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UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

Writing and Reading Practices in Fifteenth-century Chosŏn  
Korea: Focusing on King Sejong's Reign (1418-1450) and  
the Invention of the Korean Vernacular Script (*Hunmin*  
*Chŏngŭm* 訓民正音)

**Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia**  
**Dipartimento Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali - ISO**  
**Dottorato in Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa**  
**Curriculum Asia Orientale**

**Giovanni Volpe**

Tutor  
Prof.ssa Antonetta L. Bruno  
Sapienza Università di Roma

Co-tutor  
Prof. Hwang Mun-hwan  
The Academy of Korean Studies

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## Introduction

### Aim and Scope

The present study aims to better understand the social and cultural significance of fifteenth-century Chosŏn texts by placing the *practices* of writing and reading at the centre of its inquiry. It does this by taking into consideration the production and actual use of these texts, not taking for granted the individual, visual, and silent type of reading that is most common nowadays but considering how early Chosŏn texts were also intended to be read aloud, or even memorized, so that, in specific cases, could be mediated for an audience of listeners. By analyzing this oral and social dimension of texts, often overlooked in the existing scholarship, this study attempts to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the written culture of pre-modern Korea.

Fifteenth-century Chosŏn Korea, with its complex and interconnected system of writing practices that included literary Sinitic (*hanmun* 漢文),<sup>1</sup> vernacular transcription systems, foreign languages and, since the middle of the century, a new vernacular script, is a period of particular interest for such a study on the oral and social dimension of written texts. The main focus of the present research is on the effects that the newly invented Korean vernacular script had on the writing and reading practices of the time. This script was promulgated in 1446, during the reign of Sejong 世宗 (1418-1450), with the name of *Hunmin Chŏngŭm* 訓民正音 (the correct sounds for the instruction of the people). Its use certainly opened new possibilities for written texts to reach a more substantial part of the population, and for larger sectors of the society to express themselves through

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<sup>1</sup> This writing practice is often termed “classical Chinese” or “literary Chinese” in much of English language scholarship. The term “literary Sinitic” has been coined by Mair (1994) and, more recently, also adopted by King (2015) and Kornicki (2018) to better reflect the cosmopolitan significance of this written practice (that was also used in other East Asian countries as Japan and Vietnam) by avoiding any necessary association with China. *Hanmun* is the Korean term used nowadays in Korean scholarship.

writing. Existing scholarship, however, does not seem to have devoted much attention to how this was made possible. What seems to be often implicitly suggested is that illiterate people could finally write with the vernacular script and read texts written with it. However, although this was undoubtedly partially true, this risks limiting our understanding of the significance of the vernacular script by considering only a part of a much larger and complex picture. Instead, what I will argue is that the new vernacular script, especially in the early years after its invention, more than opening the way to a universal literacy unlocked new possibilities for the oral realization and mediation of texts. By analysing these dynamics, this study attempts to contribute to the understanding of the seminal fifteenth-century Korean vernacular texts compiled during the reign of Sejong and, more in general, to the history of writing and reading in the Korean peninsula.

### **Theoretical Framework: Writing as a Social and Cultural Practice**

The methodology of the present research combines a rigorous historical and philological analysis of written texts with a theoretical approach based on the analysis of writing and reading as social and cultural practices. This perspective considers texts not only from a strictly linguistic point of view or from that of their material form and contents but takes into consideration their actual use in their social and historical context.

We can find this type of approach to the study of written materials well outlined in the work of Armando Petrucci (1986, 2002), who asserts a conception of the “history of written culture” that, drawing from that of the French paleographer Jean Mallon, “deals with the history of the production, formal features and social uses of writing and written records in a given society, regardless of the techniques and the materials employed from time to time.”<sup>2</sup> Petrucci mostly focuses on the Latin and European textual traditions, but his

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<sup>2</sup> Petrucci (2002:VI). Translated from Italian.

approach, that starting from the formal analysis of written records (of any kind) addresses the issue of their use and function “also, if not mainly, in their most relevant anthropological and social aspects”, is potentially open to the study of any cultural and linguistic tradition.<sup>3</sup>

The work of Giorgio Raimondo Cardona shows a similar interest in the social and “anthropological” aspect of writing. His seminal study titled *Anthropology of Writing* (2009) theorizes a “sociology of writing” that, drawing from theoretical constructs that are characteristic of the sociolinguistics, advocates an analysis of the written texts as “events” situated in specific “social domains” and “situations”.<sup>4</sup> Cardona, as Petrucci, never explicitly dealt with Korea but was inclined toward a broader approach to the phenomenon of writing, visible in his *Universal History of Writing* (1986), and the theoretical issues and the critical insights raised in his works do find a fertile ground when applied to the case of pre-modern Korea. Although studies on historical linguistics and bibliographical aspects of pre-modern Korean texts abound in the existing scholarship, an approach towards a “written culture” that focuses on and social aspects of writing applied to the Korean case is much scarcer. Cardona’s conception of a sociological framework to the analysis of texts do find application in the discussion of fifteenth-century Korean texts that, through their vocal performance and mediation, emerge as social events situated in specific situations. Furthermore, Cardona’s insight on an “ideological connotation” of writing and the resulted distinction between “a structural and denotative aspect, and a halo of connotations that are not functional but ideologized”<sup>5</sup> is particularly relevant in the context of the invention of the vernacular script in fifteenth-century Korea. As we shall see, its creation on the background of pre-existing ideologically loaded writing practices based on Chinese characters

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<sup>3</sup> Petrucci (2002:VII). Translated from Italian.

<sup>4</sup> Cardona (2009:73-74).

<sup>5</sup> Cardona (2009:88).

inevitably caused an opposition that, more than on its functional features, was based on its ideological connotation.

The approach to the social aspect and function of written texts of the famous French scholar Roger Chartier (1994, 1995) goes in a similar direction. Chartier put at the centre of his analysis the physical form of a text and the process of reading, which is also, if not mainly, intended in its oral dimension. The following passage from his introduction to the recent collection of essays on the history of reading in the West that he edited with Guglielmo Cavallo well delineates this kind of approach:<sup>6</sup>

Rejecting the notion that the text exists in itself, separate from any material manifestation, we should keep in mind that no text exists outside of the physical support that offers it for reading (or hearing) or outside the circumstances in which it is read (or heard). Authors do not write books: they write texts that become written objects—manuscripts, inscriptions, print matter or, today, material in a computer file. All these objects are handled, in various ways, by flesh and blood readers whose reading habits vary with time, place and milieu.

The connection between the physical form of a text and its use, and the oral and aural dimension of the activity or reading, are all central aspects analyzed by Chartier, that the present study attempts to consider in the context of pre-modern Korea.

The oral dimension of written texts is also central in the work of the American scholar Walter J. Ong. In his famous essay *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) he discusses the relationship between writing and orality. Particularly significant for the present research is his analysis of the connection between printed texts and orality (chapter 5), through which he notices how, even after the invention of print, aural processes kept a primary role in the compilation and use of texts, and how the visual and analytical interpretation of the space in a text is the result of a profound interiorization of print. This

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<sup>6</sup> Chartier and Cavallo (1999:5).

observation suggests dedicating particular attention to the cognitive processes underlining the reading of a text and how these processes might influence the construction of its sense. It also prompts a reflection on the difference between the perception of a text by a contemporary reader, mainly based on an abstract and analytical visual interpretation, and that of a reader from an epoch before the diffusion and interiorization of print, mostly based on an oral and aural interpretation.

### Previous Studies

The invention of the Korean vernacular script is unquestionably one of the most researched topics in the entire field of Korean Studies. A comprehensive review of even the most important of these studies would go beyond the aim and scope of the present research. I will thus limit this discussion to some of the most comprehensive and recent works on the topic to which the present study is most indebted, and to those that attempted a similar theoretical approach.

Kang Sin-hang (2003) and An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007) collect the works of a lifetime of two Korean scholars to which the present study is most indebted. The work of Kang Sin-hang (2003) starts with a discussion of the reason for the invention of the new script proceeding to the issues related to its inventor(s). Particularly noteworthy are the annotated translations in modern Korean of the most important texts related to the invention of the new script. The work of An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007) collects a series of studies on the *Hunmin chŏngŭm*. Particularly useful for the present research were the studies on the invention, use, and diffusion of the new script.<sup>7</sup> Both works, however, never address the aspects related to the oral realization and mediation of vernacular texts that are central in the present research.

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<sup>7</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007: chapters 8 to 12).

As for English language studies, the only comprehensive work dedicated to the invention of the Korean vernacular script is, to the best of my knowledge, that of Gari K. Ledyard (1998), based on his PhD dissertation of 1965. This work, titled *The Korean language reform of 1446*, remains a point of reference for any new English language research on this topic and is the one to which the present research is the most indebted. Starting with the analysis of writing in Korea before the invention of the alphabet—including the Chinese script and vernacular transcription systems—this study investigates the cultural and linguistic background of the invention of the new script. It includes a complete English translation of the text of the *Hunmin chōngŭm* and discusses the early vernacular texts written in the new script. It ends by suggesting a new explanation for its invention based on the relation with the Mongol ‘Phags-pa script. It might be noticed that the present study has a similar structure that starting from the discussion of writing in the Korean peninsula before the creation of the vernacular script proceeds to its invention and early applications, although in the present case limited to Sejong’s reign. Ledyard’s fundamental premise and aim are, however, completely different from the ones of the present research. While to study of Ledyard aims to ultimately demonstrate an influence of the ‘Phags-pa script on the invention of the Korean vernacular script, the present research mainly focuses on the significance of the invention of the vernacular script in the oral realization and mediation of the texts in the context of the writing and reading practices of fifteenth-century Chosŏn Korea. This aspect, which is never addressed by Ledyard, leads the present study to focus on totally different aspects of the same primary sources.

Essential studies that shed light on the use and diffusion of the vernacular script in the Chosŏn period are An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007: 199-234), Paek Tu-hyŏn (2001) and Si Chŏng-gon (2007). All these studies focus on a diachronic analysis of the diffusion of the vernacular script by analyzing historical records and the printing and distribution of vernacular texts. The present study, although much indebted to them, focuses on the more definite period of Sejong’s reign and,

instead of assessing the diffusion of the vernacular script, attempts to understand the processes through which specific texts in vernacular were read and employed.

Specific studies with an approach to the analysis of writing as a social and cultural practice in the context of early Chosŏn Korea seem to be still limited. The work of Oh Young Kyun (2013) goes however into this direction by dedicating ample space to the oral dimension and modalities of reading of the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖—a text that is also analyzed in the present research—and discussing how they determined its textual features. The present study has a similar approach but a broader scope that considers the oral dimension and social aspects of texts as part of the writing and reading practices of the time. Furthermore, in discussing the modalities of reading of vernacular texts, it attempts to take into consideration not only their layout but also linguistic aspects as orthography. By doing this, it attempts to offer a more comprehensive picture of the writing and reading practices in early Chosŏn Korea.

### **Research Summary**

The present research is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter starts with a discussion of the linguistic situation in the Korean peninsula before the invention of the vernacular script, that included *hanmun*, vernacular transcription systems, and foreign languages. Following the theoretical framework of the present research, the examination of these writing systems is not limited to the functional and linguistic aspects but considers their actual use in the texts of the period. Starting with *hanmun*, after a brief historical account of the adoption and use of this writing practice in the Korean peninsula, it is discussed in more detail its status and use during the first half of the fifteenth-century. Of particular interest during this period is the diffusion and reprint of *hanmun* texts imported from Ming China and the ways these *hanmun* texts were employed at court during specific lectures. It is also considered the official production of *hanmun* texts in Chosŏn Korea, highlighting how these texts could use, according to their

aim, specific textual strategies that made possible different types of reading. The second part of this first chapter discusses the vernacular transcription systems (*ch'aja p'yogibop* 借字表記法) that developed in the Korean peninsula. Particular attention is dedicated to the development and function of *idu* 吏讀 and *kugyöl* 口訣, still widely employed at the beginning of the Chosŏn period, and to the elements of continuity between these vernacular practices and the later practices related to the Korean vernacular script. The final section of this first chapter examines the foreign languages and related writing practices, whose usage, although limited, was crucial in the diplomatic relationships with neighbouring countries and populations. The languages taken into examination are the Chinese vernacular language, Mongolian, Japanese and Jurchen. Ample space is dedicated to their insertion as curricula in the *Sayögwŏn* 司譯院 (Office of interpreters) and the discussion of the texts used for their study. It is finally discussed how the attention these languages received in the early Chosŏn period might have influenced the invention and early uses of the vernacular script.

The second chapter is dedicated to the invention and promulgation of the vernacular script, discussing its reception, first related projects, and early diffusion. It starts by examining the first entry reporting the completion of the vernacular script (*Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 102:42a) and discusses several issues connected with it, as its brevity and position in the Annals, the suddenness of its announcement, its exact date, and the issue of its inventor. The chapter continues by discussing the first project carried out concerning the new script and the dissent that took form in a memorial submitted to the king. This last document, which is entirely translated and annotated, is particularly important to understand the conception of writing in fifteenth-century Korea and provides essential insights into the process of creation of the vernacular script and its intended uses. The third part of the chapter deals with the publication of the *Hunmin Chŏngŭm* in 1446, discussing its structure and contents. The chapter ends with an assessment of the diffusion of the vernacular script during the reign of Sejong.



The third and final chapter is devoted to the vernacular texts compiled during the reign of Sejong. Of these texts is presented their compilation process and discussed the significance of the vernacular script by examining their intended usages. It starts with a discussion on the *Yongbi ōch'ōn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons), the first work of literature that employed the new invented vernacular script. It then continues by examining the compilation of Buddhist texts: the *Sōkpo sangjōl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Articles on the Record of Sakyamuni) and the *Wōrin ch'ōn'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 (Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers). The third part of the chapter is dedicated to the use of the vernacular script to notate the pronunciation of Chinese characters and to study the Chinese vernacular language, examining the compilation of Chinese characters dictionaries as the *Tongguk chōngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country) and the *Hongmu chōngun yōkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions), and that of a language manual as the *Chik'ae tongjasūp* 直解童子習 (Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children). The last part discusses the project of making a vernacular edition of Confucian texts as the *Four Books (sasō* 四書) and the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations) with the vernacular script.

## I. The Linguistic Landscape Before the Invention of the Vernacular Script

Before the invention of the vernacular script in the middle of the fifteenth century, people in the Korean peninsula wrote exclusively with Chinese characters (*hanja* 漢字). They employed these characters in two fundamentally different ways: to write in literary Sinitic (*hanmun* 漢文) and to render the vernacular language through different transcription systems. Foreign languages and their writings also occupied a crucial linguistic space. Knowledge of vernacular Chinese, both spoken and written, was crucial in diplomatic relations with Ming China. Furthermore, other languages as Mongolian, Jurchen, and Japanese were learned and employed in the contacts with neighbouring populations. The consideration of all these languages and writing practices will provide a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic landscape of the period, essential for any discussion aimed to understand the invention of the vernacular script and its employment in fifteenth-century Chosŏn texts.

### I.1. *Hanmun*

*Hanmun* 漢文 is the written practice that was used as the primary medium for any literary and intellectual discourse in the Korean peninsula. There is no exact date for its first introduction in the Korean peninsula, but it might have started to be used in its northern part since at least the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC when Han China established four commanderies in this region.<sup>8</sup> Dated surviving examples are however all quite late, the earliest being an inscription from the early 5<sup>th</sup>-century memorial stele of King Kwanggaett'o (廣開土王, r. 391-413) located on the northern side of the mid-Yalu river in today's Chinese Jilin province.<sup>9</sup> Other

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<sup>8</sup> Ledyard (1998:34). On the formation of the so-called Four Chinese Commanderies, see Lee Ki-baik (1984:19-21).

<sup>9</sup> Some scholars interpret the writing on this memorial as an early *idu* text. See, for example, Nam Pung-hyun (2012:42).

## I. The Linguistic Landscape Before the Invention of the Vernacular Script

inscriptions, dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, are in the buried memorial tablet from the tomb of Paekche king Muryeong (*Muryöng Wangnŭng Chisök* 武寧王陵誌石) and in the monument stone erected by the Silla king Chinhŭng (*Chinhŭng Wang Sunsubi* 眞興王巡狩碑). All these inscriptions show that by the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century *hanmun* was currently used in the Three Kingdoms.<sup>10</sup>

In the Silla (668-918) and Koryŏ period (918-1392) *hanmun* ensured its prestige and uncontested role as a written practice in the Korean peninsula. This prestige derived, for the most part, from Confucianism and its related literature since access to power came to be based on it. In the Silla period, the curriculum of the *T'aehakkam* 太學監 (Great Learning Institute)<sup>11</sup> contained classical Chinese texts as the *Analects* (*Lunyu*, Kr. *Nonŏ* 論語) and the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*, Kr. *Hyogyöng* 孝經).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, a state examination system for the selection of government officials called *Toksŏ samp'umgwa* 讀書三品科 (three-grades reading examination) was introduced in 788. This examination granted positions in the government by measuring the proficiency of the candidates in reading *hanmun* texts.<sup>13</sup> In the Koryŏ period, a system of civil service examination (*kwagŏ* 科擧) on the T'ang model was introduced in 958 by King Kwangjong 光宗 (r. 949-97) and became the main path to enter the government service.<sup>14</sup> The two main fields of this examination were the Composition Examination (*chesulkwa* 製述科) and the Classics Examination (*myönggyöngkwa* 明經科).<sup>15</sup> *Hanmun* texts as the *Five Classics* (*Ogyöng* 五經), the *Classic of Filial Piety*, and the *Analects* were studied in the State Academy (*Kukchagam* 國子監) established in 992 by King Söngjong 成宗 (r. 981-997).<sup>16</sup> Particularly noteworthy were also the Monthly Composition Exercise (*Munsin Wölgwaböp* 文臣月課法), that each month required civil officials to

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<sup>10</sup> An Pyöng-hŭi (2007:235).

<sup>11</sup> This institute was renamed as such around 750 from the previous State College (*Kukhak* 國學) established in 682.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Ki-baik (1984:83-84).

<sup>13</sup> Lee Ki-baik (1984:83-84).

<sup>14</sup> *Koryösa* 高麗史, 2:27b: [...] 九年夏五月始置科擧命翰林學士雙翼取進士 [...]”.

<sup>15</sup> Duncan, *et al.* (2009: 69).

<sup>16</sup> Lee Ki-baik (1984:119).

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compose lyrical and rhapsodic poems (*sibu* 詩賦) on set themes, and the so-called Notched Candle Poetics (*Kakch'ok pusi* 刻燭賦詩), that measured the literary skill of students in writing poems in a set time limit (measured by the time that a burning candle took to reach a mark previously made on it).<sup>17</sup>

From the Koryŏ period are also the oldest surviving Korean historical texts compiled in *hanmun*: the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms) compiled by Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075-1151) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the *Samguk Yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) compiled by the Buddhist monk Iryŏn 一然 (1206-1289) in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, perhaps the most impressive work of the period was the carving of the *hanmun*-translated Buddhist Tripitaka (Kr. *Taejanggyŏng* 大藏經). Its original woodblocks, completed in 1087, were stored in the Puin-sa temple but destroyed during the Mongol invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A new edition was carved when the court took refuge from the Mongol on Kanghwa Island and completed in 1251. This second edition is commonly called *Koryŏ Tripitaka* or *Tripitaka Koreana* (*Koryŏ taejanggyŏng* 高麗大藏經) and is currently preserved at the Haein-sa temple.

In the Chosŏn period (1392-1910) *hanmun* writing maintained and strengthened its status as the writing of the scholar-officials. In the early years of the dynasty, Kwŏn Kŭn 權近 (1352-1409) distinguished himself for his erudition and poetic compositions at the Ming court by composing 24 poems for the Chinese Emperor.<sup>18</sup> This episode, whose context will be better discussed in I.3.1, shows very well the profound knowledge of this written practice possessed by Korean scholar-officials and how *hanmun* could potentially overcome any spoken linguistic difference. Furthermore, the civil service examination system not only continued to be the main channel for access to the central government but also increased its importance.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge of *hanmun* was a prerequisite to access any

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<sup>17</sup> Lee Ki-baik (1984:134).

<sup>18</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 11:4b (6/3/8) [1397].

<sup>19</sup> Duncan (2015:118).

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position in the central government, and this was stressed even more by the official ideology of the new dynasty: Neo-Confucianism.

Neo-Confucianism was introduced into Korea in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century through Yuan China (1271-1368), thus during the final part of the Koryŏ period, and became the dominant ideological force behind the socio-political foundation of the Chosŏn dynasty. This ideology was a reorientation of the Confucian tradition that emerged during the Song dynasty. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), one of its most influential thinkers, reprogrammed the canon of the Confucian Classics by selecting a group of texts that, in his view, were the fundamental Confucian texts to be read. These texts would later come to be known as the *Four Books* (Ch. *Sishu*; Kr. *Sasŏ* 四書):

- The *Great Learning* 大學 (Ch. *Daxue*; Kr. *Taehak*);
- The *Analects* 論語 (Ch. *Lunyu*; Kr. *Nonŏ*);
- The *Mencius* 孟子 (Ch. *Mengzi*; Kr. *Maengja*);
- The *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 (Ch. *Zhongyong*; Kr. *Chungyong*).

Only after mastering these books, selected because considered more accessible than other texts, students were supposed to turn to the previously authoritative *Five Classics*:

- The *Book of Changes* 易經 (Ch. *Yijing*; Kr. *Yŏkkyŏng*);
- The *Book of Poetry* 詩經 (Ch. *Shijing*; Kr. *Sigyŏng*);
- The *Book of Documents* 書經 (Ch. *Shujing*; Kr. *Sŏgyŏng*);
- The *Book of Rites* 禮記 (Ch. *Liji*; Kr. *Yegi*);
- The *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 (Ch. *Chunqiu*; Kr. *Ch'unch'u*).

These texts became the foundation of the intellectual background of the Chosŏn scholars, and their knowledge a prerequisite to gain a position in the central government.

In 1419 Sejong (r. 1418-1450) started to gather in the Hall of Worthies (*Chipyŏnjŏn* 集賢殿) young and talented scholars who would fully commit themselves in pursuing learning and made the study of the *Four Books*

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compulsory even to pass the Military Examination (*mugŏ* 武舉).<sup>20</sup> In the same year the collections of commentaries on the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* (Ch. *Si shu wu jing da quan*; Kr. *Sasŏ Ogyŏng taejŏn* 四書五經大全)<sup>21</sup> and *The Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle* (Ch. *Xingli daquan*; Kr. *Sŏngni taejŏn* 性理大全), a collection of selected Song philosophical texts initially compiled in 1415 in Ming China, were brought in the Korean peninsula by a returning diplomatic mission from the Ming capital as a special gift from the emperor.<sup>22</sup> All these collections were assiduously studied during Sejong's reign and exerted a significant influence in that period. In 1425 the king ordered the governors of the Ch'ungch'ŏng, Chŏlla, and Kyŏngsang provinces to reprint them.<sup>23</sup> The governor of the Kyŏngsang province presented to the king the requested copies two years later, in 1427. When fifty more copies were presented in 1428, the king ordered to distribute them among the scholars of the Hall of Worthies, high ranking officials (higher than rank 2), and other institutions.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, Kim Ton 金墩 (1385-1440), a scholar of the Hall of Worthies, received an order from the king to question two Ming envoys about the *Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle*.<sup>25</sup> As pointed out by Kang Sin-hang (2003:21), that the two envoys were unable to answer his questions is illustrative of the high level of knowledge of this text that the Chosŏn scholars had already reached at the time.

Sejong himself regularly attended lectures and held discussions on Confucian texts with the scholars of the Hall of Worthies in the so-called Classics Mat (*kyŏngyŏn* 經筵). In 1418 he opened these lectures with a discussion on the

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<sup>20</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 3:14a (1/2/16) [1419].

<sup>21</sup> These collections of commentaries on the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* were compiled on imperial order by Hu Guang 胡廣 (1370-1418), a Ming scholar at the Hall of Literary Profundity (*Wenyuange* 文淵閣), at the same time of the *Great Compendium*.

<sup>22</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 6:10a (1/12/7) [1419]. The importance of these texts can be also surmised by the fact that they are listed in the entry before other sumptuous gifts sent with the same mission, as a large quantity of coins, silk, horses and sheep.

<sup>23</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 30:4a (7/10/15) [1425].

<sup>24</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:8b (10/4/1) [1428]. The institutions to which the copies of these texts were distributed were the Spring and Autumn Office (*Ch'unch'u'gwan* 春秋館) and to the State Academy (*Sŏnggyun'gwan* 成均館).

<sup>25</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:4a (10/4/16) [1428].

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*Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (Ch. *Daxue yanyi*, Kr. *Taehak yŏnŭi* 大學衍義), the 1229 edition of the Great Learning made by the Song scholar Zhen Dexiu 眞德秀 (1178-1235). In 1422 started the lectures on the *Doctrine of the Mean* and in 1424 on the *Great Learning*.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in 1432 specific lectures on the *Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle* started in the Classics Mat and continued until 1434.<sup>27</sup> Several entries in the Annals report how these lectures continued throughout his reign. This suggests that Confucian texts were not merely the object of an individual study but that, to the contrary, they were read aloud and discussed by scholars who verbally interacted to each other.

*Hanmun* texts were not only imported from China and, eventually, reprinted locally, but there was also an active and official production of these texts by Chosŏn scholars. This was the case of the *Six Codes of Administration* (*Kyŏngje yukchŏn* 經濟六典) printed in 1397.<sup>28</sup> Another example of *hanmun* texts produced in this period is the compilation of official historical records as the *History of Koryŏ* (*Koryŏsa* 高麗史). This text was ordered by king T'aejo (r.1392-98) during his very first year of reign and was finally completed in 1451 after a long and complicated compilation process during which it was revised several times.<sup>29</sup> The compilation of the *Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (*Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄) started with the completion of the *Annals of King T'aejo* (*T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄) right after he died in 1408 and were completed in 1413.<sup>30</sup> The *Annals of King Chŏngjong* (*Chongjŏng Taewang Sillok* 恭靖大王實錄) were completed in 1426, while the *Annals of King T'aejong* (*T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄) were finished in 1431.<sup>31</sup>

An important aspect related to the use of the Annals is that their consultation was allowed only by historiographers and, thus, they were not ordinarily

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<sup>26</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 15:5a (4/1/23) [1422] and 23:32b (6/3/14) [1424].

<sup>27</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 55:10b (14/2/6) [1432] and 63:24b (16/3/5) [1434].

<sup>28</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 12:12a (6/12/26) [1397]. These legal codes, although no more extant, became the basis for the later *Great Code for State Administration* (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典) that was compiled in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 2:9b (1/10/13) [1392]; *Munjong Sillok* 文宗實錄, 9:17b (1/8/25) [1451].

<sup>30</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 25:17b (13/3/22) [1413].

<sup>31</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 33:10a (8/8/15) [1426]; 51:34b (13/3/17) [1431].

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accessible by other officials or even by the king. An episode that is revealing of this aspect is when the officials of the Spring and Autumn Office (*Ch'unch'ugwan* 春秋館), in charge of their compilation and preservation, criticized the decision of Sejong of moving the Annals of King T'aejo from their archives so that they could be consulted for the supplementation of the verses of the *Yongbi ōch'ōn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons).<sup>32</sup> In that occasion, they pointed out that only historiographers were allowed to consult the Annals and that in the Vernacular Script Office (*Ōnmunch'ōng* 諺文廳) they were too exposed since the entry was not regulated.<sup>33</sup> The king immediately changed his order to move the Annals and, instead, ordered two historiographers of the Spring and Autumn Office to copy the relevant parts.<sup>34</sup> These strict regulations concerning the access and consultation of the Annals show how any classification of the texts of the period based on their linguistic features alone might be incomplete without taking into consideration their actual use. The plain and simple layout of the Annals can be regarded as a reflection of their function, that was not the diffusion of their contents but, primarily, their preservation for future generations. As can be seen in Figure 1, there are no features intended to ease their reading, except for a circle (○) used to indicate the start of a new entry. Furthermore, the text is characterized by the absence of any breaks on the page, with the exclusion of the space left as a sign of respect before the name or action of the king. This makes the Annals different from other texts that, despite being similarly written in *hanmun*, were intended to be regularly consulted, if not memorized, read aloud, discussed, or even “performed”, in front of an audience.

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<sup>32</sup> See chapter III.1 for a comprehensive discussion on the compilation of this text.

<sup>33</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 114:18a (28/11/8) [1446].

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



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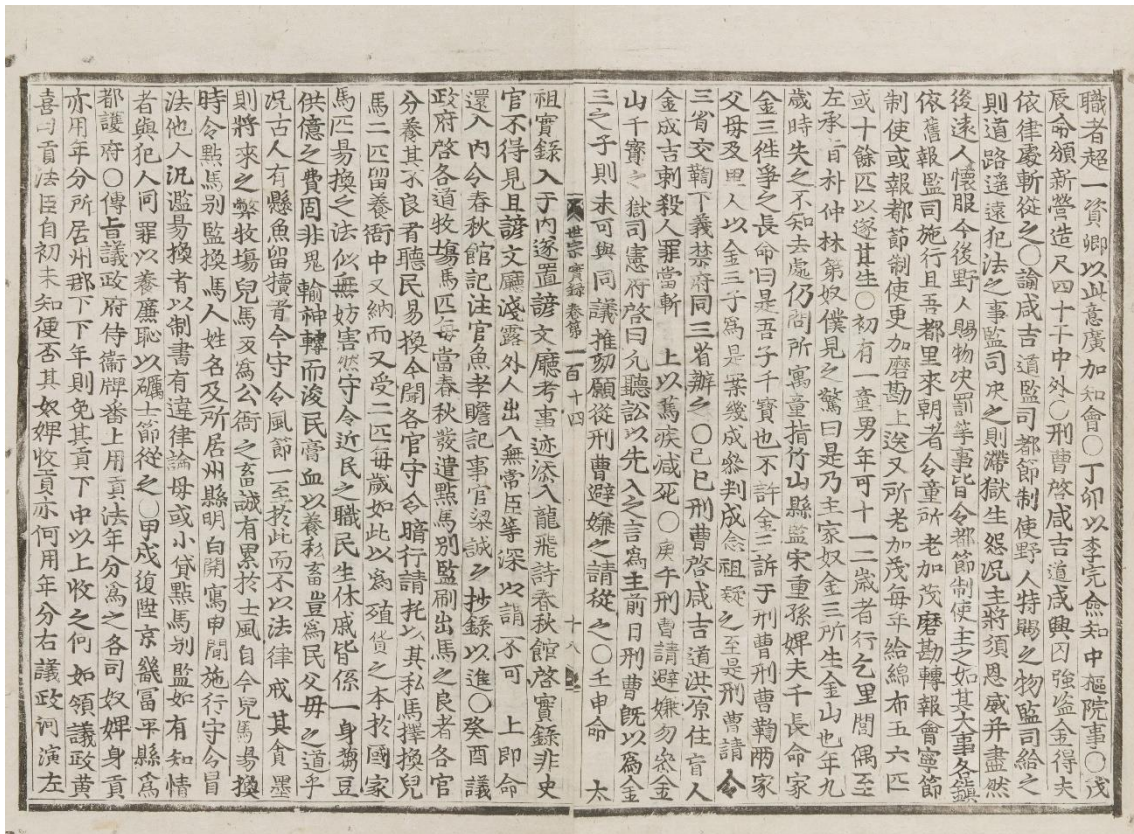


Figure 1. *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 (*Annals of King Sejong*), 114:18. Photographic reproduction of the Mt. Taebaek version (*T'aebaeksan-bon* 太白山本), currently preserved in the Busan Historical Repository (*Pusan kirok chŏngbo sent'ŏ* 부산기록정보센터).

The *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations; henceforth *SH*) is an example of these latter types of texts, offering a striking contrast with the *Annals* for what concerns its intended employment and layout. Printed and distributed in 1434,<sup>35</sup> the *SH* was one of the most significant *hanmun* publications during Sejong's reign. This work can be described as a Chosŏn moral primer that, through a series of *exempla* in the form of brief stories and related illustrations (*to* 圖), presented the right moral behaviour (*haengsil* 行實) according to the three social relationships (*samgang* 三綱) which were considered the most important in a Confucian society: father-son (*puja* 父子), king-subject (*kunsin* 君臣), and husband-wife (*pubu* 夫婦). Its intended aim was to instruct the people according to Confucian moral and

<sup>35</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 56:33a (14/6/9) [1432].

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ethics—a didactic project expressed in the term *kyohwa* 教化 “transform through education”—as part of the ideological project that, since the foundation of the new dynasty, had aimed to transform Chosŏn Korea into an exemplar Confucian state. Sejong commissioned it to Sŏl Sun 僖循 (d. 1435) and the scholars of the Hall of Worthies (*Chiphyŏnjŏn* 集賢殿). The specific event that urged the king to start the compilation of this kind of educational text was a case of patricide that in 1428 involved a man named Kim Hwa 金禾 in Chinju 晉州, in the southern part of the peninsula. The Annals reveal how the king held an assembly to discuss how to strengthen filial piety and fraternal duty (*hyoje* 孝悌) after hearing about this case at the Classics Mat (*kyŏngyŏn* 經筵), where he took regular lectures and discussed Confucian Classics with the scholars of the Hall of Worthies.<sup>36</sup> It was on this occasion that the project of the compilation of a Confucian instructive work, which would eventually become the *SH*, was first discussed and assigned to Sŏl Sun and the supervision of the Hall of Worthies.<sup>37</sup> The *SH* was completed and presented to the king in 1432, while printing and distribution were ordered two years later in 1434.<sup>38</sup>

The text of the *SH* is divided into three separated volumes (*kwŏn* 卷): *Hyoja-do* 孝子圖 (Illustrations of Filial Sons), *Ch'ungsin-do* 忠臣圖 (Illustrations of Loyal Subjects), and *Yŏllyŏ-do* 烈女圖 (Illustrations of Devoted Women). Each story opens with a picture on one page (right part of the folio) and the text of the story on the following page (left part of the folio). The main text of the stories is usually followed by verses (*si* 詩) and, in some cases, a eulogy (*ch'an* 贊). Although we do not possess an original copy of the first edition, some old copies are considered close to the original edition.<sup>39</sup> Figure 2 shows the pages with the first story in the *Ch'ungsin-do* (Illustrations of Loyal Subjects) from the copy preserved at the

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<sup>36</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 42:1a (10/10/3) [1428].

<sup>37</sup> Sŏl Sun had at the time the grade of Councilor on duty (*chikchehak* 直提學) in this institution.

<sup>38</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 56:33a (14/6/9) [1432]; 64:19a (16/4/27) [1434].

<sup>39</sup> Ok Yŏng-jŏng (2008:47).

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Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (古貴 172.1-Se63s) and considered a reprint (*chunggan-bon* 重刊本) of the first edition.

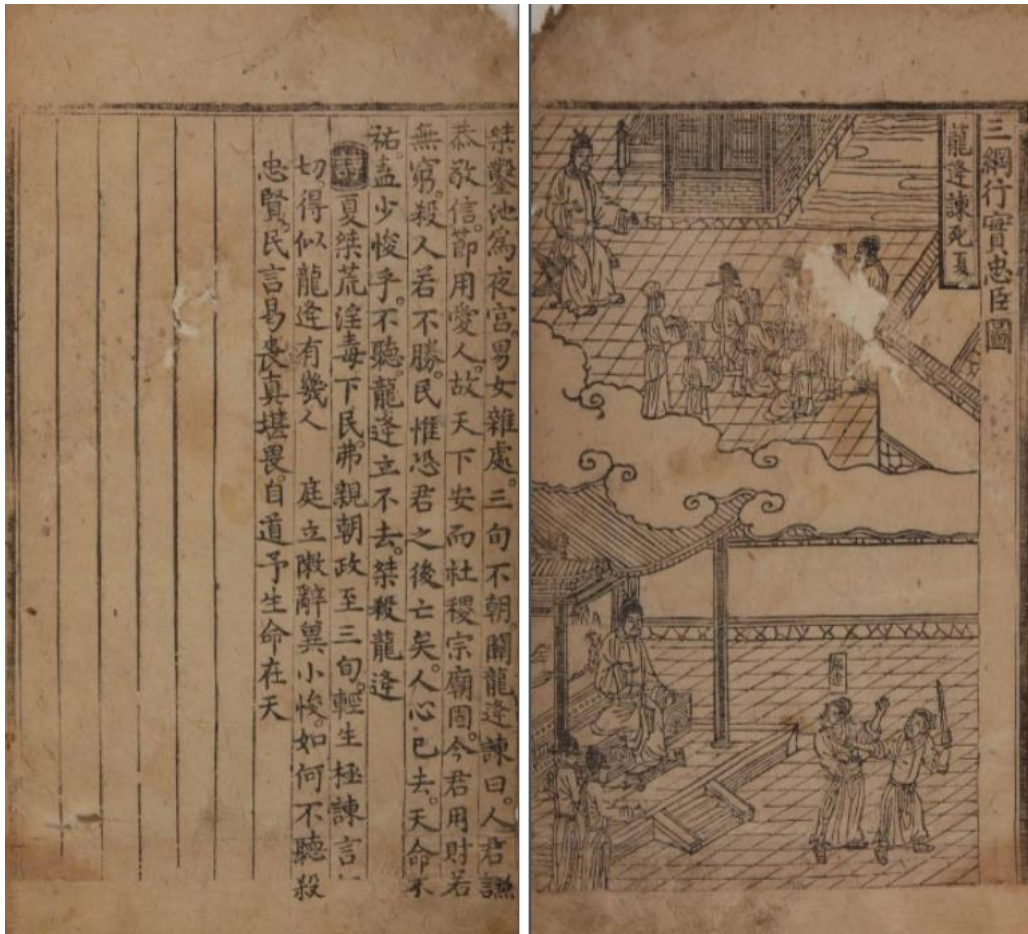


Figure 2. *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated examples of conduct according to the three relations), *Ch'ungsin-do* 忠臣圖 (Illustrations of loyal subjects), *Yongbang kansa* 龍逢諫死 (Yongbang admonished the king and died). Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (古貴 172.1-Se63s).

What makes this text particularly interesting in the present discussion on *hanmun* writing and its significance in the Korean context is that, as a text whose primary function was to be propagated widely among the population, faced the king with the limitations of this writing practice and, yet, is illustrative of the potential of a *hanmun* text to be employed beyond an individual and silent

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reading. This emerges in the instructions on the distribution of the text given by Sejong himself:<sup>40</sup>

○上曰三綱人道之大經君臣父子夫婦之所當先知者也肆予命儒臣編集古今并付圖形名曰三綱行實俾鍍于梓廣布中外思欲擇其有學識者常加訓導誘掖獎勸使愚夫愚婦皆有所知識以盡其道何如 [...]

His Majesty stated: “The Three Relations are the great rule of the Way of Man, it is thus a prerequisite to properly know the relations of king-subject (*kunsin* 君臣), father-son (*puja* 父子), and husband-wife (*pubu* 夫婦). I have finally ordered my Confucian subjects (*yusin* 儒臣) to collect old and new [stories] and to make illustrations of them. I named them *The Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations* (*Samgang haengsil* 三綱行實). Print and widely distribute them in and out [of the capital]. And how about selecting people of knowledge (*haksikcha* 學識者) who will fulfil their duty to instruct (*hundo* 訓導), guide and encourage all ignorant men and women (*ubu ubu* 愚夫愚婦) to know [these stories]?

As can be seen in the last lines of these instructions, the king not only ordered the distribution of the text but also suggested to select people of knowledge (*haksikcha* 學識者) to teach the text to the ignorant men and women (*ubu ubu* 愚夫愚婦). This issue of the diffusion of the text is further elaborated in the following passage:<sup>41</sup>

[...] 第以民庶不識文字書雖頒降人不訓示則又安能知其義而興起乎予觀周禮外史掌達書名于四方使四方知書之文字得能讀之今可倣此 令中外務盡誨諭之術京中漢城府五部外方監司守令旁求有學識者敦加獎勸無貴無賤常令訓習至於婦女亦令親屬諄諄教之使曉然共知 [...]

However, the masses (*minsŏ* 民庶) do not know about writing (*munja* 文字). [Thus,] even if the text is distributed, if nobody instructs them, how can they understand

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<sup>40</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 64:19a (16/4/27) [1434]. When not otherwise noted, all translations of the Annals are mine. In case of passages that already have an English translation in other works that I am aware of, reference is made on them in the notes. A complete modern Korean translation of the Annals can be found in <http://sillok.history.go.kr/>.

<sup>41</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 64:19a (16/4/27) [1434]. An English translation of this passage can be also found in Oh Young Kyun (2013:78).

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its meaning and be inspired by it? I have read in the *Rites of Zhou* 周禮 (*Zhou li*, Kr. *Chu rye*) that an external secretary (*oesa* 外史) was in charge of the diffusion of texts in the four directions, so that [everyone in] the four directions could understand the writing of these texts and could read them. We can now take this as a model. I order to make efforts to exhaust any ability to instruct and enlighten, inside and out [of the capital]. The five districts under the Hansŏng administration inside the capital, the provincial governors (*kamsa* 監司) and the local magistrates (*suryŏng* 守令) in the external regions shall search everywhere instructed people, without social distinction, who will be encouraged and exhorted to make efforts to teach [the text]. As for women, relatives should teach them earnestly, making them understand by sharing what they know.

The difficulty for the text to reach the illiterate population was thus immediately noticed by the king, who addressed this issue by making instructed persons to read and explain the text in vernacular. What was conceived by the king was thus what Oh Young Kyun (2013:78) aptly terms as a “mediated reading”. Through this process, the *SH* assumed a crucial oral and performative dimension. Its text, far from being the object of an individual and solitary reading, was placed at the centre of the social interactions between the reader-instructors who had the role of mediators and the illiterate listeners who were its final target.

Considering how *hanmun* texts could be read and orally conveyed in the vernacular language, it is not surprising that conceiving a method for rendering in written form their vernacular realization had always been a significant concern in Korea, that was still felt as such in the fifteenth century. As we shall see, the need to make written texts more transparent to a vernacular interpretation and reading can be seen reflected in the different systems that were developed for the transcription of the vernacular language. Furthermore, despite how *hanmun* was used as a shared writing practice in all East Asia, local languages and writing practices retained an essential role in the diplomatic and commercial relations with neighbouring populations, even in the relations with China itself.

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### I.2. Vernacular Practices

Vernacular transcription systems developed very early in the Korean peninsula and were still widely used in the early Chosŏn period. The common underlying criterion of all these systems was the “borrowing” of Chinese characters to express the vernacular language. For this reason, nowadays they are usually called *ch’aja p’yogibop* 借字表記法 (transcription systems with borrowed characters) by Korean scholars.<sup>42</sup>

The first usage of Chinese characters to transcribe the vernacular language was that of the transcription of proper nouns (as names of persons, official titles, and places). This method is called *koyumyŏngsa p’yogibop* 固有名詞表記法 (transcription system of proper nouns) by Korean scholars and used Chinese characters phonologically for their sound value (*ŭm* 音 reading) and logographically for their meaning (*hun* 訓 reading). Early examples of this usage can be seen in the above-mentioned *hanmun* inscriptions dated from the Three Kingdoms period.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the *Samguk Sagi* 三國史記 (History of the Three Kingdoms), the oldest extant history of Korea compiled by Kim Pusik (1075-1151) in 1145, contains many geographical names transcribed with this method in the section dedicated to geography (*chiri* 地理).<sup>44</sup> An example provided by Lee and Ramsey (2011:37) is the Koguryŏ place name of what is today the city of Suwŏn, which is recorded in fascicle 37 of the *Samguk Sagi*. This place is written phonographically as 買忽 and logographically as 水城. In the first case, the Chinese characters were used for their sound values, and their reading resulted in a word that must have been close to the Koguryan vernacular pronunciation

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<sup>42</sup> The term *ch’aja p’yogi(bop)* 借字表記(法) started to gain diffusion among Korean scholars only from the 1980s (see Song Ki-jung 1997:5). Before that, these vernacular transcription systems were usually indicated with the term *idu* 吏讀. This is also how fifteenth-century Chosŏn scholars called them. In fact, the first appearance of this term is in a memorial presented to the throne dated 1446 (see II.2.2). Nowadays, however, the term *idu* is generally used by scholars to indicate only a specific type of vernacular transcription that will be further discussed below.

<sup>43</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:235).

<sup>44</sup> The section of the *Samguk Sagi* dedicated to geography is contained in fascicles 34 to 37.

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of the place. In the second case, the original pronunciation of the characters was ignored, and they were read according to their meaning (i.e., “water town”) by using the equivalent Koguryan vernacular words.

Besides the transcription of names, there was also the development of more complex systems for writing entire sentences and texts in vernacular. Nowadays, these systems of vernacularization are usually divided by scholars into three major types:

(1) *hyangch'al* 鄉札 (local letters), that were used for vernacular songs (*hyangga*) during the Silla period until early Koryŏ;

(2) *idu* 吏讀 (clerical reading) that was mainly used for official and administrative documents;

(3) *kugyŏl* 口訣 (oral formula) usually employed to gloss Buddhist and Confucian texts.

If *hyangch'al* fell into disuse at the beginning of the Koryŏ period, *idu* and *kugyŏl* continued to be widely employed throughout the Chosŏn period. These systems not only show the development of highly sophisticated writing and reading practices but also formed the conceptual basis on which the new vernacular script was created. Briefly reviewing their history and, in particular, their actual practice at the turn of the fifteenth century and up to the invention of the vernacular script will provide the background for a better understanding of the emerging of this new writing system and its usage in the texts of the period.

### 1.2.1. *Hyangch'al*

The *hyangch'al* system was used in 25 *hyangga* (vernacular songs) recorded in two early Koryŏ texts: the *Kyunyŏ Chŏn* 均如傳 (Life of the Great Master Kyunyŏ, 1075) and the *Samguk Yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, late 13<sup>th</sup> century). The former text is the biography of the poet-monk Kyunyŏ (923-973) and contains 11 *hyangga* written by him, thus dating from the very beginning of the Koryŏ period (918-1392). The second is a later text compiled by the Buddhist

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monk Iryön (1206-1289) and contains 14 *hyangga* dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup>

The transcription strategies used in these poems are not different from those seen in the transcription of proper nouns, with Chinese characters employed for their semantic and sound value. For certain syllables, however, the characters used for their phonological transcription were different from those used in the transcription of names.<sup>46</sup> A common transcription strategy used in the *hyangch'al* system was to write words with two combined characters, the first was used for its semantic value and the second for its sound to represent the final consonant of the word. The example provided by Lee and Ramsey (2011:61) is the word 夜音 “night” (*pam* in Middle Korean), where the character 夜 indicated the meaning of the word and the character 音 the final consonant *-m*. This practice of using a Chinese character to represent the final consonant of a word is called *marŭmch'ömgiböp* 末音添記法 (system of adding the final sound) by Korean scholars.

