The system thus uses a capital letter at the beginning of each syllable in a word to differentiate each syllable. This is unique among romanization systems and reflects the growing use of capital letters in the middle of compound words in English. Another unique feature of this system is the use of italics for all romanized Korean words, including personal names, in an Roman-letter-language text. Like the use of capital letters at the beginning of each syllable, this is designed to make romanized Korean look "unique" by using conventions not found in Roman-letter languages. Though small in number, the *HanSe* group has promoted group solidarity through frequent meetings, activities, and a website. Despite these activities, however, the *HanSe* system is impractical because typing a capital letter at the beginning of each syllable and using italics deviate from established customs in all Roman-letter-languages and slow down the speed of typing. The uniqueness of the system, particularly the use of inter-lexical capitalization, has brought a fresh perspective to the recent debate.

Table 11. *HanSe* System (1996)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ			
g	n	d	r/l	m	b	s	ng	j	tz	k	t	p	h	gg	dd	bb	ss	jj			
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ
a	eo	o	u	eu	i	ae	e	oi	eui	oa	ui	oae	ueo	ue	ia	ieo	io	iu	iae	ie	

Examples: 독립문: *DogLibMun* 전라: *JeonRa*

4.5. Others

Several other systems have also been developed in recent years that do not fit any of the above categories. Lee Hyun Bok (1994), a linguist at Seoul National University, has developed a system that assigns a different Roman letter to each *han'gŭl* graph and compound vowel (see Table 12). The system follows the 1959 MOE paradigm of using a voiced sound for ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ, but deviates considerably from that system by using different letters for the fortis sounds ㅋ, ㅌ, and ㅃ, which in most systems are indicated by doubling the letter used to represent ㄱ, ㄷ, and ㅂ (i.e., “kk,” “tt,” “pp” in McCune-Reischauer and “gg,” “dd,” and “bb” in the 1959 MOE system). Professor Lee designed the system in the early 1990s for use in sending e-mail messages in Korean on computers that do not have *han'gŭl* fonts installed. He wanted to reduce the number of letters to speed up typing and to make the system simple so that readers could easily visualize the original *han'gŭl* as they read the text.

Table 12. Lee Hyun Bok's Computer-Communication System (1994)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅈ			
g	n	d	l	m	b	z	q	j	ch	kh	th	ph	h	k	t	p	s	c			
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ
a	v	o	u	w	i	x	e	we	wy	wa	wi	wx	wv	we	ya	yv	yo	yu	yx	ye	

Examples: 독립문: *Doglibmun* 전라: *Jvnla*

Another interesting proposal, illustrated in Table 13, has come from You Mahn-gun (1992), a professor of phonetics at Sönggyungwan University in Seoul. Like Kim Bokmoon’s system, Professor You’s system breaks many established conventions. It is the only system to differentiate between long and short vowels in Korean; long vowels are indicated by adding an “h” to the end of the vowel. This distinction was noted, along with tones, in early *han’gŭl* orthography, but was lost in the orthography in the middle of the sixteenth century. Modern Korean continues to distinguish homonyms by vowel length, though some younger speakers have lost the ability to make such distinctions. Of all the proposed systems, Professor You’s system is the most phonetic because it is aimed at providing clear guidelines to accurate Korean pronunciation. For native speakers of Korean, however, the system is difficult because the distinction between long and short vowels requires considerable phonetic introspection. Systems such as Lee Hyun Bok’s and You Mahn-gun’s open a number of new possibilities for romanization systems that extend the debate on romanization beyond the simple internationalist-nationalist paradigm.

Table 13. You Mahn-gun’s System (1992)

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅊ	ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅎ	ㅊ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅍ					
g	n	d	l/r	m	b	s	ng	j	ch	kh	th	ph	h	k	t	p	ss	cz				
ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ	ㅞ	ㅟ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅢ	ㅣ	ㅤ	ㅥ	ㅦ	ㅧ	ㅨ	ㅩ	
a	au	o	ou	u	i/y	ai	e	we	ui	wa	wi	wai	wau	we	ya	yau	yo	yu	yai	ye		

**Examples:** 독립문: Dongnibmoun 전라: Jaulla

Note: In this system, all vowels may take an “h” suffix to indicate that the vowel is a long vowel.