The *hyangch'al* was used for a limited period and, as already mentioned, fell in disuse after the Koryö period. Although no *hyangga* dated after the early Koryö has survived, this system of transcription might have continued to be used throughout the period for the composition of vernacular poetries.<sup>47</sup>

### I.2.2. *Idu*

The *idu* system was arguably the most common method of vernacular transcription and the one that was used for the longest time, up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its fundamental criterion was the change of the syntactical order of the sentence from *hanmun* to vernacular Korean and the insertion of specific

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<sup>45</sup> According to Lee and Ramsey (2011:57), one of these songs might have been composed by a Paekche prince while the other by Silla poets, for the most part in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>46</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:60).

<sup>47</sup> Ledyard (1998:53).



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characters to indicate the grammatical parts of the sentence (particles, affixes, and other function words) by using their sound or semantic value.

The earliest *idu* texts are in the form of inscriptions on metal and stone.<sup>48</sup> An example of these inscriptions is the *Imsin sŏgisŏk* 壬申誓記石 (Imsin oath stone inscription), dated 552 (or 612).<sup>49</sup> This is a small stone tablet (32 x 12,3 cm) discovered near the city of Kyŏngju with inscribed a text in Chinese characters but with a Korean syntactical order (see Figure 3). The authors seem to have been two Silla youths who vowed to strictly observe a certain code of conduct and to complete the reading of some Chinese classical texts.<sup>50</sup>

壬申年六月十六日二人并誓記天前誓今自三年以後忠道執持過失无誓若此事失天大罪得誓若國不安大亂世可容行誓之又別先辛未年七月廿二日大誓詩尚書禮傳倫得誓三年

On the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month in the year *Imsin*, we two together solemnly swear and record. We swear in front of Heaven. We swear that, from now on, for the next three years, we will keep the path of loyalty without fail. We swear that, should we fail in doing this, we will receive severe punishment from Heaven. And we swear that even should the country not be at peace and the world in great chaos, we will proceed on that path. Furthermore, we have also already taken a great vow on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month in the year *Sinmi*. We swore to learn the poetries (詩, i.e. the *Classic of Poetry*), the Hallowed Documents (尚書, i.e. the *Book of Documents*), the Rites (禮, i.e. the *Book of Rites*), and the Commentary (傳, i.e. the *Commentary of Zuo* 左傳) for three years.<sup>51</sup>

It can be noticed that the morpho-syntactic structure of this text is purely Korean. This is evident by the use of the recurrent character 誓 “to swear” that, as a verb, is always placed at the end of the sentence according to the SOV syntactical order

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<sup>48</sup> For an extensive list of these inscriptions, see Nam Pung-hyun (2012:42).

<sup>49</sup> The difference of sixty years among the possible dates is due to the fact that the year is indicated with the sexagesimal cycle.

<sup>50</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:55); An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:236).

<sup>51</sup> I have referred to the English translation of Lee and Ramsey (2011:55) and the Korean translation of An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:236).

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of the Korean language. The expression 今自 “from now” also reflects the Korean morphology since it reverses the classical Chinese form 自今 in the order corresponding to the contemporary Korean 지금부터 (now-from). Borrowed characters employed as function words and functional morphemes do not appear in this inscription yet. The only exception seems to be the character 之 placed after the character 誓 at the end of the first part of the text (before the recounting of the previous oath), that can be interpreted as expressing the conclusive form of the verb, similarly to the contemporary Korean suffix -다.<sup>52</sup>



Figure 3. *Imsin sŏgisŏk* 壬申誓記石 (Imsin oath stone inscription). National Museum of Korea. Code: 경주 282.

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<sup>52</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:55).

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A further example that shows a certain development in this method of transcription is the *Kyŏngju Namsan Sinsŏngbi* 慶州南山新城碑 (Inscription of New Kyŏngju Namsan Fortress). This inscription is in a stele that was erected in 591 on Namsan in Kyŏngju as a memorial for the construction of a fortress. The text of this stele not only shows a Korean syntactical order as the example above but also some characters that were used to indicate Korean functional morphemes.<sup>53</sup> In the example below (a) shows the beginning of the original text with underlined the borrowed characters used for the grammatical parts, (b) a literal translation with the function of the grammatical glosses underlined, and (c) a final translation.

- a. 辛亥年二月廿六日南山新城作節如法以作 [...]
- b. Sinhae year (591) second month 26<sup>th</sup>-day Namsan new fortress make-time  
accord method-inst. make
- c. “On the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the year *Sinhae* (591) when (I) made the new fortress, (I) made it following the prescribed method.”<sup>54</sup>

Here the character 節 is used as a function word to indicate the time, similarly to the contemporary Korean 叫,<sup>55</sup> while the character 以 is used as an instrumental particle as the contemporary Korean particle 로.

An even more developed system can be seen in a later inscription dated 758 made on a three-story stone pagoda erected at Karhang Temple (*Karhang-sa Sŏkt'apmyŏng* 葛項寺石塔銘), located near today's Kimch'ŏn city in North Kyŏngsang province. This inscription shows different Chinese characters used for their sound or semantic value to indicate functional morphemes as particles, suffixes, and other function words.<sup>56</sup> Below are the first three lines of the original

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<sup>53</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:55).

<sup>54</sup> I followed the English translation in Whitman (2015:425).

<sup>55</sup> Another Chinese character used to indicate “time” was 時. However, from the Silla period the character 節 seems to have been used more often than 時. See Nam P'ung-hyŏn (2000:193).

<sup>56</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:55); An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:237).

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text (that can also be seen in Figure 4), followed each by a literal translation with grammatical glosses. A final translation is provided at the end.

二塔天寶十七年戊戌中立在之

Two pagodas Tianbao 17 year *Musul* (758)-loc. erect-perf.-decl.

甥姊妹三人業以成在之

Brother elder sister younger sister three-cl. deed-inst. make-perf.-decl.

甥者零妙寺言寂法師在弥

Brother-top. Yǒngmyo temple Önjök monk to be-conj.

“The two pagodas were erected in the 17th year of Tianbao, 758. Three people, a brother and elder and younger sisters built it as a part of their practice. The brother was Önjök, a monk of Yǒngmyo temple, and...”<sup>57</sup>

In this example we can find several characters used as functional morphemes (underlined in the original text): 中 (locative), 之 (declarative), 以 (instrumental), 者 (topic) and 在 (used as a perfective auxiliary in the first two lines and as a copula in the third line).<sup>58</sup> These characters were all selected for their meaning. An interesting exception is the character 弥, which is employed phonographically to represent the coordinate conjunction indicated in contemporary Korean by the suffix -며. This was a new development in the use of borrowed characters and, for this reason, this inscription is said to represent an almost completely developed form of *idu*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> I followed the analysis of Whitman (2015:425).

<sup>58</sup> Whitman (2015:425).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

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Figure 4. *Karhang-sa Sökt'apmyöng* 葛項寺石塔銘 (Inscription on the stone pagoda of the Karhang Temple). National Museum of Korea.

The *idu* system remained widely used at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when it was employed in a complete and more standardized form.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, in this period, we find the first evidence of its use as a translational tool to adapt existing *hanmun* texts. Example of an early Chosŏn *idu* text is the *Tae Myöng nyul chikhae* 大明律直解 (Direct Explanation of the Great Ming Code, 1395). This was an adaptation of the Ming penal code with added a vernacular translation in *idu*. The term *chikhae* 直解 “direct explanation” — that in this text seems to refer to the addition of the *idu* version<sup>61</sup> — is not present in the actual title written in the text, where we can only find the title *Tae Myöng nyul* 大明律 as the original Ming

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<sup>60</sup> *Idu* will remain in current use until the end of the Chosŏn period.

<sup>61</sup> As we shall see in I.3, the term *chikhae* 直解 “direct explanation” was also used to indicate texts used to learn vernacular Chinese.

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version. This is also how the text is referred to in the Annals and other historical sources.<sup>62</sup> The only extant copy is a reprint dated before the Japanese invasions.<sup>63</sup>

The *Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lu* 大明律) had been adopted by King T'aejo since the beginning of his reign in 1392.<sup>64</sup> However, the project for the compilation of a vernacular version had already started in the last years of the Koryŏ period, when a memorial (*sangso* 上疏) presented to King U 禡王 (1375-1388) by the Ministry of Justice (*Chŏnbŏpsa* 典法司) in 1388 suggested adopting the *Great Ming Code*. This memorial also raised the issue that some parts were not in compliance with Korean's laws, suggesting thus to select people able in the written (*mun* 文) and local (*ri* 俚) language of China and Korea to revise it. Furthermore, it is proposed to use the resulting text to instruct (*hundo* 訓導) officials (*kwalli* 官吏) all over the country.<sup>65</sup>

This vernacular version of the code was then completed in 1395 (30 fascicles distributed into 4 volumes). The text is divided into paragraphs and, in each one, placed side by side, are the original *hanmun* text and the *idu* version written with smaller characters (see Figure 5). To this structure seems to refer the passage in the postface asserting that "following the characters [we] directly explained [them]" (逐字直解).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, this vernacular version of the code was not a 1:1 translation since several parts contain changes and additions aimed to adapt the contents to the Korean situation, in line with what was suggested in the above-seen memorial.<sup>67</sup> As noted by An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:28), the extent of these changes is such that the text might be better defined as an adaptation than a translation.

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<sup>62</sup> The title *Tae Myŏngnyul chikhae*, the one to which is nowadays known among Korean scholars, appeared for the first time in a modern commented edition of 1936 called *Kyojŏng Tae Myŏngnyul chikhae* 校訂 大明律直解. For a detailed discussion on the origin of this name, see An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009, chapter 9).

<sup>63</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:219).

<sup>64</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄 1:43a (1/7/28) [1392].

<sup>65</sup> *Koryŏsa* 高麗史, volume 84 [1388, 9<sup>th</sup> month]: 然與本朝律不合者有之伏惟殿下命通中國與本朝文俚者斟酌更定訓導京外官吏 [...]

<sup>66</sup> *Tae Myŏngnyul chikhae* 大明律直解, *palmun* 跋文.

<sup>67</sup> For an example of these differences, see An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:27-28).

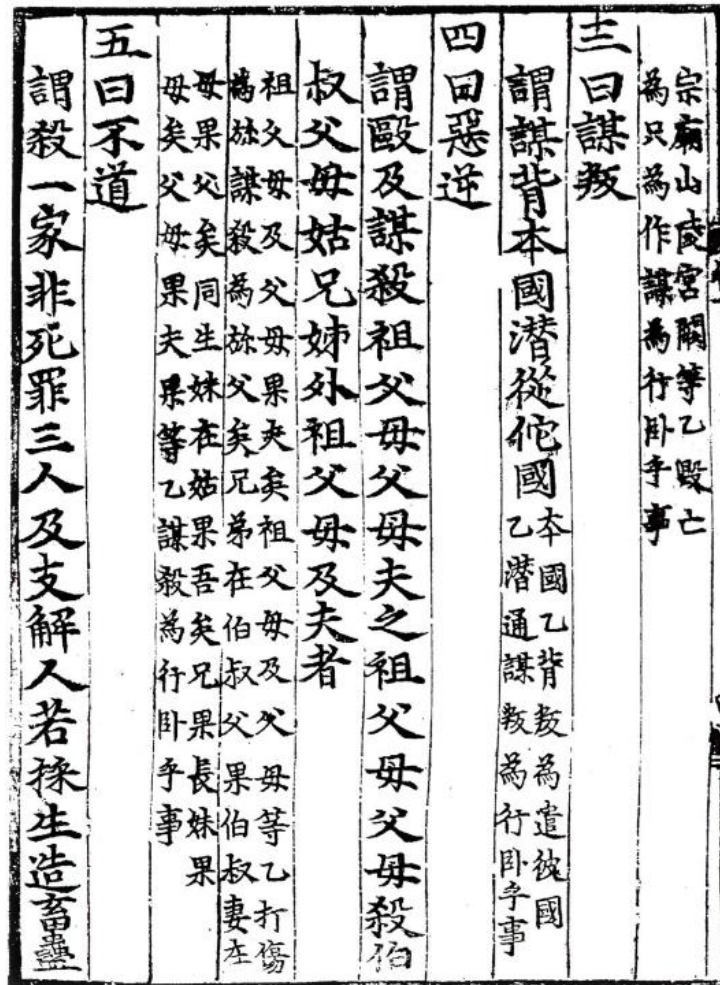


Figure 5. *Tae Myōng nyul chikhae* 大明律直解 (Direct Explanation of the Great Ming Code). 1:4b.

Figure 5 shows a page from the section titled “Ten Abominations” (*Sibak* 十惡) containing what were considered the ten biggest crimes. Line 2 presents the title of the third of these crimes: “plotting treason” (*moban* 謀叛). In line 3, leaving a one-character space from the upper margin, is the original *hanmun* text describing this crime followed by the *idu* version written with smaller characters. Below is the *idu* version with the grammatical parts underlined:

本國乙背叛為遣彼國乙潛通謀叛為行卧乎事

Plotting treason is to betray one’s own country by being in secret communication with a foreign country.

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The colophon (*palmun* 跋文) of the text gives us more detailed information on the intended aim of the compilation of this text and how it was planned to be used:<sup>68</sup>

[...]

聖上思欲頒布中外使仕進輩傳相誦習皆得以取法然其使字不常人人未易曉况我本朝三韓時薛聰所製方言文字謂之吏道土俗生知習熟未能遽革焉得家到戶諭每人而教之哉宜將是書讀之以吏道導之以良能 [...]

His Majesty (King T'aejo) intended [the Great Ming Code] to be promulgated all over the country and to make it known among scholars getting a position in the government, who would have memorized and internalized it so that everyone might have become acquainted with its laws. However, since [the Great Ming Code] uses uncommon words not everyone understands it with ease. In our country, at the time of the three Han, Söl Ch'ong invented a script (*munja* 文字) for the local speech (*pangŏn* 方言) called *ido* (吏道).<sup>69</sup> As a local custom, people have learned and become well acquainted with it, we cannot abruptly change this. How could we reach every house and teach [the Great Ming Code] to everyone? We should read them the text in *idu* and have men of innate ability to guide them.

This passage confirms that the code was intended to be distributed to officials all over the country, who were supposed to memorize and get acquainted with it. However, due to the difficulty of the language in the text, it was decided to add a vernacular version using the *idu* system (here called *ido* 吏道). *Idu* is presented as a well-established practice at the time of the compilation of this code and, for this reason, an *idu* version was regarded as the most effective way to reach all the population. Through this version instructed officials would have been able to more effectively mediate it.

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<sup>68</sup> *Tae Myŏng nyul chikhae* 大明律直解, *palmun* 跋文.

<sup>69</sup> The term *ido* 吏道 is a variant of the word *idu* 吏讀. For a detailed discussion on the origin and meaning of this term, see Ledyard (1997:60-67).



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The difficulties to spread the *Tae Myǒng nyul* in the country and the need for a vernacular version are also asserted in a later entry in the *T'aejong Sillok*. Here it is recorded that the *Tae Myǒng nyul* was the official code in use in the country and had to be applied, but that the Chosŏn people were not able to easily get acquainted with it (我國人未易通曉). For this reason, the text had been translated in the local language (俚言譯), distributed all over the country (頒布中外) and taught by officials (使官吏講習).<sup>70</sup> This passage seems to confirm that the mediation of officials had a crucial role in the diffusion of the code.

But what was the actual effectiveness of this *idu* version? It seems that, for all its translation and adaptation, the text failed to provide a fully accessible text to the officials. Significant is the following remark made by Sejong in 1426, thus several years after the text had been in use in the country:<sup>71</sup>

[...]而律文雜以漢吏之文雖文臣難以悉知況律學生徒乎自今擇文臣之精通者別置訓導官如唐律疏義至正條格大明律等書講習可也其令吏曹議諸政府 [...]

[...] Since the articles of the criminal codes (*yulmun* 律文) are complicatedly written in *hanmun* and *idu*, even scholar-officials (*munsin* 文臣) find it difficult to understand them fully, not to speak of the students! From now on, select officials that are well-versed in these texts and nominate them “educational officials” (*hundogwan* 訓導官).<sup>72</sup> They should teach texts as the Tang Code (*Tangnyul soui* 唐律疏義), the Legal Standards of the Zhizheng Era (*Chijǒng chogyōk* 至正條格) and the Great Ming Code (*Tae Myǒng nyul* 大明律). Bring this matter to the Ministry of Personnel (*Ijo* 吏曹).

Here Sejong is worried about the difficulties in the understanding of legal codes, regardless of their being written in *hanmun* or *idu*. Quite interesting is his remark that even officials might find problems in understanding them. From here the

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<sup>70</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 8:26a (4/10/28) [1404]: 今大明律時王之制所當奉行然我國人未易通曉宜以俚言譯之頒布中外使官吏講習.

<sup>71</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 34:4b (8/10/27) [1426].

<sup>72</sup> It indicated officials (rank 9A) appointed in different government offices and areas in charge of specific training (in this case legal learning).

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necessity to employ specific scholar-officials called *hundogwan* 訓導官 (educational officials), particularly well-versed in these texts, to teach them.

Another example of *idu* text of the period is the *Yangjam kyŏnghŏm ch'waryo* 養蠶經驗撮要 (The Essentials for Sericulture Management, 1415). This was a Korean vernacular version of part of the fourth volume of the *Nongsang jiyao* 農桑輯要 (Fundamentals of Agriculture and Sericulture, Kr. *Nongsang chibyŏ*), a Yuan text on agriculture. The fourth volume dealt specifically with the raising of the silkworms (*Ch. Yangcan*, Kr. *Yangjam* 養蠶) and the translated part consisted of around ¼ of the original text.<sup>73</sup> As it was the case with the *Tae Myŏng nyul chikhae*, the text in *hanmun* is divided into paragraphs with, attached to each, a loose translation in *idu* that contains consistent changes from the source. As can be seen in Figure 6, in this case, the *idu* text is inserted by leaving two characters' space on the upper part with characters of the same size.<sup>74</sup> Below is the *idu* version of the first sentence with underlined the grammatical parts:<sup>75</sup>

蠶段陽物是乎等用良水氣乙厭却桑葉叱分喫破爲遣飲水不冬

Silkworms, being creatures of the sun, distaste water, eat only mulberry leaves, and do not drink water.

This was a text that, for its nature, had the practical aim of aiding farmers in the cultivation of silkworms. But how was it disseminated and used? And what was the role of the *idu* version? Sure enough, it could not be directly read by farmers. Although being in vernacular, the *idu* required a profound knowledge of Chinese characters and was not accessible by farmers. It might thus be surmised that its farming techniques were supposed to be indirectly taught to these farmers by officials, using a strategy similar to that seen for the *Tae Myŏng nyul chikhae*. A later entry in the *Tanjong Sillok*, dated 1454, seems to support this view. Here it is stated that, according to a report (*chŏngmun* 呈文) from the

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<sup>73</sup> Yi Kwang-ri (1965).

<sup>74</sup> The original text as well as the photographic reproduction of the first two pages of the book can be found in Yi Kwang-ri (1965).

<sup>75</sup> I have followed the analysis of Yi Ch'ŏl-su (1989:44).

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Ministry of Taxation (*Hojo* 戶曹), the State Council (*Ŭijǒngbu* 議政府) lamented the lack of results in silk farming due to officials (*kwalli* 官吏) not following the right method to raise the silkworms.<sup>76</sup> For this reason, the State Council ordered to select instructed men as inspectors (*kamgo* 監考) with the precise task to teach the manual (*pangsǒ* 方書).<sup>77</sup> This record shows how the silk farming manual was aimed to be disseminated via local officials to the actual farmers who were the final target of its instructions. The lack of results later led the State Council to intervene by selecting specifically instructed inspectors with this task. Overall, this process was not much different from what happened with the *Tae Myǒng nyul*. In both cases, the *idu* version aimed to improve the diffusion of the text through the mediation of officials. Historical records show, however, how the results were far below those expected, to the point that it was needed to select specific officials in charge of the task.

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<sup>76</sup> *Tanjong Sillok* 端宗實錄 12:11b (2/9/16) [1454]: “議政府據戶曹呈啓 [...] 然官吏等不依方養蠶故無效 [...]”.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*: “[...] 又選解文字勤謹者爲監考使教方書 [...]”.

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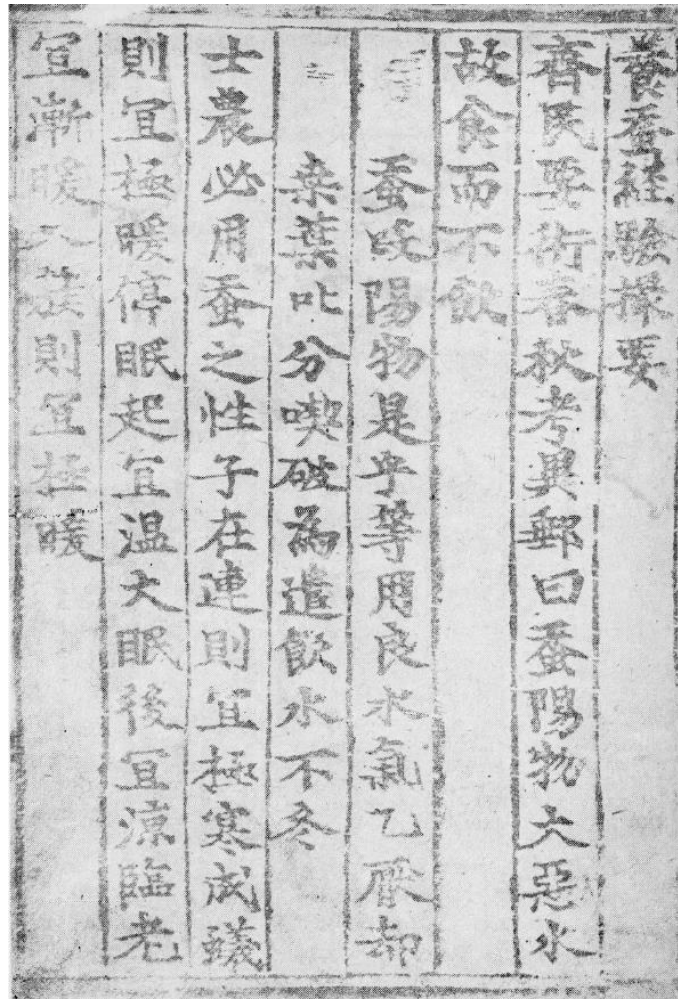


Figure 6. *Yangjam gyŏnghŏm ch'waryo* 養蠶經驗撮要 (The Essentials for Sericulture Management). 1a. Yi Kwang-ri (1965).

The *Tae myŏng nyul chikhae* and the *Yangjam kyŏnghŏm ch'waryo* are the only extant Chosŏn *idu* texts published before the invention of the vernacular script. But historical records tell us that they were not the only ones. For example, the *Kyŏnje yukchŏn* 經濟六典 (The Six Codes of Governance, 1397), that was the first penal code promulgated by the Chosŏn dynasty in 1397 by king T'aejo, also contained an *idu* explication.<sup>78</sup> The Annals state how the *idu* version of this text had been published during king T'aejo's reign and distributed to government officials (*kwalli* 官吏) in and out of the capital, making them accustomed to it and easy for them to observe it.

<sup>78</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 52:20a (13/5/3) [1431].

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As we shall see in the next chapter, historical sources mention *idu* on several occasions concerning the creation of the vernacular script. Indeed, it might be argued that a major reason for the creation of the new script was to offer a more efficient alternative to this writing system.

### I.2.3. *Kugyöl*

The *kugyöl* system was used to gloss *hanmun* texts so that they could be read in vernacular. The fundamental difference with *idu* was that it did not change the order of the original *hanmun* text but only inserted annotations that elucidated the interpretation and reading of the sentences.

These annotations could be made with symbols (*puho-kugyöl* 符號口訣) or with characters (*munja-kugyöl* 文字口訣). In *puho-kugyöl* (symbol *kugyöl*), symbols could be made by making tiny depressions on paper with a wooden stylus (*kak'pil* 角筆) or by using ink with a brush (*muksö puho-kugyöl* 墨書符號口訣).<sup>79</sup> These dots, usually called *chöm'to* 點吐 “point glosses”, were placed on the perimeter of the Chinese characters as morphosyntactic glosses that indicated grammatical elements.<sup>80</sup> Syntactic inversion marks (*yökdok puho* 逆讀符號) could also be used to change the order of the sentences. Interpreting these marks allowed a vernacular reading of the original *hanmun* text. In *munja-kugyöl* (characters—*kugyöl*) morphosyntactic glosses were made with borrowed Chinese characters (*ch'aja kugyöl* 借字口訣), often in a simplified form (*yakcha* 略字).

Regardless of the transcriptional system (marks or characters), two radically different interpretative methods developed:

- (1) A vernacular reading, called by Korean scholars *sökdok kugyöl* 釋讀口訣 or *hundok kugyöl* 訓讀口訣;

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<sup>79</sup> In the latter case, the ink could also have different colors (black, red or white). See Chung Jae-young (2006:136).

<sup>80</sup> Although the general criteria behind this system seems to be the same in all discovered documents, there are some differences in the meaning associated to these marks.

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(2) A Sinoxenic (or Sino-Korean) reading, called by Korean scholars *ũmdok kugyŏl* 音讀口訣 or *sundok kugyŏl* 順讀口訣.<sup>81</sup>

The earliest examples of *sŏkdok kugyŏl* can be found in texts dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, considering the level of complexity of the system used in these texts, and the conservative language it reflected that shows different points of contact with the language of previous *idu* texts and *hyangga*, it can be surmised that it developed much earlier.<sup>82</sup> This seems to be confirmed by surviving 8<sup>th</sup> century glossed texts belonging to the Hwaŏm doctrine (*Hwaŏm-jong* 華嚴宗) that were discovered in Japan and that show similarities with the Korean glossing tradition, suggesting an influence from the Silla glossing practice.<sup>83</sup> This means that the practice of glossing Buddhist texts with the *sŏkdok kugyŏl* system in the Korean peninsula can be predated, at least, to the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century. As for the conservative language in later texts, Chung Jae-young (2006:152) explains it by arguing that the notations in these texts were not the result of an individual practice but that of a long-standing tradition of copying and transmission of texts by several generations of Buddhist monks.<sup>84</sup>

This *sŏkdok kugyŏl* modified the *hanmun* text by inserting reading marks (*t'o* 吐) to the right or the left of the elements of the sentence, as well as inversion glosses (*yŏkdokchŏm* 逆讀點) between them so that it could be read in vernacular. More in detail, the reading method was the following: the reader read first the elements of the sentences that had notations on their right, skipping the parts with notations on the left, then, when he encountered an inversion mark, had to go back to the part annotated on the left that he had skipped and insert it in that point of the sentence.<sup>85</sup> A text that presents this system is the *Kuyŏk Inwang kyŏng*

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<sup>81</sup> For a discussion on the Korean terms related to the *kugyŏl* practice, see also Yi Sŭng-jae (1997:142). For the translation of the terms related to the different *kugyŏl* practices, see Whitman *et al.* (2010).

<sup>82</sup> Chung Jae-young (2006:152).

<sup>83</sup> Chung Jae-young (2006:152); Whitman (2015:426-27).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Whitman (2011:108).

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舊釋仁王經 (Old Translation Sutra of the Benevolent Kings), a 13<sup>th</sup>-century text that was also the first of this kind to have been discovered in the '70s.

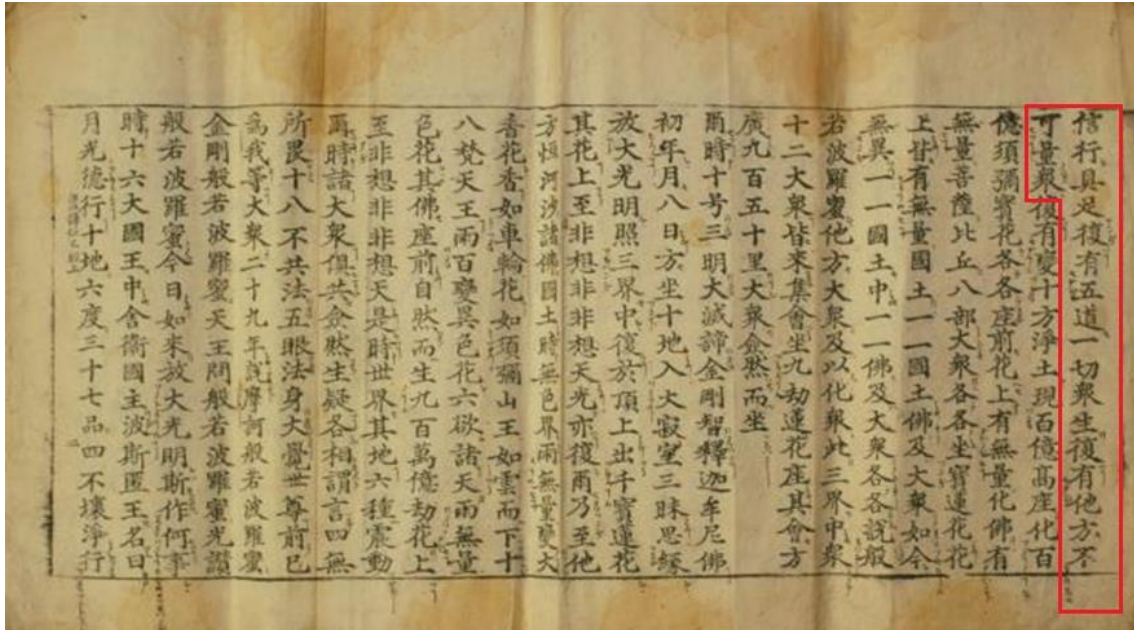


Figure 7. *Kuyōk Inwang kyōng* 舊釋仁王經 (Old Translation Sutra of the Benevolent Kings). <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/>

An example from this text can elucidate how this method worked:<sup>86</sup>

- A: [...]信行し具足ニ分復ソ有ヒナが五道ヒ一切衆生リ、復ソ有ヒナが他方ヒ不不可可量ノの衆、
- B: [...]信行し 具足ニ分 復ソ 五道ヒ 一切 衆生リ 有ヒナが 復ソ 他方ヒ 量ノの 可可 不不 衆 有ヒナが <舊仁02:01-2>

(A) reproduces that first two lines (until the third character in the second line) of the original text in Figure 7 (framed in the picture) by changing the disposition of the lines from vertical to horizontal. The smaller characters placed on the bottom of the line are the notations written on the right side of the characters in the original, while those written in the upper part are notations written on the left. (B), on the other hand, reproduces the order through which the text was read

<sup>86</sup> The example is taken from Chung Jae-young (2006:149-150). See also Whitman (2011:107-108) for an analysis and translation of this passage in English.

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according to the reading method introduced above. Thus, applying this reading method, the text was normally read by supplying the morphosyntactic elements indicated by simplified characters written on the right side until the character 有, that having notations on the left was skipped and supplied only when the inversion dot is encountered, that is right before the character 復. Continuing the reading of the text, the reader encountered three other characters (有, 不, and 可) having notations on the left and two more inversion dots placed after 量 and 衆. However, it should also be noted that 可 has an inversion dot at the end of its notations on the left side. This means that, when the reader reached the first inversion dot after the character 量, he first supplied 可 and then, due to the inversion mark in its notation, 不 as well. The final inversion dot indicated where the remained character 有 should be inserted.

Despite its apparent complexity, the final result was a morpho-syntactically vernacular text. The use of the simplified borrowed characters in these earlier *kugyŏl* texts reflects how the vernacular letters will be used to represent the morpho-syntactical elements of the sentence of texts written mixing Chinese characters and vernacular characters that developed right after the invention of the vernacular script. A significant difference, however, is that in these *kugyŏl* texts some Chinese characters were read according to their corresponding vernacular translation. In later texts written with the vernacular script, all Chinese characters were instead read according to their Sino-Korean pronunciation, while Korean vernacular words were written exclusively with the vernacular script.

The *sŏkdok kugyŏl* started to disappear at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Vernacular annotated documents from the fourteenth century onwards are characterized by the *ŭmdok kugyŏl*. Contrary to the *sŏkdok kugyŏl* system analyzed above, with this system the sentence was left in the original *hanmun* order, with no indications about syntactical change and with only functional morphemes added between clauses. It is still not clear what caused this drastic change. Whitman (2011:99) suggests, as possible reasons, the pressure and prestige of the



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cosmopolitan language, the relatively high level of literacy, and a shift toward a formulaic reading of Buddhist texts. While Chung Jae-young (2006:154) draws attention to the possible influence of the Mongol invasion and domination of Korea in that period, that by entering the new pan-regional order of the Yuan Empire found itself open more than ever to Chinese ideology and texts. However, given the scarcity of textual material covering the period between the end of the thirteenth and early fifteenth century, it remains difficult to reach a definitive conclusion about the reasons that caused this change in the mode of vernacular notations. We should also consider that this change in the written form of the texts did not necessarily mean a similarly drastic change in how the texts were read. As already pointed out before, we should distinguish between the written form of the texts and the practice of reading them. In other words, this apparent abandonment of a system of glossing that reflected the vernacular language for one that remained closer to the original *hanmun* text did not necessarily mean a complete abandonment of the vernacular reading of these texts.

Despite the appearance and diffusion of *ũmdok kugyŏl* style texts, *sŏkdok* style annotations can be still seen used in limited sections of some texts of the early Chosŏn period.<sup>87</sup> Chung (2006:155), for example, shows a section of a mid-15<sup>th</sup> century dated edition of the *Pŏphwagyŏng* 法華經 (Lotus Sutra) displaying a part glossed in *sŏkdok* style. As pointed out by Whitman (2015:427), it is also possible to argue that these Buddhist texts glossed in *sŏkdok* style influenced later fifteenth-century Buddhist texts written with a mixed style of vernacular script and Chinese characters. It might thus be possible to trace a continuity between this type of vernacular practice and the tradition of *ŏnhae* Buddhist texts that developed from the second half of the fifteenth century.

*Kugyŏl* glossing was also used in the annotation and reading of Confucian texts. Textual records provide indirect evidence that a vernacular transcription of these texts was practised during the Silla period. One is the following passage

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<sup>87</sup> Chung (2006:154-155).

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in the *Samguk Sagi*, recounting how the Silla scholar Söl Ch'ong 薛聰 (655-?) used to teach the Nine Classics (*kugyŏng* 九經):<sup>88</sup>

以方言讀九經訓導後生

[Söl Ch'ong] used the local speech to read the Nine Classics, tutoring younger scholars.

Here the character 讀 might have indicated not just the reading of the Nine Classics but the employment of borrowed characters to annotate and read them in vernacular. As pointed out by An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:26-27), if the above passage simply referred to Söl Ch'ong reading the Nine Classics to his students, we would likely have just found written the following sentence: “以九經訓導後生”, i.e., that Söl Ch'ong tutored his pupils in the Nine Classics. This is because it went without saying that the teaching of these texts was done by orally delivering them in vernacular. Thus, the use of the character 讀 in this passage seems to suggest that this vernacular translation was put in written form.<sup>89</sup> This shows how vernacular transcriptions of *hanmun* texts had found, since their first employments, actual use in oral performances, here specifically in a didactic setting where a senior scholar tutored (*hundo* 訓導) his disciples.

A further textual record that can be interpreted as evidence of vernacular glossing made by Söl Ch'ong in the interpretation of the Classics can be found in the following passage contained in the *Samguk Yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) compiled by the Buddhist monk Iryŏn (1206-1289):<sup>90</sup>

以方音通會華夷方俗物名訓解六經文學至今海東業明經者傳受不絕

[Söl Ch'ong] used the local sounds to reconcile the Chinese and barbarian with local popular names of things. He glossed and explained the literature of the Six

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<sup>88</sup> *Samguk Sagi* 三國史記, fascicle 46.

<sup>89</sup> A similar interpretation of the character 讀 is also given by Ledyard (1998:65), who links this use of the character 讀 to that in the later term *idu* 吏讀 (clerical reading), where it indicated a vernacular transcription.

<sup>90</sup> *Samguk Yusa* 三國遺事, fascicle 4.

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Classics and, to this day, those who in Korea dedicate themselves to the interpretation of the Classics have continuously learned [his teachings].

Here the text records how Söl Ch'ong used borrowed characters to gloss the names of things (*mulmyǒng* 物名) in vernacular Chinese and the languages of the neighbour “barbarian” populations in Korean. Moreover, the term *hunhae* 訓解 (gloss and explain) seems to confirm that he used to explain the Classics by glossing them in vernacular with borrowed characters. It also records that the method of glossing of Söl Ch'ong had been transmitted to the present period (i.e. Koryŏ) and still practised by the scholars.

Both these passages do not provide any details about the actual method used by Söl Ch'ong to render in vernacular these texts, and none of these glossed Confucian texts has survived, but the system used was likely a *sŏkdok kugyŏl* type.<sup>91</sup>

The following entry in the *Sejong Sillok* shows how the vernacular annotation of Confucian texts was still practised in the early Chosŏn period:<sup>92</sup>

○上語卞季良曰昔<sup>93</sup> 太宗命權近著五經吐凡讀書以諺語節句讀者俗謂之吐<sup>94</sup> 近讓之不得遂著詩書易吐唯禮記四書無之予慮後學或失本意以訓諸生若因此而教豈不有益

His Majesty to Pyŏn Kye-ryang (卞季良, 1369-1430): “In the past T’aejong (太宗, r. 1401-1418) had ordered Kwŏn Kŭn (權近, 1352-1409) to make annotated versions (*t’o* 吐) of the Five Classics. (Generally, in the reading of books, the vernacular punctuation of sentences is commonly called *t’o* 吐).<sup>95</sup> Kwŏn Kŭn initially declined,

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<sup>91</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:27).

<sup>92</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:14a (10/4/18) [1428]. An English translation of this passage can be also found in Traulsen (2016:117).

<sup>93</sup> In the original text the name of the king is preceded by a blank space as a sign of respect.

<sup>94</sup> In the original text this note is written with half sized characters and divided into two columns filling a single line.

<sup>95</sup> The note seems referring to the practice of dividing a text in sentences having a complete meaning (*ku* 句) and further segments corresponding to the pauses made during reading (*tu* 讀). The explanation of this division in *kudu* 句讀 can be found in a note referring to the practice of punctuation contained in the *Gujin yunhui juyao* 古今韻會舉要 (Abridged Collection of Rhymes of the Ancient and Modern), a Chinese rime dictionary that will be further discussed in II.2.1. See

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but then realized the annotated versions of the *Classic of Poetry* (詩經), the *Classic of Documents* (書經) and the *Classic of Changes*(易經). Only the *Book of Rites* (禮記) and the *Four Books* (四書) were not realized. I am worried that younger scholars, not truly understanding these texts, might fear to teach them to students. Would it not be beneficial if they teach using these [annotated versions]?”

季良對曰近尙讓之況小臣乎四書臣於幼時學之禮記則本不學且禮記文多瑣屑而意亦旁通不可執一以定先儒亦言禮記漢儒掇拾煨燼之餘語多未詳似難考定

Pyŏng Kye-ryang answers: “If even [Kwŏn] Kŭn declined, how can I, your humble servant, do this? I have studied the *Four Books* at a young age, but never studied the *Book of Rites*. Moreover, this text is intricated and full of trifling matters. And is not possible to have a detailed and clear understanding while grasping its [entire] meaning. Even early Confucian scholars said that “the *Book of Rites* is what Han Confucian scholars have gathered from the ashes of a fire and, due to this, many are the things not stated clearly.” I am worried that it might be difficult to understand.

上曰然

His Majesty: “I see.”

右議政孟思誠曰有吐則臣恐學者不着力研究

Maeng Sa-sŏng (孟思誠, 1360-1438), Third State Councilor (*Uŭijŏng* 右議政), said: “I am worried that if there are notations scholars will not put efforts in their studies.”

上曰程朱亦慮學者未達經書奧旨故着註解令其易知外方教導若因此誨人則豈無補乎 His Majesty answered: “Even Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi were worried that students would not become well versed in the Classics and, for this reason, added commentaries with explications (註解) to make them easier to understand. If teachers in the countryside use these [reading notations] for teaching, how could it not be useful?”

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Volpe (2019:361) for the argument on how the practices of punctuation and vernacular reading were conceptually linked in the early Chosŏn period.

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From this discussion, we know that glosses (*t'o* 吐) were employed during King T'aejong's time for at least three of the Five Classics and that Sejong was making plans to complete this project and extend it to the *Four Books* as well. These books (the *Five Classics* and the *Four Books*) were, as we have seen, the basis of the Confucian learning of the time and part of the Civil Service Examinations (*kwagŏ* 科擧). Their learning started in the provincial schools (*hyanggyo* 鄉校) that were diffused throughout the country. Sejong seems to have regarded glossed versions as particularly beneficial for younger scholars who had not yet a full grasp of these texts, allowing them to teach these texts to their students. It seems thus that he envisioned a specific usage of these texts in a pedagogical environment between master-pupils. This practice seems not too distant from how vernacular readings had already been used by Sŏl Ch'ong to teach his pupils in the Silla period. They allowed not only to elucidate the meaning of a text to a reader but also made it easier and more convenient to transmit it to students.

Unfortunately, these annotated texts have not reached us. However, considering the definition of *t'o* given in the entry of the Annals as “vernacular punctuations” (諺語節句讀), it seems clear that the notations were of the *sundok kugyŏl* type, that is in line with the type of *kugyŏl* that became commonplace after the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. From the entry in the Annals, it also appears that there was an inherent difficulty in the task of notation of these texts that went beyond the technical employment of notations and had much to do with the difficulty of interpretation of the texts themselves. Annotating these texts meant not just elucidating their syntactical structure in vernacular but also providing an interpretation to their meaning. In the above-seen passage, we have seen how Kwŏn Kŭn—who, judging by the words of Pyŏn Kye-ryang, was held in high esteem by his contemporaries—had tried to decline at first this responsibility and then managed to complete only part of the task. Pyŏn Kye-ryang too was worried about not having the skills for completing the task requested by his king. Finally, it should be noticed the remark of the Third State Councilor, concerned that vernacular notations might harm the study of the Classics. A conservative stance

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that grounded its reasoning on the fact that these explanations risked leading the students to base their understanding of the vernacular explications and not on the original texts. A stance that is readily rejected by the king, who points out how the explanation through commentaries had also been sustained in China by Cheng Yi 程子 and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), that is by the most influential thinkers of what is nowadays commonly referred to as Neo-Confucianism or Cheng-Zhu school. The problem of the vernacular elucidation of the *Four Books* will remain a long-standing issue that, as we shall see in Chapter III, will be brought forward again thirty years later, this time in an attempt to realize it with the new invented vernacular script.

### I.3. Foreign Languages

Besides *hanmun* and the different practices adopted to render *hanmun* texts in vernacular, an important niche of the Chosŏn linguistic landscape was occupied by foreign languages and their writings. These were the languages and writings of the countries and populations that, for their geographical position, had various types of contacts with the Chosŏn kingdom. The beginning of the new dynasty saw a renewed interest in these languages. Among these languages a primary position was occupied by the Chinese language, that should be separated from the written practice of *hanmun* discussed above. But the languages of other neighbouring populations, as the Japanese, the Mongols, and the Jurchen, were also not neglected. Here it will be discussed the role and importance of these languages and their related writing practices in the first half of fifteenth-century Chosŏn Korea.

#### I.3.1. Chinese

The vernacular Chinese language can be found indicated in the Chosŏn sources of the period as *hwaŏn* 華言 or *hanŏ* 漢語. Connected to it was also the *hanimun* 漢吏文 (Chinese clerical writing), that was the written diplomatic language used

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for the official letters sent to the Ming court. This writing started to be used in Yuan China and is often described as a *hanmun* with inserted colloquial elements. According to Ledyard (1998:157), these colloquial forms were gradually reduced while the vocabulary and expressions developed in a “highly technical officialese.” Since used for the official communications with China, the *Sŭngmunwŏn* 承文院 (Office of Diplomatic Correspondence) had a significant interest in its training. Nevertheless, as we shall see, its study seems to have also been pursued in the *Sayŏgwŏn* 司譯院 (Office of Interpreters), the official Chosŏn institution dealing with foreign languages.

The *Sayŏgwŏn*—that had been already active in the Kōryo period—was reestablished in 1393, shortly after the founding of the new dynasty, to study the Chinese language (*hwaŏn* 華言).<sup>96</sup> One year later, in 1394, Sŏl Changsu 僉長壽 (1341-1399), the commissioner (*chejo* 提調) of this office, submitted a memorial to the king that, by particularly stressing the importance of Chinese language training and knowledge, summarized the aim behind the establishment of this institution and reminded its importance in the administration of the state:<sup>97</sup>

[...]我國家世事中國言語文字不可不習是以殿下肇國之初特設本院置祿官及教官教授生徒俾習中國言語音訓文字體式上以盡事大之誠下以期易俗之効 [...]

[...] Since our country has served China from generation to generation, we cannot but study their language (*ŏnŏ* 言語) and writing (*munja* 文字). For that reason, Your Majesty, right after the founding of the dynasty, established the Office of Interpreters and put officials and instructors in charge of the training of students, so that they could learn the sounds and meanings (*ŭmhun* 音訓) of the Chinese spoken language (*chungguk ŏnŏ* 中國言語), as well as the form and style (*ch'eshik* 體式) of writing (*munja* 文字). [All this] primarily to do our best in [showing] the

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<sup>96</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 4:10b (2/9/19) [1393]: “置司譯院肄習華言”

<sup>97</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 6:17a (3/11/19) [1394].

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sincerity of serving the great (*sadae* 事大) [i.e. China]; and secondly, to improve our customs.<sup>98</sup> [...]

The memorial continues with a series of detailed advice related to the improvement of the office, in particular concerning the instruction and examination of the students. It suggests that there should be three instructors (two of Chinese and one of Mongolian) and that the students should be divided according to their curriculum (Chinese and Mongolian).<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, it laments the lack of prospective students willing to learn foreign languages, proposing that brilliant students from the five districts of the capital and the provinces should be sent to the central government every year to pursue studies in these languages.<sup>100</sup> The memorial also proposes that examinations should be held every three years and that Chinese language students should be examined in the *Four Books* (*sasö* 四書), the *Elementary Learning* (Ch. *Xiaoxue*, Kr. *Sohak* 小學),<sup>101</sup> *imun* 吏文 (clerical writing, i.e. the Chinese written language of the diplomatic protocol) and spoken Chinese (*hanö* 漢語).<sup>102</sup> It then goes into further details about the three different categories of exam and grades had to be assigned according to the subjects<sup>103</sup> and the number of candidates to be accepted for each category. Other suggestions are related to the expulsion of the students from the school (those who failed to become proficient in the selected languages after three years of training would have been sent to serve in the military) and to

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<sup>98</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:12) points out that the character 俗 “vulgar”, usually used in the sense of “custom” (*p’ungsok* 風俗), might have been used here in a more specific sense to denote the “vulgar pronunciation” (*sogŭm* 俗音), i.e. the Korean pronunciation, of Chinese characters.