### 5. Conclusion

The economic crisis of late 1997 brought an end to economic system that spurred Korea’s growth for over thirty years. Korea is now entering a period of national re-creation that will change the face of Korean society. Driving the changes will be greater democracy and openness to the outside

world. As the economy worsened in the fall of 1997 and into the winter of 1998, the debate on romanization was shoved to the sidelines. The National Academy of the Korean Language quietly continued its plans for to implement its proposals as state policy. By the spring of 1998, however, it was clear that the new government of Kim Dae-jung was not interested in expensive new projects. The Ministry of Culture and Sports, which oversees the Academy of the Korean Language, announced at the end of June 1998 that all further debate on changing the official romanization system be stopped because of a lack of funds and national consensus for the change (*Hanguk Ilbo* 1998). The Ministry also stopped discussion of proposed changes to *han'gŭl* orthography for the same reason.

For the time being, this put an end to the romanization debate in Korea. Private groups, such as the *HanSe* group, remain active, but talk of changing the official romanization system will have to wait for economic recovery and another burst of linguistic nationalism in the bureaucracy. Economic recovery will no doubt come first as Korea has committed itself to opening up its economy to foreign investment. An early test of the bureaucracy's commitment to internationalism came in mid-1998 as Microsoft offered to invest 20 million dollars in the Han'gŭl & Computer Company (H & C), the maker of Korea's most popular word processing software Arae A Han'gŭl, in return for halting development of new versions of Arae A Han'gŭl. This caused a public uproar because many Koreans were proud that a domestic software company using the name "Han'gŭl" could maintain an 80% market share against Microsoft. The government, however, resisted the temptation to intervene on H & C's behalf, saying that it was an issue "for the market to solve." Ironically, the debate over H & C took place at the same time the government decided to postpone indefinitely any plans to change the romanization system. In both cases, the government sided with what it perceives as the global trend to let the "market efficiency" sort things out. This suggests that "the market" may have the greatest sway over future debates on romanization. If so, then the stage may be set for an open competition – as opposed to closed proscriptionism – among romanization systems for public sympathy. In deciding which system is best, the public will mostly judge each system by the simple standard that King Sejong set for himself: "to make convenient for daily use."

## Note on Romanization:

In this paper, I have used the current official system in South Korea that was adopted in 1984. This does not reflect my preference for this system of the other proposals. Names are, when known, romanized according to the preferences of the author, which often deviate from the official system. Other names are romanized according to the 1984 system with two syllables of the given name being closed up instead of divided by a hyphen as is common.

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## ABSTRACT

### Nationalism and Globalism in Transliteration Systems: Romanization Debates in Korea

Robert J. Fouser

The debate over romanization of Korean flared anew in 1997 as the National Academy for the Korean Language presented a proposal for a new romanization system to replace the current system, which closely resembles the 1939 McCune-Reischauer system. The debate between advocates of the new system and defenders of the current system came from differing views on the role of *han’gŭl* in the maintenance of Korean cultural nationalism.

Supporters of the new system argued that the current system is flawed because it deviates greatly from *han’gŭl* orthography by representing allophonic changes with different Roman letters, which makes it difficult for Koreans to use the current system. They further argue that the current system offends Korean national pride because it distorts the “purity” and “scientific intent” of *han’gŭl*. Defenders of the current system, however,

argue that it helps non-native speakers come up with a reasonably accurate Korean pronunciation. They also stress the aesthetic appeal of the current system to non-Koreans over all other systems of romanization.

In this paper, I first present background information on the politics of romanization since the division of Korea into two states in 1948. Through a detailed analysis of media reports and official documents, I then show how the recent debate in South Korea has unfolded since 1996. Finally, I discuss how the current debate reflects the continuing conflict between nationalism and globalism in Korean orthographic and romanization policies.

The current debate over romanization of Korean is important because it shows how the pressures of globalization cause a nationalistic reaction in transliteration systems as well as native-language orthographies around the world. As globalization continues, transliteration systems will play an increasingly important role in debates about how nations and peoples, particularly those with non-Roman alphabets, represent themselves orthographically in the emerging “global culture.”

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