<sup>99</sup> *T’aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 6:17a (3/11/19) [1394]: [...] 一額設教授三員內漢文二員蒙古一員優給祿俸生徒額數分肄習業 [...]

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*: [...] 一習業生徒鮮有自願來者 令在京五部及各道界首府州擇良家子弟十五歲以下天資明敏者歲貢一人 [...]

<sup>101</sup> The *Elementary Learning* was a Song textbook for the instruction of the youths compiled by collecting the teachings of Zhu Xi. It was completed in 1187.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* Category 1 (第一科) and rank 7a (正七品) were for candidates proficient in all four subjects; category 2 and rank 8a for those knowing only half of the *Four Books*, the *Elementary Learning*, and proficient in the Chinese language; category 3 and rank 9a for candidates proficient only in the Small Learning and Chinese.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*



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instructions for the issue of the certificates, that included that of granting a crimson certificate (*hongp'ae* 紅牌) to successful candidates.<sup>104</sup> King T'aejo sent all the submitted proposals to the Privy Council (*top'yōngŭisasa* 都評議使司) to be implemented.<sup>105</sup>

This memorial indicates that proficiency in the Chinese language was considered a crucial skill to be acquired. Particular significant seems the suggestion to issue a crimson certificate to the successful candidates. As pointed out by Song Ki-joong (2001:14), this was the same type issued to those who passed the more prestigious *mun'gwa* 文科 (literati category). Furthermore, the principal 7<sup>th</sup> rank (*chōng ch'ilp'um* 正七品, 7a) that was provided to the successful candidates of the first category was only one grade below the rank offered to the candidates who passed the *mun'gwa*.<sup>106</sup> This could be interpreted as an attempt to attract more students, perhaps in consideration of the low esteem that the profession of the interpreter had at the time. This low esteem seems also reflected in the memorial by the concern on the lack of students willing to pursue this profession and the proposal of having some students sent every year from the provinces.<sup>107</sup> This emphasis put on Chinese language skills was justified by the dynamics between vassal state and greater state exemplified in the concept of *sadae* 事大 “serving the Great” that guided Chosŏn foreign policy toward China.

That knowledge of the Chinese language and related writing practices was crucial in maintaining the diplomatic relations with Ming China is shown by how its lacking caused severe diplomatic issues in the early years following the establishment of the new dynasty. The Annals reveal how congratulatory memorials sent from 1394 to 1396 to the Ming capital in the occasion of the emperor's birthday (*sōngjōl* 聖節) and New Year's Day (*wōndan* 元旦) had caused severe tensions between the two countries for containing inappropriate words.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:20).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. On the issue of the low social status of the interpreters in the Chosŏn period, see also Wang Sixiang (2014).

<sup>108</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 9:9b (5/6/14) [1396].

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Illustrative is the letter that in 1396 the Ming Ministry of Rites (*li bu* 禮部) sent as an answer to the congratulatory memorials received by a Chosŏn embassy in the occasion of the New Year's Day. This letter accused Chosŏn that their memorials had contained "thoughtless and disrespectful" (輕薄戲侮) words. It also threatens war as a possible outcome of such behaviour, giving the order to send to the Ming court the officials responsible for the drafting of the memorial.<sup>109</sup>

A few days after the reception of this letter King T'aejo ordered to escort to the Ming court Kim Yakhang 金若恒 (1353-1397), supervisor of the Palace Library (*p'an Chŏn'gyosi sa* 判典校寺事), who had drafted one of the controversial memorials addressed to the heir apparent (*chŏnmun* 箋文). The other official who compiled the memorial addressed to the emperor (*py'ojŏn* 表箋) was Chŏng T'ak 鄭擢 (1363-1423), chancellor of the State Academy (*Sŏnggyun Taesasŏng* 成均大司成), but could not be sent because ill and unable to make the voyage to China. The king also sent an answer to the letter received from the Ming Ministry of Rites where he apologized and admitted that the mistakes in the composition of the memorials were caused by ignorance from Chosŏn part and were not meant to offend:<sup>110</sup>

[...]竊詳小邦僻居海外聲音言語不類中華必憑通譯僅習文意所學粗淺措辭鄙陋且不能盡悉表箋體制以致言詞輕薄 何敢故爲戲侮以生釁端 [...]

[...] Our small kingdom (*sobang* 小邦), being remotely located across the sea, has a language (*ŏnŏ* 言語) and sounds (*sŏngŭm* 聲音) different from those of China (*Chunghwa* 中華). We need to rely on interpretation (*t'ongyŏk* 通譯) to understand the meaning of writing (*munŭi* 文意). Moreover, we are shallow in learning, poor in the use of words, and not able to master the different styles in the composition of memorials. This has led us to the inappropriate use of words. How could we dare to provoke discord by deliberately being thoughtless and disrespectful? [...]

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<sup>109</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 9:2a (5/2/9) [1396].

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

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The seriousness of the issue at stake is evident from this exchange of letters. The Chosŏn king was forced to comply with the emperor's request by sending one of the officials who compiled the contested memorials.

This diplomatic crisis caused by these memorials did not end here. Five months later Chinese envoys reached the Chosŏn court with a new letter from the Ming Ministry of Rites containing the emperor orders to send to the Ming court all the officials responsible for the drafting of the memorials, including the one addressed to the emperor. It was also ordered to send the family members of the Korean envoys already kept at the Ming court. In his answer, the Chosŏn king reports the results of the internal investigation that had been done on the matter and the names of the three officials responsible for the compilation of the memorials.<sup>111</sup> The letter sent in this occasion contains once again similar justifications as those of the previous letter seen above. It reasserts how insults in the memorials were not intentional but caused because officials were ignorant of the classics and histories, and because, since they lived far away from China, the "difference in the sounds of the language" (*öŭmpyölli* 語音別異) had caused them to have limited knowledge and not knowing how to compile memorials (*py'ojön* 表箋) properly.<sup>112</sup> The king complied with the emperor's request by sending all the officials that had been involved in the compilation of the two controversial memorials to the imperial capital.

It seems that this crisis was partially solved when Kwŏn Kŭn 權近 (1352-1409), one of the officials sent to the Ming court, was allowed to return home after distinguishing himself for his erudition and poetic compositions. One of the missives sent to the Chosŏn court also conveyed a proposal suggesting a combined marriage between one of the emperor's grandson and of the king's granddaughter. However, in these missives it is asserted several times that the

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<sup>111</sup> These officials were Chŏng T'ak 鄭擢 (1363-1423), who had drafted the memorial, Kwŏn Kŭn 權近 (1352-1409) who had revised it and No Indo 盧仁度 (?-?) who had requested the revision to the latter.

<sup>112</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 10:1b (5/7/19) [1396]: 臣不諳經史而撰文者皆是海外之人語音別異學不精博未識表箋體制以致字樣差謬 豈敢故爲戲侮

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emperor would have allowed only the visit of envoys who could fluently speak Chinese:<sup>113</sup>

今後差使臣來時要通漢人言語的來不通漢人言語的不許來

From now on, when you send envoys to us, you should send only those who are proficient in the Chinese language (要通漢人言語的來). Those who cannot speak Chinese will not be allowed to visit.

Moreover, the emperor himself urged the king to revise the selection of governments officials through a letter sent via the Ming's Ministry of Rites, deploring the situation of officials in Chosŏn and asserting that officials who could speak Chinese were fundamental for a good relationship between the two countries:<sup>114</sup>

自古上至人君次至分茅胙土之君開國承家必得正人君子方乃國昌首用小人必亂邦也  
[...] 今朝鮮每歲措表箋者以文詞而構禍在我雖不以爲必然 [...] 禍將有日必不可逃  
爾禮部移文朝鮮國王深思靜慮知朕所言

Since antiquity, from the emperor to the lords of vassal states, to establish a new dynasty and continue to rule, the state must secure men of integrity, outstanding in wisdom. This is a sure way to make it prosper. If he employs petty people from the beginning, they will inevitably throw the country into chaos. [...] Nowadays, Chosŏn is causing trouble every year by composing memorials using inappropriate words. [...] If this situation continues, disasters are inevitable in the future. You, officials of the Ministry of Rites, send a letter to the king of Chosŏn and let him deeply reflect over what I have said.

This diplomatic crisis that had escalated from these misunderstandings in communication was surely humiliating and potentially dangerous for the newly established Chosŏn kingdom, that since its foundation had grounded its political legitimacy on the relationship with Ming China as a vassal state. It is clear that

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<sup>113</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 11:4b (6/3/8) [1397].

<sup>114</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 11:4b (6/3/8) [1397].

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for the Ming emperor the knowledge of Chinese by Chosŏn officials was a requirement that went well beyond the simple need of a means of communication and that had instead much to do with the ideological and political conception at the base of the hierarchical relationship between the two countries. The emphasis that the Chosŏn government put on the Chinese language as a curriculum in the Office of Interpreters is thus logical as a means to maintain the diplomatic relationship with the powerful neighbour.

The Chinese language remained at the centre of Chosŏn interests during the reign of T'aejong 太宗 (r. 1401-1418). A memorial submitted in 1404 by the *Sahŏnbu* 司憲府 (Office of the Inspector-General) pointed out how in the study of interpretation (*sayŏk* 司譯) it was only learned the Chinese language (*hanŏ* 漢語) without studying the classics and histories (*kyŏngsa* 經史), and that thus interpreters did not understand or committed mistakes in communicating with Chinese envoys, bringing shame to the country. It was thus requested the appointment of specific officials called *hundogwan* 訓導官 (education officials) to instruct younger learners (*hujin* 後進) in the translation of the Chinese language and the study of the classics so that they could understand the meaning of what was told by the Ming envoys.<sup>115</sup> Another memorial submitted in 1413 by the *Chŏngbu* 政府 (State Council) similarly lamented that the students of the *Sayŏgwŏn* only learned the sounds of Chinese (*hanŭm* 漢音) and that when it was a matter of "meanings and principles" (*ŭiri* 義理) they could not understand anything. For this reason, it is asked to appoint a civil official as *hundogwan* to use the Chinese sounds to teach and instruct in the meanings and principles.<sup>116</sup> The request was approved by the king. These memorials show how the Chinese language remained a crucial skill in diplomacy. Students of Chinese were required not only to have a purely linguistic knowledge but also to use it to interpret the discussions with the Chinese envoys, often imbued by quotations from the classics, Chinese history, and Confucian philosophical concepts. The figure of the

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<sup>115</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 8:4b (4/8/20) [1404].

<sup>116</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 25:29a (13/6/8) [1413].

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*hundogwan* was established to form a link between these two types of knowledge inside the *Sayŏgwŏn*.

During Sejong's reign interest in the Chinese language continued and entries in the Annals suggest that Sejong himself had a personal interest in it. In 1421, in the early years of his reign, he required the assistance of Cho Sŭngdŏk 曹崇德, director of the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (*Sŭngmunwŏn* 承文院), who knew Chinese pronunciation (*hanŭm* 漢音), for the study of the *Daxue Yu Lu* 大學語錄 (Recorded conversations on the Great Learning) during his royal lectures at the Classics Mat (*kyŏngyŏn* 經筵).<sup>117</sup> The *Daxue Yu Lu* was the section of the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Conversations of Master Chu, arranged topically) devoted to the Great Learning, one of the *Four Books* that had become the central texts of the Confucian canon in the teachings of Zhu Xi.<sup>118</sup> The need to have a scholar proficient in the Chinese pronunciation was probably because this text was written in colloquial Chinese.<sup>119</sup> These lessons continued in the later years of his government. An entry of 1434 records that Sejong habitually attended every other day lectures on the *Chikhae sohak* 直解小學 (Direct Explication of the Elementary Learning) with Yi Pyŏn 李邊 (1391-1473), employed in the Office of Interpreters, and Kim Ha 金何.<sup>120</sup> The *Chikhae sohak* had been compiled by Sŏl Changsu at the end of the Koryŏ period.<sup>121</sup> The text is not extant but it might have been an explicated version in colloquial Chinese of the *Xiaoxue* 小學 (Elementary Learning), thus adapted to be employed for the study of the language.<sup>122</sup> Both Yi Pyŏn and Kim Ha had returned from a sojourn in the Liaodong, where they had been dispatched to make inquiries on this text.<sup>123</sup> Yi Pyŏn, at that time employed

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<sup>117</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 14:9b (3/11/24) [1421].

<sup>118</sup> On the importance of the *Four Books* as the core-teachings in the Neo-Confucian school of Zhu Xi, see Gardner (1984).

<sup>119</sup> On the use of the colloquial style in the so-called *yu-lei* texts, see Gardner (1991).

<sup>120</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 64:28a (16/5/18) [1434]: ○李邊金何隔二日進講直解小學以爲常

<sup>121</sup> Sŏl Changsu was the scholar who, as commissioner (*chejo* 提調) of the *Sayŏgwŏn*, submitted the above-seen memorial about the organization of this institution.

<sup>122</sup> The significance of the term *chikhae* "direct explication" in the titles of the books used to study the Chinese language is discussed in further detail below.

<sup>123</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 63:17a (16/2/6) [1434].

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in the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (*Sŭngmunwŏn*), was particularly renowned for his Chinese language skills.<sup>124</sup>

The importance of Chinese language for Sejong seems also clear from his answer to a memorial submitted by Sŏl Sun 僖循, Vice Academic Counselor (*pujehak* 副提學) of the Hall of Worthies (*Chipyŏnjŏn* 集賢殿) in 1434, that had presented the request to make three of the older officials in the Office of Interpreters (*Sayŏgwŏn*) to stop continuing their studies of the Chinese language and to move them to the Hall of Worthies to pursue literary studies. This is the answer of the king and the opinion that the Chief State Councilor (*yŏngŭijŏng* 領議政) Hwang Hŭi 黃喜 (1363-1452) and the Second State Councilor (*chwaŭijŏng* 左議政) Maeng Sa-sŏng 孟思誠 (1360-1438) gave on the matter:<sup>125</sup>

集賢殿上書請除石堅秀文禮蒙等肄習華語還仕本殿予則以爲兼治華語無損於學  
且五經四書皆以華語讀之萬萬有補於國家其議以啓

Answering to the memorial submitted by the Hall of Worthies, I decided to make Sin Sokkyŏn, Nam Sumun and Kim Yemong to discontinue their studies in the Chinese language (*hwaŏ* 華語) and move them to the duties in the Hall of Worthies. [Yet] I believe that an additional proficiency in the Chinese language is not detrimental to the pursuit of literary studies. Moreover, if you read in Chinese (*hwaŏ* 華語) all the *Five Classics* and the *Four Books*, it would be highly beneficial for our country. Discuss it and report to me.

The answer to Hwang Hŭi was the following:<sup>126</sup>

全學華語以資事大可也

We agree that a thorough study of Chinese (*hwaŏ* 華語) will be beneficial for our relationships with China (*sadae* 事大).

To this the king simply answered by saying:

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 63:3b (16/1/10) [1434].

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

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That is how it is.

Thus, despite the particular circumstances that made the king decide to move these three scholars, the record shows the consideration of Sejong for the study of the Chinese language, also concerning the reading of the Classics. A view that was shared by the two officials who had the highest ranks in the State Council (*Ŭijŏngbu* 議政府).

Other petitions show how efforts in promoting Chinese language learning kept being made. In 1436 the State Council ordered the Ministry of Rites to dispatch to the Liaodong peninsula particularly bright and young students, and civil officials specialized in the Chinese language (*kangigwan* 講肄官) so that by residing there they could make inquiries about the Classics (*kyŏngsŏ* 經書) and learn the pronunciation (*ŏŭm* 語音).<sup>127</sup> In 1442 a petition submitted by the chief superintendent (*tojejo* 都提調) of this office, Sin Gae 申概 (1375-1446), laments about the situation of Chinese language studies and urges to enforce more strict rules to improve its learning among the students:<sup>128</sup>

[...]國家深慮事大禮重務崇華語勸課之方至爲詳密然能通華語者罕少雖或有通者音亦未純每當中國來使御前傳語尤難其人今觀業譯者習華語至十年之久而不及奉使中國數月往來之熟此無他於中國則凡所聞所言無非華語而耳濡目染在本國之時入本院則不得已而習漢音若常時則令用鄉語一日之內漢語之於鄉語不能十分之一也

In our country, the proper practice of serving the great is a matter of deep concern and we make efforts [in learning] and esteem the Chinese language (*hwaŏ* 華語). Thus, we are extremely careful and mindful to encourage it. However, people proficient in Chinese are rare. Even those who can speak Chinese do not have a clear pronunciation. Thus, when envoys came from China, it is extremely difficult to find interpreters worthy of being in the presence of the king. At the moment,

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<sup>127</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 74:12b (18/8/15) [1436].

<sup>128</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 95:19b (24/2/14) [1442].



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even interpreters who studied the Chinese language for ten years are not familiar with the language as those who, serving as envoys, resided in China for a few months. This is simply because in China everything that is heard and spoken is Chinese, and thus you get used to it. In our country, when you enter our institute you are forced to practice Chinese pronunciation (*hanŭm* 漢音) but, at the same time, you are free to use Korean (*hyangŏ* 鄉語) at every moment. In one day, the time spent speaking in Chinese (*hanŏ* 漢語) is one-tenth of the time spent speaking Korean (*hyangŏ* 鄉語).

This petition shows the concern for the lack of proficient interpreters and a profound awareness of the difficulties in learning Chinese pronunciation. After almost half-century from the establishment of a Chinese language curriculum in the Office of Interpreters, not only the knowledge of Chinese language was still regarded as a critical skill but that problems related to its study were still deeply felt in the government. Pronunciation seems to have been the most problematic issue. To solve it, the suggestion was to force students and interpreters of the institute to speak Chinese more often and to plan a series of punishments for those who were caught speaking Korean.<sup>129</sup>

Information on the books used to learn the Chinese language at the time of Sejong comes mostly from a memorial dated 1430 recording the titles of the texts that were studied in various fields of study (*hak* 學) for the selections (*ch'wijae* 取才) of low-level officials.<sup>130</sup> Among these lists, we find the titles used in the study of the Chinese clerical writing (*hanihak* 漢吏學) and translation studies (*yŏghak* 譯學) for “Chinese pronunciation” (*hanhun* 漢訓).<sup>131</sup> The list related to the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 47:28a (12/3/18) [1430].

<sup>131</sup> In 15<sup>th</sup>-century Chosŏn the character *hun* 訓 could be used to indicate the pronunciation of Chinese characters. This use can be seen in an entry of the Annals [*Sejong Sillok*, 127:16a (32/1/29)] on the proper way of reading the royal edicts (*chosŏ* 詔書), where the term *hanhun* 漢訓 is juxtaposed to *hyanghun* 鄉訓 to indicate, respectively, the Chinese and the vernacular (Korean) pronunciation of Chinese characters (see also An Pyŏng-hŭi 2009:199). This double and complementary use of the character *hun* 訓 paralleled that of *yŏk* 譯, that could be used to indicate both the translation of a foreign language and the pronunciation of its script. For example, in the

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Chinese language repeats the titles mentioned in the 1394 memorial of Sŏl Changsu about the organization of the Office of Interpreters and adds other titles for a total of twelve books. Unfortunately, most of the original editions of these texts are not extant, and we can only make conjectures on how they were organized and what textual strategies they used to teach the contemporary colloquial Chinese language.

A first thing that we can notice from the titles of these texts is that many of them are well-known Confucian classical texts. We find, for example, listed the *Sŏ* 書 and the *Si* 詩, referring to the *Shujing* 書經 (Kr. *Sŏgyŏng*, “The Book of Documents”) and the *Shijing* 詩經 (Kr. *Sigyŏng*, “The Book of Poetry”)—that were two of the so-called *Five Classics*—and the *Four Books* (*Sasŏ* 四書).<sup>132</sup> From only the titles it is difficult to know if these texts were simply left as the original *hanmun* edition or if they contained a translation in vernacular Chinese. Song Ki-joong (2001:56) speculates that they might have been used for the general knowledge of the interpreters or even contained specific pronunciation devices in simple Chinese characters or a Korean syllabary derived from Chinese characters. Unfortunately, the lack of any existing text does not make it possible to draw any definitive conclusion. I would, however, point out that it is also possible that these texts were left as they were and that their pronunciation, and perhaps explanation, in vernacular Chinese were simply orally taught by instructors and memorized by students.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that some of the titles in the list are preceded by the term *chikhae* 直解 (direct explication). This is the case of the *Chikhae taehak* 直解大學 (Direct Explication of the Great Learning) and the *Chikhae sohak* 直解小學 (Direct Explication of the Elementary Learning). Furthermore, other texts that are not indicated as *chikhae* in this specific memorial can be found mentioned in other occasions as such. This is the case of the *Hyogyŏng* 孝經

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title of the *Hongmu chŏngun yŏkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions) the term *yŏkhun* 譯訓 is used to refer to the transcription with the vernacular letters (*yŏk* 譯) of the Chinese pronunciation of characters (*hun* 訓). See III.3 for a discussion of the text.

<sup>132</sup> On these texts, see I.1.

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(Classic of Filial Piety), that is mentioned as *Chik'ae hyogyǒng* 直解孝經 (Direct Explication of the Classic of Filial Piety) in an earlier memorial presented by the Ministry of Rites in 1423.<sup>133</sup> Even the *Tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 (Training Manual for Children), a 1404 Ming manual for children compiled by Zhu Fengji 朱逢吉, is indicated as *Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 (Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children) in a later preface to the edition compiled with the vernacular script (currently not extant).<sup>134</sup> We might thus wonder if these texts were somehow adapted to learn and teach the vernacular Chinese language. It is particularly noteworthy that the *Great Learning* is also separately mentioned as a “direct explication” despite being already comprised in the *Four Books*. This suggests that this text had some features that the *Four Books* mentioned before did not.

The term *zhi jie* 直解 (Kr. *chikhae*) was used in China for explicated editions of classical texts in colloquial Chinese.<sup>135</sup> Examples of Yuan dynasty works are the *Zhongyong zhi jie* 中庸直解 (Direct Explanation of the Doctrine of the Mean), the *Daxue zhi jie* 大學直解 (Direct Explanation of the Great Learning) and the *Xiaojing zhi jie* 孝經直解 (Direct Explanation of the Classic of Filial Piety). The first two served as lecture outlines for the Mongol emperors, while the latter for the education of the masses.<sup>136</sup> It is thus likely that Chosŏn scholars referred to these existing Chinese editions when they mentioned the *chikhae* editions of classical Confucian texts. Since these texts contained commentaries in colloquial Chinese, they could be used by Korean interpreters to study and practice the language.

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<sup>133</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 20:26b (5/6/23) [1423]. In this memorial it was urged to print the *Chik'ae hyogyǒng* and other texts used in the Office of Interpreters with movable types.

The term *chikhae* was also used in China for explicated editions of classical texts in colloquial Chinese. Examples of Yuan dynasty works are the *Zhongyong zhi jie* 中庸直解 (Direct Explanation of the Doctrine of the Mean) and the *Xiaojing zhi jie* 孝經直解 (Direct Explanation of the Classic of Filial Piety). Chosŏn scholars might have used these existing texts to practice colloquial Chinese. On their model, they might have compiled new texts adding explanations in this language. This seems to have been the case of the *Chikhae sohak* and the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp*, both compiled by Korean scholars.<sup>134</sup> This text will be discussed in further detail in III.3.

<sup>135</sup> Mair (1985:326).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

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Taking these editions as a model, Chosŏn scholars particularly well versed in the Chinese vernacular language might have adapted other texts for this educational purpose by adding explanations in that language. This seems to have been the case of the *Chikhae sohak* and the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp*, that were both compiled in Korea.<sup>137</sup> These works are not extant, but the later *Hunse p'yŏnghwa* 訓世評話 (Narratives with commentary for future generations) might offer an example of how this type of texts might have looked. Here the *hanmun* text is divided into paragraphs and a version in colloquial Chinese is attached after each of these paragraphs by leaving a one-character space on the top (see *Hunse p'yŏnghwa sang* 訓世評話上 (Narratives with commentary for future generations, first part), 1518 edition. Figure 8). According to the Annals, this text was ordered to be printed in 1473, during the reign of Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 1469-1494),<sup>138</sup> but its author, Yi Pyŏn 李邊 (1391-1473), had been a literate active since the early Chosŏn period who had served in the *Sŭngmunwŏn* and the *Sayŏgwŏn* during the reign of Sejong.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, his name appears in relation to the *Chikhae sohak* in the Annals, where it is recorded that in 1434 he visited the Liaodong peninsula to question scholars of the Hanlin Academy (Ch. *Hanlinyuan*, Kr. *Hallimwŏn* 翰林院)<sup>140</sup> about this text and that, in the same year, he made lectures on it for

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<sup>137</sup> The term *chikhae* used in the postface to the Korean edition of the *Tae Myŏng nyul* 大明律 (The Great Ming Code) to indicate an *idu* version attached to the *hanmun* text (see I.2.2) might have been similarly employed on the model of these Chinese editions with vernacular explanations. *Chikhae* editions of Confucian texts used by interpreters, however, could hardly have presented an *idu* version since it would be difficult to understand how a vernacular explication might have helped in the learning the contemporary colloquial Chinese. Furthermore, we should consider that Confucian texts were more likely to be vernacularized in Korean with *kugyŏl* type of transcription system (see I.2.3). In the context of learning the Chinese language, it seems thus to be more likely that *chikhae* editions had an attached explication in vernacular Chinese.

<sup>138</sup> *Sŏngjong Sillok* 成宗實錄, 31:7b (4/6/13) [1473]. It is not however clear if it was actually printed in 1473 or later in 1480. The only extant copy is a 1518 edition. See Yi Chae-yŏn *et al* (1998:23).

<sup>139</sup> Yi Chae-yŏn *et al* (1998:12).

<sup>140</sup> The Hanlin Academy was a Chinese institution established since Tang times in charge of the compilation of royal edicts and diplomatic documents, as well as the compilation of historical publications.

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Sejong.<sup>141</sup> A further link with this text is that in the preface of the *Hunse p'yŏnghwa* it is stated that one of the reasons for its compilation was that the language of the *Chikhae sohak* was considered to be too distant from the Chinese language used in the daily life.<sup>142</sup> It is thus possible that early fifteenth-century Chosŏn *chikhae* texts related to the study of the Chinese language as the *Chikhae sohak* had a layout similar to that of the later *Hunse p'yŏnghwa*.<sup>143</sup> The absence of any extant text, however, does not make it possible to draw any certain conclusion.

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<sup>141</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 63:17a (16/2/6) and 64:28a (16/5/18) [1434]:

<sup>142</sup> Yi Chae-yŏn et al (1998:14).

<sup>143</sup> In the case of the *Hunse p'yŏnghwa*, the absence of the term *chikhae* in the title might have been due to the fact that there was no underlying original text and thus no need to differentiate it.

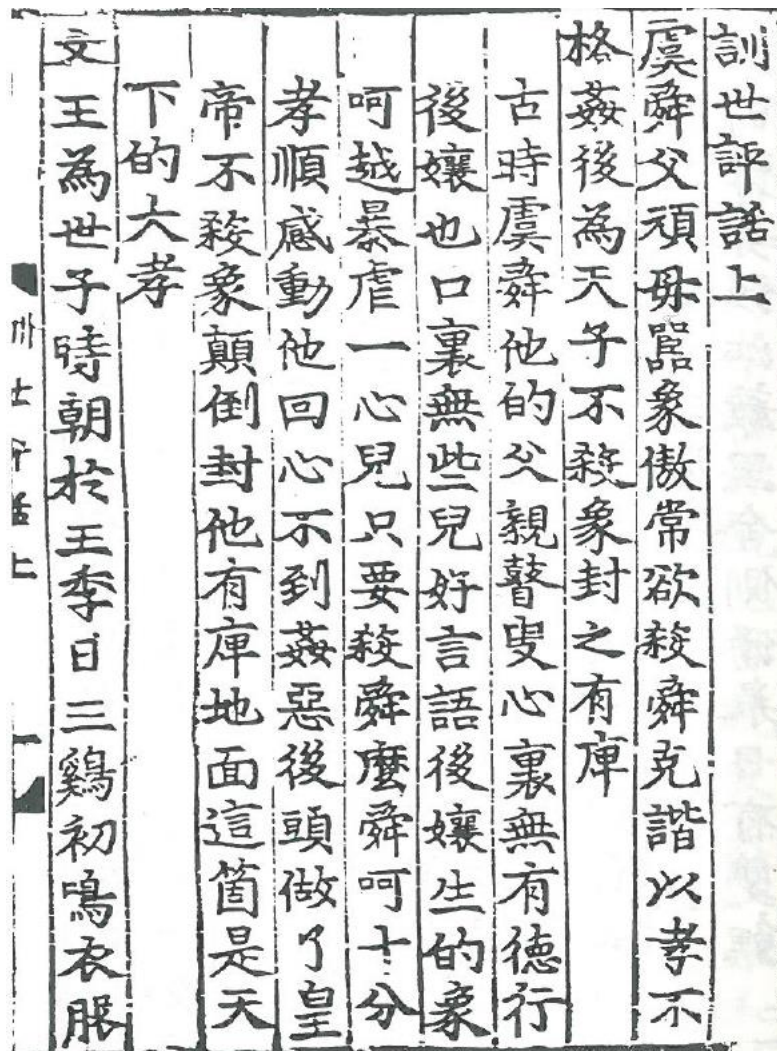


Figure 8. *Hunse p'yonghwa sang* 訓世評話上 (Narratives with commentary for future generations, first part), 1518 edition. Each paragraph of the main text in *hanmun* is followed by an explication in vernacular Chinese by leaving a one-character space on the top. Yi Chae-yön *et al* (1998:382).

Besides *hanmun* texts and versions of these texts with explications in vernacular Chinese, some titles of the 1430 list referred to Korean language manuals conceived explicitly for the study of the vernacular Chinese language by interpreters. These texts were the *Pak T'ongsa* 朴通事 (Interpreter Pak) and the *Nogöltae* 老乞大 (Honorable Cathayan)<sup>144</sup>. Both texts are mentioned for the first

<sup>144</sup> In the title *Nogöltae* 老乞大 the first character 老, literally meaning “old”, was probably used as a honorific appellation, while the last two characters 乞大 seem to have been used as a transcription for the Mongolian word indicating the Chinese people (Kidai). The use of a Mongolian word in the title of this text can be explained with the fact that it was originally

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time in the already mentioned memorial presented by the Ministry of Rites in 1423, where it is urged to print these two texts with movable types.<sup>145</sup> The *Nogŏltae* contains conversations between a Korean merchant and a Chinese, it is thus believed to have been used to learn common practical expressions that a Korean interpreter accompanying a Korean embassy to the Chinese court could have needed while travelling.<sup>146</sup> The *Pak T'ongsa*, on the other hand, contains more sophisticated expressions, as those that could have been used by a learned person, and the topics of the conversations seem to reflect situations related to the high culture of the Ming capital.<sup>147</sup> It is thus believed to have been used to learn how to interpret the formal expressions used by Korean envoys and the Chinese scholar-officials.<sup>148</sup> A copy of what is believed to be the original edition of the *Nogŏltae* was discovered in 1998. Considering how the language of this edition reflects the Chinese language of the Yuan period, it is believed to be an early Chosŏn reprint of the original text composed at the end of the Koryŏ period.<sup>149</sup> In Figure 9 it is possible to see the photographic reproduction of the first page of this edition.

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compiled at the end of the Koryŏ period, when this term might have been still in use in the northern part of China. For a more detailed discussion on the interpretation of this title, see Song Ki-joong (2001:88-92).

<sup>145</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 20:26b (5/6/23) [1423].

<sup>146</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:66).

<sup>147</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:66).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Hŭng Yun-p'yo and Chŏng Kwang (2001:286).

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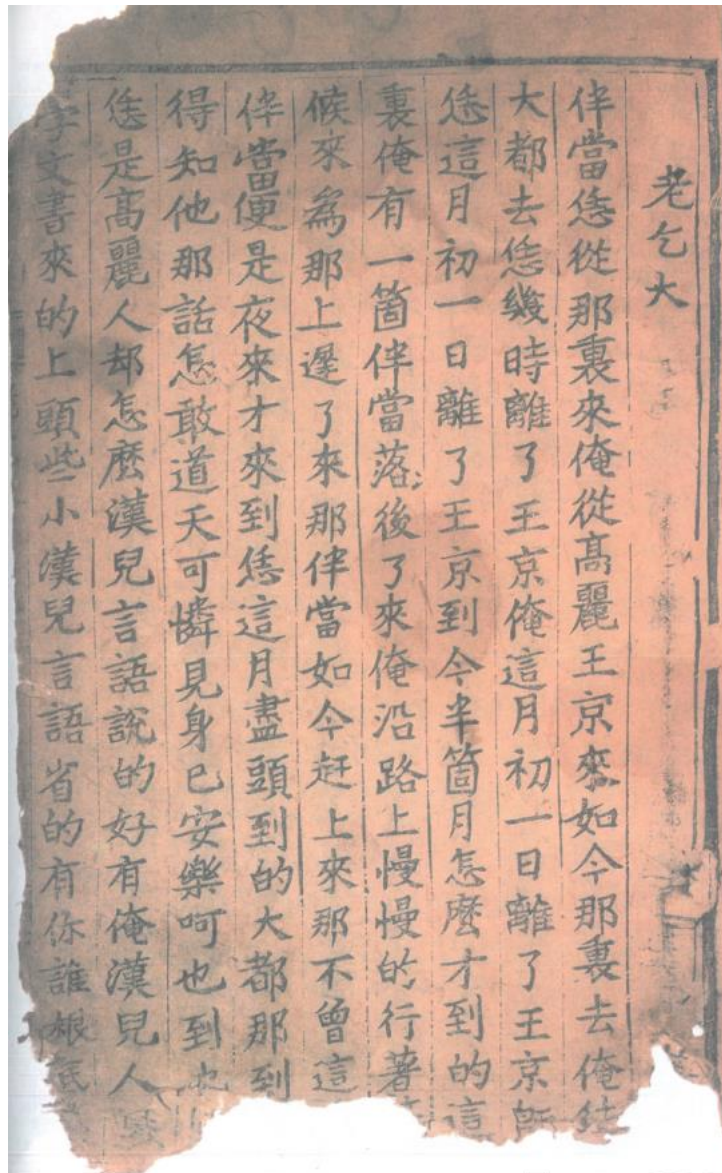


Figure 9. *Nogöltae* 老乞大 (Honorable Cathayan). Supposed early Chosŏn reprint of the original edition. Chŏng Kwang *et al.* (2000:69).

Different types of texts were used in the study of the Chinese language but the lack of existent texts makes it difficult to reach certain conclusions on their actual layout and organization. Information from the titles and the few extant texts suggest that they were *hanmun* texts and/or editions of *hanmun* texts having an attached vernacular Chinese version (*chikhae* 直解). Furthermore, interpretation textbooks as the *Nogöltae* contained only the text in vernacular Chinese. Regardless of the type of the texts, it seems clear that a prerequisite for



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their study was the presence of a teacher versed in the Chinese vernacular pronunciation. Particularly revealing is the already mentioned entry in the Annals recording how Sejong himself was assisted in the study of the *Chikhae sohak* by scholars with an in-depth knowledge of Chinese pronunciation. Even the *Nogŏltae*—that was a conversation manual—did not contain any indication on the pronunciation or explanation of the language itself but only the main text without any division or mark aimed to help the reader in its reading and understanding (see Figure 9). From this, we can suppose that the reading of this text by learners was only possible through the repetition of what was orally articulated by a senior scholar expert in Chinese pronunciation.

### I.3.2. Mongolian

The Annals do not provide any exact record for the establishment of a curriculum dedicated to Mongolian in the *Sayŏgwŏn* (Office of Interpreters). However, the teaching of Mongolian is mentioned in the above-seen 1394 memorial submitted by Sŏl Changsu related to the organization of the *Sayŏgwŏn*, where it is suggested that one of the three instructors of the institution should be of Mongolian and that the students should be divided according to the language (i.e., Chinese and Mongolian).<sup>150</sup> Considering that the *Sayŏgwŏn* was established in 1393, only one year before this memorial, a Mongolian curriculum must have been set shortly after its establishment, right after the Chinese language curriculum, or perhaps at the very same time of it.<sup>151</sup>

From the same memorial, we also learn that students were examined on the Mongolian language, its script and Uyghur script (*wiolja* 偉兀字).<sup>152</sup> It is also

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<sup>150</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 6:17a (3/11/19) [1394].

<sup>151</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:10) argues that although the entry in the Annals related to the establishment of the *Sayŏgwŏn* mentions only the Chinese language, Mongolian was likely taught there from the very beginning.

<sup>152</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 6:17a (3/11/19) [1394]. Two different categories of exam were devised: category 1 for candidates who knew how to “translate” (*yŏk* 譯) the Mongolian letters, to write its script and the Uyghur script; category 2 for those who could only write Uyghur and

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specified that the ranks obtained should be the same as the students of the Chinese curriculum. Such attention to the Mongol language at a time when, after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, significant contacts with the Mongols were absent might seem surprising. However, we should consider that the Mongol domination had likely left a long-lasting memory in the Korean peninsula. It is possible that, despite the absence of an immediate need to have interpreters in this language, it was decided to maintain a number of them ready in preparation of a possible new rising of the Mongols in East Asia, as a sort of diplomatic version of a standing army.<sup>153</sup> But another possibility is that despite the fall of the Yuan dynasty there was still a practical need of interpreters of Mongolian in commerce with China due to the many inhabitants of ethnic Mongol origin dwelling in the northeast area of China that were encountered by Koreans when travelling or trading in that regions.<sup>154</sup>

The absence of any urgent need seems, however, to have led the Chosŏn government to neglect at times the study of Mongolian. This is indicated by the many petitions showing concern about the state of the study of Mongolian studies and urging to increase the number of students in this language. In 1411, for example, the Ministry of Rites begins its petition by pointing out that the duties of the Office of Interpreters were aimed “to serve the great” (*sadae* 事大) and for “neighbourly relations” (*kyorin* 交隣)<sup>155</sup>, but that there were only two educational officials (*hundo* 訓導) of Mongolian and very few students, urging to increase their number up to thirty by selecting them from the brightest and

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communicate in Mongolian. As pointed out by Song Ki-joong (2001:13), with Mongolian script the memorial likely referred to the ‘Phags-pa script. The character *yŏk* 譯 was used in a loose sense to indicate both a translation of the meaning and the reading of the pronunciation of a foreign language and its script. See also p. 89 for a discussion on this.

<sup>153</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:8).

<sup>154</sup> Chŏng Kwang (2017:421).

<sup>155</sup> The term *kyorin* 交隣 was traditionally used to describe the relations of the Chosŏn kingdom with neighbour populations other than China. It is usually interpreted by scholars as indicating the establishment of peaceful relations with these populations on an equal level but it has been recently reinterpreted by Chong Da-ham (2010) as implying a more aggressive policy aimed to assert a suzerainty over them by adopting the Ming imperial model but remaining at the same time in the Ming-centered world order.

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smartest ones in the Schools of the Five Districts (*Obu Hak* 五部學).<sup>156</sup> In 1419 the Minister of Rites (*Yejo p'ansö* 禮曹判書), Hō jo (1369-1439), made the following report:<sup>157</sup>

蒙古之學雖非今日之急務其於國家亦不可廢也今試譯科雖不中格必取三四人以開後學

Mongolian Studies (*monggojihak* 蒙古之學) are not such an urgent matter in these days, nevertheless, our country should not discard them. Even if there were no successful candidates in the last examination in the interpretation category (*yökkwa* 譯科),<sup>158</sup> it is necessary to select two or three prospective students.

In 1422 the Ministry of Personnel (*Ijo* 吏曹) submitted a similar petition:<sup>159</sup>

蒙古學非時所尚傳習者少請以取才分數多者每當都目政用二人以勵其學

Mongolian Studies (蒙古之學) are no more esteemed nowadays, for this reason, few people study them. Our appeal is that among the candidates with high scores in the regular evaluations (*tomokchōng* 都目政),<sup>160</sup> two should be selected and encouraged in pursuing these studies.

And less than two months later, the Ministry of Rites submitted another petition that requested a special examination in the Dörbeljin (the Mongolian script also called 'Phags-pa), that contrary to the Uyghur script was scarcely studied:<sup>161</sup>

蒙古字學有二樣一曰偉兀眞二曰帖兒月眞在前詔書及印書用帖兒月眞常行文字用偉兀眞不可偏廢今生徒皆習偉兀眞習帖兒月眞者少自今四孟朔蒙學取才並試帖兒月眞通不通分數依偉兀眞例

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<sup>156</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 22:50b (11/12/2) [1411].

<sup>157</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 3:33b (1/4/16) [1419].

<sup>158</sup> The interpretation category (*yökkwa* 譯科) was the category of the civil service examinations for the selection of interpreters. It was one of the four categories for the technical studies that gave access to lower official positions.

<sup>159</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 18:23b (4/12/21) [1422].

<sup>160</sup> This regular evaluation (*tomokchōng* 都目政) was usually held twice a year and served to raise or drop the position of officials and to make new appointments.

<sup>161</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 19:11b (5/2/4) [1423].

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In the study of Mongolian writing, there are two types of script: one is called Uyghur (*uioljin* 偉兀眞), the other Dörbeljin (*chöbawöljin* 帖兒月眞). In the old edicts (*chosö* 詔書) and seals (*insö* 印書) they used the Dörbeljin; in ordinary writing the Uyghur. We cannot choose one and dismiss the other. At the moment all students learn the Uyghur script, only a few the Dörbeljin. From now on, on the first month of each of the four seasons, we suggest selecting those talented in Mongol Studies, examine them in the Dörbeljin and sort them according to their proficiency on the example of what already done for the Uyghur.

All these petitions were accepted by the king, showing that efforts were made to maintain knowledge of the Mongol language and scripts in the early years of the new dynasty up to the reign of Sejong.

As for the books used to learn Mongolian and its related scripts, we can find a list in the above-seen 1430 memorial recording the texts required in translation studies for the selections (*ch'wijae* 取才) of low-level officials.<sup>162</sup> This list contains ten titles for “Mongolian pronunciation” (*monghun* 蒙訓)<sup>163</sup> and two titles dedicated explicitly to the “writing of characters” (*söja* 書字). All these texts are unfortunately not extant, but the titles suggest that some of them were Mongolian translations of Chinese texts compiled during the Yuan dynasty, while others were Mongol texts.<sup>164</sup> Particularly interesting is that the *Nogöltae* 老乞大 (Honorable Cathayan)—that was already in the list for Chinese language texts—appears in this list as well. It is thus believed that this was a Mongolian translated version of the original text devised to learn the Chinese language.<sup>165</sup> Unfortunately, since the text is not extant, we cannot know its layout. It might have presented the Mongolian translation attached to the original vernacular Chinese text, perhaps visually distinguishing it by leaving a margin on the upper part, or only the translation without any base text. As for the two texts intended

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<sup>162</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 47:28a (12/3/18) [1430].

<sup>163</sup> For the translation of the character *hun* 訓 as “pronunciation” in the context of foreign language learning, see note 131.

<sup>164</sup> For a complete list and discussion of these titles, see Song Ki-joong (2001:84-111).

<sup>165</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:60).

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explicitly for the study of the Mongol scripts, they were titled *Uioljin* 偉兀眞 and *Chöbawöljin* 帖兒月眞. As can be seen from the petition of the Ministry of Rites analyzed above, the titles referred to the two Mongol scripts studied at the time: the Uyghur script and the Dörbeljin (or 'Phags-pa) script.

### 1.3.3. Japanese and Jurchen

Although at a slightly later time than Chinese and Mongolian, languages and writings of other neighbouring populations as the Japanese, Ryukyuan and Jurchen also received particular attention in early fifteenth-century Chosŏn.

Interest in the Japanese language coincided with the increase of contacts after the threat posed by the raids of Japanese marauders subsided, and trading rights were granted to the Japanese vessels in selected ports in the Kyöngsang province, situated in the southeast part of the peninsula. In 1414 Japanese language teaching was thus introduced in the Office of Interpreters due to the reported steady contacts with Japanese and the low number of people able to speak the language.<sup>166</sup> However, in 1421 the Ministry of Rites submitted a memorial requesting to make more efforts to promote the study of the Japanese language, worrying for the lack of prospective students and the possible discontinuation of the Japanese curriculum.<sup>167</sup> In 1430 measures for its promotions were demanded once again by the Ministry of Rites, that showed particular concern for the possible disappearance of people able to translate the Japanese writing (*yök'ae Waesö* 譯解倭書).<sup>168</sup> A couple of months later a similar request for the promotion of the Japanese language teaching was presented by the governor (*kamsa* 監司) of Kyöngsang province.<sup>169</sup> This latter notice also reveals how the teaching of the language was required in the ports situated on the southeast coast of the province,

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<sup>166</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 28:37a (14/10/26) [1414]: ○命司譯院習日本語倭客通事尹仁甫上言日本人來朝不絕譯語者少願令子弟傳習從之

<sup>167</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 13:3a (3/8/8) [1421]

<sup>168</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 49:28b (12/8/29) [1430].

<sup>169</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 50:5b (12/10/11) [1430].

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namely Nei-p'ŏ 乃而浦 (corresponding to the modern Chinhae harbour in Ch'angwŏn), Pusan-p'ŏ 富山浦 and Yŏm-p'ŏ 鹽浦 (in today Ulsan).<sup>170</sup>

Books for “Japanese pronunciation” (*waehun* 倭訓)<sup>171</sup> are also listed in the above-seen 1430 memorial recording the texts required in translation studies for the *ch'wijae*, right after the lists of Chinese and Mongolian texts.<sup>172</sup> This list presents eleven titles, all unfortunately not extant.<sup>173</sup> Many of these titles, however, seem to correspond to textbooks used for elementary education in Japan.<sup>174</sup> Among these texts we find, for example, the *Iroha* 伊路波 (Kr. *Irop'a*), a Japanese syllabary that presented the syllabic letters arranged in the form of a Buddhist poem. We also find once again the *Nogŏltae* 老乞大 (Honorable Cathayan), that, as was the case of the edition in Mongolian, must have been a translated edition in Japanese of the original text in Chinese (or perhaps of the edition in Mongolian). As is the case with the Mongolian version, since this text is no longer extant, we cannot know its layout. It might have presented the Japanese text attached to the original Chinese text or only the Japanese version.

This interest in the Japanese language was supplemented by specific attention to Ryukyuan writing. The beginning of this interest corresponds to the period immediately after the establishment of the Ryukyu islands as an independent kingdom in 1430. The Annals record that in 1431 an envoy from the Ryukyu Kingdom (*Ryuk'yuguk* 琉球國) was received at court, where he presented an official dispatch (*chamun* 咨文) to the king.<sup>175</sup> Ryukyuan writing started then to be taught at the Office of Interpreters in 1437, when the Ministry of Rites reported that, despite the occasional arrival of envoys from the Ryukyu Kingdom there was no one able to understand the writing (*mun* 文) they used. It was thus

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<sup>170</sup> These were the three ports that were opened to the Japanese vessels.

<sup>171</sup> For the translation of the character *hun* 訓 as “pronunciation” in the context of foreign language learning, see note 131.

<sup>172</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 47:28a (12/3/18) [1430].

<sup>173</sup> For a complete list and a brief description of each of these titles, see Song Ki-joong (2001:129-139).

<sup>174</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:126).

<sup>175</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 54:23a (13/11/9) [1431].

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suggested to find someone able to understand it and employ him as an instructor in the Office of Interpreters so that he could teach it to the students of Japanese.<sup>176</sup> It should be noticed that this report refers to the writing of the Ryukyu Kingdom, not the language, and seems revealing of a specific type of writing that the Ryukyu Kingdom used for their diplomatic documents.<sup>177</sup>

Moving to the northern border of the country, we find the Jurchen language spoken in the Hamgil region,<sup>178</sup> where contacts with Jurchen people seem to have always been frequent. T'aejo himself, the founder of the dynasty, raised to power from this region and a petition submitted by him at the times of his military campaigns, before the founding of the new dynasty, describes residents of that area as having good relations with Jurchen and Tartars through trade and, sometimes, marriage.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, new territories in that area were recently incorporated into the Chosŏn kingdom by T'aejo and later definitely secured by Sejong with a series of garrisons. At the time of Sejong, we can find a petition of the Ministry of Rites dated 1426 reporting a continuous flux of Jurchen and the difficulties in communicating with them. The report pointed out that it was not proper to employ interpreters from the countryside and suggested to select in the Hamgil Province three bilingual persons able to speak Jurchen language and employ them in the Office of Interpreters.<sup>180</sup> This seems to suggest that there had been no interpreters of Jurchen language in this office until then, although, of course, bilingual speakers must have resided in the northern border of the

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<sup>176</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 79:17a (19/11/27) [1437]: ◦禮曹啓琉球國往來聘而我國無通解其文者 請令中外搜訪通解琉球國文者差司譯院訓導令倭學生兼習從之

<sup>177</sup> Unfortunately, I could not find any Ryukyuan diplomatic document of the period. It is possible that these documents were written mixing Chinese characters and *kana*. An example of this type of writing can be seen in a letter dated 1471 from Kanamaru (King Shō En, 1415-1476) of Ryūkyū Kingdom to Shimazu clan.

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Letter\\_of\\_Kanamaru.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Letter_of_Kanamaru.jpg))

<sup>178</sup> The Hamgil province (*Hamgil-do* 咸吉道) corresponded to the current Hamgyŏng province (Hamgyŏng-do 咸鏡道).

<sup>179</sup> *T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄, 1:17a [*Ch'ongsŏ*, general introduction].

<sup>180</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 33:19a (8/9/22) [1426]: ◦禮曹啓野人連續上來只令鄉通事傳語未便 請咸吉道居人內擇其女眞及本國語俱能者三人屬於司譯院, 爲野人館通事從之

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Korean peninsula where contacts were recurrent. The establishment of a Jurchen curriculum in the Office of Interpreters can thus be dated from 1426.

Texts for the study of the Jurchen language are not listed in the memorial of 1430 that recorded the titles of the books studied for the other languages. A list of fourteen Jurchen books is however contained in the later *Kyōngguk taejōn* 經國大典 (The Great Code for State Administration).<sup>181</sup> It is likely that at least some of these texts were already in use during Sejong's time since this code also contains lists for the other languages and most of their titles correspond to those in the 1430 memorial. According to Song Ki-joong (2001:157), these books must have contained the Jurchen script of the Jin dynasty (1115-1234), that remained in use until the early fifteenth century. Some of the titles are identical to Chinese books, and it is thus assumed that they were translated into Jurchen during the Jin dynasty.<sup>182</sup> Other books seem to have been elementary textbooks or to have contained children's stories.<sup>183</sup>

All these languages and related writings (Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese, and Jurchen) remained as curricula in the Office of Interpreters and at the centre of the government's interests during the first part of the fifteenth century. As seen, efforts to improve and maintain these languages were continuously made, and all the petitions concerning their improvements were always accepted by the Chosŏn kings. There was thus always a strong awareness of the importance of the study of these languages for the foreign policy of the country and commerce, and this awareness was always accompanied by a clear understanding of the problems related to their learning. This remained true during Sejong's reign. In 1442, only one year before the completion of the new vernacular script, a petition advocated the enactment of a series of measures to improve the Chinese language skills of students and officials in the institute, extending the same measures to

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<sup>181</sup> *Kyōngguk taejōn* 經國大典 (The Great Code for State Administration), *Yejōn* 禮典 (Code of Rites), *Ch'wijae* 取才.

<sup>182</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:157).

<sup>183</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:158).



## I. The Linguistic Landscape Before the Invention of the Vernacular Script

students of Mongolian (*monggoŏ* 蒙古語), Japanese (*waeŏ* 倭語) and Jurchen (*yŏjinŏ* 女眞語) languages.<sup>184</sup>

What implications would this attention to foreign languages have in the context of the invention of the new vernacular script? One of the possible effects that have been considered by scholars is the influence of foreign scripts in the creation of the new vernacular letters.<sup>185</sup> The theory of a possible inspiration from the Mongol 'Phags-pa script in the creation of the shapes of the Korean vernacular letters has been presented by Ledyard (1997/1998) and, before, by Hope (1957).<sup>186</sup> Song Ki-jung (2009) has more recently drawn attention to different linguistic similarities with the 'Phags-pa script. An example of these similarities is the principle of using the same letters for both initial and final consonants of the syllable.<sup>187</sup> This principle—defined as *chongsŏng puyong ch'osŏng* 終聲復用初聲 (the final sounds use the initial sounds again) in the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* (1446)—will be a key notion in the creation of the new script.<sup>188</sup> Another linguistic element in common between the two writing systems was the differentiation of the vowels as separate letters (and not only as added marks to the consonants) and the order of the three basic vowels.<sup>189</sup> Although these similarities do not necessarily imply a derivative origin, it is hard to exclude any influence of this pre-existing linguistic knowledge in the creation of the new script. Japanese and Jurchen scripts, on the other hand, could hardly have much influence on the creation of the letters of the new Korean vernacular script. In the case of the Japanese *kana* syllabary, the inherent differences between the two languages did not make letters devised for a language having syllables with a

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<sup>184</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 95:19b (24/2/14) [1442].

<sup>185</sup> The influence of Chinese characters, to which the next chapter will often draw attention, it is surely the most evident but it does not fall in the present discussion since their knowledge was considered by the Koreans of the time as an integral part of their cultural background and it was not strictly related to Chinese as a foreign language.

<sup>186</sup> The possible inspiration of the 'Phags-pa script for the creation of the shapes of the Korean vernacular letters is briefly discussed in II.1 (p.82).

<sup>187</sup> Song Ki-jung (2009:58).

<sup>188</sup> On these features of the Korean vernacular script, see also II.3.2.

<sup>189</sup> Song Ki-jung (2009). The vowels of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* will be discussed in II.3.2.

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structure mostly formed by a consonant and a vowel to be of any actual use in the case of Korean, where consonants can be often found in final position. As for the Jurchen script, it has been noted that it was an imperfect writing system, partly phonetic (syllabary) and partly logographic.<sup>190</sup> The opinion of Ledyard (1998:105) on this is straightforward, stating that “if the Jurchen script did no more than discourage them [the Koreans] from imitating it, it performed a great service.” Nevertheless, Ledyard’s view also suggests how the lack of any direct influence of these scripts on the creation of the vernacular script does not necessarily imply that they were not considered in the process. As we shall see in the next chapter, the languages and writings of these populations are indeed mentioned concerning the creation of the vernacular script,<sup>191</sup> showing how their scripts could hardly not have been used as a term of comparison in the process of the creation of the new letters, even as models to not eventually be followed.

Besides a possible foreign connection in the creation of the letters themselves, we can at least suppose that recurrent contact with foreign languages and the problems related to their learning might have influenced the linguistic interests of Sejong and his assistants, causing as a natural reaction an increased awareness of their vernacular language. It is, for example, clear that there was a deep awareness of the difference between Korean and Chinese language, that was stressed in more than one occasion in the letters sent to the Ming court, and that was described by King T’aejo, as “difference in the sounds of the language” (語音別異). These words anticipate the most famous sentence “the sounds of our language are different from those of China” (國之語音異乎中國) written by Sejong at the beginning of his preface to the *Hunmin chōngŭm*.<sup>192</sup> Although this awareness was hardly something new, the events that characterized the early years of the dynasty seem to have intensified it. The role of these languages in the linguistic landscape of early fifteenth-century Chosŏn should thus still

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<sup>190</sup> Song Ki-joong (2001:157).

<sup>191</sup> See II.2.2.

<sup>192</sup> See II.3.1.

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considered an essential element in the analysis of the invention of a new vernacular script and of its related writing practices that were developed in the following years.

Finally, we might also ask ourselves if this context of recurrent concern about foreign languages might have stimulated the creation of the new letters to help their learning. Recent studies that have focused on Chinese language learning as a significant reason behind the invention of the new script are, for example, Chŏng Da-ham (2009) and Sixiang Wang (2014). Textual evidence also exists suggesting that the vernacular script might have been created from the beginning with the aim of supporting the learning of this language.<sup>193</sup> That this was *the* primary reason remains however highly questionable, especially considering that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the new script was created with the primary aim of representing the sounds of the Korean language. Nevertheless, even without assuming any direct connection with the need to learn Chinese or other foreign languages, the fact remains that the vernacular script was almost immediately adapted to accommodate the Chinese pronunciation of characters, becoming a powerful tool to be used for the study of the Chinese language.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> This seems to be suggested by a passage of the preface to the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 collected in the *Tongmunsŏn* 東文選, vol. 94. This passage is translated in III.3.2 (p.219).

<sup>194</sup> On the process of adaptation of the Korean vernacular script to represent the Chinese pronunciation of characters, see Yu Hyo-hong 俞曉紅 (2014). The use of the vernacular script to represent the sounds of the Chinese language and learn this language will be discussed in Chapter III.

## II. The Invention and Promulgation of the Vernacular Script

### II.1. Completion and First Announcement

According to the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 (Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty; henceforth simply Annals), the new vernacular script was completed for the first time by King Sejong 世宗 (1397-1450, r. 1418-1450) during the 12<sup>th</sup> month of his 25<sup>th</sup> year of reign (December 1443 – January 1444):<sup>195</sup>

○是月 上親制諺文二十八字其字倣古篆分爲初中終聲合之然後乃成字凡于文字及本國俚語皆可得而書字雖簡要轉換無窮是謂訓民正音

This month His Majesty<sup>196</sup> personally created (*ch'inje* 親制) the 28 characters (*cha* 字) of the vernacular script (*ŏnmun* 諺文). These characters are modelled on the old seal (*kojŏn* 古篆). Divided they make initial (*ch'o* 初), medial (*chung* 中) and terminal (*chong* 終) sounds (*sŏng* 聲), once combined they form characters (*cha* 字, i.e. syllabic blocks)<sup>197</sup>. They can transcribe both Chinese characters (*munja* 文字) and the local language (*iŏ* 俚語) of our country. Despite being essential, they change without end. They have been named “the correct sounds for the instruction of the people” (*Hunmin Chŏngŭm* 訓民正音).

A first element worth of notice is that this entry reporting the completion of the vernacular script is also the first occasion when the script itself is mentioned. That is, despite the amount of work and efforts that were surely put in its creation, the Annals and other documentary sources contain no prior mention of any preparative work, discussion, or ongoing research related to it. Suddenly, and

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<sup>195</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 (Annals of King Sejong), 102:42a (25/12/30) [1443-1444]. See further below for a discussion on the issue of the exact dating of this entry according to the Western calendar.

<sup>196</sup> In the original text the character 上 indicating the king is preceded by a blank space as a sign of respect, a common practice in the texts of the period. In the translation this is rendered by the use of the capitalized honorific term “His Majesty”.

<sup>197</sup> The same term “character” (*cha* 字) was used to indicate both the single letters of the new vernacular script and their combination in syllabic blocks.

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with no apparent clamour, the vernacular script makes its appearance on the pages of the dynastic Annals. Some scholars have explained this sudden mention of the completion of the new script by arguing that it was a project carried out in secret by the king.<sup>198</sup> However, we should consider that the Annals were the result of a careful selection made by their compilers after the death of the king.<sup>199</sup> Thus, the absence of entries or other documentary evidence related to the vernacular script before its completion does not necessarily mean that it was a project carried out in secret but, more simply, could mean that these records were cut from the final draft. As pointed out by An Pyöng-hŭi (2007:129-131), there are other instances of events that, although having no apparent reason to be kept secret, were not recorded in the Annals at the time they happened but are suddenly mentioned in later entries. A significant example is King T'aejong's project of annotating with vernacular glosses (*t'o* 吐) the Five Classics.<sup>200</sup> We know about it only because Sejong decided to continue this project and the entry in the Annals that records this decision contains a reference to that earlier attempt made by T'aejong.<sup>201</sup> Otherwise, there would have been no mention of it in any historical record. However, this does not imply that it was a secret project. Similarly, it is possible that any reference to the vernacular script before its completion did not pass the revision process and, thus, did not make it into the final version of the Annals.

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<sup>198</sup> See, for example, Yi Sung-nyöng (1958:48); Lee Ki-Moon (1997:17); and Ramsey (2006:22).

<sup>199</sup> After the drafts (*sach'o* 史草) made by the historiographers were collected with other administrative documents submitted by the different offices of the government, they underwent a review process and, then, a final examination when they were reedited to compile the final version. The earlier drafts were then all washed away to eliminate any trace of unauthorized records. See Choi Byonghyon (2014:xviii).

<sup>200</sup> This project was discussed in I.2.3.

<sup>201</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 119:19b (30/3/28).

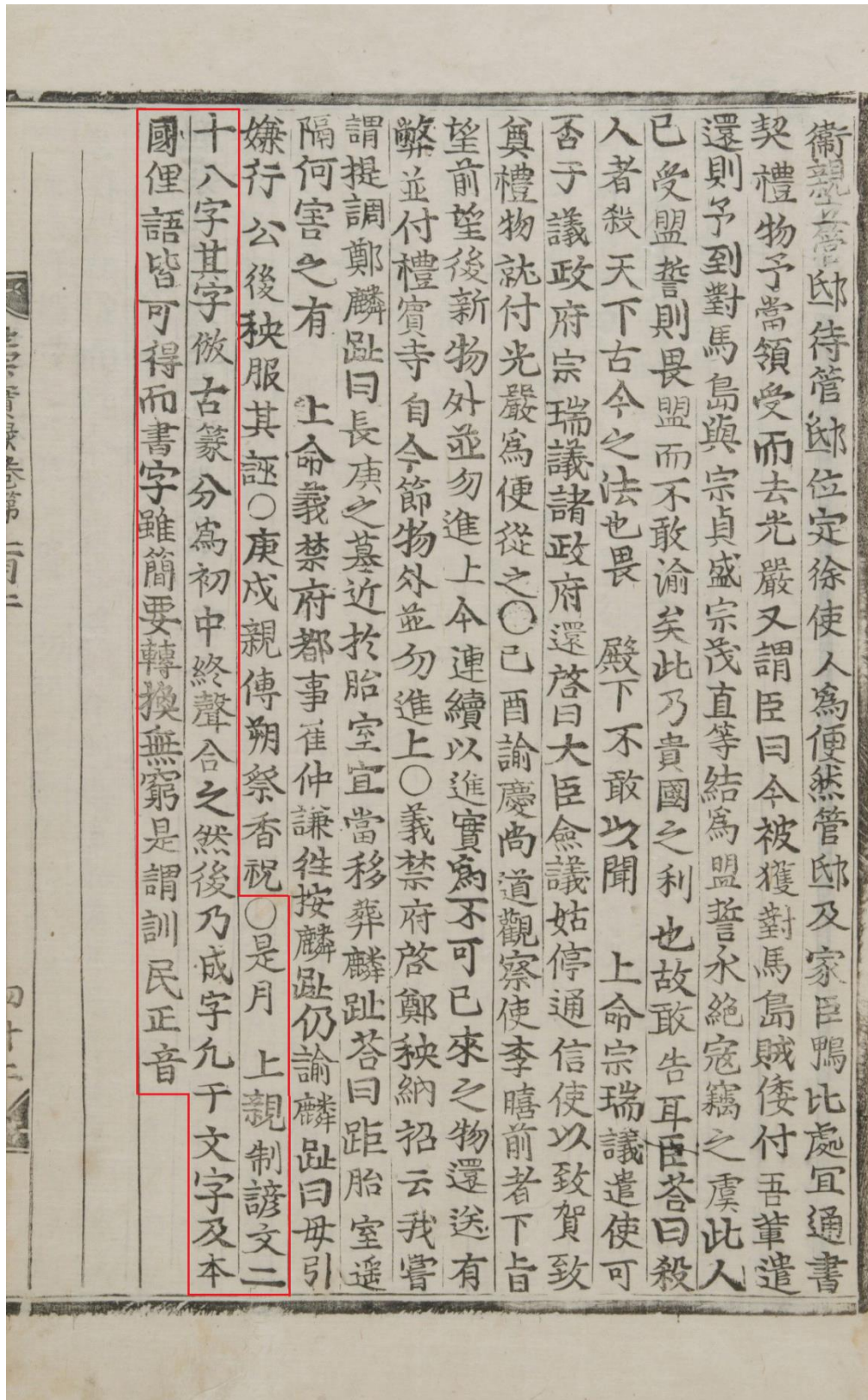


Figure 10. *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 (Annals of King Sejong), 102:42a. Framed in red is the entry recording the completion of the vernacular script.

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Another aspect that strikes most of this entry is its brevity and placement in the Annals. As can be seen in Figure 10 (framed in red), it fills little more than a couple of lines at the very end of fascicle number 102, almost as a closing note at the end of a year of reign. This lack of any particular emphasis or celebratory intent in the official entry of the dynastic annals announcing the completion of what is nowadays considered the most significant accomplishment of Sejong and, in retrospect, perhaps the most significant event in Korean cultural history, may seem surprising. Perhaps, this might well have reflected the way the creation of the new script was proclaimed: no large-scale public announcement nor any great event held in the royal palace. Be that as it may, the compilers of the Annals seem to have judged this entry to contain all the necessary basic information to record this accomplishment.

For all its suddenness and brevity, this entry manages to condense a considerable quantity of information that successfully presents a basic introduction to the creation and significant features of the vernacular script, although not yet providing its letters. Firstly, we find a temporal indication, that is not, however, the exact date of the event. The entry starts with “this month” (*siwöl* 是月), leaving us with only a vague temporal indication. A span of roughly thirty days is not a problem to chronologically place this event, but it leaves us with an unusual situation when it comes to converting the date we find in the Annals (based on the lunar calendar) in the Western calendar. This is because the last month of the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Sejong falls between December 1443 and January 1444 when converted in the Western calendar, leaving us with not just the day but also the month and year uncertain. As can be seen in Table 1, the lunar month started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1443 and ended on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1444. Thus, the first eleven days of the month were in 1443 while the rest were in

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1444. As a consequence, the year of the completion of the vernacular script can be found differently indicated as 1443, 1444, or even 1443-1444.

Table 1. Table showing the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Zhengtong (正統) in the Ming Dynasty, corresponding to the 25<sup>th</sup> year of reign of Sejong, with the equivalent dates of the Western calendar. Framed is the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the year. The table was generated through the *2000 Year Converter for Chinese and Western Calendars* 兩千年中西曆轉換. Academia Sinica Center for Digital Cultures (ASCDC) 中央研究院數位文化中心提供服務 at <http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw/>

中曆月份	中曆日序																																
	日 干支	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	日 干支	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	日 干支	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
明英宗正統8年 歲次：癸亥 生肖：豬 西元1443年1月31日(星期四)起																																	
1	丁巳	1/31	2/1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	丁卯	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	丁丑	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	3/1
2	丁亥	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	丁酉	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	丁未	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	-
3	丙辰	31	4/1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	丙寅	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	丙子	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
4	丙戌	30	5/1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	丙申	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	丙午	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	-
5	乙卯	29	30	31	6/1	2	3	4	5	6	7	乙丑	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	乙亥	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	-
6	甲申	27	28	29	30	7/1	2	3	4	5	6	甲午	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	甲辰	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
7	甲寅	27	28	29	30	31	8/1	2	3	4	5	甲子	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	甲戌	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	-
8	癸未	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	9/1	2	3	癸巳	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	癸卯	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	-
9	壬子	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	10/1	2	壬戌	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	壬申	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
10	壬午	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	11/1	壬辰	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	壬寅	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
11	壬子	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	12/1	壬戌	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	壬申	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	-
12	辛巳	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	辛卯	31	1/1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	辛丑	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19

After providing this vague temporal indication, the entry states that the letters were a “personal creation of the king” (*sangch'injae* 上親制). This is documentary evidence of particular importance since it clearly states that the creator of the vernacular script was the king himself. There seems to be no reason to cast any doubt on it, especially since the same assertion is repeated in other sources as well.<sup>202</sup> However, the issue of its inventor has been and continues to be one of the most scholarly debated topics about the vernacular script. The related theories can be roughly divided into two major types. The first sees Sejong as the sole inventor, taking at face value the above-seen statement in the Annals and other sources. This theory is usually called *ch'inje-söl* 親制說 (theory of personal creation) by Korean scholars and is sustained, for example, by Hong Ki-mun (1946) and Lee Ki-Moon (1997). According to this theory, the king created the new script by himself and the scholars of the *Chiphyōnjōn* 集賢殿 (Hall of Worthies) were involved only after its completion for the compilation of related projects. A second theory, although not questioning the central role of the king,

<sup>202</sup> For example, in the postface to the *Hunmin chōngūm* written by Chōng Inji (see II.3.1).



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considers the creation of the vernacular script as the result of the cooperation between Sejong and the scholars of the Hall of Worthies. This theory is called *ch'inje hyöpch'an-söl* 親制協贊說 (theory of the personal creation and cooperation) and is sustained, among others, by scholars as Yi Sung-nyöng (1958), Kang Sinhang (2003:13-87) and An Pyöng-hüi (2007). According to this theory, that the king was the creator does not preclude that he might have received support in this task. Considering the participation of the scholars of the Hall of Worthies in several related projects after its invention, it seems reasonable to assume that they might have a role in the creation of the script as well. This view takes into consideration not only the textual records but also the context of the creation of the vernacular script and the feasibility of such a task by Sejong alone. Although the central role of Sejong in the invention of the vernacular script remains unchallenged, it seems most likely that some of the most brilliant minds of the time, gathered by the king himself, participated in the project. The extent of their contribution remains, however, unclear.

The rest of the entry in the Annals contains more specific information on the vernacular script itself. Firstly, it states that the number of letters was twenty-eight, a number that, as we shall see, is consistent with the one provided by the *Hunmin chöngüm* 訓民正音 (The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People)—the book called as the script itself that will be printed in 1446 for its promulgation (henceforth *HC*)—that counted 17 consonants (excluding the double characters) and 11 vowels.<sup>203</sup> It also gives a name to these letters: *önmun* 諺文 (vernacular script). This term can be often also found translated as “vulgar script” in English language scholarship.<sup>204</sup> This translation, however, poses an important issue when it comes to its use and significance in the context of the period since it risks giving the new script a negative connotation that the term did not initially have. In the case we are discussing here, for example, the term is used in an official entry in the Annals that had no reason to connotate it

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<sup>203</sup> See II.3.1.

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, Yu Cho (2002:6).

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negatively. The final proof of the absence of any intrinsic negative connotation is the fact that Sejong himself used this term.<sup>205</sup> Even interpreting the term “vulgar” in its original meaning of “popular” (from Latin *vulgaris*) to indicate something correlated to the lower classes,<sup>206</sup> making this association still seems to be a possibly misleading limitation of the actual scope and use of the Korean vernacular writing, especially in the early period after its creation that is the focus of the present research. The character *ŏn* 諺 might thus better interpreted here to simply refer to the Korean “vernacular” language, with no negative or class connotation *per se*.<sup>207</sup>

The entry continues by asserting that these new vernacular letters imitate the old seal (*kojŏn* 古篆). Scholars have given different interpretations to this reference to the “old seal” as a model for the vernacular letters. Ledyard (1998), for example, interprets it as a hidden reference to the Mongol ‘Phags-pa script by pointing out that the expression *kojŏn* 古篆 might be an abbreviation of the word *monggojŏn* 蒙古篆 (Mongol Seal), which was another name of the ‘Phags-pa script found in the Yuan sources.<sup>208</sup> This interpretation is part of Ledyard’s wider argument on the influence of the ‘Phags-pa script on the creation of the vernacular letters.<sup>209</sup> Examples of ‘Phags-pa letters can be found in the table of initials in the *Menggu Ziyun* 蒙古字韻, a Yuan Phagspa-Chinese dictionary

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<sup>205</sup> For example, in his reply to the memorial submitted to protest against the new script recorded in *Sejong Sillok*, 103:19b (26/2/20) [1444]. See II.2.2.

<sup>206</sup> We can find it used in this sense to indicate the vulgar Latin that was spoken by the lower classes as opposed to the literary Latin.

<sup>207</sup> The issue of the correct interpretation of the term *ŏnmun* 諺文 was already raised in the Korean academia by Hong Ki-mun (1946: vol. 2, 46), who asserted that the term should not be interpreted as referring to the “vulgar language” (*sogŏn* 俗言) but to the Korean language (*urimal* 우리말). See also Kim-Renaud (2000:17) for a criticism on the translation of this term as “vulgar writing” in English scholarship.

<sup>208</sup> Ledyard (1998:426-435).

<sup>209</sup> See Ledyard (1997) and Ledyard (1998), in particular chapter 6 of the latter.

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whose only surviving copy is an eighteenth-century manuscript currently preserved at the British Library (see Figure 11).

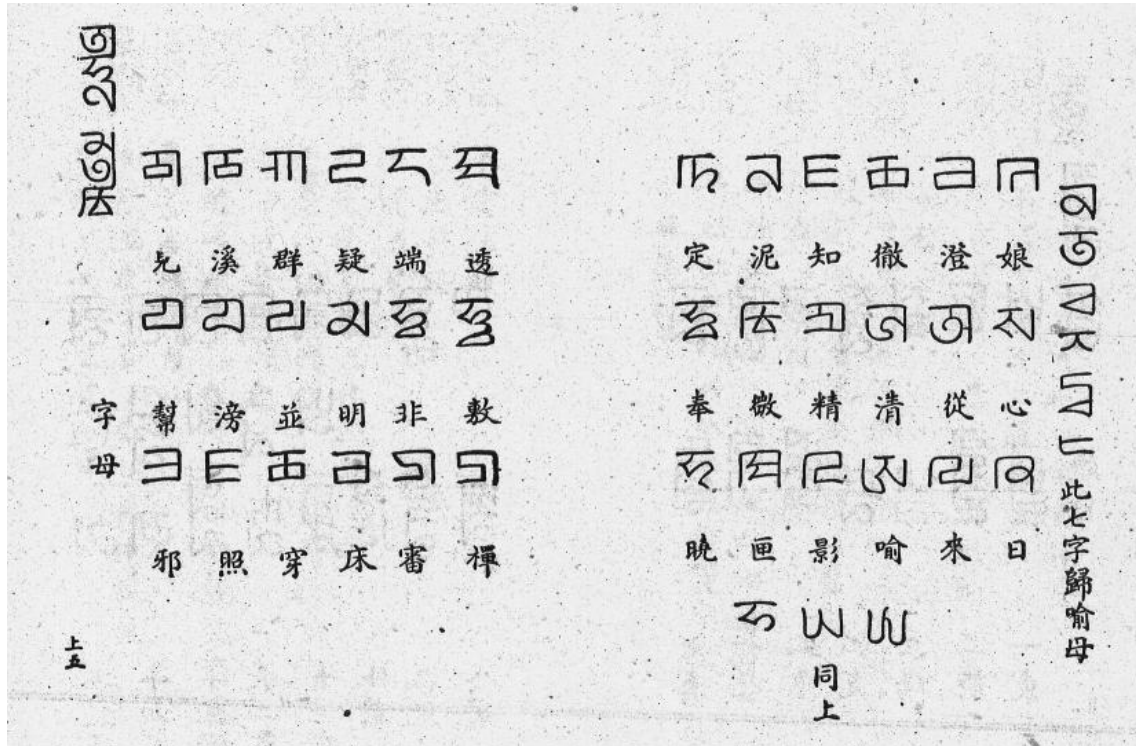


Figure 11. *Menggu Ziyun* 蒙古字韻. Table of initials. Luo Changpei 羅常培 and Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪 (1959). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

A perhaps more straightforward interpretation, and one that seems to be still held by the majority of the scholars nowadays, is to consider the term “old seal” as referring to the Chinese calligraphic style of the seal script (*chǒnjià* 篆字).<sup>210</sup> This seems to be also how the term was interpreted by the scholar-officials of that time.<sup>211</sup> In this case, the problem is to understand what the assertion that the letters of the new script were “modelled on” (倣) this ancient calligraphic style exactly meant. We know from the *HC* text that the principles used to create the graphic forms of the basic letters were based on the depiction of the articulatory activity and/or the representation of the place of articulation in the case of

<sup>210</sup> More precisely, the text might have been referring to the so-called “small seal script” (小篆) that was adopted in China by the state of Qin to unify the script. From the Han dynasty this script was replaced by the clerical script but remained in use as an old style of calligraphy for engraving seals and other inscriptions. For more details on the evolution and features of this script, see chapter 4 of Qiu Xigui (2000).

<sup>211</sup> See II.2.2.

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consonants, while were grounded on symbolic representations in the case of vowels.<sup>212</sup> The parallel with the seal script might thus have been suggested by the prominent pictorial nature of this ancient calligraphic style and used to indicate this iconographic principle at the base of the creation of the new letters. This interpretation seems to be sustained by the following passage in the postface of Chǒng Inji to the *HC*, that also mentions the “old seal” in connection with the new letters:<sup>213</sup>

象形而字倣古篆。因聲而音叶七調。

By depicting shapes (*sanghyǒng* 象形), the letters resemble the old seal (*kojǒn* 古篆), and by being based on the principles of sounds, they correspond to the seven keys (*ch'ilcho* 七調).

In this passage, it is clear that the resemblance with the “old seal” refers to the fact that the new letters were created by “depicting shapes”, i.e. to their iconographic elements. Worthy of notice is also how, in the second part of the sentence, Chǒng Inji draws a parallel between the sounds of the new letters with those of the seven keys of traditional Korean court music. Here it is evident that the sounds of the new letters had no direct origin from music and that this parallel only aimed to draw attention to the phonemic nature of the new script. Similarly, the parallel with the calligraphic style of the seal script hardly referred to an actual derivation of the new letters from Chinese characters written in this style. More reasonably, it was used because of the prominent pictorial nature of this calligraphic style to stress the iconographic elements at the base of the creation of the new script. The underlying aim might have been to present the vernacular script as not wholly separated from Chinese characters.

The assertion that the letters of the vernacular script are divided in initial, medial and terminal sounds, and that, once combined, form “characters” (i.e.,

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<sup>212</sup> See II.3.2.

<sup>213</sup> See II.3.1 for a complete translation and analysis of this text.

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syllabic blocks)<sup>214</sup> is also particularly important. This explanation, although might seem obvious for a modern reader, constituted a significant turning point from the existing Chinese phonological scholarships that had analyzed the syllable only according to a binary division of “character mother” (*zimu* 字母) and rime (*yun* 韻). With this new tripartite division, it was asserted the principle of the separation of the rime in two parts: a “medial sound” (i.e., a vowel) and a “terminal sound” (i.e., a final consonant).<sup>215</sup> This division of the syllable into three parts was the point of departure for all the phonological work on the vernacular script.

After this brief technical explanation, the entry in the Annals concludes by explaining the purpose of the new letters: the transcription of both Chinese characters (*munja* 文字) and the local language of their country (*pon'guk iö* 本國俚語). It then highlights the bound-less possibilities of expression (*chönhwan mugung* 轉換無窮) of this script despite its simplicity (*kanyo* 簡要). Finally, it provides the official name of the script: “the correct sounds for the instruction of the people” (*Hunmin Chöngüm* 訓民正音).

### II.2. Early Projects and Dissent

#### II.2.1. *The “translation” of the Collection of Rimes*

The second entry mentioning the vernacular script in the Annals is dated the second month of the 26<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Sejong (1444), thus a couple of months after the announcement of its completion, and consists of the following order:<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> As already mentioned in the translation of this passage, the character 字 could be used to indicate both the single letters and their combination in syllabic blocks.

<sup>215</sup> It should be remembered, however, that the practice of indicating the final sound of a syllable had been already used in the *hyangch'al* system. See I.2.1 (p.24).

<sup>216</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:19a (26/2/16) [1444].

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○丙申命集賢殿校理崔恒副校理朴彭年副修撰申叔舟李善老李塏敦寧府注簿姜希顏等詣議事廳以諺文譯韻會東宮與晉陽大君璫安平大君塔監掌其事皆稟睿斷賞賜稠重供億優厚矣

In the 16<sup>th</sup> day (*Pyöngsin* 丙申), it was ordered to the Collator<sup>217</sup> (*kyori* 校理, rank 5A) of the Hall of Worthies (*Chipyönjön* 集賢殿) Ch'oe Hang 崔恒, the Assistant Collator (*pugyori* 副校理, rank 5B) Pak P'aengnyön 朴彭年, the Assistant Compilers (*pusuch'an* 副修撰, rank 6B) Sin Sukchu 申叔舟, Yi Söllo 李善老 and Yi Kae 李塏, and the Registrar in the Department of Substantial Repose (*Tonnyöngbu chubu* 敦寧府注簿, rank 6A)<sup>218</sup> Kang Hüian 姜希顏 to gather in the Office for the Discussion of Affairs (*Ŭisach'ong* 議事廳) and translate (*yök* 譯)<sup>219</sup> the *Yunhui* 韻會 (Kr. *Unhoe*; Collection of rimes) with the vernacular script (*önmun* 諺文). The supervision of this project was assigned to the Crown Prince (*Tonggung* 東宮)<sup>220</sup>, Prince Chinyang Yu 晉陽大君璫 and Prince Anp'yöng Yong 安平大君塔. Everyone was required to report to the king. Several prizes were granted and generous provisions provided.

The *Yunhui* (Collection of rimes) mentioned in this entry is the *Gujin yunhui juyao* 古今韻會舉要 (Kr. *Kogüm unhoe köyo*, Abridged Collection of Rimes of the Ancient and Modern; henceforth *Yunhui*), a Yuan Chinese rime dictionary compiled by Xiong Zhong 熊忠 (?-?) and printed in 1297.<sup>221</sup> This was a dictionary that must have possessed particular popularity among the literati of the time since we can find several instances where it is quoted in the Annals of King Sejong. In 1434 it also got a local reprint in the Kyöngsang Province, where it was

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<sup>217</sup> For the translation of the titles of the scholars of the Hall of Worthies, I have followed Ledyard (1988:138).

<sup>218</sup> The Department of Substantial Repose (*Tonnyöngbu* 敦寧府) was one of the offices responsible of the administration of the Royal House.

<sup>219</sup> With the term “translation” (*yök* 譯) the text seems to have intended a transcription with the vernacular script of the pronunciations contained in the dictionary. See further below for a discussion on this.

<sup>220</sup> Literally “Eastern Halls”, the place of residence of the Crown Prince inside the Royal Palace.

<sup>221</sup> This text was an abridged version of the *Gujin yunhui* 古今韻會 compiled by Huang Gong Shao 黃公紹 (?-?) in 1292.

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printed by Sin In-son 辛引孫 (1384-1445), governor of that province, in the prefectures (*pu* 府) of Kyōngju and Miryang. A partial copy (fascicles 27-30) of this Chosŏn edition is preserved in the National Museum of Korea (code 3473) and is registered as National Treasure no. 1158. According to the postface at the end of the volume, two copies preserved in the Classics Mat (*kyōngyōn* 經筵) were sent from the capital to make possible the printing. This suggests that the text must have been used in the lectures at court that the king had with the scholars of the Hall of Worthies.

The task of the translation of this text was assigned to six scholars who were all but one members of the Hall of Worthies (*Chipyōnjōn* 集賢殿): Ch'oe Hang 崔恒 (1409-1474), Pak P'aengnyōn 朴彭年 (1417-1456), Sin Sukchu 申叔舟 (1417-1475), Yi Sōllo 李善老 (d. 1453), Yi Kae 李塏 (1417-1456) and Kang Hūian 姜希顔 (1419-1464).<sup>222</sup> They were all quite young scholars who had entered the institution only in the last few years.<sup>223</sup> The supervision of the project was assigned to three sons of Sejong: the current Crown Prince, who would become King Munjong 文宗 (r.1450-1452), Prince Chinyang 晉陽大君 (1417-1468), who would later become King Sejo 世祖 (r. 1455-1468), and Prince Anp'yōng 安平大君 (1418-1453). The Office for the Discussion of Affairs (*Ŭisach'ōng* 議事廳), where the project was carried out, was probably the administrative office of the Crown Prince.<sup>224</sup>

This entry reveals that the new script was immediately used in connection with Chinese rime dictionaries. Furthermore, the involvement of the princes as supervisors of the project is significant of the importance attached to this task by Sejong. Although nothing of this specific project of the "translation" of the *Yunhui* is heard anymore after this brief reference in the Annals, the work that was conducted on it likely resulted in the compilation of the *Tongguk chōngun*

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<sup>222</sup> Kang Hūian was the only non-member of the group. However, he will later become a member of the institution in 1454.

<sup>223</sup> Ch'oe Hang, who was 35 and had been appointed to the Hall of Worthies in 1434, was the most senior member among them, while all the other members were in their late twenties and had entered the institution only few years before this assignment.

<sup>224</sup> Ledyard (1998:139).

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東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country) in 1447. This was a dictionary that aimed to set a standard Sino-Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters, and that saw the involvement of the same scholars of the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui*. Particularly illustrative of the link between these two projects is the similarity in the system used for the organization of characters in the two dictionaries.<sup>225</sup> This seems to suggest that the interest in the *Yunhui* should be seen as part of a larger project aimed at the establishment of the correct Sino-Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters. Research on existing Chinese rime dictionaries was probably considered necessary to assess how the actual Sino-Korean pronunciations differed from those contained in them. As pointed out by Ledyard (1998:372), the *Yunhui* was particularly convenient for this type of research due to its systematic arrangement of characters in comparison to other rime dictionaries.

We should also consider that the term “translation” (*yŏk* 譯) used in connection to this project hardly referred to an actual translation of the text. This term was also used to refer to the transcription of the pronunciations of Chinese characters with the vernacular script. An example of this usage can be found in the title of the *Hongmu chŏngun yŏkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions), where the expression *yŏkhun* 譯訓 is used to refer to the transcription with the vernacular script of the Chinese pronunciation of characters.<sup>226</sup> The character 譯 is also described as follows in a note of the preface of the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Articles on the Record of Sakyamuni):<sup>227</sup>

譯역은 翻편 譯역이니 ㄴ미나랏그를 제나랏글로 고터 쓸 씨라

YEK\_un PHEN-YEK\_ini no.m\_oy nalas ku.lul cey nalas kul\_lwo kwothye ssul ssi\_la

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<sup>225</sup> Kang Sin-hang (2003:68-69).

<sup>226</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:199).

<sup>227</sup> *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* sŏ:6a. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo*. See III.2 for a discussion on this text. The romanization of the original Middle Korean follows the Yale system.



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譯 (YEK) is “translating” (PHEN-YEK 翻譯), thus writing by changing the script of another country in the script of one’s own country.

This notation is illustrative of the conception of “translation” at that time, that did not necessarily indicate a translation from one language into another but could also denote the transcription with the vernacular script of these languages. We can thus conclude that the “translation” of the *Yunhui* was aimed to the transcription with the vernacular script of its pronunciations and that the study made on it would be instrumental in the compilation of the *Tongguk chǒngun*.<sup>228</sup>

### II.2.2. *The protest memorial*

Only a few days after the start of the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui* a memorial (*sangsomun* 上疏文) that criticized the new vernacular script was submitted to the king by a group of members of the Hall of Worthies. This group was led by the Assistant Academician (*pujehak* 副提學, 3A) Ch’oe Malli 崔萬理 (?-1445) and composed by the following other members: the Associate Academician (*chikchehak* 直提學, 3B) Sin Sǒkcho 辛碩祖 (1407-1459), the Associate Collegian (*chikchǒn* 直殿, 4A) Kim Mun 金汶 (?-1448), the Researcher (*ǔnggyo* 應教, 4B) Chǒng Ch’angson 鄭昌孫 (1402-1487), the Assistant Collator (*pugyori* 副校理, 5B) Ha Wiji 河緯之 (14124-1456), the Compiler (*pusuch’an* 副修撰, 6A) Song Ch’ǒgǒm 宋處儉 (?-?), and the Writer (*chǒjangnang* 著作郎, 8A) Cho Kǔn 趙瑾 (1417-1475).<sup>229</sup> This memorial is recorded in its entirety in the Annals and structured into six points, each with a precise topic and objective. This division suggests that the memorial aimed to methodically counter a series of arguments that had been previously made about the new script, but that cannot be found recorded in other parts of the Annals.<sup>230</sup> The text of this memorial is significant because it reveals

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<sup>228</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the *Tongguk chǒngun*, see III.3.

<sup>229</sup> For the translation of the titles of the scholars of the Hall of Worthies, I have followed Ledyard (1988:155).

<sup>230</sup> Some of these arguments in favor of the new script can be seen reflected in the postface of Chǒng Inji 鄭麟趾 to the *Hunmin chǒngǔm*. See II.3.1.

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the existence of a faction inside the Hall of Worthies that was contrary to the new vernacular script and that perhaps reflected a more spread sentiment in large part of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, the arguments countering the invention and employment of the vernacular script are also revealing of the conception of writing in that period, in particular regarding its strong identification with Chinese characters and its ideological connection with the position of the Chosŏn kingdom in the Sino-centered world. It also shows what the perception of the scripts of neighbouring populations and the vernacular writing practices through Chinese characters was. Finally, it provides a series of information on the invention of the vernacular script and the projects related to it that are not recorded in other parts of the Annals. Before discussing these aspects, it is presented here the original text and the translation of the six points of this memorial and the debate that followed between the king and its submitters.<sup>231</sup>

The first point raised in the memorial criticizes the absence of any connection between the new vernacular script and Chinese characters, calling attention to the possible impact that the adoption of this new script might have in the relations with Ming China:<sup>232</sup>

一我朝自 祖宗以來至誠事大一遵華制今當同文同軌之時創作諺文有駭觀聽儻曰諺文皆本古字非新字也則字形雖倣古之篆文用音合字盡反於古實無所據若流中國或有非議之者豈不有愧於事大慕華

I. Since the time of the Royal Ancestors<sup>233</sup> we have served with sincerity the great (i.e., China) and constantly followed Chinese institutions.<sup>234</sup> Now, at a time when

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<sup>231</sup> In the translation and notation of the text I have greatly relied on the works of Ledyard (1998) and Kang Sin-hang (2003). For the quotes of classic Chinese texts, I referred to the original texts retrieved at the Chinese Text Project website (<https://ctext.org>) and the English translations by James Legge.

<sup>232</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20a (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>233</sup> The expression “since the time of the royal ancestors” (自祖宗以來) refers to the founding of the Yi dynasty. In the original text a blank space was left before the term “royal ancestors” (*chojong* 祖宗) as a sign of respect.

<sup>234</sup> Since its foundation the new Yi dynasty had based its own legitimacy on the relations with Ming China under the concept of *sadae* 事大 (serving the great), that secured their position in the Sino-centric world order, and strived to follow Chinese institutions.

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we share the same script and axle length (i.e., the same civilization),<sup>235</sup> we see and hear with astonishment that the vernacular script (*ŏnmun* 諺文) has been created. It might be said that the vernacular script is completely based on the ancient characters (*koja* 古字)<sup>236</sup> and is not a new script. But even if the shape of the characters follows that of the old seal script (*kojijŏnmun* 古之篆文), combining them according to their sounds is utterly contrary to the tradition and has, in truth, no ground.<sup>237</sup> If this will be known in China and criticized, how will it not be a source of embarrassment for our proclaim of serving the great and following Chinese civilization?

The second point asserts how due to the newly invented vernacular script Chosŏn risked becoming identified as culturally closer to the neighbouring “barbaric” populations and separated from Chinese civilization.<sup>238</sup>

一自古九州之內風土雖異未有因方言而別爲文字者唯蒙古西夏女眞日本西蕃之類各有其字是皆夷狄事耳無足道者傳曰用夏變夷未聞變於夷者也歷代中國皆以我國有箕子遺風文物禮樂比擬中華今別作諺文捨中國而自同於夷狄是所謂棄蘇合之香而取螻螂之丸也, 豈非文明之大累哉

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<sup>235</sup> The expression used in the original text is *tongmun tongkwe* 同文同軌 and derives from the following passage in the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 (Ch. *Zhongyong*; Kr. *Chungyong*), one of the *Four Books*: [...] 非天子不議禮不制度不考文今天下車同軌書同文行同倫 [...] “To no one but the son of Heaven does it belong to discuss the subject of ceremonial usages; to fix the measures, and to determine (the names of) the written characters. Now, throughout the whole kingdom, carriages have all wheels of the same breadth of rim; all writing is with the same characters; and for conduct there are the same rules.)” Translation by James Legge 1885:324. This sentence originally indicated the consolidation of the kingdom under one ruler but is used in the memorial to stress the sharing of the same civilization between China and the Chosŏn kingdom.

<sup>236</sup> With “ancient characters” (*koja* 古字) the memorial seems to refer to the Chinese characters written in the old seal calligraphic style. The connection between these characters and the new vernacular letters was also stated in the entry presenting their creation discussed in II.1. It is also repeated in the postface of Chŏng Inji to the *HC* (see II.3.1).

<sup>237</sup> This sentence, by mentioning how the new script consisted of characters having a phonemic value and combining according to it, suggests that the authors of the memorial, despite their opposition, had at least a basic knowledge of how it linguistically worked.

<sup>238</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄 (Annals of King Sejong), 103:20a (26/2/20) [1444].

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II. Since antiquity, although the Nine Regions [of China]<sup>239</sup> have different climate and terrain (*p'ungt'o* 風土; literally, “wind and soil”), this has not caused the creation of separate scripts according to the local languages.<sup>240</sup> Although populations as the Mongols (*monggo* 蒙古), the Tanguts (*sōha* 西夏), the Jurchen (*yōjin* 女真), the Japanese (*ilbon* 日本) and the Tibetans (*sōbōn* 西蕃) have each a different script, these are all matters of barbarians (*ijōk* 夷狄), there is no worth in mentioning them.<sup>241</sup> It has been transmitted [through the Classics] that Chinese ways were used to change barbarians but never before has been heard of any being changed by barbarians.<sup>242</sup> China has always considered our country as holding to the customs of Kija<sup>243</sup> and modelling all our literary and material culture, as well as rituals and music, on theirs. Creating now a separate vernacular script means to abandon China and identify ourselves with the barbarians. This is like throwing away storax resin<sup>244</sup> for pills made of dung beetles. How will this not provoke considerable damage to our civilization?

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<sup>239</sup> The expression *Kuju* 九州 (Ch. *Jiuzhou*) is referring to the nine states to which China was traditionally divided in the past and is used here to indicate the Chinese territory.

<sup>240</sup> The link between the natural features of a region and its language was drawn from the preface to the *Huangji jingshi shu* 皇極經世書 (Kr. *Hwanggyŏk kyōngsesŏ*, “Book of the Supreme Ultimate Ordering of the World”), a philosophical treatise of the Song philosopher Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077). It is also mentioned by Chōng Inji in its postface to the *HC* (see II.3.1) and seems thus to have been a central argument in justifying the invention of a vernacular script.

<sup>241</sup> As seen in I.3, Chosŏn kept a specific office with the task of studying the languages and scripts of these neighbouring populations, that were thus well known at the time of the invention of the vernacular script. Their mention in the memorial suggests how these scripts must have received some attention in the process of inventing the new vernacular script.

<sup>242</sup> This is a quote from a passage in chapter 4 of the “Teng Wen Gong I 滕文公上” in the *Mengzi* (The Works of Mencius): 吾聞用夏變夷者未聞變於夷者也 “I have heard of men using the ways of our great land to change barbarians, but I have not yet heard of any being changed by barbarians.” Translation by James Legge (1875:210).

<sup>243</sup> Kija 箕子 was considered the first king who brought Chinese civilization in the Korean peninsula. It is a legendary figure believed to have been a nobleman of Shang 商 dynasty in China. Imprisoned by the last tyrannical ruler of Shang, when the latter was finally deposed by king Wu (the founder of the Chou 周 dynasty) he fled East and arrived in the Korean peninsula, where he was invested by king Wu as the feudal lord of (Old) Chosŏn. It was thus a key figure linking Chinese civilization to the Korean peninsula.

<sup>244</sup> The storax was a resin obtained from the sap of the *Liquidambar orientalis* (*sohaphyang* 蘇合香), a deciduous tree, and was used for medical purposes.

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The third point addresses the issue of the use of the new script as a substitute for the *idu* system. This is also the lengthiest passage of the memorial, suggesting how the usage of the new vernacular script in place of borrowed Chinese characters systems must have been an essential objective of the king and his assistants:<sup>245</sup>

一新羅薛聰吏讀雖爲鄙俚然皆借中國通行之字施於語助與文字元不相離故雖至胥吏僕隸之徒必欲習之先讀數書粗知文字然後乃用吏讀用吏讀者須憑文字乃能達意故因吏讀而知文字者頗多亦興學之一助也若我國元不知文字如結繩之世則姑借諺文以資一時之用猶可而執正義者必曰與其行諺文以姑息不若寧遲緩而習中國通行之文字以爲久長之計也而況吏讀行之數千年而簿書期會等事無有防(礙) [礙] 者何用改舊行無弊之文別創鄙諺無益之字乎

III. The *idu* system created by Söl Ch'ong in the Silla period may be rough and rustic but since it makes exclusive use of characters borrowed from China for the functional elements of the language (*ōjo* 語助)<sup>246</sup> is, in principle, not separated from them. Even if low-level officials and the masses have the strong desire to learn *idu*, they can use it only after reading several books [in *hanmun*] and acquiring a basic knowledge of the [Chinese] characters. People who employ *idu* have to know the characters to be able to understand its meaning. For this reason, those who learn characters by using *idu* are many, and this is beneficial for the development of learning. If our country had never known characters and we were in an era of using knotted strings,<sup>247</sup> then it might be right to adopt the vernacular script and use it

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<sup>245</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20a-20b (26/2/20) [1444]. Due to the length of this particular passage I have divided it in paragraphs and interposed their translations for a better reading and comparison with the original text.

<sup>246</sup> *Idu* uses Chinese characters for their sound or semantical value to represent the functional element of the Korean language, as particles, suffixes and adverbs. More details on how this system worked and examples of its usage are provided in the previous chapter (see I.2.2).

<sup>247</sup> The memorial is referring to the system of knotted cords mentioned in the Chinese tradition as predating the writing with characters. In the *Xi Ci II* 繫辭下 (Section II of the Great Appendix) of the *Book of Changes* 易經 is explained as follows: 上古結繩而治後世聖人易之以書契 “in the highest antiquity, government was carried on successfully by the use of knotted cords (to preserve the memory of things). In subsequent ages the sages substituted for these written characters and bonds.” Translation by James Legge (1882:385).

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for a certain period. But [even in that case] people in their right mind would surely think that, instead of using the vernacular script for a certain period, might be better to invest their time in the long-term project of gradually learning the Chinese characters. Moreover, *idu* has been used for a thousand years to write accounts, contracts and other documents without any problem. Why changing a writing practice that has been in use for such a long time and with no disadvantage with characters that are vulgar and not beneficial?

若行諺文則爲吏者專習諺文不顧學問文字吏員岐而爲二苟爲吏者以諺文而宦達則後進皆見其如此也以爲二十七字諺文足以立身於世何須苦心勞思窮性理之學哉如此則數十年之後知文字者必少雖能以諺文而施於吏事不知聖賢之文字則不學墻面昧於事理之是非徒工於諺文將何用哉我國家積累右文之化恐漸至掃地矣

If the vernacular script acquires common usage, then those who aspire to become clerks will only learn this script and not care of learning [the Classics]. As a consequence, they will become separated from Chinese characters. If the clerks gain positions by using the vernacular script, then in the future everyone will see this and think that to affirm oneself in the world will be enough to know the 27 characters of the vernacular script.<sup>248</sup> Why then make strenuous efforts and concern oneself with Confucian learning? The result will be that in a decade or so those who know Chinese characters will surely decrease. Even if it is possible to perform clerks' work by using the vernacular script, if they do not know the script of the Sages ignorance will hinder them (lit. will have them facing a wall) in discerning right and wrong in the pattern of things. What usefulness will have then the mere usage of the vernacular script? We are afraid that our civilization, with its learning and accumulated merits, will be little by little swept away as dust.

前此吏讀雖不外於文字有識者尙且鄙之思欲以吏文易之而況諺文與文字暫不干涉專用委巷俚語者乎借使諺文自前朝有之以今日文明之治變魯至道之意尙肯因循而襲之

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<sup>248</sup> The number of 27 characters indicated here is different from that of 28 indicated in the entry that reported the completion of the alphabet only a couple of months earlier (see II.1) and that was also the final number of the characters in the *HC* text (see II.3.1). It is thus possible that this number of 27 was a mistake made by the compilers of the memorials.

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乎必有更張之議者此灼然可知之理也厭舊喜新古今通患今此諺文不過新奇一藝耳於學有損於治無益反覆籌之未見其可也

[Furthermore] the *idu* system used thus far, although not extraneous to Chinese characters, is still held in low esteem by learned men who wish to change it with *imun* (吏文).<sup>249</sup> How much more the vernacular script, that has no connection with Chinese characters and will be exclusively used for the vulgar language of the streets? Even if the vernacular script had been in use from the previous dynasties, now that we have an enlightened policy would we still consider it right and pursue it like if we were the state of Lu reforming to attain the ways [of the ancient kings]?<sup>250</sup> There would be people questioning the necessity to maintain such a practice and arguing that it should be absolutely corrected. This is a perfectly understandable line of reasoning. Despising the old and favouring the new is a recurring vice of both ancient and present times. This vernacular script is nothing more than a new curious technique that is both harmful to learning and not beneficial for the government. Even pondering it from all possible angles, we, your humble servants, do not see its utility.

The fourth part deals with the specific aim of using the vernacular script in criminal procedures:<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> *Imun* 吏文 was the written language used by Ming China for administrative use and in the diplomatic exchanges. In the previous chapter we have seen how its knowledge was a prerequisite to carry out diplomatic relations with Ming China and how its lacking had caused serious diplomatic issues during the early years of the new Yi dynasty. See I.3.1.

<sup>250</sup> Lu 魯 was a vassal state during the Zhou Dynasty (1066-221 BC). This was probably a reference to the following passage of the sixth book (Yong Ye 雍也) of the Analects 論語: 子曰齊一變至於魯魯一變至於道 “The Master said: ‘Qi, by one change, would come to the State of Lu. Lu, by one change, would come to a State where true principles predominated.’” Translation by James Legge (1870:35-36). In this passage of the Analects Confucius was expecting the state of Lu, supposedly in decline, to reform and become a state that carried out the ways of the ancient kings. The memorial seems to have used this passage to assert that the Chosŏn kingdom had already attained this state through an enlightened (Ming oriented) policy and that thus any further reform was not necessary and could only be negative. Both Ledyard (1998) and Kang Sin-hang (2003), however, do not interpret this passage as a quote from the Analects. Ledyard (1998:143), for example, translates it as “given the order of our present day civilization, and out most proper desire to change from crudity, would we still be willing to continue on and maintain it in use?”

<sup>251</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20b (26/2/20) [1444].

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一若曰如刑殺獄辭以吏讀文字書之則不知文理之愚民一字之差容或致冤今以諺文直書其言讀使聽之則雖至愚之人悉皆易曉而無抱屈者然自古中國言與文同獄訟之間冤枉甚多借以我國言之獄囚之解吏讀者親讀招辭知其誣而不勝種楚多有枉服者是非不知招辭之文意而被冤也明矣若然則雖用諺文何異於此是知刑獄之平不平在於獄吏之如何而不在於言與文之同不同也欲以諺文而平獄辭臣等未見其可也

IV. It might be said that, when a sentence is executed and a criminal punished, if *idu* is used as a writing system ignorant people unable to understand it might receive an undeserved treatment for a single mistake of a character, but that now, if their words are written with the vernacular script, these can be read to them. Thus, even extremely ignorant people can easily understand everything and not receive unfair treatment. But in China, since antiquity, despite the correspondence between writing and speech, there have been a great many lamentable instances in the legal proceedings of criminal cases. In the case of our country, some prisoners know *idu* and directly read their depositions. But, even if they discover incongruences in them, they cannot avoid the flogging, and many end up being undeservedly punished. It is thus clear that it is not the inability to understand their statements to cause undeserved punishments! Then, even if we use the vernacular script, what change there will be? The fair or unfair punishment of criminals depends upon the quality of the official in charge of the prison, not upon the correspondence between writing and speech. The intention to use the vernacular script to punish criminals justly does not seem reasonable to us.

The fifth point criticizes the hasty modalities through which the new script was being promulgated:<sup>252</sup>

一凡立事功不貴近速國家比來措置皆務速成恐非爲治之體儻曰諺文不得已而爲之此變易風俗之大者當謀及宰相下至百僚國人皆曰可猶先甲先庚更加三思質諸帝王而不悖考諸中國而無愧百世以俟聖人而不惑然後乃可行也今不博採群議驟令吏輩十餘人訓習又輕改古人已成之韻書附會無稽之諺文聚工匠數十人刻之劇欲廣布其於天下後世公議何如且今清州椒水之幸特慮年歉扈從諸事務從簡約比之前日十減八九至於啓

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<sup>252</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20b-21a (26/2/20) [1444].



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達公務亦委政府若夫諺文非國家緩急不得已及期之事何獨於行在而汲汲爲之以煩聖躬調變之時乎臣等尤未見其可也

V. Generally, in accomplishing a meritorious deed, there is no value in doing it hastily in a short time. [Yet,] in this country, efforts have been made to complete all the recent measures quickly and we are afraid that this might be contrary to the proper forms of government. It might be said that the creation of the vernacular script is something unavoidable, yet it dramatically alters our customs and thus should be adequately discussed with your ministers (*chaesang* 宰相) down to all other officials (*paengnyo* 百僚). Nevertheless, even if everyone in the country agrees with that, it should still be carefully considered and announced in advance,<sup>253</sup> and then add a triple thought about it. It would not be improper to consult the records of previous emperors, and there would be no shame even in examining this matter with China. You should be prepared to wait for the rise of a sage a hundred ages hence, and have no misgivings,<sup>254</sup> before passing to action. But now you do not

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<sup>253</sup> The sentence 先甲先庚 comes from two passages in the *Book of Changes* 易經. The first part (先甲) comes from the following explanation of the hexagram *Gu* 蠱: 蠱元亨利涉大川先甲三日後甲三日 “*Gu* indicates great progress and success (to him who deals properly with the condition represented by it). There will be advantage in (efforts like that of) crossing the great stream. (He should weigh well, however, the events of) three days before the turning point, and those (to be done) three days after it.” Translation by James Legge (1882:95). The second part (先庚) is from the hexagram *Xun* 巽: 九五貞吉悔亡无不利无初有終先庚三日後庚三日吉 “The fifth NINE undivided, shows that with firm correctness there will be good fortune (to its subject). All occasion for repentance will disappear, and all his movements will be advantageous. There may have been no (good) beginning, but there will be a (good) end. Three days before making any changes, (let him give notice of them); and three days after, (let him reconsider them). There will (thus) be good fortune.” Translation by James Legge (1882:190-91).

<sup>254</sup> This passage seems to quote the following passage of the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸: [...] 故君子之道本諸身徵諸庶民考諸三王而不繆建諸天地而不悖質諸鬼神而無疑百世以俟聖人而不惑質諸鬼神而無疑知天也百世以俟聖人而不惑知人也 [...] “Therefore the course of the superior man is rooted in his own character and conduct, and attested by the multitudes of people. He examines (his institutions) by comparison with those of the founders of the three dynasties, and finds them without mistake. He sets them up before heaven and earth, and there is nothing in them contrary to (their mode of operation). He presents himself with them before Spiritual Beings, without any doubt about them arising. He is prepared to wait for the rise of a sage a hundred ages hence, and has no misgivings. That he can present himself with them before Spiritual Beings, without any doubts about them arising, shows that he knows Heaven; that he is prepared to wait for the rise of a sage a hundred ages hence, without any misgivings, shows that he knows men.” Translation by James Legge (1885:325). Ledyard (1998:145) does not consider this quote and translates this passage as “people have not been deluded in waiting a hundred generations for a sage!”.

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listen to different opinions. You suddenly instruct [in the vernacular script] a dozen of low-level officials (*ibae* 吏輩), hastily edit the rime dictionaries (*unsŏ* 韻書) compiled by the ancients, inserting in them the baseless vernacular script, gather a dozen of workers to carve it,<sup>255</sup> and suddenly desire to promulgate it everywhere. What will the world and future generations think about this?

Furthermore, for your [upcoming] trip to the natural springs in Chŏngju,<sup>256</sup> you are worried about the particularly bad harvest and try to cut as possible everything concerning your dignitaries. In comparison to the previous times, there was a reduction of 80-90%. You have even delegated official affairs. The vernacular script is not an urgent matter for the state that should be solved within a fixed date. How, alone in your temporary residence, are you going to be absorbed in this and distress yourself at a time when you should take care of your health? We, your humble servants, do not see it as appropriate.

The final point criticizes the vernacular script for being a distraction from other more important matters in the instruction of the Crown Prince.<sup>257</sup>

一先儒云凡百玩好皆奪志至於書札於儒者事最近然一向好着亦自喪志今東宮雖德性成就猶當潛心聖學益求其未至也諺文縱曰有益特文士六藝之一耳況萬萬無一利於治道而乃研精費思竟日移時實有損於時敏之學也

VI. According to ancient scholars, many pleasant things deprive men of their will entirely. Writing letters (*sŏch'al* 書札) is one of the things to which scholars are most attached to, but if they let themselves to be exclusively absorbed by it, they end up losing their will. Now, the Crown Prince, despite having an utterly cultivated virtue, is still supposed to properly apply his mind in the learning of the sages and improving what he is still lacking. The vernacular script, even if it might be said to

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<sup>255</sup> This might be a reference to the carving of wooden movable types.

<sup>256</sup> In the memorial these natural springs are called *ch'osu* 椒水, literally “pepper water”, a name that derived from the taste of the water, similar to black pepper. It was considered beneficial to cure diseases and when Sejong heard about that (around one month before the date of the present memorial) decided to visit it to cure his eye disease [SS, 103:12b (26/1/27)]. The king left the palace to go to these springs one week after the memorial [SS, 103:25a (26/2/28)].

<sup>257</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21a (26/2/20) [1444].

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be of some benefit, is still only one of the six arts (*yugye* 六藝) of a literary gentleman<sup>258</sup> and has not a single benefit for one's cultivation. Devoting himself and spending all time on it is harmful to learning that requires constant earnestness.

The Annals report that, after reading this memorial, the king summoned its submitters and made the following remarks:<sup>259</sup>

汝等云用音合字盡反於古薛聰吏讀亦非異音乎且吏讀制作之本意無乃爲其便民乎如其便民也則今之諺文亦不爲便民乎汝等以薛聰爲是而非其君上之事何哉且汝知韻書乎四聲七音字母有幾乎若非予正其韻書則伊誰正之乎且疏云新奇一藝予老來難以消日以書籍爲友耳豈厭舊好新而爲之且非田獵放鷹之例也汝等之言頗有過越且予年老國家庶務世子專掌雖細事固當參決況諺文乎若使世子常在東宮則宦官任事乎汝等以侍從之臣灼知予意而有是言可乎

You said that the use of sounds to create characters is utterly contrary to tradition, but is not the *idu* of Söl Ch'ong also different from it in [the use of] sound?<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, was not the fundamental purpose of the creation of *idu* to make more convenient the life of people? If it was so, then has not the vernacular script the very same purpose? If you say that what Söl Ch'ong created is right, then how can you say that what your king created is not?

Furthermore, are you familiar with the rime dictionaries (*unsö* 韻書)? Do you know the four tones (*sasöng* 四聲) and the seven places of articulation of sounds (*ch'irüm* 七音)<sup>261</sup>? If I do not rectify the rime dictionaries, who will do that?

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<sup>258</sup> The six arts (*yugye* 六藝) were rites (*ye* 禮), music (*ak* 樂), archery (*sa* 射), horsemanship (*ö* 御), calligraphy (*sö* 書) and numbers (*su* 數). These are listed in the section of the *Rites of Zhou* 周禮 (Ch. *Zhōu lǐ*; Kr. *Churye*) titled "Earthly Officials: Minister of Education" (*Diguan situ* 地官司徒). The *Rites of Zhou* was a work on the organization of bureaucracy often quoted in Chosŏn Korea.

<sup>259</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21a-21b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>260</sup> This remark that *idu* differed from tradition in the use of sounds seems to be referring to the fact that some characters could be read with their corresponding vernacular word, thus not necessarily using their pronunciation.

<sup>261</sup> The seven sounds (*ch'irüm* 七音) refer to the classification of sounds according to their place of articulation: molar sound (*aüm* 牙音), lingual sound (*sörüm* 舌音), labial sound (*sunüm* 唇

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In your memorial, you also defined [the vernacular script] “a new curious technique”.<sup>262</sup> However, as I get old, it is difficult for me to pass the time and I have made companions of books, how could I do that by “despising the old and favouring the new”? Furthermore, this is not a case of “going hawking”; your words went too far!<sup>263</sup>

Besides, since I am getting old the general affairs of the state have been taken over by the Crown Prince. Even in case of minor matters, he should be involved and take part in the decisions, how much more in the case of the vernacular script! If I have him always staying in his residence,<sup>264</sup> am I supposed to put the eunuchs in charge of affairs?

You are loyal subjects who should clearly understand my intentions, how can you say something like this?

After these remarks made by the king, Ch’oe Malli and his group gave the following reply:<sup>265</sup>

萬理等對曰薛聰吏讀雖曰異音然依音依釋語助文字元不相離今此諺文合諸字而竝書變其音釋而非字形也且新奇一藝云者特因文勢而爲此辭耳非有意而然也東宮於公事則雖細事不可不參決若於不急之事何竟日致慮乎

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音), incisor sound (齒音 *ch’iŭm*), laryngeal sound (*huŭm* 喉音), semi-lingual sound (*pansŏrŭm*) 半舌音), and semi-dental sound *panch’iŭm* (半齒音). This classification was adopted from the Chinese phonological theory and employed as a phonological background in the invention of the consonants of the vernacular script.

<sup>262</sup> Sejong is referring to the passage at the end of the third point of the memorial.

<sup>263</sup> This sentence “to go hawking” (田獵放鷹) is not contained in the memorial. As pointed out by Ledyard (1998:159), it is possible that this passage was expunged from it. Indeed, judging by the reaction of the king, it might have been considered too offensive and thus cut when the Annals were compiled. We can suppose that this expression might have been used in the memorial to depict the creation of the vernacular script as something not important, almost as a pastime and a distraction from what should have been the ruler’s true concerns.

<sup>264</sup> Literally “Eastern Halls” (*Tonggung* 東宮), the place of residence of the Crown Prince inside the Royal Palace.

<sup>265</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21b (26/2/20) [1444].

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Although you might say that the *idu* of Söl Ch'ong is different in [its use of] sound,<sup>266</sup> the characters used for the functional elements of the language (*ōjo* 語助) still make use of the sounds and semantic values of Chinese characters and, thus, are not in principle separated from them. This vernacular script [on the other hand] combine different letters and write them one after the other, changing its sounds and semantic values. Moreover, it has not the form of Chinese characters.

As for the expression “a new curious technique”, it was only a literary expedient, it had no other meaning.

The Crown Prince, when dealing with public affairs, should be involved and take part in decisions, even in minor matters. However, if it is not something urgent, why should have his mind on it all the time?

Finally, the Annals report the remarks that the king specifically addressed to two submitters of the memorial. The first is directed to Kim Mun and concerns his complete about-face on the vernacular script. The second is addressed to Chŏng Ch'angson and has to do with his criticism about the project to compile with the vernacular script the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations):<sup>267</sup>

上曰前此金汶啓曰制作諺文未爲不可今反以爲不可又鄭昌孫曰頒布三綱行實之後未見有忠臣孝子烈女輩出人之行不行只在人之資質如何耳何必以諺文譯之而後人皆效之此等之言豈儒者識理之言乎甚無用之俗儒也

His Majesty said: “Previously Kim Mun had said that the creation of the vernacular script was something that had to be done. But now, contrary to that, he says that should not be done. Furthermore, Chŏng Ch'angson said that after the distribution of the *Samgang haengsil* he had not seen the emerging of loyal subjects (*ch'ungsin* 忠臣), filial sons (*hyoja* 孝子), and devoted women (*yōllyō* 烈女),<sup>268</sup> and that the

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<sup>266</sup> Literally “different in sound” (異音). Here Ch'oe Malli seems to be answering to the remark on *idu* made by the king at the beginning of his reply. As before, I interpret it as referring to the fact that *idu* used also Korean vernacular readings of Chinese characters.

<sup>267</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>268</sup> These were also the three parts through which the text was divided. For the compilation and structure of this text, see I.1.

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[moral] behaviour of the people is solely based on their inherent qualities, questioning that after translating it with the vernacular script everyone would have followed [its examples]. These words of yours, how can be the words of a Confucian scholar (*yuja* 儒者) who knows the “nature of principle” (*li* 理)?<sup>269</sup> They indeed are words of a useless rustic scholar.”

The Annals report then the following note:<sup>270</sup>

前此 上教昌孫曰予若以諺文譯三綱行實頒諸民間則愚夫愚婦皆得易曉忠臣孝子烈女必輩出矣昌孫乃以此啓達故今有是教

Before of this, His Majesty had said to Chǒng Ch’angson: “If I translate with the vernacular script the *Samgang haengsil* and distribute it among people, then ignorant husbands and wives, everyone will be able to understand it easily, and loyal subjects, filial sons and devoted women will surely emerge!” Chǒng Ch’angson addressed than the king as above, and that is the reason for the following instruction.

This instruction was to send all the submitters to the Office for the Deliberation of Forbidden Affairs (*Ŭigŭmbu* 義禁府) so that their actions could be investigated. The Annals reveal that they were all detained one day before being freed. Only Chǒng Ch’angson was dismissed from office, while Kim Mun was individually interrogated and investigated for his about-face. A subsequent entry reveals that he was found guilty of declaring the false in a memorial addressed to the king and was thus condemned to 100 blows of heavy flogging (*chang* 杖) and three years of forced labour (*to* 徒).<sup>271</sup> But this punishment was amply reduced since

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<sup>269</sup> The concept of *li* 理 was at the base of the Neo-Confucian thinking. A fundamental ideal inherent in this concept was that all men could achieve moral virtue through learning. This meant that everyone could be educated to develop their moral nature. The *Samgang haengsil-to* had precisely this objective. The assertion of Chǒng Ch’angson that the moral behavior of the people was solely based on their inherent qualities went against this fundamental belief and thus caused the stark reprimand of the king.

<sup>270</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>271</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:22a (26/2/21) [1444].

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flogging was converted in a fine (*sok* 贖).<sup>272</sup> Both Chǒng Ch'angson and Kim Mun ended to be reinstated in their position a few months later.<sup>273</sup>

This memorial and the subsequent discussion that the king had with its submitters can be discussed from several perspectives, but we will focus here on two aspects that are strictly related to the purpose of the present research: (1) the conception of writing that arises from this document; (2) and the new information that this document provides on the invention of the vernacular script and its intended usages.

As for the first aspect concerning the conception of writing, it emerges an almost exclusive identification between “writing” and Chinese characters. This identification was the primary line of reasoning sustaining the first three points of the memorial, where the new vernacular script is criticized by pointing out the absence of any connection with Chinese characters. The reason why, for the compilers of the memorial, the innovative linguistic feature of the new script as characters that combined according to their sounds was unacceptable was that it separated it from the principles of Chinese characters. Furthermore, a general connection with Chinese characters written in the old seal calligraphic style was readily rejected. However, the very fact that this resemblance was presented as a key feature of the new script is revealing of how this conception of writing was deeply rooted in the mentality of the time and that an attempt was indeed made to present the new vernacular script and Chinese characters as connected.

The reason why Chinese characters were considered the only script possible resided in their *ideological connotation* as a central element linking Chosŏn with Chinese civilization and its institutions. This connection, exemplified by the expression “share the same script and axle length” (*tongmun tonggwe* 同文同軌), was crucial for the maintenance of the relations with Ming China, making possible for Chosŏn to benefit from its position in the Sino centric world order with a status that separated Korea from other neighbouring countries and

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 104:35a (26/6/21) [1444].

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populations. As seen in I.3, the writings of these other countries and populations were amply known by the Chosŏn scholars of the time but, as asserted in the second point of the memorial, these were “matters of barbarians” (*ijŏksa* 夷狄事), unworthy of any serious consideration. The adoption of a vernacular script meant “to abandon China and identify with the barbarians”, breaking an essential link with Chinese civilization and leaving Chosŏn in a precarious position. From here, the worry about the possible consequences that news of the invention of a new vernacular script reaching China might have on their relations.<sup>274</sup>

Another reason that made this link with Chinese characters crucial was that it sustained the internal ideological order of the state that grounded on Neo-Confucianism and its related literature. In the view of the compilers of the memorial, the creation of a vernacular script risked disrupting Chosŏn civilization from the inside. Significant is, in the third point, the reference to clerks who, by employing the vernacular script in place of *idu*, risked in a short time to not use Chinese characters anymore. What was feared is that having a large sector of the bureaucracy, although limited to its lower strata, severed from this knowledge might have caused a severe imbalance in the society as a whole and undermine its Confucian bases.

It is from the same perspective of an ideological identification between writing and Chinese characters that we should also understand the defence of the *idu* system by the compilers of the memorial. From their point of view, this system, despite being “rough and vulgar”, was still considered acceptable since

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<sup>274</sup> This was not an exaggerated concern since it seems that efforts were indeed made to not make known the new script to Chinese envoys visiting Korea during the following years. Ledyard (1998:160) notes how Chinese envoys who visited Korea after the promulgation of the vernacular script did not report anything about it in their diaries. Particular significant seems to be the case of Ni Qian 倪謙 (1415-1479), who arrived in Korea in 1450, just a few years after the promulgation of the new script, and who was in close contact with the scholars who had worked on it. The Annals report how he exchanged poetries with Chŏng Inji, Shin Suk-chu 申叔舟 (1417-1475), Sŏng Sam-mun 成三問 (1418-1456) and others [*Sejong Sillok*, 127:22a (32/1/3) 1450], and that during his stay at court he was even questioned on phonology (*ŭmun* 音韻). [*Munjong Sillok*, 4:10a (1/10/10) 1450].



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it employed Chinese characters and its learning had to pass through their knowledge first. Although Sejong attempts to counter the argument of the memorial by stating that *idu* had the same function of his vernacular script and that its use of Chinese characters did not entirely respect the traditional one, the final argument of Ch'oe Malli was that *idu* remained closer in use and shape to Chinese characters.

Moving now to the second aspect of this discussion of the memorial, in this document it is possible to find invaluable information on the context surrounding the creation of the new vernacular script and on its intended usages. For example, the third section that supports the use of *idu* as a better option than the vernacular script reveals how the latter was intended to be used as a more convenient system for the compilation of administrative documents and all other types of texts that had until then been written with *idu*. The fourth section focuses in particular on the use of the vernacular script for the compilation of documents related to the testimonies in criminal procedures. This is a remarkably interesting piece of information since, although these types of documents have not survived, their mention in this memorial tells how this usage was discussed at the time.<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, in discussing the use of the vernacular script for the transcription of testimonies, it reveals how it was not necessarily direct writing or reading that was expected from the so-called “ignorant people” but that by having their words registered with the vernacular script, these could be read to them and verified. It was thus a mediated writing and reading, likely made by clerks, for the sake of the illiterate people that was expected in this specific case. This suggests how the conception of literacy as direct writing and reading risks being too limited to understand the possibilities that the new vernacular script opened for the employment and diffusion of texts, urging us to always take into consideration their possible oral dimension and social dynamics.

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<sup>275</sup> A specific case in which the use of the vernacular script might have been applied was that of the *tajim* 拷音, a document through which a person connected to a certain legal case acknowledged that its statement was correct. On this practice, see Kim Jae-mun (1993:96-107).

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The fifth point of the memorial is also particularly informative since, by criticizing the haste through which the new script was being put into use, it also indirectly provides information on some events that had happened after its completion and that were not chronologically reported in separate entries in the Annals. Firstly, it reveals that a group of low-level officials (*ibae* 吏輩) was ordered to learn the new script immediately after its completion. As pointed out by Ledyard (1998:135), this also suggests that there must have already been some sort of basic primer, likely in the form of manuscript, that was used in this occasion. In the same passage of the memorial, it is also mentioned the compilation of rime dictionaries (*unsŏ* 韻書) with the vernacular script and a not better specified “carving” (*kak* 刻). The compilation of rime dictionaries likely referred to the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui* that, as seen above, is already recorded as a separate entry in the Annals. But here the answer of Sejong about the critics to this project presented in the memorial is also particularly interesting since, by pointing out the ignorance of the submitters about rime dictionaries and their lack of phonological knowledge, confirms how Sejong considered the compilation of rime dictionaries with the vernacular script a central project. His expression “if I do not correct the rime dictionaries, who will do that?” also displays a strong and personal commitment toward this goal. The “carving”, on the other hand, probably referred to the carving of movable types for the vernacular script to be used for this project. Wooden movable types were indeed used for the printing of the *Tongguk chŏngun* that, as discussed before, was the final result of the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui*.

The final part of the document is also revealing of how the king had planned the translation of the *Samgang haengsil-to* as one of the first projects connected to the vernacular script. It might also be possible to extract a further piece of information in the reprimand addressed to Kim Mun. Here it is said that Kim Mun changed his opinion on the vernacular script, but there is no reference to why precisely this scholar had been consulted about it. However, a later entry in the Annals dated 1448 reveals that Kim Mun was the scholar put in charge of the

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vernacular translation of the *Four Books*.<sup>276</sup> As pointed out by An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:142), we can thus reasonably suppose that Kim Mun had been addressed by the king about the possibility to use the vernacular script for the translation of these texts, perhaps even before the completion of the vernacular script. That he initially agreed with it and then, after the script was completed, changed his mind seems to justify the anger of the king.

### II.3. The *Hunmin Chŏngŭm*

Despite this protest memorial, the work on the vernacular script continued and, in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 1446, almost three years after its completion, a book called *Hunmin chŏngŭm* 訓民正音 (The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People)—as the script itself—saw the light.<sup>277</sup> The only extant copy of this original 1446 edition is today preserved in the Kansong Art Museum in Seoul and classified as National Treasure no. 70.

This text (henceforth *HC*) is divided into two main parts. The first part was compiled by Sejong himself and is usually called *ponmun* 本文 (base text) by Korean scholars.<sup>278</sup> It contains (i) a preface explaining the reason and aim of the creation of the new alphabet—that is usually called *ŏje sŏmun* 御製序文 (the preface of the king)<sup>279</sup>—and (ii) a short primer of the alphabet—usually referred to as *yeŭi* 例義 (examples and principles)<sup>280</sup>—explaining the sounds of the new letters and providing the basic rules for their employment in syllabic blocks and the instructions for the indication of the tones. The second part of the text is titled

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<sup>276</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 119:19b (30/1/28).

<sup>277</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 113, 36b (28/9/29) [1446]: ○是月訓民正音成。

<sup>278</sup> The authorship of Sejong is stated in the Annals, where this part can also be found [*Sejong Sillok*, 113, 36b (28/9/29)]. Furthermore, in the *HC* text this part is written with bigger characters as a means of respect towards the king, visually separating it from the rest of the book.

<sup>279</sup> This name comes from the expression in the Annals introducing it: 御製曰 “the text written by the king says...”

<sup>280</sup> This is the name that Chŏng Inji, who wrote the postface of this text (see below), gives to a text compiled by the king at the time of the completion of the alphabet. The majority of scholars assume that this was the text later attached to the *HC* and forming its first part.

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*haerye-bon* 解例本 (explanations and examples section)<sup>281</sup> and consists of a more extended treatise commissioned by the king to the scholars of the Hall of Worthies. These scholars were the same who had been involved in the already discussed project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui* (Ch’oe Hang, Pak P’aengnyŏn, Sin Sukchu, Kang Hŭian, Yi Kae and Yi Sŏllo) plus Sŏng Sammun 成三問 (1418-1456). This second part is divided into six different sections (see Table 2) explaining in detail the origin of the shape of the new letters, the phonological and philosophical theories that served as the basis for their creation, the articulation of their sounds, and their employment. It ends with a postface written by Chŏng Inji 鄭麟趾 (1396-1478).

At the end of this postface a more precise date is provided: the first decade (*sanghan* 上澣) of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the 11<sup>th</sup> year of *Zhengtong* (正統), corresponding to the 28<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Sejong (1446).<sup>282</sup> This must thus have been the date of the completion of the second part of the volume (*haerye-bon*), while the first part (*ponmun*) compiled by the king, or at least an earlier draft of it, might have been compiled earlier, possibly at the time of the completion of the alphabet in 1443, and then later attached to the 1446 final version of the *HC*.<sup>283</sup>

Table 2. Division of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* in its two main sections (on the left) and subsections (on the right). In square brackets are the corresponding numbers of folios of the Kansong edition.

<i>Hunmin chŏngŭm</i> 訓民正音 (The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People)	
<i>ponmun</i> 本文 (base text) [1a-4a]	<i>ŏje sŏmun</i> 御製序文 (the preface of the king) [1a]

<sup>281</sup> Contrary to the sections of the first part, the names of the sections of the second part are the actual titles contained in the text.

<sup>282</sup> The current date for the “Hangeul Day” (한글날), the national holiday that commemorates the promulgation of the Korean alphabet in South Korea, is 9<sup>th</sup> October and is based on the conversion of the tenth day of the ninth month of 1446 (lunar calendar) in the Gregorian calendar. However, according to the Julian calendar, that is usually used in the West to date historical events before the official introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582, the first decade of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 1446 corresponds to 21-30 September 1446.

<sup>283</sup> See Ledyard (1998: 135); An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:123-124); Kim Sŭr-ong (2012:447, 461).

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	<i>yeŭi</i> 例義 (examples and principles) [1a-4a]
<i>haerye-bon</i> 解例本 (explanations and examples section) [1a-29b]	<i>chejahae</i> 制字解 (explanation of the creation of the letters) [1a-14b]
	<i>ch'osŏnghae</i> 初聲解 (explanation of the initial sounds) [14b-15b]
	<i>chungŏnhae</i> 中聲解 (explanation of the medial sounds) [15b-17b]
	<i>chongsŏnghae</i> 終聲解 (explanation of the final sounds) [17b-20b]
	<i>hapchahae</i> 合字解 (explanation of the combination of the letters) [20b-24b]
	<i>yongjarye</i> 用字例 (examples of the usage of the letters) [24b-26b]
	postface by Chŏng Inji [26b-29b]

Here it is presented a complete translation of the first part of the *HC* (*ponmun*) and the postface of Chŏng Inji. These two parts of the text are also recorded in the *Annals*.<sup>284</sup> Of the *ponmun* part also exists a supplemented “explicated version with the vernacular script” (*ŏnhae* 諺解)<sup>285</sup> prefaced to the later *Wŏrin sŏkpo* 月印釋譜 (The Buddha and the Record of Sakyamuni, 1459).<sup>286</sup> The first folio of the Kansong edition of the *HC*—containing the preface of the king and the first

<sup>284</sup> A difference between the two versions is that the *HC*, contrary to the *Annals*, has punctuation and is characterized by a specific layout. Furthermore, the postface in the *HC* contains a few more lines at the end with the date, the titles of Chŏng Inji and his formal closing regards to the king.

<sup>285</sup> The term *ŏnhae* is employed to indicate explications and translations of *hanmun* texts written in the vernacular script. However, such term is not found in the titles of these texts until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, it cannot be found in the original title of the vernacular explication of the *HC* and is used here according to the usual academic practice to distinguish this text from the original *hanmun* version. For a discussion on the early uses of the term “*ŏnhae*”, see Traulsen (2016:119, n.14).

<sup>286</sup> The use and significance of this text will be discussed in III.2.2.

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lines of the *yeŭi* section—is missing and was reconstructed at the time of its discovery in 1940. However, this reconstruction contains some mistakes and debated issues.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, for the original text of this part, we have only the text recorded in the Annals and the *ŏnhae* version attached to the later *Wŏrin sŏkpo*.

I will then discuss and analyze the information that these texts provide on the significance of the invention of the alphabet and its early use. As for the *haerye-bon* (the second part) a complete translation and analysis of this text—that is devoted to the linguistic details and philosophical background of the new script—is beyond the scope of this research. It will be however presented an overview of the contents of each section, discussing the significance of specific linguistic explanations (as on orthography) and textual features (as layout and division in prose and verse) in the intended use of the new script and of the text of the *HC* itself.<sup>288</sup>

### II.3.1. Preface and postface

The preface of Sejong and the postface of Chŏng Inji are the two sections of the text that respectively open and close the *HC*, providing several pieces of information on the reasons and process behind the creation of the alphabet. Due to their related contents, presenting and contextualizing them together will make possible a better analysis and a more comprehensive understanding of these two texts.

The preface written by Sejong expresses the reason and aim for the invention of the new vernacular script:<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> For a discussion on these issues, see Han Jae-yŏng, *et al* (2017); An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007); Chŏng U-yŏng (2001); Ch'oe Se-hwa (1997).

<sup>288</sup> A complete English translation of this part can be found in Ledyard (1998:282-318). For an annotated translation in Korean, see Kang Sin-hang (2003:129-171).

<sup>289</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 113, 36b (28/9/29) [1446].

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國之語音異乎中國與文字不相流通故愚民有所欲言而終不得伸其情者多矣予爲此憫然新制二十八字欲使人易<sup>290</sup>習便於日用耳

The spoken language of the country (i.e. Korea) differ from [that of] the Middle Kingdom (i.e. China) and is not mutually compatible with [Chinese] characters. For this reason, the ignorant people, even if they have something to say, are in many cases unable to express their mind.<sup>291</sup> I considered it to be pitiful and created 28 new letters. I simply desire to make everyone easily learn and conveniently<sup>292</sup> use them daily.

The vernacular explication (*ŏnhae* 諺解) of this text attached to the beginning of the first volume of the *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* is believed to have been composed shortly after the compilation of the *HC*.<sup>293</sup> This version is helpful for the present discussion because it explicates the meaning of the text (syntactic structure, the meaning of most the Chinese characters used and vernacular translation) by reflecting the interpretation given to it by its contemporaries.<sup>294</sup> In presenting it here, I have followed the division of the lines in the original text (that I numbered for a better reference).<sup>295</sup> For each line I have indicated with letters its different parts: (a) original *hanmun* text with the inserted pronunciation of Chinese characters (in smaller characters) and Korean functional elements in vernacular; (b) explanation of the meaning of the Chinese characters; (c) vernacular

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<sup>290</sup> The character 易 used in the text of the preface recorded in the Annals seems to be a mistake made by the compiler. The correct character 易 is used in the *ŏnhae* version attached to the *Wŏrin sŏkpo*. Furthermore, in the *ŏnhae* version the character 人 is repeated twice as 人人. See further below for an analysis and translation of the *ŏnhae* version of this text.

<sup>291</sup> Chŏng Yo-il (2008) and Kim Chu-p'il (2016) interprets the character 者 not as "people" but as "thing" or "occasion". This sentence will be further discussed below.

<sup>292</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:81-90) points out that the character 便 in the expression 便於日用 should be interpreted as indicating a mental convenience and not a physical one.

<sup>293</sup> Orthographic evidences show similarities with the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Articles on the Record of Sakyamuni, 1447). It is therefore supposed that the vernacular version of the *HC* was originally attached to the first volume of this text, which unfortunately has not reached us. See An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:204-05).

<sup>294</sup> The author(s) of the text are unknown.

<sup>295</sup> *Sejong ŏje Hunmin chŏngŭm* 世宗御製訓民正音, 1a-3b. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* 月印釋譜, vol.1

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translation.<sup>296</sup> Every part is romanized using the Yale system. Furthermore, (a) is followed by my analysis that, leaving the order of the original text, literally translates the meaning of the semantic terms and explains the grammatical value of the inserted functional elements.<sup>297</sup> My translation follows parts (b) and (c).<sup>298</sup> By doing this, I have attempted to reflect how the Koreans of the time read the text.

(1)

(a) 國<sub>kwik</sub>之<sub>cing</sub>語<sub>ng</sub>音<sub>ng</sub>音<sub>ng</sub>이

*KWIK-CING-NGE-QUM\_i*

COUNTRY-OF-LANGUAGE-SOUNDS\_*nom.*

(b) 國<sub>kwik</sub>은 나라히라<sub>on nara.h</sub>之<sub>cing</sub>는 입겨지라<sub>non ipkye.c</sub>語<sub>ng</sub>는 말쓰미라<sub>ng malsso.m</sub>

*KWIK\_on nara.h\_ila*

國 (KWIK) is country

*CING\_non ipkye.c\_ila*

之 (CING) is a grammatical element

*NGE\_nun malsso.m\_ila*

語 (NGE) is the spoken language

(c) 나랏말쓰미

*Nalas malsso.m\_i*

The spoken language of the country

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<sup>296</sup> In the original text, (b) follows the main text but is written in smaller characters, (c) is placed in a different line by leaving a one-character space on the upper margin of the page.

<sup>297</sup> For a list of the abbreviations used for the functional elements, see Appendix: List of grammatical abbreviations.

<sup>298</sup> In the analysis and translation of this text I have mostly referred to Kang Sin-hang (2003). To the best of my knowledge, there are no existing English translations of this text.



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(2)

(a) 異乎中<sub>동</sub>國<sub>국</sub>에<sub>하</sub>야

*I-HHWO-TYWUNG-KWUYK\_ho\_ya*

*DIFFER-FROM-MIDDLE-KINGDOM\_do\_conj.*

(b) 異<sub>이</sub>는<sub>는</sub> 다<sub>다</sub>를<sub>를</sub> 씨<sub>씨</sub>라<sub>라</sub>乎<sub>乎</sub>는<sub>는</sub> 아<sub>아</sub>모<sub>모</sub>그<sub>그</sub>에<sub>에</sub>는<sub>는</sub> 거<sub>거</sub>체<sub>체</sub>쓰<sub>쓰</sub>는<sub>는</sub> 字<sub>字</sub> | 라<sub>라</sub>中<sub>동</sub>國<sub>국</sub>은<sub>은</sub>  
皇<sub>황</sub>帝<sub>帝</sub> 텡<sub>텡</sub>겨<sub>겨</sub>신<sub>신</sub>나<sub>나</sub>라<sub>라</sub>히<sub>히</sub>니<sub>니</sub>우<sub>우</sub>리<sub>리</sub>나<sub>나</sub>랏<sub>랏</sub>常<sub>상</sub>쌩<sub>쌩</sub>談<sub>담</sub>땀<sub>땀</sub>애<sub>애</sub>江<sub>강</sub>南<sub>남</sub>이<sub>이</sub>라<sub>라</sub>는<sub>는</sub> 나라

*I\_non talolssila*

異 (*I*) is to differ

*HHWO\_non amwoku.ngey honwon kye.ch\_ey psunun CCO\_ila*

乎 (*HHWO*) is a character used as a preposition meaning “compared to something”

*TYWUNG-KWUYK\_on HHWANG-TYEEY kyesin nala.hini wulinalas*

*SSYANG-TTAM\_ay KANG-NAM\_ila hono.nila*

中國 (*TYWUNG-KWUYK*) is the country where the emperor resides and, in the common language of our country, is called *Gangnam* 江南

(c) 中<sub>동</sub>國<sub>국</sub>에<sub>에</sub> 달<sub>달</sub>아

*TYWUNG-KWUYK\_ey talGa*

*Differs from China*

(3)

(a) 與<sub>영</sub>文<sub>문</sub>字<sub>字</sub>로<sub>로</sub>不<sub>不</sub>相<sub>相</sub>流<sub>流</sub>通<sub>通</sub>호<sub>호</sub>씨

*YE-MUN-CCO\_lwo PULQ-SYANG-LYUW-THWONG\_hol\_ssoy*

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WITH-CHARACTERS\_*instr.* NOT-MUTUALLY-FLOW-PASS  
THROUGH\_*do conj.*

- (b) 與영는이와더와흐는겨체쓰는字꼴 | 라文문은글와리라不불은아니  
흐논쁘디라相상은서르흐논쁘디라流를통통은흘러스므출씨라

*YE\_nun iwa tyewa honon kye.ch\_ey psu.nun CCO i la*

與 (YE) is a character used as a preposition meaning “with this or that”

*MUN\_un kulwa.l\_ila*

文 (MUN) is character

*PULQ\_un ani honwon ptu.t\_ila*

不 (PULQ) means “not”

*SYANG\_on selu honwon ptu.t\_ila*

相 (SYANG) means “mutually”

*LYUW-THWONG\_om hulle somochol ssi\_la*

流通 (LYUW-THWONG) is to flow and pass-through

- (c) 文문字꼴와로서르스몯디아니홀씨

*MUN-CCO\_walo selu so.mosti ani hol\_ssoi*

Is not mutually compatible with characters

(4)

- (a) 故공로愚웅民민이有홀所송欲욕言言형하야도

*KWO\_lo NGU-MIN\_i NGUW-SO-YOK-NGE ho\_ya\_two*

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REASON\_*instr.* IGNORANT-PEOPLE\_*nom.* HAVE-THINGS-  
DESIRE-SAY\_*do\_inf.\_aux.*

- (b) 故公는 전치라愚翁는 어릴씨라有翁는 이실씨라所송는 배라欲욕은 ㅎ  
고저홀씨라言언은 니를씨라

*KWO\_non cyenchoi\_la*

故 (KWO) is reason

*NGU\_nun elil ssi\_la*

愚 (NGU) is to be ignorant

*NGUW\_nun isil ssi\_la*

有 (NGUW) is to have/to exist

*SO\_non pay\_la*

所 (SO) is thing

*YOK\_on hokocye hol ssi\_la*

欲 (YOK) is wanting to do

*NGE\_un nilul ssi\_la*

言 (NGE) is to say

- (c) 이런전치로어린百백姓생이니르고저홍배이셔도

*Ilen cyencho\_lo elin POYK-SYENG\_i nilukwocye hwolq pay isye\_two*

For this reason, the ignorant people, even if there are things that they  
want to express

(5)

- (a) 而상終중不불得득伸신其情情者장 | 多당矣矣라

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*ZI-CYUNG-PULQ-TUK-SIN-KKUY-CCYENG-CYANG<sub>i</sub> TANG-NGUY<sub>la</sub>*

AND-END-NOT-OBTAIN-TO UNFOLD-THEIR-MEANING-PERSONS (THINGS/OCCASIONS)<sub>nom.</sub> MANY-END<sub>decl.</sub>

- (b) 而싱는 입겨지라終중은 므츄미라得득은 시를씨라伸신은 펼씨라其평  
는 제라情평은쁘디라者장는 노미라多당는 할씨라矣왕는 말뫼는 입겨  
지라

*ZI<sub>non</sub> ipkye.c<sub>ila</sub>*

而 (ZI) is a grammatical element

*CYUNG<sub>un</sub> mocho.m<sub>ila</sub>*

終 (CYUNG) is end

*TUK<sub>un</sub> silul ssi<sub>la</sub>*

得 (TUK) is to obtain<sup>299</sup>

*SIN<sub>on</sub> phyel ssi<sub>la</sub>*

伸 (SIN) is to unfold

*KKUY<sub>non</sub> cey<sub>la</sub>*

其 (KKUY) is their own

*CCYENG<sub>un</sub> ptu.t<sub>ila</sub>*

情 (CCYENG) is meaning/intention

*CYANG<sub>non</sub> now.m<sub>ila</sub>*

者 (CYANG) is a person<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> In literary Chinese the character 得 was also used as a potential marker when accompanying a verb.

<sup>300</sup> According to Chǒng Yo-il (2008) and Kim Chu-p'il (2016), the word *nwom* 喆 could be also interpreted as "thing" or "case".

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*TANG\_non hal ssi-la*

多 (TANG) is to be many

*NGUY\_non mal mos\_non ipkye.c\_ila*

矣 (NGUY) is a grammatical element that indicates the conclusion of a sentence.

- (c) 莫欸내제쁘들시러피디몬 흥노미하니라

*Mochomnay cey ptu.t\_ul sile phyeti mwot\_holq nwom\_i hanila*

In the end, the persons that cannot express their meaning are many

(or), the cases when they cannot express their meaning are many

(6)

- (a) 予영 | 爲彔此欸憫민然션호야

*YE\_i WI-CHO-MIN-ZYEN ho\_ya*

*I\_nom. CONSIDER-THIS-PITIFUL do-inf.*

- (b) 予영는내호 습시논쁘디시니라此欸는이라憫민然션은어엇비너기실  
씨라

*YE\_nun na\_y hozopsinwon ptu.t\_isinira*

予 (YE) means "I"

*CHO\_non i\_la*

此 (CHO) is this

*MIN-ZYEN\_un eyespi nekisil ssi\_la*

憫然 (MIN-ZYEN) is to be pitiful

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- (c) 내이를 爲 亨 ㅎ야어엿비너겨

*Nay i\_lol WI hoya eyespi nekye*

I considered it to be pitiful

(7)

- (a) 新新制 二 十 八 字 號 ㅎ노니

*SIN-CYE-ZI-SSIP-PALQ-CCO ho\_nwo\_ni*

NEW-CREATE-TWENTY-EIGHT-CHARACTERS do\_proc.+  
vol.<sup>301</sup>\_conj.

- (b) 新新은 새라 制 亨 ㅎ ㄹ ㅅ ㅅ ㅅ ㄹ ㄹ 二 十 八 字 號 은 스물 여덟 비라

*SIN\_on say\_la*

新 (SIN) is new

*CYE\_non moyngkolosil ssi\_la*

制 (CYE) is to create

*ZI-SSIP-PALQ\_on sumulyetul.p\_ila*

二十八 (ZI-SSIP-PALQ) is twenty-eight

- (c) 새 로 스물 여덟 字 號 ㄹ ㅎ 노니

*Saylwo sumul.yetulp CCO\_lol mwoyng\_nwoni*

I created twenty-eight new letters

(8)

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<sup>301</sup> The prefinal ending -노- (-nwo-) was composed by the processive -ㄴ- (-no-), indicating an action taking place at the present time, and the volitive -오- (-wo-) indicating an action that was the result of the subjective intention of the speaker.

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- (a) 欲<sup>욕</sup>使<sup>승</sup>人<sup>신</sup>人<sup>신</sup>人<sup>신</sup>으 로易<sup>잉</sup>習<sup>습</sup>하야 便<sup>편</sup>於<sup>於</sup>日<sup>일</sup>用<sup>용</sup>용<sup>용</sup>耳<sup>싱</sup>니라

*YOK-SO-ZIN-ZIN\_olo I-SSIP ho\_ya PPYEN-QE-ZILQ-YONG-ZI\_nila*

DESIRE-MAKE-PEOPLE\_*instr.* EASY-LEARN do\_*conj.*

CONVENIENT-FOR-DAY-USE-SIMPLY\_*decl.*

- (b) 使<sup>승</sup>는히여<sup>히여</sup>하<sup>하</sup>논마리<sup>마리</sup>라人<sup>신</sup>은사<sup>사</sup>르<sup>르</sup>미<sup>미</sup>라易<sup>잉</sup>는쉬<sup>쉬</sup>불<sup>불</sup>씨<sup>씨</sup>라習<sup>습</sup>은니<sup>니</sup>길  
씨<sup>씨</sup>라便<sup>편</sup>은便<sup>편</sup>安<sup>안</sup>한<sup>한</sup>흘<sup>흘</sup>씨<sup>씨</sup>라於<sup>於</sup>형<sup>형</sup>는아<sup>아</sup>모<sup>모</sup>그<sup>그</sup>에<sup>에</sup>하<sup>하</sup>논겨<sup>겨</sup>체<sup>체</sup>쓰<sup>쓰</sup>는字<sup>자</sup>쥬<sup>쥬</sup> | 라  
日<sup>일</sup>씼은나<sup>나</sup>리<sup>리</sup>라用<sup>용</sup>은<sup>은</sup>뵈<sup>뵈</sup>씨<sup>씨</sup>라耳<sup>어</sup>는<sup>는</sup>썩<sup>썩</sup>르<sup>르</sup>미<sup>미</sup>라하<sup>하</sup>논<sup>논</sup>쁘<sup>쁘</sup>디<sup>디</sup>라

*SO\_non hoyGye nwon ma.l\_ila*

使 (SO) is an expression for making doing

*ZIN-on salo.m\_ila*

人 (ZIN) is a person

*I\_on swiful ssi\_la*

易 (I) is to be easy

*SSIP\_on nikil ssi\_la*

習 (SSIP) is to learn

*PPYEN\_un PPYEN-QAN hol ssi\_la*

便 (PPYEN) is to be comfortable

*QE\_nun amwokungey honwon kye.ch\_ey psunun CCO\_ila*

於 (QE) is a character used as a preposition that means “for something”

*ZILQ\_on na.l\_ila*

日 (ZILQ) is day

*YONG\_on psul ssi\_la*

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用 (YONG) is to use

*ZI\_non stolo.m\_ila honwon ptu.t\_ila*

耳 (ZI) means “simply that”

(c) 사람마다히여수비니겨날로뿌메便安穩키호고저흥씩르미니라

*Salom\_mata hoyGye sufi nikye nal\_lo psu.m\_ey PPYEN-QE\_khuy*

*hokocye holq stolo.m\_inila*

[and] simply desire to make everyone easily learn (the new characters) and conveniently use every day

The postface of Chǒng Inji is a much longer text that provides information on the reason for the invention of the vernacular script contextualizing it in the linguistic situation of the time and framing it in Neo-Confucian philosophy.<sup>302</sup> Furthermore, it gives details on its creation (e.g. its inventor and principles) and its possible uses, praising its realization. It ends by listing the authors of the *haerye* text and the date of its completion. This text is immediately attached to the last section of the *HC haerye*, without providing any separate title but only by starting a new line and leaving a blank space of one character from the upper margin for the whole text (see Figure 12).<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> A Neo-Confucian philosophical framework characterizes also the first section of the *haerye* dedicated to the explanation of the creation of the vernacular letters. See II.3.2.

<sup>303</sup> This layout provided a visual separation from the previous section. As pointed out by Kim Sŭr-ong (2015:63), this method of lowering the text by leaving a space on the upper margin (*k'annaerigi*) can be also interpreted as a sign of respect towards the king by separating the part of the text written according to his instructions (the six sections of the *to haerye* that were already written with smaller characters when compared to the *ponmun* written by Sejong) to the postface that had been personally and separately written by an official. The same layout was used in the *HC ōnhæ* to separate the vernacular translation from the main text.



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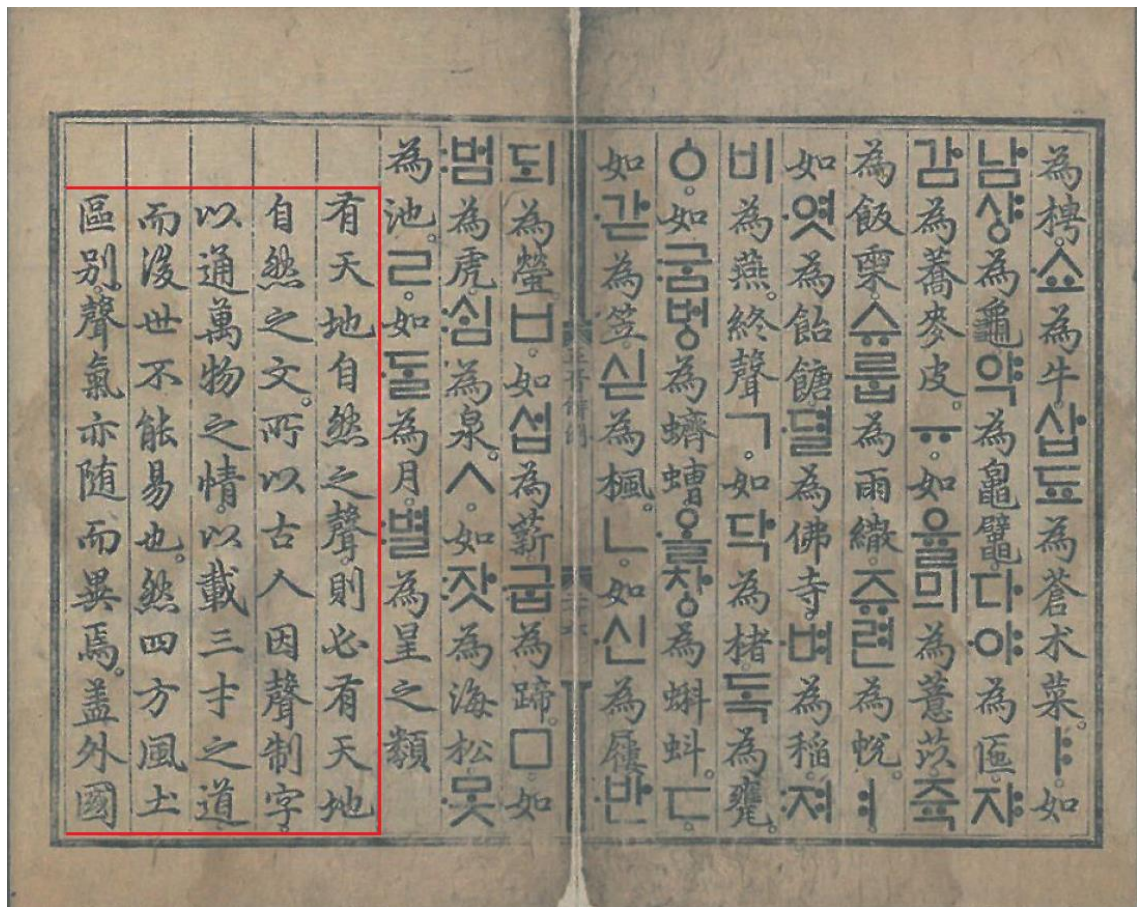


Figure 12. *Hunmin chongum Haerye-bon* 訓民正音解例本. Folio no. 26. Kansong edition. Framed is the beginning of the postface of Chong Inji (continuing in the successive folios).

Below is the original text and translation of this postface:<sup>304</sup>

有天地自然之聲。則必有天地自然之文。

If there are sounds (*sŏng* 聲) for all the natural things, then there is also writing (*mun* 文) for them.

所以古人因聲制字。以通萬物之情。以載三才之道。而後世不能易也。

For this reason, the ancient people created characters (*cha* 字) based on those sounds and used them to understand the mind (*chong* 情) of all things and to record

<sup>304</sup> HC: 26b-29b. It should be noted that in the original text there is no change of line. However, for a better readability and analysis of the text, I have separated it in lines corresponding to the *kujöm* 句點, the small circles placed in the lower-right part of the characters to signal the end of a sentence. In this translation, as in that of other parts of the HC, I am particularly indebted to the English translation of Ledyard (1998) and the modern Korean translation of Kang Sin-hang (2003).

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[on books] the way of the Three Powers (*samjae* 三才).<sup>305</sup> Later generations could not change that.

然四方風土區別。聲氣亦隨而異焉。

However, the climate and terrain (*p'ungt'o* 風土) in the four directions is different, and the speech sounds and energy (*sǒnggi* 聲氣)<sup>306</sup> differ accordingly.<sup>307</sup>

蓋外國之語。有其聲而無其字。

Generally, the languages outside the country (i.e. outside China) have sounds (*sǒng* 聲) but no script (*cha* 字).

假中國之字以通其用。是猶柄鑿之鉏鋤也。豈能達而無礙乎。

They borrowed the characters of China and made use of them. But this is just like inserting a square handle in a round hole. How can it not constitute an obstacle to communication?

要皆各隨所處而安。不可強之使同也。

The point is that everything accommodates what is appropriate for it and cannot be forced to be the same [of something that is not].

吾東方禮樂文章。侔擬華夏。

In our eastern direction (*tongbang* 東方; i.e., Korea) the rites and music, and all civilization, match those of China (*hwaha* 華夏).

但方言俚語。不與之同。

But the local language (*pangŏn iŏ* 方言俚語)<sup>308</sup> is not the same.

學書者患其旨趣之難曉。治獄者病其曲折之難通。

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<sup>305</sup> The three powers (*samjae* 三才) are Heaven, Earth and Man.

<sup>306</sup> The term *sǒnggi* 聲氣 seems to be referring to the pronunciation of people.

<sup>307</sup> This correspondence between the natural features of a region and speech sounds reflects the same concept presented in the preface to the *Huangji jingshi shu* 皇極經世書 (Kr. *Hwanggŭk kyŏngsesŏ*, "Book of the Supreme Ultimate Ordering of the World"), a philosophical treatise of the Song philosopher Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077).

<sup>308</sup> The expression *pangŏn iŏ* 方言俚語, literally "regional speech and local language", seems to refer here to the Korean language, as opposed to the Chinese language.

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As a result, those who study [*hanmun*] books are made worried by the difficulty of understanding their details; and those who handle criminal procedures are afflicted by the difficulty of sorting out of their intricacies.

昔新羅薛聰。始作吏讀。官府民間。至今行之。

In the past Sōl Ch'ong of Silla created the *idu*, that has been used until the present times by officials and the common people.

然皆假字而用。或澁或窒。

However, [*idu*] makes exclusive use of borrowed characters, thus is rough and limiting.

非但鄙陋無稽而已。至於言語之間。則不能達其萬一焉。

Not only is vulgar and has no bases but, when it comes to language, it is not possible to communicate one in ten thousand things.

癸亥冬。

During the winter of the year *kyehae* (1443),

我<sup>309</sup>

殿下創制正音二十八字。略揭例義以示之。名曰訓民正音。

our Ruler (i.e., Sejong) created the 28 letters of the correct sounds, presented concise examples and principles (*yakke yeüi* 略揭例義), and named them “the correct sounds for the instruction of the people (*Hunmin chōngŭm* 訓民正音).”

象形而字倣古篆。因聲而音叶七調。

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<sup>309</sup> In the original text there is a change of the line (*ihaeng* 移行) before the term *chōnha* 殿下 (ruler), that is thus placed at the beginning of the next line. This was a honorific practice called *taedubop* 擡頭法 (rule of raising the head) by Korean scholars since the next line was usually placed above the upper margin of the text. When, as in this case, there is only a change of the line it is also called *ihaengbop* 移行法 (rule of changing the line). See Hwang Mun-hwan (2015:82-85).

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By depicting shapes (*sanghyōng* 象形), they resemble the old seal (*kojōn* 古篆), and by being based on the principles of sounds, they correspond to the seven keys (*ch'ilcho* 七調)<sup>310</sup>.

三極之義。二氣之妙。莫不該括。

From the meaning of the Three Ultimates (*samgŭk* 三極)<sup>311</sup> to the mystery of Yin and Yang (*igi* 二氣), nothing is left out.

以二十八字而轉換無窮。簡而要。精而通。

There are [only] 28 letters, but their combinations are endless. They are simple but essential, detailed, but easy to understand.

故智者不崇朝而會。愚者可浹旬而學。

Therefore, an intelligent man masters them in one morning, an ignorant man can learn them in ten days.

以是解書。可以知其義。以是聽訟。可以得其情。

If these letters are used to explicate [*hanmun*] books, it is possible to understand their meaning; if they are used in criminal procedures, you can understand their intricacies.

字韻則清濁之能辨。

Rimes of characters (*chaun* 字韻) can be distinguished in clear and muddy (*ch'ōngt'ak* 清濁).<sup>312</sup>

樂歌則律呂之克諧。

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<sup>310</sup> The seven keys (*ch'ilcho* 七調) were used in the native Korean court music (*hyangak* 鄉樂) and are listed in the *Akhak kwebōm* 樂學軌範 (Canon of Music, 1493).

<sup>311</sup> Synonym of Three Powers (*samjae* 三才) used above: Heaven, Earth and Man.

<sup>312</sup> The term *ch'ōngt'ak* 清濁 is referring to the division of the consonants in “clear sounds” (*ch'ōngŭm* 清音) and “muddy sounds” (*t'agŭm* 濁音) according to their modes of articulation. This criterion was taken from Chinese phonology and employed in the *HC* for the division of the consonants in “wholly clear” (*chōnch'ōng* 全清) [ㄱ ㅋ ㆁ ㄷ ㅌ ㄴ ㄹ ㅎ], “partly clear” (*ch'ach'ōng* 次清) [ㅋ ㆁ ㆁ ㅌ ㅌ ㄴ ㄹ ㅎ], “wholly muddy” (*chōnt'ak* 全濁) [ㄱ ㅋ ㆁ ㄷ ㅌ ㄴ ㄹ ㅎ], and “neither clear nor muddy” (*pulch'ōng pult'ak* 不清不濁) [ㅇ ㄴ ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ]. See also II.3.2.

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Songs (*akka* 樂歌) can be combined with the twelve-note system (*yullyŏ* 律呂).<sup>313</sup>

無所用而不備。無所往而不達。

There is nothing to which they cannot be applied, nothing that cannot communicate.

雖風聲鶴唳。雞鳴狗吠。皆可得而書矣。

Even if is the sound of the wind and the call of the crane, or the clucking of the hen and the barking of the dog, everything can be written.

遂<sup>314</sup>

命詳加解釋。以喻諸人。

Finally, we received the [royal] order of adding detailed explanations and making everyone learn them.<sup>315</sup>

於是。臣與集賢殿應教臣崔恒。副校理臣朴彭年。申叔舟。修撰臣成三問。敦寧注簿臣姜希顏。行集賢殿副修撰臣李塏。李善老等。謹作諸解及例。以敘其梗槩。

I, your humble servant,<sup>316</sup> together with the Researcher (*ŭnggyo* 應教, rank 4B) of the Hall of Worthies Ch'oe Hang 崔恒, the Assistant Collator (*pukyori* 副校理, rank 5B) Pak P'aengnyŏn 朴彭年 and Sin Sukchu 申叔舟, the Compiler (*such'an* 修撰, rank 6A) Sŏng Sammun 成三問, the Registrar in the Department of Substantial Repose (*Tonnyŏngbu chubu* 敦寧府注簿, rank 6A)<sup>317</sup> Kang Hŭian 姜希顏, and the Assistant Compilers (*pusuch'an* 副修撰, rank 6B) Yi Kae 李塏 and Yi Sŏllo 李善老,

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<sup>313</sup> The term *yullyŏ* 律呂 is referring to the traditional twelve-note system in East Asian music.

<sup>314</sup> This is another case of *taedubop* 擡頭法 (rule of raising the head). In this case it is used because the text reports an order of the king.

<sup>315</sup> With "adding of detailed explanations" (*sangga haesŏk* 詳加解釋) the postface seems to be referring to the *haerye* part of the text. This passage seems thus to clarify that the *haerye* part was added later to a preexistent part written by the king himself at the time of the completion of the alphabet and that the postface calls "examples and principles" (*yeŭi* 例義).

<sup>316</sup> With the term *sin* 臣 Chŏng Inji is referring to himself as the author of this postface. It should be noted that in the original text the character is written smaller as a sign of humility. So are the given names of the other scholars involved. This practice is called *ch'asobŏp* 差小法 (rule of reduction) by Korean scholars. See Hwang Mun-hwan (2015:87-89).

<sup>317</sup> About this office, see note 218.

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carefully compiled various explanations and examples, and presented an outline of that.

庶使觀者不師而自悟。

We hope that those who will see them will learn even without a teacher.

若其淵源精義之妙。則非臣等之所能發揮也。

The cleverness of their profound origin and precise principles is not something that your humble subjects can express.

恭惟我<sup>318</sup>

殿下。天縱之聖。制度施爲超越百王。

We reverentially think that the government of Your Majesty, with his Heaven granted wisdom, has transcended all the previous kings.

正音之作。無所祖述。而成於自然。

The creation of the Correct Sounds is not something that has been transmitted from the past but something that formed from nature itself.

豈以其至理之無所不在。而非人爲之私也。

Since there is nothing where its principles are not present, it is not something that men could have made by themselves.

夫東方有國。不爲不久。而開物成務之大智。蓋有待於今日也歟。

Here in the eastern direction, there has been a country for a long time, but for a Great Sage to accomplish material development and cultivation (*kaemul sŏngmu* 開物成務)<sup>319</sup> we had to wait the present day!

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<sup>318</sup> This is another case of *taedubop* 擡頭法 before the word *chŏnha* 殿下.

<sup>319</sup> This expression can be found in the *Xi Ci I* 繫辭上 (Section I of the Great Appendix) of the *Book of Changes* 易經: 子曰夫易何為者也夫易開物成務冒天下之道 [...] “The Master said: ‘What is it that the Yi does? The Yi opens up (the knowledge of the issues of) things, accomplishes the undertakings (of men), and embraces under it (the way of) all things under the sky.’” Translation by James Legge (1882:371).

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正統十一年九月上澣。

In the first decade (*sanghan* 上澣) of the 9th month of the 11th year of Zhengtong.

資憲大夫禮曹判書集賢殿大提學知春秋館事 世子右賓客<sub>臣</sub>鄭麟趾拜手稽首謹書

Your humble subject Chǒng Inji, Grand Officer for Assisting Toward Fundamental Laws (*Chahǒntaebu* 資憲大夫), Minister of Rites (*Yejo p'ansǒ* 禮曹判書), Senior Academician of the Hall of Worthies (*Chiphyǒnjǒn taejehak*), Director of the Spring and Autumn Office of Historical Records (*Chi ch'unch'ugwan sa* 知春秋館事), and Second Mentor of the Crown Prince (*Seja ubin'gaek* 世子右賓客), deeply bows touching the floor with his forehead and carefully writes.

Before proceeding to a more in-depth discussion of these two texts (preface and postface of the *HC*) it should be noticed how their contents are closely connected to the above-seen protest memorial submitted by Ch'oe Malli and the other scholars of the Hall of Worthies in 1444. Kim Chu-p'il (2016), for example, points out that the preface of the king was written based on three key concepts that can also be found in the discussion that the king had with the submitters of the memorial: the difference in sound (*iŭm* 異音), the convenience of the people (*p'yǒnmin* 便民), and the ease of understanding (*ihyo* 易曉). Furthermore, the postface of Chǒng Inji covers many of the same points addressed by the memorial itself, although with a positive stance in favour of the vernacular script (see Table 3 below).<sup>320</sup>

*Table 3.* Comparison of selected passages from the postface of Chǒng Inji and the memorial submitted by Ch'oe Malli and other scholars of the Hall of Worthies showing the connection between the two texts. The comparison is adapted from Kang Sin-hang (2003:198-200).

Postface of Chǒng Inji	Memorial of Ch'oe Malli
The resemblance of the vernacular script with the old seal	
By depicting shapes ( <i>sanghyǒng</i> 象形) they resemble the old seal ( <i>kojǒn</i> 古篆)	It might be said that the vernacular script is completely based on the ancient characters

<sup>320</sup> For a detailed list and discussion of the connections between the memorial and the postface of Chǒng Inji, see also Kim Chu-p'il (2016).

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	<p>(<i>koja</i> 古字)<sup>321</sup> and is not a new script. But even if the shape of the characters follows that of the old seal script (<i>kojijönmun</i> 古之篆文), combining them according to their sounds is utterly contrary to the tradition and has, in truth, no ground.</p>
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### The writings of neighbouring populations

<p>However, the climate and terrain (<i>p'ungt'o</i> 風土) in the four directions is different, and the speech sounds and energy (<i>sönggi</i> 聲氣) differ accordingly. Generally, the languages outside the country (i.e., outside China) have sounds (<i>söng</i> 聲) but no script (<i>cha</i> 字). They borrowed the characters of China and made use of them. But this is just like inserting a square handle in a round hole. How can it not constitute an obstacle to communication?</p>	<p>Since antiquity, although the Nine Regions [of China] have different climate and terrain (<i>p'ungt'o</i> 風土), this has not caused the creation of separate scripts according to the local languages. Although populations as the Mongols (<i>monggo</i> 蒙古), the Tanguts (<i>söha</i> 西夏), the Jurchen (<i>yöjin</i> 女真), the Japanese (<i>ilbon</i> 日本) and the Tibetans (<i>söbön</i> 西蕃) have each a different script, these are all matters of barbarians (<i>ijök</i> 夷狄), there is no worth in mentioning them.</p>
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### *Idu*

<p>In the past Söl Ch'ong of Silla created the <i>idu</i>, that has been used until the present times by officials and among the people. However, <i>idu</i> makes exclusive use of borrowed characters, thus is rough and limiting. Not only is vulgar and groundless but when it comes to the</p>	<p>The <i>idu</i> system created by Söl Ch'ong in the Silla period may be rough and rustic but for the functional elements of the language (<i>öjo</i> 語助) makes exclusive use of Chinese characters</p>
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<sup>321</sup> With “ancient characters” (*koja* 古字) the memorial seems to refer to the Chinese characters written in the old seal calligraphic style. The connection between these characters and the new vernacular letters was also stated in the entry presenting the creation of the alphabet that has been discussed in II.1. It is also repeated in the postface of Chöng Inji to the *HC* (see II.3.1).



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spoken language there is no one in ten thousand things that can be communicated.	and thus is, in principle, not separated from them. [...]
Use of the vernacular script in criminal procedures	
[...] those who handle criminal procedures find difficult to understand their intricacies. [...] if are used in criminal procedures, you can understand their circumstances.	You say that, when a sentence is executed and a criminal punished, if <i>idu</i> is used as a writing system ignorant people unable to understand it might receive an undeserved treatment for a single change of a character, but that now if their words are written with the vernacular script, these can be read to them. Thus, even extremely ignorant people can easily understand everything and not receive unfair treatment. [...]
Use of the vernacular script in the compilation of rime dictionaries	
[...] Rimes of characters ( <i>chaun</i> 字韻) can be divided into clear and muddy ( <i>ch'ōngt'ak</i> 清濁) [...]	[...] hastily edit the rime dictionaries ( <i>unsō</i> 韻書) compiled by the ancients by inserting in them the not yet carefully investigated vulgar script [...]

If the existence of a connection between these texts seems clear, more difficult is to assess a precise chronology between them and the exact nature of this connection. By considering only the dates reported in the Annals (1444 for the memorial and 1446 for the *HC*) one might be led to assume that the texts in the *HC* (the preface of the king and postface of Chōng Inji) were rejecting the arguments presented in the memorial. However, we should consider that the date of 1446 contained in the Annals refers to the completion of the entire *HC* and that the preface of the king could have been written before, perhaps at that time of the completion of the vernacular script. This is because the postface of Chōng Inji mentions that the king had presented “examples and principles” (*yeŭi* 例義)

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of the vernacular script in the winter of 1443, possibly referring to the section of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* written by the king or, perhaps, an early draft of it.<sup>322</sup> We should also consider that the structure and style of the memorial seem to reflect that it was written in response to a series of arguments in favour of the vernacular script. It is thus possible that both the postface of Chŏng Inji and the memorial reflected opposite arguments about the new vernacular script that were held and discussed among scholars of the Hall of Worthies at the time of the completion of the alphabet.<sup>323</sup> In any case, bearing in mind that the preface of the king and the postface of Chŏng Inji were closely related with the memorial and the result of the same background and circumstances will be helpful to contextualize better and understand them.

We can now proceed to discuss in more detail the preface of Sejong. The first sentence (corresponding to lines 1-3 of the *ŏnhae* version) is probably the most well-known passage and expresses the fundamental linguistic condition that led to the creation of the new vernacular script: the intrinsic difference between the Korean and the Chinese language. A difference that made it difficult to employ Chinese characters to convey the Korean language. In Chapter I, we have seen how this difference between the two languages had been felt well before Sejong's reign and expressed, for example, by T'aejo to justify the mistakes made by Chosŏn scholar-officials in the compilation of the congratulatory memorials written in *imun*.<sup>324</sup> This awareness must have been felt throughout the history of Korea since inherent in the linguistic differences between the two languages. Sejong, however, for the first time translated this awareness into action, originally devising a new script that, although necessarily influenced by Chinese phonology and a conception of writing that, until then, had been based exclusively on Chinese characters, was tailored on the Korean language.

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<sup>322</sup> Since the system presented here is consistent with the *haerye* part of the *HC* that was the result of two and a half years of systematization of the alphabet, we cannot be sure that there were not changes in it.

<sup>323</sup> This view can be found in Hong Ki-mun (1946) and Kang Sin-hang (2003:197).

<sup>324</sup> See I.3.1.

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It should be noted that by saying that the sounds of the Korean language could not be conveyed through Chinese characters, the king might have also, if not mainly, been referring to their employment in *idu*. As pointed out by Kim Chu-p'il (2016), the concept of "difference in sound" (*iŭm* 異音) expressed in this preface seems closely connected to the discussion on the difference between *idu* and the vernacular letters that Sejong and Ch'oe Malli had after the submission of the memorial. Furthermore, considering the uses of the new letters discussed in the memorial and the postface of Chŏng Inji (as the compilation of administrative documents, the explication of books, and the transcription of testimonies) we can see that the vernacular script was not necessarily presented as a substitute to *hanmun* but as an alternative to vernacular practices that used Chinese characters to convey the Korean vernacular language.

In the second sentence of the preface (lines 4-6 of the *ŏnhae* version), the king explains the consequence that this situation of mismatch between speaking and writing caused in the Korean society: the difficulty for the "ignorant people" (*umin* 愚民) to express themselves. A crucial step to understanding this sentence is the interpretation of the term *umin* 愚民. We can start by seeing how the character *min* 民 is used in other sources. This character is translated as *POYK-SYENG* 百惝姓惝 in the note to the title of the *HC ŏnhae*.<sup>325</sup> In the postface of the *HC* written by Chŏng Inji it is made a clear distinction between "officials" (*kwanbu* 官府) and the "people" (*min* 民):

昔新羅薛聰。始作吏讀。官府民間。至今行之。

In the past Sŏl Ch'ong of Silla created the *idu*, that has been used until the present times by officials and the common people.

This passage seems also to suggest that the common people could learn and use *idu*. The following passage related to the distribution of the original *Samgang haengsil-to*, however, clearly implies that they did not know *hanmun*:<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> *Sejong ŏje Hunmin chŏngŭm* 世宗御製訓民正音, 1a. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* 月印釋譜, vol.1.

<sup>326</sup> See I.1.

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[...]第以民庶不識文字書雖頒降人不訓示則又安能知其義而興起乎[...]

However, the masses (*minsŏ* 民庶) do not know about writing (*munja* 文字). [Thus,] even if the text is distributed, if nobody instructs them, how can they understand its meaning and be inspired by it?

Finally, this is how the character *min* 民 is used in the passage recording the remarks that the king made after reading the memorial of Ch'oe Malli:<sup>327</sup>

[...]且吏讀制作之本意無乃爲其便民乎如其便民也則今之諺文亦不爲便民乎[...]

Furthermore, was not the fundamental purpose of the creation of *idu* to make more convenient [the life of] people? If it was so, then has not the vernacular script the very same purpose? [...]

Here, similarly to the first example, it seems to be implied a connection between *idu* and the people. The character *min* 民 can thus be interpreted as referring to the common people, not officials, who did not know *hanmun*. It seems that they could potentially know *idu*, but no further information is provided on this.

The analysis of the character *u* 愚 might allow us to delimit better the “people” mentioned in the preface of the king as the target of the script. This character is translated with the vernacular 어릴 in the *ŏnhae* version of the *HC*.<sup>328</sup> This verb can be translated as “to be stupid; to be foolish.”<sup>329</sup> It does not seem to have any necessary connection with illiteracy but, at the same time, does not exclude it as a possible interpretation in the context of the preface. It might be helpful, then, to see how the character *u* 愚 was used in other contexts. In the postface of Chŏng Inji it is used in opposition to the character 智 (intelligence, wisdom) to indicate those who are slower in learning, here specifically in the learning of the newly invented vernacular letters:

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<sup>327</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21a-21b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>328</sup> *Sejong ŏje Hunmin chŏngŭm* 世宗御製訓民正音, 1a. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* 月印釋譜, vol.1.

<sup>329</sup> This verb could have at the time also the meaning of “to be young”. Nowadays, it has remained with this only this meaning (어리다), while the meaning “to be stupid” has taken the form 어리석다. See Kang Sin-hang (2003:184).

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故智者不崇朝而會愚者可浹旬而學

Furthermore, an intelligent man masters them [the vernacular letters] in one morning, an ignorant man can learn them in ten days.

In the discussion between the king and the submitters of the anti-alphabet memorial the character *u* 愚 designates those men and women who could not read the original text in *hanmun* of the *Samgang haengsil-to*:

予若以諺文譯三綱行實頒諸民間則愚夫愚婦皆得易曉忠臣孝子烈女必輩出矣

If I translate with the vernacular script the *Samgang haengsil-to* and distribute it among people, then ignorant men and women, everyone will be able to understand it easily, and loyal subjects, filial sons and devoted women will surely emerge!"

This passage seems to support the idea that the category of the ignorant people included those who could not read *hanmun*.<sup>330</sup> The following passage of the anti-alphabet memorial is particularly interesting since it contains the same term *umin* 愚民 used in the preface of the king:

若曰如刑殺獄辭以吏讀文字書之則不知文理之愚民一字之差容或致冤今以諺文直書其言讀使聽之則雖至愚之人悉皆易曉而無抱屈者

It might be said that when a sentence is executed and a criminal punished, if *idu* is used as a writing system ignorant people unable to understand writing might receive an undeserved treatment for a single change of a character, but that now, if their words are written with the vernacular script, these can be read to them. Thus, even a person who is extremely ignorant can easily understand everything and not receive unfair treatment.

This passage of the memorial is repeating a point that had been previously made (we can see this from the expression 若曰),<sup>331</sup> likely by the king himself or his

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<sup>330</sup> Kang Sin-hang (2003:123), for example, interprets the term *umin* 愚民 in the preface as indicating the mass of people who did not know *hanmun*.

<sup>331</sup> An Pyöng-hŭi (2007:136).

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assistants, and defines the “ignorant people” as those who “do not know the principles of writing” (不知文理). In this case, it is referring in particular to their impossibility to read writings in *idu*. The expression “extremely ignorant” (至愚) appears to refer to those people who were completely illiterate. It is interesting to see here how a character with an adverbial function could precede the character 愚 to indicate a further degree of illiteracy.

The term *umin* 愚民 used in the preface might then be interpreted as referring to the common people, i.e. not officials, who could not read with sufficient proficiency Chinese characters (whether in *hanmun* or *idu*). The use of the expression “extremely ignorant” (至愚) in the last example also seems to suggest that limited knowledge of Chinese characters could be achieved by them. The sentence of the preface can thus be interpreted as expressing the difficulty for the common people to write, thus the absence of widespread literacy among the population, that caused the king to feel compassion for them and to create the vernacular letters. However, although this interpretation is valid in its general outlines, we should consider that a spread of literacy among his subjects was not necessarily the most immediate outcome that the king might have expected as a result of its invention. The above-seen passage of the memorial dealing with the use of the vernacular script in criminal procedures showed that the new script was intended as a tool to transcribe the words of the “ignorant people” so that they could be read to them. Similarly, the passage of the preface might have implied not just an activity of writing made by the ignorant people but the possibility to faithfully transcribe their words through a *mediated* writing.

The use of specific terms in the sentence of the preface might be compatible with this suggested interpretation. The first one is the character 言 “to say”. Now, considering the context of the sentence, interpreting it as “saying through writing” is perfectly reasonable. However, this interpretation does not necessarily imply any direct writing made by ignorant people. If we look at how the character 言 is translated in the vernacular explication, this is 니르- (*niru-*), a term that has no necessary connection with “writing” but corresponds to modern Korean verbs

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이르다 (to tell) and 말하다 (to say; to speak). We can also see how the character 言 is used in other related texts. For example, the following remark made by Sejong in answering to the scholars who submitted the anti-alphabet memorial:

此等之言豈儒者識理之言乎

These words of yours, how can they be the words of Confucian scholars who know the “nature of principle”?

With this sentence, Sejong was addressing Kim Mun and Chǒng Ch’angson about some of their assertions that had been made about the possible employments of the alphabet and, for what we know, the king was referring to verbal declarations made during a discussion he had with these scholars, not to something they wrote. In the following other instance, the memorial is about the use of the vernacular script for the transcription of words of ignorant people during the criminal procedure:

今以諺文直書其言讀使聽之

[...] if their words are written with the vernacular script, these can be read to them.

Here the action of writing with the vernacular script is separated by that of speaking and is not even made by the same person: the oral words are those of the ignorant people, while the writing of those words is made by a different person, likely a clerk.<sup>332</sup> It seems thus to me that the character 言 in the preface of Sejong could have been used to indicate also, if not mainly, the words of the ignorant people that were separately transcribed by an official, and not necessarily writing made directly by them.

Another term that calls attention is the character 情, translated in the vernacular explication as 情, corresponding to the modern Korean word 뜻. This term has a broad semantic spectrum (meaning; intention;

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<sup>332</sup> As mentioned in II.2.2, a specific case in which the use of the vernacular script might have been applied was that of the *tajim* 拷音, a document through which a person connected to a certain legal case acknowledged that its statement was correct. See also Kim Jae-mun (1993:96-107).

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determination/destiny/fate) and not necessarily the meaning of sentiment or feeling, as it is often translated in English. We can see how the character 情 is used by Chǒng Inji in the following passages taken from his postface to the *HC*:

所以古人因聲制字。以通萬物之情。以載三才之道。而後世不能易也。

For this reason, the ancient people created characters (*cha* 字) based on those sounds and used them to understand the meaning (*chǒng* 情) of all things and to record [on books] the way of the Three Powers (*samjae* 三才).

以是聽訟。可以得其情。

If [the vernacular letters] are used in criminal procedures, you can understand their intricacies.

In both these passages, the character 情 is used about something expressed through writing. In the first case, the sentence is referring to the expression through Chinese characters of the “all things” (*manmul* 萬物), in the second example is referring to the expression through the vernacular script of the circumstances related to criminal procedures. Thus, in both cases, it is not used to express any personal feeling of the people. The second case seems particularly relevant in this discussion since it is referring, as the preface of the king, to writing made with the vernacular script. In the preface, it could then have been similarly intended to indicate the mind of the ignorant people that in some official circumstances, as the case of criminal procedures, needed to be faithfully transcribed, and not the personal feelings that they could not write down.

On the ground of the above-seen considerations, it seems possible that the king was not necessarily expressing general compassion for people who could not write their personal feelings but that his compassion was also, and perhaps most importantly, focused on the many cases of ignorant people who could not have their words faithfully recorded. This was a situation that could cause serious consequences, as an undeserved punishment due to mistakes in the transcriptions of their words during criminal procedures. In other words, Sejong



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might have not merely presented a script conceived to be learned and used by the common people to *write*, but as a script that could be used to faithfully and conveniently *transcribe* their words in a way that everyone could at least understand when listened. This involved not only the ignorant people but officials as well since implied active writing made by clerks and reading (or listening) by the common people.

The last part of the preface (lines 6-8 of the *õnhae* version) seems to state exactly this by expressing the wish of the king that the new vernacular script could be used by anyone, without specifying any particular use. This learning by the population is presented as only a “desire” by the king, not something to be forced on them. It is also stressed the simplicity of its learning and the convenience of its use.

We come now to the postface of Chõng Inji. As previously done with the anti-alphabet memorial, we will focus on two main aspects: the conception of writing that is presented in this document (especially in its connection with the invention of the new vernacular script) and the new information that it provides on the context of the invention of the vernacular script and its intended usages.

As for the first aspect, it can be noticed that, as a very premise, the postface of Chõng Inji considers writing (*mun* 文) as closely related to sounds (*sõng* 聲):

有天地自然之聲。則必有天地自然之文。所以古人因聲制字。以通萬物之情。以載三才之道。而後世不能易也。

If there are sounds (*sõng* 聲) for all the natural things, then there is also writing (*mun* 文) for them. For this reason, the ancient people created characters (*cha* 字) based on those sounds and used them to understand the mind (*chõng* 情) of all things and to record [on books] the way of the Three Powers (*samjae* 三才). Later generations could not change that.

This is contrary to one of the major points raised in the anti-alphabet memorial, that criticized the vernacular script precisely because based on sounds and thus different from Chinese characters. In fact, the direct relation of the vernacular

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script with sounds was for Ch'oe Malli the main reason that made this script different from Chinese characters and thus not suitable. Chŏng Inji, on the other hand, explains the origin of Chinese characters similar to that of a phonetic script. As pointed out by Kim Chu-p'il (2016:116), this explanation does not match the traditional ones that can be found in Chinese sources. In the preface to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (The Explication of Characters, Simple and Complex), for example, *mun* 文 are explained as generated from the forms of things, and *cha* 字 as the combination of forms and sounds. It seems thus that Chŏng Inji might have purposefully drawn attention to the phonetic features of Chinese characters to present the vernacular script as not disconnected from them and, ultimately, justify its invention.

The postface also presents the situation of the other languages outside China that had to borrow Chinese characters to express their sounds:

蓋外國之語。有其聲而無其字。假中國之字以通其用。是猶柄鑿之鉏鋤也。豈能達而無礙乎。

Generally, the languages outside the country (i.e. outside China) have sounds (*sŏng* 聲) but no script (*cha* 字). They borrowed the characters of China and made use of them. But this is just like inserting a square handle in a round hole. How can it not constitute an obstacle to communication?

In doing this, Chŏng Inji places the linguistic situation of Korea among those of the other neighbouring population. This parallel had been heavily criticized in the memorial of Ch'oe Malli, that considered these populations as barbaric and thus their situation no worth of any serious discussion. Chŏng Inji, on the other hand, makes a clear distinction between the relation of Chosŏn Korea with Chinese civilization and the purely linguistic difference between the Korean language and the language of China.

Finally, the postface of Chŏng Inji presents the following opinion about *idu*:

然皆假字而用。或澁或窒。非但鄙陋無稽而已。至於言語之間。則不能達其萬一焉。

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However, [*idu*] makes exclusive use of borrowed characters, thus is rough and limiting. Not only is vulgar and has no bases but, when it comes to language, it is not possible to communicate one in ten thousand things.

While Ch'oe Malli had sustained the use of *idu* on the ground that it made exclusive use of Chinese characters and was thus beneficial for learning, here Chŏng Inji describes it as “rough and limiting” and does not consider its relation with Chinese characters but only the difficulties in its practical employment for communication.

The postface of Chŏng Inji also provides valuable information on the events related to the creation of the alphabet and its intended usages. It says that in the year *kyehae* (1443), Sejong had created the 28 letters of the correct sounds and presented examples and principles (*yeüi* 例義) of them, naming these letters “the correct sounds for the instruction of the people (*Hunmin chŏngŭm* 訓民正音). This passage roughly matches with the entry of the Annals that records the completion of the new script,<sup>333</sup> confirming the creator of the script as Sejong, the number of the letters, and also the official name that was given to them. But it also adds a piece of crucial information that was not recorded in that entry by saying that at the time of its completion the king himself had presented “examples and principles” The majority of scholars argue that this document might have been the first part of the *HC* written by the king.<sup>334</sup> This is because in the postface Chŏng Inji asserts that he and other scholars of the Hall of Worthies were ordered to add “explanations” (*haesök* 解釋), that resulted in the *haerye* part of the book. Thus the “examples and principles” might correspond to the first part written by the king and the “explanations” to the second part (*haerye* part).<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> See II.1.

<sup>334</sup> See, for example, An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:123-24).

<sup>335</sup> Ledyard (1998: 171), on the other hand, points out that the first part of the *HC* has no examples and hardly any stated principle, suggesting that the “concise examples and principles” mentioned by Chŏng Inji might have been referring to Sejong’s own notes that, together with the first part written by him, were given to the commission in charge of the compilation of the *haerye* part.

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For this reason, “examples and principles” (*yeŭi* 例義) is also the name that is commonly given by Korean scholars to the second section of the first part of the *HC*.

The postface also discusses the different practical usages that were considered for the new script. It presents the explication of books written in *hanmun* and transcription of testimonies in criminal procedures as a key usage of the new script, explaining that they were needed because those “who study books experience difficulties in understanding them; and those who handle criminal procedures find difficult to understand their intricacies.” By saying this, it makes clear that the new script was intended to be employed by scholars and clerks in place of vernacular transcription systems. It also asserts how it could be used for the rimes of characters (*chaun* 字韻) and songs (*akka* 樂歌), applications that had already started with the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui* and the compilation of the vernacular verses of the *Yongbi ōch’ōn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons) that began in 1445. Of all these applications, only for the transcription of testimonies there is no existing document, and we cannot be sure if the new script was ever used for that. However, we should consider that, contrary to the other types of texts mentioned (dictionaries, exegesis and literary texts), transcriptions of criminal procedures were not documents that needed to be printed or preserved for a long time. That these documents did not survive does not necessarily mean that they never existed.

### II.3.2. *Examples, principles and explanations*

The so-called “Examples and principles” section of the *HC* written by Sejong immediately follows his preface and contains a list of the new vernacular letters, with their sounds explained through Chinese characters,<sup>336</sup> followed by some

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<sup>336</sup> There is a correspondence between the Chinese characters used to explain the pronunciation of the letters in this section and those used in the *Tongguk chōngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country, 1447). See An Pyōng-hŭi (2007:123-128).

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basic explanations about their use. Below I present the original text followed by a translation:<sup>337</sup>

ㄱ。牙音。如君字初發聲。並書。如蚪字初發聲<sup>338</sup>

ㄱ is a molar sound (牙音)<sup>339</sup>, as the first sound (聲)<sup>340</sup> of the character 君. Written side by side (並書)<sup>341</sup> corresponds to the first sound of the character 蚪

ㅋ。牙音。如快字初發聲

ㅋ is a molar sound, as the first sound of the character 快

ㆁ。牙音。如業字初發聲

ㆁ is a molar sound, like the first sound of the character 業

ㄷ。舌音。如斗字初發聲。並書。如覃字初發聲

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<sup>337</sup> Besides the Kansong edition, the same text can be found in the Annals [*Sejong Sillok*, 113, 36b (28/9/29)] and in the *ŏnhae* version contained in the *Wŏrin sŏkpo*. I used the Kansong edition as the primary source for the original text, attempting to reproduce as faithfully as possible its layout. However, the first two folios of this edition are missing (until the letter ㄷ) and some of the choices that were made in reproducing them are still debated, especially concerning the punctuation signs (called *kudujŏm* 句讀點 by Korean scholars) and the changes of line for the sentences containing the explanations of the double characters (*pyŏnsŏ haeng* 並書行). I have based my choices on the recent comprehensive study of Han Jae-yŏng, *et al* (2017). I also used the Kansong edition as a reference for the form of the letters of the vernacular script, that is slightly different from the one normally used nowadays. In particular, the consonants are more squarish, and the vowels use a dot in place of a small line (for example ㅏ in place of ㅑ). To reproduce the form of these letters I have used the “EBS Huminjeongeum” font. For the translation, I am particularly indebted to Ledyard (1998) and Kang Sin-hang (2003).

<sup>338</sup> The placement of the sentences containing the explanations of the double characters (*pyŏnsŏ haeng* 並書行) is still debated among scholars. In the reproduction of the Kansong edition these sentences are placed in a different line and written by leaving a blank space on the top. However, a different possibility is that these sentences were placed right after the explanation of the basic character, without changing the line. Here I have chosen this second option. This choice to not change the line also implies the addition of a *kujŏm* 句點 closing the previous sentence. See Han Jae-yŏng, *et al* (2017) for an in-depth analysis on this issue.

<sup>339</sup> The consonants are classified according to their place of articulation, a system taken from Chinese traditional phonology.

<sup>340</sup> In the original text two characters are used to indicate the word here translated as “sound”: 音 and 聲. For a discussion on the different employment of these two characters, see Ledyard (1998:177-188) and Song Ki-jung (2014).

<sup>341</sup> This expression is referring to the double character ㄱ. This and the other double consonants (ㄷ, ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅉ) were used to represent the “wholly muddy” (*chŏnt’ak* 全濁) sounds of traditional Chinese phonology and, for the most part, were used to write the prescribed pronunciation of the Chinese characters, not vernacular Korean.

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ㄨ is a lingual sound (舌音), as the first sound of the character 斗. Written side by side corresponds to the first sound of the character 覃

ㄨ。舌音。吞字初發聲

ㄨ is a lingual sound, as the first sound of the character 吞

ㄨ。舌音。如那字初發聲

ㄨ is a lingual sound, as the first sound of the character 那

ㄨ。唇音。如警字初發聲。竝書。如步字初發聲

ㄨ is a labial sound (唇音), as the first sound of the character 警. Written side by side corresponds to the first sound of the character 步

ㄨ。唇音。如漂字初發聲

ㄨ is a labial sound, as the first sound of the character 漂

ㄨ。唇音。如彌字初發聲

ㄨ is a labial sound, as the first sound of the character 彌

ㄨ。齒音。如卽字初發聲。竝書。如慈字初發聲

ㄨ is an incisor sound (齒音), as the first sound of the character 卽. Written side by side corresponds to the first sound of the character 慈.

ㄨ。齒音。如侵字初發聲

ㄨ is an incisor sound, as the first sound of the character 侵

ㄨ。齒音。如戊字初發聲。竝書。如邪字初發聲

ㄨ is an incisor sound, as the first sound of the character 戊. Written side by side corresponds to the first sound of the character 邪.

ㄨ。喉音。如挹字初發聲

ㄨ is a laryngeal sound (喉音), as the first sound of the character 挹

ㄨ。喉音。如虛字初發聲。竝書。如洪字初發聲

ㄨ is a laryngeal sound, as the first sound of the character 虛. Written side by side corresponds to the first sound of the character 洪

ㄨ。喉音。如欲字初發聲

ㄨ is a laryngeal sound, as the first sound of the character 欲

ㄨ。半舌音。如閭字初發聲

ㄨ is a semi-lingual sound (半舌音), as the first sound of the character 閭

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△。半齒音。如穰字初發聲<sup>342</sup>

△ is a semi-incisor sound (半齒音), as the first sound of the character 穰.

·。如吞字中聲

· is like the middle sound of the character 吞

一。如卽字中聲

一 is like the middle sound of the character 卽

丨。如侵字中聲

丨 is like the middle sound of the character 侵

ㄣ。如洪字中聲

ㄣ is like the middle sound of the character 洪

卜。如覃字中聲

卜 is like the middle sound of the character 覃

ㄩ。如君字中聲

ㄩ is like the middle sound of the character 君

丩。如業字中聲

丩 is like the middle sound of the character 業

ㄩ。如欲字中聲

ㄩ is like the middle sound of the character 欲

卜。如穰字中聲

卜 is like the middle sound of the character 穰

ㄣ。如戊字中聲

ㄣ is like the middle sound of the character 戊

丩。如警字中聲

丩 is like the middle sound of the character 警

終聲復用初聲。○連書唇音之下。則爲唇輕音。初聲合用則竝書。終聲同。· 一 ㄣ ㄩ

ㄩ ㄣ。附書初聲之下。丨 丩 卜 卜 丩。附書於右。凡字必合而成音。左加一點則去聲。

二則上聲。無則平聲。入聲加點同而促急

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<sup>342</sup> From this point I present the original text in the Kansong edition of the *HC*, including punctuation signs and changes of line.

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The terminal sounds (終聲) use again the initial sounds (初聲). If ○ is written below a labial sound, it becomes a light labial sound (唇輕音). If initial sounds are combined, they are written side by side. The same goes for the final sounds. · — ㄷ ㄷ ㄷ ㄷ ㄷ are attached below the initial sounds. | ㅏ | ㅑ | ㅓ | ㅕ are attached to their right. The letters need to be combined to form a syllable (音).<sup>343</sup> One dot (一點) added to the left indicates a departing tone (去聲), two a rising tone (上聲), nothing an even tone (平聲). An entering tone (入聲) is indicated by adding dots in the same way, but [the resulted pronunciation] is faster and tense (促急).<sup>344</sup>

The “Explanations and examples” part of the *HC (haerye-bon)*—that expands on the “Examples and principles” section written by the king—is separated from the first part of the text since, although bound as a single book, it starts in a separate folio having its head-title: *Hunmin chǒngŭm haerye* 訓民正音解例. The title in the block-centre (*p’ansimje* 版心題) is also different and indicated as *Chǒngŭm haerye* 正音解例.<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, the numbers of the folios (*changch’a* 張次) placed in the *p’ansim* 版心 (the central part of the folio) starts from 1 once again. The size of the characters is also slightly smaller than the previous part, visually indicating the different authorship of the two parts of the text (the king for the first part and the scholars of the Hall of Worthies for the second part).<sup>346</sup>

The first section of this second part is titled *chejahaehae* 制字解 (explanations of the creation of the letters). This is the most extended section of the text and, as suggested by the title itself, is devoted to the explanation of the principles and

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<sup>343</sup> In this case the character 音 means the sound of a syllable. The sentence means that a syllable is formed by initial, medial and terminal sounds. See Kang Sin-hang (2003:128).

<sup>344</sup> In the Chinese literary language, the entering tone indicated the syllables that ended in an unreleased voiceless stop (-p, -t, -k) and that had pitch distinctions neutralized. This sentence means that in vernacular Korean this class of syllables, differently from the Chinese literary language, maintained a pitch distinction and thus merged into other tones. In other words, although formally maintaining the “entering tone” category as in the Chinese phonological tradition, this passage shows how this term had no actual practical significance for Korean. See Lee and Ramsey (2011:123).

<sup>345</sup> *Chǒngŭm* 正音 seems to be used here as an abbreviation of *Hunmin chǒngŭm* 訓民正音. This abbreviation is also used several times in the text itself to indicate the script.

<sup>346</sup> In the first part written by the king each page (side of the folio) has 7 lines and 11 characters for each line. In this second part (*haerye-bon*) each page has 8 lines and 13 characters.



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theory behind the creation of the new letters. It starts by setting the creation of the new script on the backdrop of Neo-Confucian philosophy, linking it to key-concepts as that of the Pattern (*i* 理) of Yin and Yang (*ümyang* 陰陽) and the Five Agents (*ohaeng* 五行).<sup>347</sup> This philosophical framework will permeate the entire work and, as noted by Ledyard (1998:196), makes it at times to resemble more a Neo-Confucian tract than an essay on writing. We cannot be sure if this philosophical rationalization was added only in a second moment, after the actual creation of the vernacular script, but it is important insofar as it reflects the intellectual background of the fifteenth-century scholars who worked on this text. Furthermore, it should be noted that this Neo-Confucian rationalization might have been important to counter the first objection presented in the memorial against the new script, that criticized the fact that the new script was utterly contrary to the tradition and represented a kind of betrayal from the civilization shared with China. By presenting the new script as integrated into the ideological framework of the time, the authors provided a powerful, and perhaps necessary, means to legitimize it.

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<sup>347</sup> For a discussion on the significance of these concepts in Neo-Confucian philosophy, see Ledyard (1998:197-208).

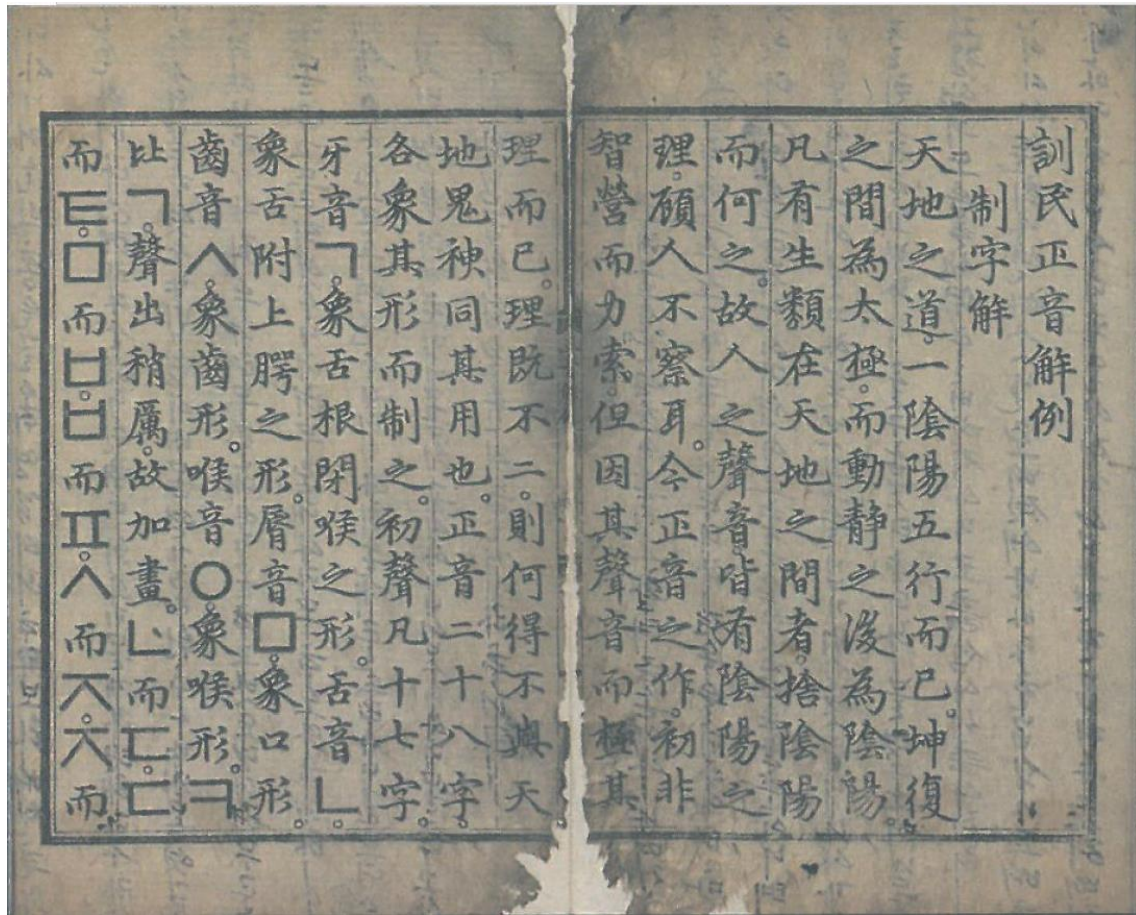


Figure 13. *Hunmin chongum Haerye-bon* 訓民正音解例本. Folio no.1. Kansong edition.

After setting this general philosophical background, the first section continues by presenting the explanations of the shape of the new letters on phonological grounds. This is perhaps the most known passage of the whole *haerye* text and the one that permitted to finally know, after the discovery of the text in 1940 (the so-called Kansong edition), the principles behind the creation of the vernacular letters. The fundamental principle presented by the text is that these letters were created “by depicting their outlines” (各象其形而制之).<sup>348</sup> Five basic consonants are thus explained as modelled on the shape of the speech organ

<sup>348</sup> The reference here seems to be to the first of the “six principles of writing” (Ch. *liushu*, Kr. *yuksŏ* 六書) used in the traditional analysis of Chinese characters: the pictographic principle (Ch. *Xiangxing*, Kr. *sanghyŏng* 象形). The study of An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:293-316) convincingly showed a systematic correspondence between the letters of the vernacular script and the traditional principles used for the analysis of Chinese characters.

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used for their articulation and, in some cases, also on the articulatory gesture of that organ:

牙音 ㄋ。象舌根閉喉之形。

The molar sound ㄋ (*k*) depicts the outline of the root of the tongue closing the throat.

舌音 ㄌ。象舌附上腭之形。

The lingual sound ㄌ (*n*) depicts the outline of the tongue touching the upper gums.

脣音 ㄇ。象口形。

The labial sound ㄇ (*m*) depicts the outline of the mouth.

齒音 ㄏ。象齒形。

The incisor sound ㄏ (*s*) depicts the outline of the teeth.

喉音 ㄛ。象喉形。

The laryngeal sound ㄛ (*ø*) depicts the outline of the throat.

All the other consonants are explained as derived from these five by adding one or more strokes, or by changing their shapes. Here is the explanation of the letter ㄏ:

ㄏ比ㄋ。聲出稍厲。故加劃。

ㄏ (*kh*) has a slightly stronger sound than ㄋ (*k*), thus one stroke is added.

The majority of the other consonants follow the same principle of adding a stroke to make a stronger sound (except for the letter ㄛ):

ㄌ而ㄌ。ㄌ而ㄌ。ㄌ而ㄌ。ㄌ而ㄌ。ㄌ而ㄌ。其因聲加劃之義皆同。而唯 ㄛ 爲異。

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ㄴ then ㄷ, ㄷ then ㅌ, ㄱ then ㅋ, ㅁ then ㅂ, ㅂ then ㅃ, ㅅ then ㅆ, ㅈ then ㅊ, ㅊ then ㅌ, ㅌ then ㅍ, ㅍ then ㅑ. The meaning of the addition of strokes to their original sound is the same for all, except for ㅑ.<sup>349</sup>

Slightly different was the principle used for the remaining two consonants: ㄹ (*l*) and ㅈ (*z*). In their case the text explains that their shape was not based on the same principle of adding a stroke to the basic letter to indicate a stronger sound, but made through a modification of the basic letter to represent a sound related to it:

半舌音 ㄹ 半齒音 ㅈ 亦象舌齒之形而異其體 無加劃之義焉

The semi-lingual sound ㄹ (*l*) and the semi-incisor sound ㅈ (*z*) also depict [respectively] the tongue and the teeth, but their shape is different, and there is no meaning in the addition of strokes.

Table 4 shows the consonants arranged according to these explanations.

Table 4. Distribution of the consonants of the vernacular script according to their shape as explained in the *chejahae* 制字解 (explanations of the creation of the letters) section of the *HC*.

Speech organ	Basic letter	Addition of strokes		
		Stronger sound		Exceptions
Molar 牙	ㄱ		ㅋ	
Tongue 舌	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㅌ	ㄹ
Mouth 唇	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅃ	
Incisor 齒	ㅅ	ㅆ	ㅈ	ㅊ
Throat 喉	ㅊ	ㅑ	ㅒ	ㅓ

After this phonological explanation of the shape of the consonants, the text continues by explaining their link with the Five Agents (*ohaeng* 五行), the Four Seasons (*sasi* 四時), the Five Notes (*oŭm* 五音) and the Five Directions (*obang* 五

<sup>349</sup> The letter ㅑ (with a small vertical stroke on the upper part) represented a molar (velar) sound. Thus, although the graphic form derived from the letter ㅊ, its sound was not phonetically related to it.

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方). As pointed out by Kang Sin-hang (2003:97), these connections were based on what might be called a “sound symbolism”.

These symbolic connections are then followed by a further phonological division of the consonants according to the manner of articulation. The letters are divided into “clear” (*ch’öng* 清) and “muddy” (*t’ak* 濁) sounds. This criterion—that was taken from Chinese phonology<sup>350</sup>—resulted in the division of the consonants in four groups as shown in Table 5 (for a better reference, the consonants have also been vertically grouped according to their place of articulation).

Table 5. Division of the consonants of the vernacular script according to their manner of articulation and following the conventional categories of classification of Chinese phonology.

Manner of articulation	Vernacular letters						
Wholly clear ( <i>ch’öng</i> 全清)	ㄱ	ㄷ	ㅌ	ㅈ	ㅊ		
Partly clear ( <i>ch’ach’öng</i> 次清)	ㅋ	ㆁ	ㆁ	ㆁ	ㆁ		
Wholly muddy ( <i>ch’ont’ak</i> 全濁)	ㄴ	ㄹ	ㄹ	ㄹ	ㄹ		
Neither clear nor muddy ( <i>pulch’öng pult’ak</i> 不清不濁)	ㅇ	ㄹ	ㄹ		ㅇ	ㄹ	ㄹ

The “wholly clear” sounds corresponded to plain voiceless consonants, the “partly clear” sounds to aspirated consonants, the “wholly muddy” sounds to voiced consonants of Chinese characters,<sup>351</sup> and the “neither clear nor muddy” sounds to the remaining sonorant and voiced consonants.

<sup>350</sup> For a discussion of the concepts of “clearness” and “muddiness” in Chinese phonology, see Ledyard (1998:188-192).

<sup>351</sup> The “wholly muddy” category is usually interpreted as originally indicating voicing in Chinese and was used by the compilers of the *HC haerye* as a convention for the transcription of the pronunciation of Chinese characters. In a very limited number of cases, these double consonants can be also found in native words to represent reinforced consonants. This happened, for example, after the prospective modifier *-ulq/olq*. The double consonants ㅎㅎ (*hh*) and ㄹㄹ (*ss*) are also presented by the *HC haerye* itself (*hapchahae* 合字解 section) in native verbs: *hhye-* ㅎㅎ- (to

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The shapes of the vowels, called “medial sounds” (*chungsöng* 中聲), are explained as based on the depiction of Heaven (*ch’ön* 天), Earth (*chi* 地) and Man (*in* 人). The vowel  $\cdot$  is explained as depicting Heaven due to the roundness of its outline;  $—$  as depicting Earth due to the flatness of its outline; and  $|$  as depicting Man due to the erectness of its outline. The sounds of these vowels are also described in terms of being deep (*sim* 深) or shallow (*ch’ön* 淺), probably to indicate the articulation of the vowel in the back or the front of the mouth respectively. The other vowels are described as a combination of these three basic letters and explained in both phonological terms and philosophical symbolism. Phonologically, they are described as “close” (*hap* 闔) or “open” (*pyök* 闢), terms that indicated the articulatory description of the mouth as “contracted” (*ch’uk* 蹙) or “spread” (*chang* 張).<sup>352</sup> Philosophically, they are framed in the usual symbolism of combined associations with Heaven, Earth and Man. They are divided into two groups:  $\div$  (*wo*),  $\vdash$  (*a*),  $\ddot{\div}$  (*yo*), and  $\vdash$  (*ya*) are associated with Yang;  $\dashv$  (*wu*),  $\vdash$  (*e*),  $\ddot{\dashv}$  (*yu*), and  $\vdash$  (*ye*) with Yin. These two groups, although rationalized in philosophical terms, represented actual vowel harmony oppositions that characterized the Korean language.

After the discussion on the vowels, the section concludes by considering how the different sounds (initial, medial and terminal) are related to each other. Here it is asserted that the initial sounds are used again for the terminal sounds (終聲復用初聲者).<sup>353</sup> A symbolic association is also provided for the different parts of the syllable: Heaven for the initial phoneme, Earth for the terminal and Man for the medial.

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pull) and *ssota* 쏘다 “to shoot”. The double consonant  $\text{ㅉ}$  (*cc*) could occur in word-medial position of Korean native words. On the reinforcement in Late Middle Korean, see Lee and Ramsey (2011:128-129).

<sup>352</sup> According to Ledyard (1998:290), the description of the mouth as “contracted” (*ch’uk* 蹙) or “spread” (*chang* 張) might have been referring to rounded and unrounded lips.

<sup>353</sup> This assertion that terminal sounds corresponded to the initial sounds corresponds to the one in the *yeŭi* 例義 (examples and principles) section written by the king and will be elaborated in the section specifically dedicated to the explanation of the terminal sounds.

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At the end of the section, right after its main text, we can find a series of verses made of 7 characters each placed in the centre of the folio, leaving a margin of three characters both above and below (see Figure 14). These verses are called *kyōl* 訣 and present a summary of the content of the main text. The function of these verses was probably to help the reader in memorizing the contents of the sections through a repetitive recitation.<sup>354</sup> Similar verses are attached at the end of each of the “explanations” sections of the text, thus of the first five of the total six sections, with the exclusion of the last “examples” section.

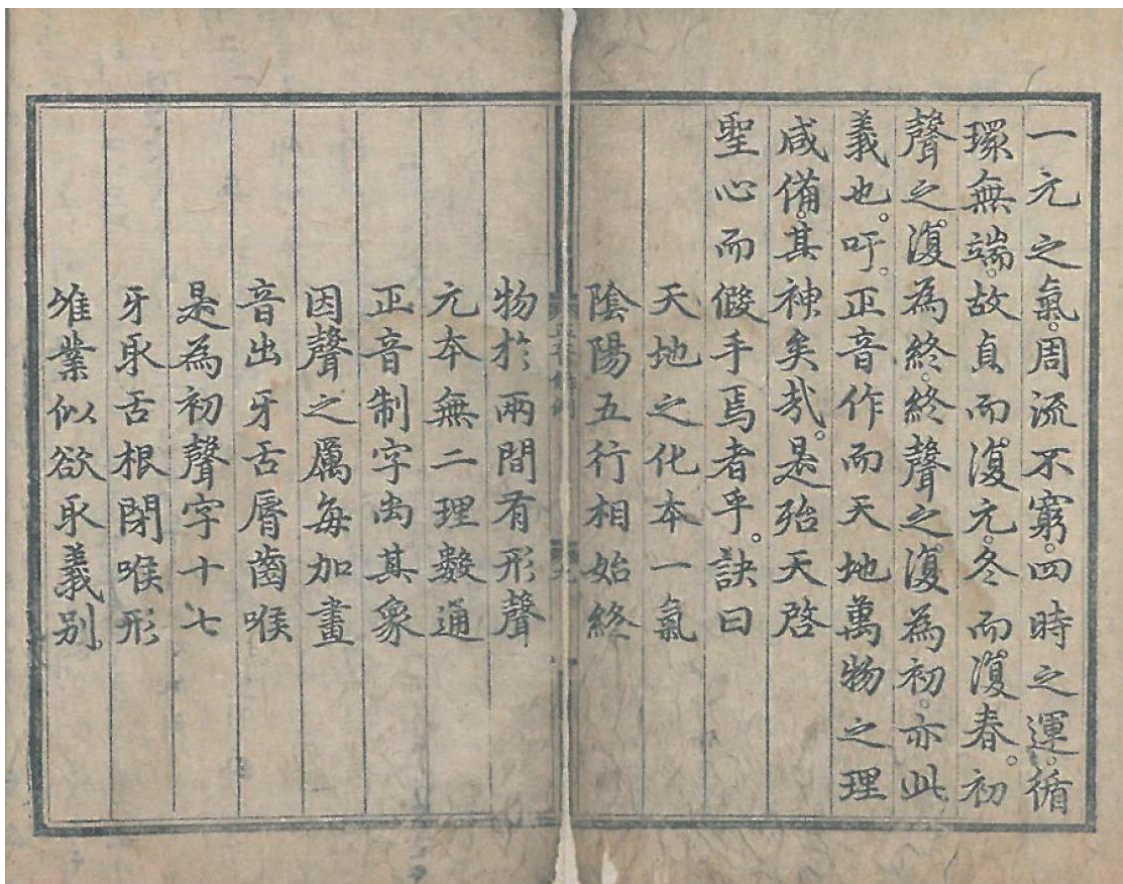


Figure 14. *Hunmin chōngŭm Haerye-bon* 訓民正音解例本. Folio no. 9. Kansong edition.

Below is a translation of the first verses of this section (visible in Figure 14):

天地之化本一氣

The transformations of Heaven and Earth are in principle one single Ether

<sup>354</sup> Chōng U-yōng (2015:41).

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陰陽五行相始終

Yin and Yang and the Five Elements are each other's beginning and end

物於兩間有形聲

All things in between have form and sound

元本無二理數通

At their origin, there is no duality but the flowing of Pattern and number

These verses summarize a much longer portion of the main text. The four verses (28 characters) seen above as an example are used to summarize seven longer sentences made of 97 characters.

Although there is a consensus on the use of these verses as a device to assimilate and memorize the content of the text through recitation, more debated is the origin of their use. Ledyard (1998), for example, points out that the origin of this type of verses can be traced back to the classics of Indian linguistics, where they are called *ślokas*. Chinese phonologists from the Tang period onwards—that Ledyard reminds us were often Buddhist monks—assimilated and adapted this model in their work, that subsequently reached Sejong and the Korean scholars. The term *kyōl* is associated by Ledyard to an old Taoist term for the transmission of occult wisdom. A different influence is suggested by Chŏng U-yŏng (2015) and Kim Mu-bong (2015), who have both argued that this use of the verses to summarize the content of the main text was an influence of the same practice used in Buddhist sutras, where the main text in prose (*changhang* 長行) is followed by summarizing verses of eulogy (*chungsong* 重頌).<sup>355</sup> The conclusion of Kim Mu-bong (2015:29) is that we can see in it a borrowing of the method of composition of Buddhist Sutras. Chŏng U-yŏng (2015:46) even suggests the possibility that the compilers of the *HC haeryae* chose this method intending to make a text with a dignity that corresponded to that of the Buddhist Sutras venerated by the common people, a sort of “*Hunmin chŏngŭm sutra*” (訓民正音經).

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<sup>355</sup> This practice corresponds to the second of the twelve methods through which are divided the teachings of the Buddha according to the style and contents (*sibibugyŏng* 十二部經). See Kim Mu-bong (2015:26).



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The same method of inserting verses after a longer text in prose was also applied in the *Samgang haengsil-to*, where the main text of the stories is followed by a version written in verses. This text, similarly to the *haerye-bon*, had been commissioned by Sejong to the scholars of the Hall of Worthies. As can be seen in Figure 2 (discussed in I.1), the verses follow the main text and are placed on a different line leaving a margin of one character on the upper part of the page. In this case, there is no formula introducing the verses at the end of the main text, but they are indicated by the character *si* 詩 at the beginning of the verses. The verses are made by seven characters, precisely as those in the *haerye-bon* but are separated by punctuation signs in the form of small circles and not written in separate lines. A passage from the Preface (*sömun* 序文) by Kwön Ch'ae 權採 (1399-1438) dated 1432 explains that these verses were intended to be recited: "when these poems are recited, will make [people] emulate the human sentiment and moral nature [of the stories]." <sup>356</sup> It seems thus that the addition of verses to a text in prose was a strategy that had been already used in a text connected to Sejong. To a certain extent, it might be said that the verses of the *Wörin ch'ön'gang chi kok* compiled by the king himself had a similar function to complement a text in prose, i.e. the *Sökpo sangjöl*. <sup>357</sup> This suggests that the use of the above-seen practice of combining prose and verses in the *HC haerye*, although connected to an established Buddhist writing practice, and possibly influenced by it, might not have been necessarily the result of a direct and intentional attempt to link this text with Buddhism but of a practical purpose in helping the memorization of the text.

After the first section on the creation of the letters, the text presents three separate sections specifically dedicated to the three parts of the syllable: *ch'osöng* 初聲解 (initial sounds), *chungson* 中聲 (medial sounds) and *chongsöng* 終聲 (terminal sounds). The explanation of the initial sounds starts with the assertion that they correspond to the character mothers (*chamo* 字母) of the Chinese rime

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<sup>356</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 56:33a (14/6/9): 諷詠其詩以體情性

<sup>357</sup> For a discussion of these texts, see III.2.

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books (*unsŏ* 韻書). It then provides representative Chinese characters whose initial sounds correspond to the vernacular consonants. These characters are the same provided in the list of the letters presented in the above-seen base text written by Sejong.

The explanation of the medial sounds similarly provides the corresponding Chinese characters that were also listed in the base text. Furthermore, it explains all the possible combination of the vowels: ㅏ (*wa*), ㅑ (*ywoya*), ㅓ (*we*), ㅕ (*ywuye*), ㅗ (*e*), ㅛ (*uy*), ㅜ (*woy*), ㅠ (*ay*), ㅡ (*wuy*), ㅟ (*ey*), ㅞ (*ywoy*), ㅝ (*yay*), ㅜ (*ywuy*), ㅟ (*yey*), ㅞ (*way*), ㅝ (*wey*), ㅞ (*ywoyay*), and ㅜ (*ywuyey*).

The section on the terminal sounds defines them as the sounds following the initial and the medial sounds and completing the syllable (*chaun* 字韻).<sup>358</sup> It distinguishes their pronunciation in relaxed (*wan* 緩) and tense (*kŭp* 急) and, in discussing their distribution among the different tones, it says that it suffices to use only eight letters in terminal position: ㄱ (*k*), ㅇ (*ng*), ㄷ (*t*), ㄴ (*n*), ㅍ (*p*), ㅁ (*m*), ㅅ (*s*), and ㄹ (*l*). This meant that, for example, the letter ㅅ (*s*) could replace all the other consonants in the incisor series: ㅈ (*c*), ㅊ (*ch*) and ㅉ (*z*). The examples provided are *poys kwoc* 빛꽃 “pear blossom” and *yez\_uy kach* 엮의갓 “fox pelt”, that the text asserts could be both written with a final -s ㅅ. The reason, although not explicitly provided in the text, was that all these consonants were pronounced as unreleased in terminal position, not differently from how they are pronounced today in contemporary Korean. Thus, one single letter could be used to phonemically represent others having the same place of articulation.<sup>359</sup> With this explanation, the text asserted a phonemic principle for the use of the vernacular letters, setting a clear correspondence between vernacular writing and its oral realization. In other words, the compilers set as a principle that the vernacular orthography should not necessarily reflect the underlying morphemic

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<sup>358</sup> As pointed out by Song Ki-jung (2014:78-79), the compilers of the *HC* intended the syllable as the minimal pronounceable unit and not as having also a semantic significance, as it was the case for the Chinese language. From this the different terms used in the text to express this linguistic concept: *sŏngŭm* 成音, *cha* 字 and *chaun* 字韻.

<sup>359</sup> Following the same principle, although no examples are provided in the text, the letter -t ㄷ could replace -th ㅌ, and -p ㅍ could replace -ph ㅍ.

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structure of the language, but could transcribe what was pronounced and heard. It seems that this phonemic writing was particularly apt for an oral and aural interpretation of the text, perhaps reflecting a conception of the vernacular script as aimed to represent the oral dimension of the language in texts that were intended to be primarily orally vocalized by the readers. This principle will be applied in all the subsequent vernacular works, with two important exceptions in works closely associated to Sejong: the *Yongbi ǒch'ǒn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons) and the *Wǒrin ch'ǒn'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 (Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers). The different orthographic decision made in these two texts might have provided the text with better visual readability independently from its actual oral realization. The possible reasons for this choice will be discussed in the next chapter. On a similar line of reasoning seems to have been the following rule that the syllable could end in a vowel and that it was not necessary the use of the letter ◯ (zero sound) in terminal position.<sup>360</sup>

The next section of the work is dedicated to discussing the combination of the letters. It starts by asserting that a syllable was formed by the combination of initial, medial and terminal sounds. The text explains then the rules for the graphic combination of the letters: circular and horizontal vowels ( · — ◡ ◢ ◣ ◤ ) are described to be placed below the initial consonants, vertical ones ( | † ‡ † ‡ ) to their right. For example, the vowel · (u) of the syllable *THUN* 呑 is said to be placed below the letter ≡ (*th*), i.e. 呑; while the vowel | (*i*) of the syllable *CHIIM* 侵 is said to be placed on the right of the consonant ㅈ (*ch*), i.e. 침. Terminal consonants are said to be always placed below both the initial and medial sounds.

For initial letters, the text asserts that it is possible to combine and use two or three letters together by writing them side by side (合用並書). The examples provided are the vernacular words *sta* ㅅㅏ meaning “earth” (地), *pcaek* ㅍㅅㅅ meaning

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<sup>360</sup> This directive will be partially reversed with the compilation of the *Tongguk chǒngun* one year later, that used the letter ◯ (zero sound) as an artificial final consonant for the pronunciations of all characters ending with a vowel.

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“one of a pair” (雙) and *pskum* 𑖑𑖔 meaning “an aperture, a crack” (隙). It is also said that the same initial letter can be written side by side (各自並書). The examples provided are the vernacular verbs *hhye* 𑖕𑖔 meaning “to pull” (引), *kwoy00ye* 𑖕𑖔𑖔 meaning “being loved by someone” (人愛我) and *sswota* 𑖔𑖔 meaning “to shoot something” (射之).<sup>361</sup> The principle of the combination and use of two or three letters together to form clusters is also said to apply to medial and terminal sounds. We have thus examples as *hwoay* 𑖕𑖔 meaning “torch” (炬) for the medial sounds and *holk* 𑖕𑖔 meaning “earth” (土) for the terminal sounds.

An important orthographical principle expressed in this section was related to the case when Chinese characters and vernacular script were mixed in the same text. The example provided by the compilers is the following:

孔子 | 魯人사람

[KWONG-CA]\_i [LO]\_s salom

Confucius\_ *nom.* Lu\_ *gen.* person

“Confucius [was] a man of Lu”

In this sentence, single vernacular letters are inserted to show the grammatical relations between the words. If the sentence had been written entirely with the vernacular script, the nominative particle | (*i*) would have been incorporated as an offglide into the preceding syllable. However, with a Chinese character, this was not possible. Thus, the offglide was placed next to it, but this was done without forming a separate syllable (◌|), as would have been in modern orthography, but leaving it isolated. Similar is the case of the *-s* 人 linking the two words 魯 (Lu) and *salom* 사람 (person), the so-called “genitive *s*” (in Korean, *sai siot* 사이시옷 “medial *s*”). In a sentence written exclusively with the vernacular script, the *s* would have been incorporated in the previous syllable, but here, in a mixed script, it was left isolated between the two words. This example reveals

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<sup>361</sup> It should be noted that the double consonant 00 did not appear among the “wholly muddy” sounds that was a category conventionally used to represent the sounds of Chinese characters. Here *hh* 𑖕𑖔, *00* 00 and *ss* 𑖔𑖔 are the only double characters that are explicitly used for Korean terms.

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how the vernacular script was hardly intended to eliminate the use of Chinese characters altogether and that, quite the contrary, was expected to be used mixed with them. This practice, however, also caused specific orthographical issues that the compilers attempted here to clarify.

The next passage is dedicated to the explanation of the tones of the vernacular language. This explanation reflects the one written by Sejong in the first part of the text: one dot at the left on the syllable indicated a departing tone, two dots a raising tone, no dots a level tone. The entering tone—that referred to syllables ending in an occlusive consonant—is also similarly described as being not fixed and merging with the others. Actual examples are also provided, as *kal* ·갈 “knife, sword” (刀) for the departing tone, *twol* :돌 “stone” (石) for the rising tone, and *hwal* 활 “bow” (弓) for the level tone. Of the entering tone, different examples are provided showing how it could resemble all other tones, as *mwot* ·못 “nail” (釘), *nat* :낱 “grain” (穀) or *put* 붙 “brush” (筆). In other words, the entering tone was only maintained at a theoretical level to conform with the Chinese system, but at a practical level, it merged with other tones. It should also be noted that the compilers, although using the same terminology used for Chinese tones, were probably referring to a pitch system and not an actual tonal system as the one in the Chinese language.<sup>362</sup> The descriptions of the four tones also have similarities with those used in China.<sup>363</sup> As pointed out by Ledyards (1998:254), “if the Chinese had not accumulated a technical literature on the subject of their tones, the Koreans would probably not have looked for such a system in their own language.” It was thus probably the familiarity of the compilers with the Chinese tonal system and the literature on this topic in Chinese works that made them analyze the suprasegmental system of their language and devise a method to mark it in the vernacular orthography. But no different to what they did in other cases during the creation and application of the vernacular script, it was not a simple transfer or a forced adaptation. Although attempting to maintain a

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<sup>362</sup> For a discussion on this, see Ledyard (1998:249-256).

<sup>363</sup> See Kang Sin-hang (2003:164).

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theoretical link with the traditional Chinese system of tones, they adapted it to represent the Korean language. The efforts that were devoted in devising this method also seems to suggest that particular attention was placed in creating a script that could reproduce as faithfully as possible the oral dimension of the language, something that had not been possible with previous transcription systems that used Chinese characters. And its precise application in all the vernacular texts of the period might imply a tendency toward an oral reading of these texts.

Similar attention to the oral realization of the language is shown by the following instructions on the use of specific letters. The initial sounds ㄱ and ㅇ (zero sound) are described as similar to each other, and thus their use is said to be interchangeable in the vernacular language.<sup>364</sup> Furthermore, the text presents a method to distinguish the two allophones of the semi-lingual ㄷ: *r* and *l*. Although aware of the fact that these two sounds, described respectively as “light” (*kyōng* 輕) and “heavy” (*chung* 重), had no distinctive value in Korean, the compilers still felt the need to provide a way to distinguish them. Their solution was to represent the light semi-lingual sound *r* by placing the letter ㅇ below ㄷ.<sup>365</sup> Finally, a similar attitude is shown by the presentation of two extra combinations of vowels (ㅑ and ㅓ) that, although not used in the language of the country (國語), are said to possibly occur in the speech of children (兒童之言) and the local dialects at the borders (邊野之語).<sup>366</sup> With this instruction, the compilers show that the vernacular script could be used for sounds that, although having no

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<sup>364</sup> The letter ㄱ (*q*) had been created to represent the pronunciation of Chinese characters. Other than that, it had very limited uses in Middle Korean. One was as the final of the prospective modifier *-ulq/olq*. The other was a substitute of the “genitive *s*” in certain environments (but this latter use is only found in the *Yongbi ōch’ōn ka* and the *HC ōnhae*). Thus, it seems that this interchangeability between the two letters might have applied only to the Sino-Korean readings of Chinese characters.

<sup>365</sup> Although not shown in the text, the resulting letter would have been ㄷㅇ. The same strategy of writing ㅇ right below a letter to represent its “light” version is also described in the above-seen “examples and principles” section written by Sejong to represent the “light labial sounds” (*sun’gyōngŭm* 唇輕音).

<sup>366</sup> This might suggest that also other combinations could have been considered possible for these special uses.

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distinctive value in the standard Korean language (i.e. the language of the capital region), could appear in idiolectal and dialectal forms.

The last section of the *HC haerye* is dedicated explicitly to the “examples” of the title and shows each letter in different vernacular words. This list of words is divided into three parts dedicated respectively to initial sounds (*ch'osǒng* 初聲), medial sounds (*chungsǒn* 中聲) and final sounds (*chongsǒng* 終聲). The initial and final sounds have two examples each, while the medial sounds have three each. This section, being a list of examples, is the only one not presenting the summarizing verses at the end.

### II.4. Early Diffusion

We do not possess much information about how the new vernacular script was spread and taught in the early years after its invention. In particular, contrary to what we might have expected, we do not have any evidence of the existence of a comprehensive plan for its diffusion among the population. We cannot even find a discussion about it in the Annals. How, then, was this new vernacular script expected to reach the population? And who became acquainted with it?

There are a few entries in the Annals that reveal how low-level officials became the first objective of the instruction of the new script. We know from the anti-alphabet memorial that immediately after the completion of the alphabet, between January and February of 1444, the king ordered a group of clerks (*ibae* 吏輩) to learn the new script.<sup>367</sup> Furthermore, shortly after the promulgation of the *Hunmin chǒngŭm*, the new script immediately became an examination subject for the selection of low-level government officials:<sup>368</sup>

○傳旨吏曹今後吏科及吏典取才時訓民正音竝令試取雖不通義理能合字者取之

Transmitted instruction (*chǒnji* 傳旨) to the Board of Personnel (*ijo* 吏曹): from now on the Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People (*Hunmin Chǒngŭm* 訓民正音)

<sup>367</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20b-21a (26/2/20) [1444]. See the fifth point of the memorial in II.2.2.

<sup>368</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114, 28b (28/12/26) [1446].

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will be added as an examination subject for the selections (*ch'wijae* 取才) of the *igwa* 吏科 and *ijön* 吏典.<sup>369</sup> Even if they are not well acquainted with the meanings and principles (*üiri* 義理), select candidates who can combine the letters (*hapja* 合字).

It should also be noted that what was required from these officials was a practical knowledge of the script—i.e., how to combine the letters (*hapja* 合字)—and not necessarily a knowledge of the “meanings and principles” (*üiri* 義理). Si Chöngkon (2007:44) interprets these “meanings and principles” as the theoretical explanations contained in the *haerye* part of the *HC*. Considering how the candidates of the examinations for the selection of low-level officials were usually students of the provincial schools (*hyanggyo* 鄉校), he thus argues that not only they were all required to know how to write and read in the new script but, to obtain a higher grade, also to know its theoretical basis explained in the *haerye* part of the *HC*. However, we should consider that the “meanings and principles” (*üiri* 義理) might have been generally referring to Confucian learning. We have encountered a similar usage of this expression in I.3.1, discussing a memorial submitted in 1413 by the *Chöngbu* 政府 (State Council) lamenting how the students of the *Sayögwön* only studied the pronunciations of Chinese characters and that when it was a matter of “meanings and principles” (*üiri* 義理) they could not understand anything.<sup>370</sup> In that case, the problem was that a mere linguistic knowledge was not enough to interpret the discussions with the Chinese envoys often imbued by quotations from the classics and Confucian philosophical concepts. In this case of the examinations for low-level government positions, it might thus have meant that knowledge of the vernacular script had the precedence to that of the Confucian classics. It is worth to notice that this seems to have been what Ch'oe Malli and the other submitters of the protest memorial had warned against when they said “If the clerks gain positions by using the vernacular script, then in the future everyone will see this and think that to affirm oneself in the world will be enough to know the 27 characters of the vernacular

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<sup>369</sup> The *igwa* 吏科 and *ijön* 吏典 served for the selection of low-level officials (*söri* 胥吏).

<sup>370</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 25:29a (13/6/8).



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script. Why then make strenuous efforts and concern oneself with Confucian learning? [...]”.<sup>371</sup> It is thus possible that these early attempts to spread the knowledge of the vernacular scripts among low-level officials were indeed aimed to accomplish precisely what Ch’oe Malli and the others had feared: to encourage a practical knowledge of the new script more than that of Chinese characters and the classics.

The attempt to spread knowledge of the new vernacular script among the lower bureaucracy also seems to be confirmed by the following entry in the Annals, reporting how the new script became an examination subject for the selection of low-level government officials in the Hamgil Province:<sup>372</sup>

自今咸吉子弟試吏科者依他例試六才倍給分數後式年爲始先試訓民正音入格者許試  
他才各司吏典取才者竝試訓民正音

From now on, the youths of the Hamgil Province who apply for the *igwa* 吏科, following the example of other provinces, should be examined in the Six Talents (*yukchae* 六才) and given a double score for it. Starting from next year, examine first in the *Hunmin Chōngŭm* and let only the successful candidates access the other exams. As for the selections of the *ijŏn* 吏典 in each government office, add the examination in the *Hunmin Chōngŭm*.

These records show that the new script became a required skill to access the low levels of the bureaucracy. These entries do not tell us how the new script was expected to be employed by these officials, but we can reasonably suppose that it was intended to be employed in place of *idu* for the compilation of administrative documents.<sup>373</sup>

An interesting document related to the diffusion of the vernacular script among low-level officials in these early years is also the following entry in the Annals dated 1449, thus at the very end of Sejong’s reign, recording how the

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<sup>371</sup> See the third point of the protest memorial in II.2.2.

<sup>372</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 116, 4b (29/4/20) [1447].

<sup>373</sup> Paek Tu-hyŏn (2001:195).

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vernacular script was used to write on a wall to vilify a high-level official named Ha Yŏn 河演 (1376-1453), at the time Chief State Councilor (*Yŏngŭijŏng* 領議政):<sup>374</sup>

演苛察又老耄行事多顛錯人有以諺字書壁上曰河政丞且休妄公事

Since Ha Yŏn is particularly selective in his examinations and makes many mistakes in his work because of his senility, a person wrote using vernacular letters on a wall what follows: "Councilor Ha, do not make once again your official duty to become foolish."

We do not know who wrote this but, as pointed out by Kim Sŭr-ong (2012:459), it was probably a low-level official. This is because a *yangban* would have most likely presented his complaints through an official memorial, while a low-level official was more likely to use an anonymous complaint toward a high ranked official as a Chief State Councilor. This unusual event suggests thus that, at the end of Sejong's reign, the vernacular script could already have attained a certain diffusion and usage among low-level officials of the capital. It also suggests a certain vivacity in the use of the new script among those who learned it, that extended to unofficial, and certainly not orthodox, uses.

A further document of the same year that might suggest the existence of a close relationship between the new script and low-level officials, as well as providing a clue on another possible intended use of the script, is the *Sari yŏngŭng ki* 舍利靈應記 (Record of the Buddha's Miraculous Response through the Relics). Compiled by Kim Suon 金守濫 (1410-1482) in 1449 on the orders of Sejong, this text recorded the construction of a Buddhist temple ordered by the king and the appearance of relics of the Buddha (*sari* 舍利) after its inauguration. Although written in *hanmun*, at the end of it are recorded with the vernacular script the personal names of 47 peoples who participated in this ceremony.<sup>375</sup> In Figure 15 it can be seen a page from this section of the book, with some of the names written with the vernacular script. According to the analysis of Chŏng Sang-hun (1994),

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<sup>374</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 126, 2a (31/10/5) [1449].

<sup>375</sup> Chŏng Sang-hun (1994:95).

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all these names belonged to low-level officials (*hagŭp kwalli* 下級官吏) from level 7A to 8B. Yi Chong-ch'an (2013:36) also points out that, for the most part, these officials having the name written with the vernacular script seem to have been low-level officials working in the royal palace. In Figure 15 (line 3 and 4) we can see, for example, the names of the following officials with the title of *Pokkŭnbuwi* 服勤副尉 (7B): Pak Kŏmgong 朴검공, Pak T'anae 朴타내 and Kim Olmanae 金을마내.<sup>376</sup> The reason why these names were recorded with the vernacular script seems to be connected to the fact that they were Korean native names and, for this reason, could have been more conveniently, and more precisely, transcribed with the vernacular script without relying on approximations by using borrowed Chinese characters. But we might also wonder if this choice in the text reflected a practice that had already gain a certain diffusion among these officials themselves.

This action of transcribing personal names seems to me also very significant from the standpoint of the social use of the new script in these early years after its invention and in line with what the desire expressed by Sejong in his preface of giving the possibility to the so-called “ignorant people” of expressing themselves. Not only writing one’s name is a reasonable desire of any individual but record these personal names was also a basic need in the administration of a state. Until then, the difference in sound between Chinese characters and Korean language had made it difficult to realize this simple action. The only way to do that was to gloss it through Chinese characters, but this could have only been done by someone who had sufficient knowledge of these characters, and the result would have inevitably been only a rough approximation of the actual name. The vernacular script, on the other hand, allowed for the first time to accurately, and more conveniently, transcribe Korean personal names precisely as they were pronounced.

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<sup>376</sup> Yi Chong-ch'an (2013:167).

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Figure 15. *Sari yŏngŭng ki* 舍利靈應記. 22a. From Yi Chong-ch'an 이충찬. 2013. (*Yŏkchu*) *Sari yŏngŭng ki* (역주) 사리영응기. Seoul: *Sejong taewang kinyŏm saŏphoe* 세종대왕기념사업회.

During Sejong's reign, there is no record showing a similar policy for the diffusion of the script among the higher levels of the bureaucracy.<sup>377</sup> Nonetheless, the king seems to have immediately expected even his high ranked officials to learn the new script. Significant is that only a few days after the promulgation of the script he used it to write a letter about the misconduct of the censors (*taegan* 臺諫) and sent it to the Office for the Deliberation of Forbidden Affairs (*Ŭigŭmbu* 義禁府) and the Royal Secretariat (*Sŭngjŏngwŏn* 承政院).<sup>378</sup> The same

<sup>377</sup> The *Hunmin Chŏngŭm* will be, however, inserted as a subject of the *mun'gwa* 文科 (literati category), the highest civil service examination, in 1460 during the reign of King Sejo.

<sup>378</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114, 12a (28/10/10) [1446].

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day, when a group of scholars of the Hall of Worthies led by Yi Kyejŏn 李季甸 (1404-1459), Councilor on Duty (*chikchehak* 直提學, 3A) in this institution, asked the king to reconsider his charges, Prince Suyang showed them a copy of this letter and said: “these are their crimes, should they not be punished?”<sup>379</sup> A few days later, when three councillors<sup>380</sup> presented the same request, the king showed several pages of this document written in the vernacular script that reported in detail the crimes of the censors and said: “ My Lords (*kyŏng* 卿) came here without knowing my thoughts, but if you take a careful look at this document you will know them.”<sup>381</sup> If the anti-alphabet memorial submitted by Ch’oe Malli is of any indication, these high officials were probably among those who shared a disapproving, if not outright hostile, attitude towards the new script. They thus could hardly have known how to read this document, especially considering that only a few days had passed by its actual promulgation. We can then well imagine the pressure that such an act put to them to learn it. It is also interesting to see how this act of the king made these officials experience a situation that was usually suffered by illiterate people who could not read documents that concerned them, for example when they were charged with some crime. This was, as we have seen in the discussion on the anti-alphabet memorial, a genuinely felt issue by the king and a crucial reason that made him invent the vernacular script. Of course, we cannot be sure if the purpose of the king through this action was to make the high ranked officials understand the importance of his invention or, perhaps, even intended as an open challenge to them. Surely writing charges on a script that had been promulgated just a few days earlier, and the insistence that officials who showed concern on it should read them directly seems not casual and can be explained only as an attempt to sustain its usage.

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<sup>379</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114, 12a (28/10/10) [1446]: 乃以諭義禁府諺文書示之曰所犯如此其不罪乎

<sup>380</sup> These were the *Uŏijŏng* 右議政 Ha Yŏn 河演 (1376-1453), the *Uch’ansŏng* 右贊成 Kim Chongsŏ 金宗瑞 (1390-1453) and the *Chwach’amch’an* 左參贊 Chŏng Pun 鄭笨 (?-1454).

<sup>381</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114, 13b (28/10/13) [1446]: 數臺諫之罪諺文書數張示之曰卿等未知予意而來若詳觀此書則可知矣[...]

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The vernacular script surely started to be actively used at court and by members of the royal family. We already mentioned that the royal princes were immediately involved in projects related to the alphabet, as the “translation” of the *Yunhui*. Furthermore, the calligraphy of the *HC* is widely accepted to be that of Prince Anp’yŏng,<sup>382</sup> while Prince Suyang compiled the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Contents of the Life History of Śākyamuni) in 1447. A notice in the Annals also reveals how Kim Suon 金守溫 (1410-1482) used to translate Buddhist books with Prince Anp’yŏng and Prince Suyang.<sup>383</sup> This compilation of vernacular Buddhist texts, including the *Wŏrin ch’ŏn’gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 (Songs of the Moon’s Imprint on the Thousand Rivers, 1447) composed by Sejong himself in the same period, might also suggest that it already reached a certain diffusion among Buddhist monks connected with the royal court. Moreover, we should also consider the female performers who sung at court the verses of literary texts as the *Yongbi ŏch’ŏn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons) and, perhaps, the *Wŏrin ch’ŏn’gang chi kok* itself.<sup>384</sup> These performers were probably required to learn the vernacular script to read and memorize the verses of these works.

In these early years, we cannot find anything suggesting that the use of the vernacular script had already reached a widespread diffusion among the common population. To be sure, there could be different ways through which the alphabet could spread and be learned by the general population. For example, those who prepared for the examinations that required the knowledge of the vernacular script could potentially spread it to their families and acquaintances.<sup>385</sup> Nevertheless, there is no historical record showing an active and official policy aimed at its general diffusion through the population, including its lower classes. It should thus not surprise that studies on the diachronic diffusion of the vernacular script tend to show a gradual social and

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<sup>382</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:41-42).

<sup>383</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 121:44a (28/9/8).

<sup>384</sup> See the next chapter for an in-depth discussion on the performance of these texts.

<sup>385</sup> Kim Sŭr-ong (2012:458).



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However, the masses (*minsŏ* 民庶) do not know about writing (*munja* 文字). [Thus,] even if the text is distributed, if nobody instructs them, how can they understand its meaning and be inspired by it? [...]

In the *Samguk Sagi* it is used to record how the Silla scholar Sŏl Ch'ong used to teach the Classics to his pupils by reading texts annotated in vernacular through borrowed characters:<sup>388</sup>

以方言讀九經訓導後生

[Sŏl Ch'ong] used the local speech to read the Nine Classics, tutoring younger scholars.

In a similar way, it was used to record Sejong stating that the edition with vernacular glosses (*t'o* 吐) of the *Four Books* was meant to make these texts easier to teach to students:<sup>389</sup>

[...] 予慮後學或失本意以訓諸生若因此而教豈不有益 [...]

“[...] I am worried that younger scholars, not truly understanding these texts, might fear to teach them to students. Would it not be beneficial if they teach using these [annotated versions]?” [...]

We also find this character in the term “Educational Officials” (*hundogwan* 訓導官), used by Sejong himself to indicate specific officials in charge of teaching legal texts that, even when written in *idu*, remained difficult to understand, especially for students:<sup>390</sup>

[...]而律文雜以漢吏之文雖文臣難以悉知況律學生徒乎自今擇文臣之精通者別置訓導官如唐律疏義至正條格大明律等書講習可也其令吏曹議諸政府 [...]

[...] Since the articles of the criminal codes (*yulmun* 律文) are complicatedly written in *hanmun* and *idu*, even scholar-officials (*munsin* 文臣) find it difficult to

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<sup>388</sup> *Samguk Sagi* 三國史記, fascicle 46.

<sup>389</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:14a (10/4/18) [1428]. See also I.2.3.

<sup>390</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 34:4b (8/10/27) [1426].



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understand them fully, not to speak of the students! From now on, select officials that are well-versed in these texts and nominate them Educational Officials (*hundogwan* 訓導官). They should teach texts as the Tang Code (*Tangnyul soŭi* 唐律疏義), the Legal Standards of the Zhizheng Era (*Chijöng chogyök* 至正條格) and the Great Ming Code (*Tae Myöng nyul* 大明律). Bring this matter to the Ministry of Personnel (*Ijo* 吏曹).

Furthermore, as seen in I.3.1, “educational officials” (*hundogwan* 訓導官) was also the name given to specific officials in the Office of Interpreters, who had the task to instruct young learners (*hujin* 後進) in the interpretation of the Chinese language and the study of the classics:<sup>391</sup>

願自今擇善於漢語而明經學者爲訓道(導)官敦諭後進博通譯語詳明經學以達朝廷使臣之意

It is desired that, from now on, those who know the Chinese language (*hanö* 漢語) and have an understanding of the Classics are appointed as Educational Officials (*hundogwan* 訓導官) and put efforts in educating young learners (*hujin* 後進) in being fluent in interpreting the language and having a detailed and clear knowledge of the Classics, so that they understand the meaning of the envoys of the [Chinese] court.

In a later memorial submitted by the *Chöngbu* 政府 (State Council), *hundogwan* are similarly mentioned as civil officials (*munsin* 文臣) appointed to the Office of Interpreters so that, by using the Chinese language, they could teach and instruct in the “meanings and principles” (*üiri* 義理) the students of the institution, who otherwise focused only on the Chinese sounds (*hanŭm* 漢音):<sup>392</sup>

○置文官訓導于司譯院政府啓司譯院學生唯傳習漢音若義理則全不通曉自今以文臣爲訓導官兼用本國語音教訓義理從之

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<sup>391</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 8:4b (4/8/20).

<sup>392</sup> *T'aejong Sillok* 太宗實錄, 25:29a (13/6/8).

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Civil officials *hundo* (*mun'gwan hundo* 文官訓導) have been appointed to the Office of Interpreters (*Sayǒgwǒn* 司譯院). The State Council (*Chǒngbu* 政府) reported: “The students of the Office of Interpreters only learn the Chinese sounds. If it is a matter of meanings and principles (*ǔiri* 義理) [they] cannot understand anything. From now on, appoint civil officials as Educational Officials (*hundogwan* 訓導官) who will make a concurrent use of the sounds of the language of the country in question (*pon'guk ǒm* 本國語音, i.e. Chinese) to teach (*kyohun* 教訓) the meanings and principles.” [The King] assented to it.

These passages related to the Office of Interpreters seems to imply that the character *hun* 訓 could also indicate teaching made in vernacular Chinese.<sup>393</sup> This further connotation is significant since, as we shall see in the next chapter, the transcription of the vernacular Chinese language would become one of the main uses of the vernacular script. But in all these cases the character *hun* 訓 maintained a clear oral and didactic dimension in its connection to writing. Its use in the title of the new vernacular script seems thus to have implied an instruction made through the oral delivery of texts written with this script by officials or learned individuals, not just a direct reading by the common people who were the final target of these texts.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the new vernacular script was immediately put into use in several areas, from literary and phonological works to the study of the Classics and the Chinese language. Furthermore, in all these texts, orality and mediation will remain central aspects of its use.

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<sup>393</sup> The double connotation of *hun* 訓 as an instruction of both the meaning and the sounds seems connected to the other double use of this character to indicate both a semantic and a phonetic gloss.

### III. The Vernacular Publications during King Sejong's Reign

The new vernacular script was applied to different kinds of works in the early years after its invention, from literary texts in verses or prose to phonological works and Confucian didactic texts. This chapter analyzes the compilation and the specific textual features of these texts. It will be noticed that each text is characterized by a particular application of the new script, layout of the pages and, in some cases, orthographical choices. Their analysis will provide important indications on their intended uses and the reading strategies expected by their readers. They will also show important elements of continuity with the writing and reading practices discussed in Chapter I.

#### III.1. A Dynastic Eulogy

The first work of literature that employed the new invented vernacular script was the *Yongbi ōch'ōn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons), a dynastic hymn in 125 cantos commissioned by Sejong 世宗 (r.1418-1450) to the scholars of the *Chip'yōnjōn* 集賢殿 (Hall of Worthies) to celebrate and politically legitimate the founding of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910).

##### *III.1.1. Compilation and printing*

Researches for the compilation of the *Yongbi ōch'ōn ka* (henceforth *YK*) seem to have started well before the completion of the vernacular script itself. An entry in the Annals reveals how, in 1442, the king considered too concise the records concerning his grandfather's military deeds included in the Annals and expressly ordered the governors of Chōlla and Kyōngsang provinces to gather from the locals accounts about the campaigns he had conducted against the Japanese marauders (*waegu* 倭寇).<sup>394</sup> For the same reason, Sejong also ordered An Chi 安止

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<sup>394</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 95:26b (24/3/1) [1442].

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(1377-1464) and Nam Su-mun 南秀文 (1408-1442), who were both scholars of the Hall of Worthies, to conduct further interviews with witnesses and record their findings.<sup>395</sup> It should be noted that all these researches consisted in the gathering and recording of oral accounts from commoners in different parts of the Korean peninsula that were later employed for the compilation of the verses of the *YK*.

A first draft of the *YK* was finally presented to the throne in the 4<sup>th</sup> month of 1445 by three scholars of the Hall of Worthies: Kwŏn Che 權蹏 (1387-1445), An Chi 安止 (1377-1464), and Chŏng Inji 鄭麟趾 (1396-1478).<sup>396</sup> Unfortunately, this first manuscript has not reached us and, for this reason, we do not know for sure how it was written and, in particular, if it already contained the verses in Korean as the final version dated 1447. The presentation (*chŏn* 箋) signed by the authors of the first draft, and dated 1445, might appear to suggest so by stating as follow:

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[...] 歌用國言。仍繫之詩。以解其語。 [...]

The songs employ the language of the country (*kugŏn* 國言). Thus, [Chinese] verses (*si* 詩) have been attached to explain their language.

A similar passage can be found in the preface (*sŏ* 序) written by Chŏng Inji and also dated 1445.<sup>398</sup>

[...] 仍釋其歌。以作解詩 [...]

To explain the songs, we composed explanatory verses.

Both these descriptions seem to reflect the structure of the definitive edition of the text, where each canto is divided into vernacular and *hanmun* verses. Does this mean that this early draft already used the vernacular script? This is theoretically possible since at the time the vernacular script had been already

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<sup>395</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 95:26b (24/3/2) [1442]

<sup>396</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 108, 5b-6a (27/4/5) [1445].

<sup>397</sup> 龍飛御天歌箋. In *Sejong Sillok*, 108:5b (27/4/5) [1445].

<sup>398</sup> 龍飛御天歌序, 4b and *Sejong Sillok* 147:7a.

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completed.<sup>399</sup> However, from a practical standpoint, this seems to be unlikely. This is because, with the exception for Chǒng Inji who wrote the postscript of the *HC*, the authors of this first draft were never involved in any project related to the vernacular script.

Furthermore, it should be noted that no other record mentions or even suggests the presence of the vernacular script in the 1445 draft. For example, the introduction (*sǒ* 序) of the *YK* written by Chǒng Inji and dated 1445 is also recorded in the music notation (*akbo* 樂譜) section attached at the end of the *Annals of King Sejong*, and it is followed by the *hanmun* verses only.<sup>400</sup> Moreover, after this presentation, the *YK* is always referred to as *Yongbisi* 龍飛詩, suggesting the presence of the *hanmun* verses only.<sup>401</sup> The earliest record linking the *YK* with the vernacular script is an entry in the *Annals* dated the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1446, where it is stated that an order was given to move the *Annals of King T'aejo* to the *Önmunch'öng* 諺文廳 (Vernacular Script Headquarters) to carry out further research and make additions to the *hanmun* verses of the work (*Yongbisi* 龍飛詩).<sup>402</sup> It seems then logical to postpone the compilation of the vernacular verses of the *YK* after the compilation of the *HC*, between 1446-1447.<sup>403</sup>

How can we explain, then, the assertion in the presentation stating that the songs were in the “language of the country” (*kugŏn* 國言)? One possible

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<sup>399</sup> The vernacular script had been completed around one year and a half before, at the end of the lunar year 1443. See II.1.

<sup>400</sup> It might be objected that the vernacular script would not have been used in an official document as the *Annals*. Thus, even if the vernacular verses had been compiled, they might not have been recorded. However, the vernacular script was used in the same section containing the preface and the *hanmun* verses to record the vernacular verses in the pieces that composed the *Pongnaeŭi* 鳳來儀, a suite that combining dance, music and singing performed the verses of the *YK*. Thus, it seems that there was no problem in using the vernacular script, at least in the appendixes at the end of the *Annals of Sejong*. The *Pongnaeŭi* and the use of the vernacular script in it will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>401</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 109:31b (27/9/13) and 110:9b (27/11/3) [1445].

<sup>402</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114:18a (28/11/8) [1446].

<sup>403</sup> Nowadays there is a wide consensus among scholars that the first manuscript of the *YK* presented in 1445 consisted only of the *hanmun* verses and that the vernacular verses were added later by the second group of scholars who was put in charge of the revision of this first draft. See, for example, Peter Lee (1975:26-27), Ledyard (1998:328) and Kang Sin-hang (2003:350-357).

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explanation is suggested by Ledyard (1998: 328), who points out that this assertion might be “historiographically retrospective.” This means that this presentation was written for the final version of 1447, despite being officially dated 1445 both in the text itself and in the Annals. Although this might be possible, to accept this hypothesis, we should also admit that there was some sort of falsification in the compilation of the presentation. However, there seems to have been no reason for that. Furthermore, of the three authors of the first draft, Kwŏn Che died shortly after the presentation and An Chi was assigned to the new position of deputy director of the Central Council (*Chungch'uwŏn pusa* 中樞院副使) a few months later.<sup>404</sup> Thus, they had no further involvement in the compilation of the *YK*, and it is difficult to understand why Chŏng Inji would have unilaterally written the presentation, or even modified the existing one, two years after the actual submission to the king of its original verses.

There is, however, another possibility: that the sentence in the presentation was not referring at the vernacular script at all. If we read it carefully, we can see that it does not contain any actual mention of the script but only asserts that these songs were in the vernacular language. In other words, it might have referred to the composition of the oral vernacular songs and not necessarily implying that these songs were written with the vernacular script.<sup>405</sup> As discussed on various occasions in the present study, the written form of a text in *hanmun* did not exclude a vernacular oral dimension. We should also consider that this would not have been the first case of pre-existing vernacular verses recorded in *hanmun*. An interesting example of this is when in 1420 Sejong ordered to Pyŏn Kye-ryang 卞季良 (1369-1430) and other scholars the composition of new vernacular songs (*kasa* 歌詞) for the local music (*hyangak* 鄉樂) performed during court banquets (*yŏnhyang* 宴享).<sup>406</sup> Pyŏn Kye-ryang submitted his *kasa* in 1424 and the Annals

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<sup>404</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 109:18b (27/8/6).

<sup>405</sup> If these verses were actually written with vernacular script, this might have been better indicated by using the term *ŏnmun* 諺文. This is how other contemporary sources had indicated writing with the vernacular script. See the order for the “translation” of the *Yunhui* (II.2.1) and the protest memorial (II.2.1).

<sup>406</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 7:19a (2/1 (leap month)/19) [1420].

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record it in *hanmun*.<sup>407</sup> In this case, it seems clear that the *hanmun* verses of this song, despite their written form, were originally in vernacular since the entry in the Annals refers to them as *Kasa* performed with local music. The *hanmun* verses of the *YK* that were presented in 1445 could thus similarly have such an underlying vernacular dimension. The presentation of the text, by asserting that the songs used the “language of the country”, might have been referring precisely to this.

Kim Sŭr-ong (2012:241) goes further in this direction by arguing that these vernacular songs could also have a direct origin in already existing popular songs. Indeed, we have seen that researches had been carried out among the people for the compilation of the *YK*. In the presentation itself, the three authors tell that they collected the praise (*ch'ingsong* 稱頌) of the people and then modelled it to the music of the royal court and the ancestral temple.<sup>408</sup> In the preface it is similarly written as follows:<sup>409</sup>

謹採民俗之稱頌之言○撰詩歌一百二十五章

We respectfully collected the words of praise of the people and compiled 125 songs. To be sure, it is not specified the actual form of these words of praise, and we cannot thus be certain that they were in the form of songs, but existing popular songs might have been collected in that occasion. It would not have been the first time that a collection of popular songs was carried out for purposes related to the legitimation of the ruling dynasty. In 1433, for example, the Ministry of Rites (*Yejo* 禮曹) had lamented the absence of directives for the collection of the lyrics of “popular songs” (*minsok kayo* 民俗歌謠) and requested it in all the country on the model of the ancient practice.<sup>410</sup> It is then possible that the compilation of the verses of the *YK* was, at least partially, based on pre-existing popular songs.

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<sup>407</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 26:30a (6/12/15) [1424].

<sup>408</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 108:5b (27/4/5) [1445]: “謹採民俗之稱頌敢擬朝廟之樂歌”

<sup>409</sup> *YK* preface, 4a.

<sup>410</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 61:54b (15/9/12) [1433]: “[...] 獨民俗歌謠之詞無採錄之法實爲未便自今依古者採詩之法令各道州縣勿論詩章俚語關係五倫之正足爲勸勉者及其間曠夫怨女之謠未免變風者悉令搜訪每年歲抄採擇上送從之”.

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Be that as it may, the project of the *YK* was revised after the presentation of the first draft. The postscript (*pal* 跋) attached to the final edition of the *YK* provides more information about this revision, stating that the king approved and named the verses *Yongbi ōch'ōn ka* 龍飛御天歌 but, at the same time, also ordered the addition of annotations to make their meaning clearer.<sup>411</sup> Furthermore, according to the Annals, the verses of the *YK* (*Yongbisi* 龍飛詩) were immediately set to music to be performed by female singers (*ch'anggabi* 唱歌婢) following Chinese traditional tunes (*Tang ak* 唐樂), but the king was not satisfied with the result and ordered the composition of new tunes modelled on traditional Chinese ones.<sup>412</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1446, the Annals mention that the *Ōnmunch'ōng* 諺文廳 (Vernacular Script Headquarters) was at work to make further researches on the Annals of T'aejo and additions to the Chinese verses of the work.<sup>413</sup> As already mentioned, it was probably in this period that not only the notations but also the vernacular verses were compiled by a different group of scholars who were working in this newly established *Ōnmunch'ōng*, the same scholars who were involved in the compilation of the *HC*,<sup>414</sup> and added to the final version of the work that was presented in the second month of 1447. Finally, in the tenth month of the same year, 550 copies were distributed to officials (*kunsin* 群臣).<sup>415</sup>

The only surviving copy of this first edition of the *YK* is the so-called Karam edition, preserved at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (가람古貴 811.51-G995y). This is a woodblock edition believed to be a copy of the first edition. It consists of five books (*ch'aek* 冊) divided into ten fascicles (*kwōn* 卷) and contains a preface (*sō* 序) written by Chōng Inji, a presentation (*chōn* 箋) by the three authors of the 1445 draft, and ends with a postface (*pal* 跋) by Ch'oe

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<sup>411</sup> That the king named the verses "songs" (*ka* 歌) seems to support the view that they were already in the vernacular language.

<sup>412</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 109:31b (27/9/13) [1445].

<sup>413</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114:18a (28/11/8) [1446].

<sup>414</sup> Among the compilers of the *YK*, the only scholar who had not participated in the compilation of the *HC* is Sin Yōng-son 辛永孫.

<sup>415</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 118:2b (29/10/16) [1447].



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Hang dated 1447. Each canto (*chang* 章) is comprised by (i) vernacular verses written mixing Korean alphabet and Chinese characters, (ii) Chinese verses (*hansi* 漢詩), and (iii) a commentary in *hanmun*. Both verses and commentary are usually interposed with notations in *hanmun* written with half-sized characters. The section dedicated to the commentary can be very long—much longer than the part dedicated to the verses—and cover several pages. In Figure 16 we can see the first page of volume 1 with the first canto. Lines 2-3 (from the right) contain the vernacular verses of the first canto, followed by the related notes written in half-sized characters that cover the remaining part of line 3 and continue until line 8. In the last line are the Chinese verses.<sup>416</sup>

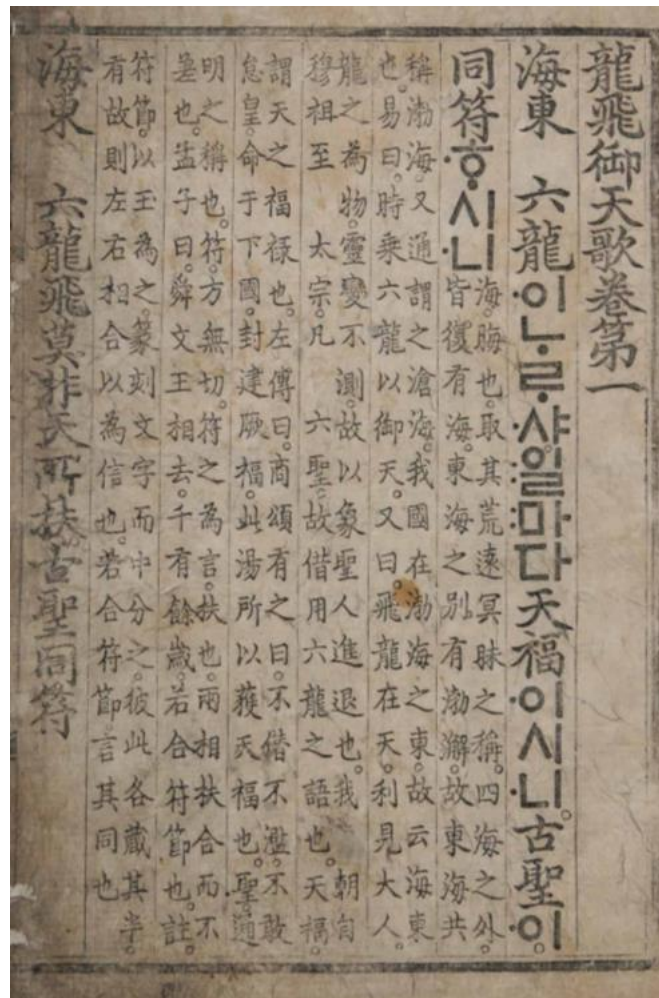


Figure 16. *Yongbi ōch'ŏn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons), 1:1a. Canto I. Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies (가람古貴 811.51-G995y).

<sup>416</sup> The first canto has no commentary section.

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Following is the transcription of the Korean verses with my translation:

海東 六龍이 ㄴ ㄹ ㅅ ㅈ 일 마 다 天福이 시 니。 古聖이 同符 ㅎ 시 니

[HOY-TWONG LYWUK-LYWONG]\_i nolosya ◦ il\_mata [THYEN-PWOK]\_isini.

[KWO-SYENG]\_i ◦ [CHEN-PWOK]\_hosini

The six dragons of Haedong fly, every deed is blessed by Heaven. [Their deeds] coincide with [those of] the sage kings of antiquity.

Below is presented, as an example, the first section of the notes related to the explanation of the word Haedong 海東:<sup>417</sup>

海·晦也·取其荒遠冥昧之稱。四海之外·皆復有海。東海之別有渤海·故東海共稱渤海·又通謂之滄海。我國在渤海之東·故云海東也。

海 (*hae*) is darkness and takes the connotation of something wild, distant and dark. Beyond the Four Seas (*sahae* 四海) everything is sea once again. And separated from the East Sea (Tonghae 東海) is situated Parhae 渤海; thus the East Sea is also called Parhae 渤海 and has even been transmitted with the name of Ch'anghae 滄海. Since our country is situated east of Parhae 渤海 it is called Haedong 海東 (east of the sea).

The *hanmun* version repeats the same verses of the vernacular one:

海東六龍飛·莫非天所扶。古聖同符

The six dragons of Haedong fly, there is nothing not blessed by Heaven. [Their deeds] coincide with [those of] the sage kings of antiquity

From this survey of the compilation of the *YK* and its textual structure, it seems clear that the work was closely related to the invention of the vernacular script and that the latter held a prominent place in the final edition of the work. However, it should also be noted that the vernacular script was likely implemented only in a second moment, during the compilation of the final

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<sup>417</sup> For the translation of the commentary I consulted the modern Korean translation in Pak Ch'ang-hŭi (2015:31).

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edition, and that it covered only a part of the whole text. What was, then, the function and overall significance of the vernacular script in the *YK*?

#### *III.1.2. Use of the text and significance of the vernacular script*

The verses of the *YK* presented with the first draft of 1445 were immediately set to music and performed by female singers following Chinese traditional tunes.<sup>418</sup> The fact that these verses were called *Yongbisi* 龍飛詩 and performed according to Chinese tunes seems to suggest that only the *hanmun* verses were set to music and performed. However, as already mentioned, this initial attempt did not satisfy the king, who ordered the composition of new tunes. This revision of the music seems to have proceeded in parallel with the revision of the text itself that, as we have seen, consisted in the addition of annotations and, most likely, also in the transcription of the vernacular verses with the new script. The result of this revision process was thus twofold: on the one hand the final edition of the *YK* text, on the other the suite for its musical performance.

We will discuss first the final edition of the *YK* text. This was, as we have seen, printed in 550 copies and distributed among officials. If we accept the process of compilation described above, the disposition of the vernacular verses before the *hanmun* ones can be considered in line with the actual process of their compilation: the vernacular verses as the original songs and the *hanmun* verses as a derived version that, as asserted in both the preface and the presentation of the text, were intended to explain the vernacular songs. The significance of the vernacular script can thus be explained with the fact that it allowed to write down these oral vernacular verses that had initially remained “hidden” behind the *hanmun* verses presented in the initial draft (that were kept and placed after them in the final edition of the text), making it an invaluable element when it came to their reading and performance.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 109:31b (27/9/13) [1445].

<sup>419</sup> The use of punctuation signs can be also interpreted as having a role in the reading and performance of the vernacular verses of the *YK*. See Volpe (2019).

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The orthography used in the vernacular verses might provide some indications on how these verses were expected to be read. The *YK*, as the majority of the vernacular texts of the period, is characterized by a fundamentally phonemic orthography. This type of orthography is different from the modern one, that is morphophonemic. The difference between these two orthographies can be seen in nouns or verb stems ending in a consonant that was followed by a particle or a suffix beginning with a vowel. In this case, the final consonant of the noun or verb stem was moved to the following syllable of the particle or suffix in place of the zero consonant  $\emptyset$ . For example, in the first canto, we find *nolosya* ㄴ ㄹ ㅅ ㅏ, that is the phonemical orthography of the verb stem *nol-* ㄴ ㄹ “to fly” followed by the honorific suffix *-osya* and the infinitive *-a*. Its morphophonemic orthography would have been ㄴ ㄹ ㅅ ㅏ. Similarly, in the second canto, we find *polom\_ay* ㅍ ㄹ ㅁ ㅏ, i.e. the phonemical orthography of the noun *polom* “wind” with the locative particle *-ay* ㅏ. Its morphophonemic orthography would have been ㅍ ㄹ ㅁ ㅏ. This orthography is called by Korean scholars *yŏnch'ŏl* 連綴 (continuously interwoven).<sup>420</sup> It seems to me that this type of phonemic orthography lends itself to a vocal realization of the text more than to a visual interpretation of it. This is because the morphological components of the sentence were not visually separated on the page and emerged only aurally through the vocalization of the text. Of course, this vocalization might have also taken place in the mind of the reader, without an actual oral articulation of the verses. But, even in that case, it remained a different type of reading than the visual one to which the modern reader is most familiar.

The matter of the orthography of the *YK* and its link with the method of reading is further complicated by the fact that its orthography was not completely phonemic. In fact, although in a minimal number of cases, a morphophonemic orthography was used for the final consonants of the syllables pronounced as unreleased. The orthography of these syllables did not follow the phonemic principle prescribed in the *HC Haerye*, where it was stated that it

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<sup>420</sup> See, for example, Yi Ik-sŏp (1991:203).

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sufficed to use only eight letters in terminal position: ㄱ (*k*), ㅇ (*ng*), ㅌ (*t*), ㄴ (*n*), ㅍ (*p*), ㅁ (*m*), ㅅ (*s*), and ㄹ (*l*).<sup>421</sup> To the contrary, we can also find syllables ending with the letters ㅈ (*c*), ㅊ (*ch*), ㅊ (*z*) and ㅍ (*ph*), thus following the principle described in the *HC* as *chongsŏng puyong ch'osŏng* 終聲復用初聲 (the terminal sounds use the initial sounds again).<sup>422</sup> Below are some examples:

꽃 *kwoc* (canto 2)

꺾고 *kiphkwo* (canto 34)

꺾 *koz* (canto 68)

빛나 *pichna* (canto 80)

This orthography is generally explained as a personal preference of Sejong because it appears only in the *YK* and the *Wŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chi kok*, the two texts in which he was most involved.<sup>423</sup> However, no particular attention has been devoted to its possible implications for the modality of reading of the text, especially in the light of the different type of phonemic orthography described above that characterizes most of the *YK*. When seen from this perspective, it seems to me that the orthographical distinction of the final consonants that were pronounced as unreleased had a significance only when the text was interpreted visually. The choice of this orthography might thus be interpreted as showing not only a deeper understanding of morphology but also an inclination toward a visual reading, apparently in contrast with the oral/aural reading associated with the phonemic orthography that characterizes the rest of the text. The minimal number of cases in which such a morphophonemic orthography was applied, however, could hardly have a significant effect on the actual reading of the text.

To understand how these verses were read, it seems essential to consider who was the intended target of the work. For example, we might ask ourselves if the vernacular script was meant to allow the text to reach the illiterate strata of society. Reaching a wide readership might seem a plausible goal for a work that

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<sup>421</sup> See II.3.2.

<sup>422</sup> See II.3.2.

<sup>423</sup> Lee Ki-moon (1997:22-23).

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had in the legitimation of the ruling dynasty its primary aim. Furthermore, it could seem quite obvious that a literary work written in this script could have been intended for those who did not possess sufficient knowledge of *hanmun*. However, although the vernacular script could be used for this purpose—as was the case of the intended translation of the *Samgang haengsil-to*—there is no record showing that the vernacular verses of the *YK* were intended to be read by illiterate people. And analyzing the actual application of the vernacular script in the text, it is not clear how it would have helped to make the text understandable for a readership who did not know *hanmun*.

The first problem is that the Korean verses are written by mixing the vernacular script and Chinese characters. What would have made problematic to read these verses it is not just the presence of Chinese characters, that have no pronunciation in vernacular, but also the difficult clusters that these Chinese characters usually form, especially when quoting established formulaic phrases taken from the Confucian classics.<sup>424</sup> These formulae derive from the Classics and generally consist of two or four characters and take a relevant part of the line. As Peter Lee (1975: 37) points out, they “produce a slow and solemn effect like a succession of spondees. Chosen always for orotundity, they stand out amidst the Korean letters, at least visually, calling for an educated response.” Therefore, although written in Korean, these verses could hardly have been understood by the majority of the so-called ignorant people of the time.

An additional problem is that all the explanatory notes expressly conceived to enlighten these difficult words and expressions were written in *hanmun*. Even the pronunciations of proper nouns that are provided in the notes are written with the *panjöl* 反切 (Ch. *fanqie*) system and not with the vernacular letters.<sup>425</sup> And

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<sup>424</sup> Confucian classics as the Book of Songs (*Shijing* 詩經), the Book of Documents (*Shujing* 書經) and the Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋) were among the major sources employed in the compilation of the work.

<sup>425</sup> The *panjöl* 反切 (Ch. *fanqie*) was a traditional system used to indicate the pronunciation of a Chinese character. One character was used to indicate the initial consonant and a second character to indicate the rest of the reading.

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the commentary—intended to enlighten the meaning of the verses—is not only written in *hanmun*, but it usually contains quotations from the Confucian classics. These parts of the work should not be discarded as of secondary importance.<sup>426</sup> The meaning of the verses can be hardly understood without the explanations in the commentary. We have already seen in the postscript (跋) and the records in the Annals that Sejong himself was well aware of this issue and, for this reason, had expressly ordered the compilation of further commentaries and notations to enlighten the meaning of the verses. These additions were regarded so crucial that in 1446 he ordered to move the Annals of King T'aejo to the *Önmunch'öng*,<sup>427</sup> a practice that was far from customary since it risked the confidentiality of the Annals and, for this reason, was taken very seriously. When Sejong had attempted to consult the Annals of T'aejong he was convinced otherwise by some high officials worried that this breaking of rules would have undermined the authority of the Annals.<sup>428</sup> This time was the Bureau of State Records 春秋館 (*Ch'unch'ugwan*) who complained by pointing out that moving them to the *Önmunch'öng* would not have allowed controlling who accessed them. In the end, he ordered to copy only the relevant parts.<sup>429</sup> That the king went against the established norms to consult the Annals in order to supply further notations to the main verses is illustrative of the importance assigned to these parts of the text. Reading only the vernacular verses would not have conveyed the full meaning of the text.

Finally, even considering only the part of the Korean verses written with the vernacular script, thus leaving aside the problem given by their writing in a mixed style that we have seen above, there is a linguistic detail that seems significant: the choice discussed above to employ in some cases a morphophonemic orthography. As noted by Ki-Moon Lee (1997:20-23), this type

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<sup>426</sup> Ledyard points out that until the 60's this was a customary practice in the Korean editions of the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga*, which contained only the Korean verses. See Ledyard (1998: 327).

<sup>427</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 114:18a (28/11/8).

<sup>428</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 80:25a (20/3/2).

<sup>429</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 114:18a (28/11/8).

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of orthography was highly theoretical and thus required advanced knowledge of the Korean language. Thus, it would be difficult to understand its use, although in a minimal number of cases, if the work aimed to reach a broad readership, including the so-called "ignorant people". It seems to me that, in this case, the simplicity of reading would have been a primary factor to take in consideration. Illiterates would have found it easier to vocalize the text and understand it aurally. Thus a morphophonemic orthography would have been an unnecessary complication.

On the grounds of all the above-seen considerations, it seems reasonable to conclude that the ignorant people could not have been the target of the work, at least for what concerns a direct reading of the text. The way the vernacular script was employed in the text did not allow a better understanding of its verses. It seems thus to me that the text of the *YK*, rather than being aimed at a large section of the society, had a clear intended target in the scholar-officials. That is, those provided with the Confucian academic background which would have allowed them to understand the text in its entirety.

The significance of the use of the vernacular script in the *YK* might not have been limited to the transmission of the vernacular verses. We might wonder, for example, if there were other reasons that led to the choice of this specific text for the first official application of the vernacular script in a literary text. Considering how the *YK* was distributed among officials in a considerable number of copies, a possible reason is that it might have offered some sort of legitimation to the new vernacular script. As we have seen, the vernacular script had aroused a strong opposition among a part of the officials, that was expressed through the petition submitted in 1444. The main reason for this opposition was the fear that the employment of the new alphabet would have separated Korea from the Confucian ecumene shared with China, bringing it closer to those populations considered as "barbarians" (*ijök* 夷狄).<sup>430</sup> These objections plausibly reflected a common opinion among the Confucian élite of the time, who not only considered

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<sup>430</sup> See chapter II.2.2.



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the classical Chinese the only vehicle that could transmit the civilization of the sages of Chinese antiquity but also based their very social status on the knowledge of the *hanmun* and classical Confucian literature.<sup>431</sup> The memorial of Ch'oe Malli and the other scholars of the Hall of Worthies was presented to the throne well before the first manuscript of the *YK* and likely conveyed an unease that was deeply felt among the elites from the time the new script was first officially announced in 1443. Although we cannot be sure if there was a strategic intent behind it, the use of the vernacular script in a work that celebrated and legitimated the ruling dynasty on the same Confucian basis that represented the ideological background of the ruling élites who opposed it might have provided a powerful political and cultural legitimation to this script.<sup>432</sup>

Furthermore, besides the matter of immediate legitimation, we should also consider that the employment of the vernacular script in the *YK* ensured its preservation in the long run, at a time when its survival after Sejong reign could not have been taken for granted considering the opposition it received. This was likely a pressing issue for the king, who at the time already suffered from health problems.<sup>433</sup> The *YK* was the perfect work to guarantee the preservation of the vernacular script since, besides the immediate aim of legitimating the dynasty, was also meant to be preserved for the time to come, continuing to celebrate the dynasty and be a guide for the future kings. These aims are clearly stated in the postscript of the work and also noticeable in the final cantos (cantos 110-124) characterized by admonitions to the future kings. Indeed, this is precisely what happened through several reprints and editions during the following three centuries. The use of the vernacular script in this specific text was thus a logical way to ensure the preservation and transmission of the vernacular script.

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<sup>431</sup> The *kwagŏ* 科擧 exams for civil administration, that allowed to access the highest positions in the government, required a deep knowledge of Confucian classics and *hanmun*.

<sup>432</sup> A similar interpretation is also suggested by Ledyard (1998: 325) and Kim Sŭr-ong (2012: 247-48).

<sup>433</sup> King Sejong died only three years later in 1450.

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Finally, the choice of using the vernacular script in the *YK* might also be interpreted as having an intrinsic meaning in the logic of the text as a eulogy of the early Chosŏn rulers and their ancestors. The deeds of the royal ancestors and previous kings were intended to be an example for the future rulers, but Sejong's deeds, unlike those of his ancestors, are not narrated. Indeed, his name does not appear even once in the text. The script he invented, on the other hand, permeates the whole text. A script that, as Lee Ki-Moon (1997:26) points out, was an embodiment of his ideal theory of governance grounded on Confucian conceptions. When seen from this perspective, the new vernacular script makes the presence of Sejong to be felt throughout the work and seems thus the perfect element to celebrate and transmit his memory and vision of ideal of governance to the future generations.

Parallel to the compilation and distribution of the *YK* as a literary text, work was also dedicated to its musical performance. This resulted in a suite called *Pongnaeŭi* 鳳來儀 that combined dance, music and singing. This suite is recorded in the section dedicated to music notation (*akbo* 樂譜) of the Annals of Sejong and is composed of five pieces: a prelude (*Chŏninja* 前引子), the *Yŏmillak* 與民樂, the *Ch'ihwap'yŏng* 致和平, the *Ch'wip'unghyŏng* 醉豐亨, and a postlude (*Huinja* 後引子).<sup>434</sup> While the *Chŏninja* and the *Huinja* were only composed by music and functioned as the beginning and closing of the performance, the three central pieces of this suite used each a different selection of cantos from the *YK*: the *Yŏmillak* used the *hanmun* verses of cantos 1 to 4 and the last canto; the *Ch'ihwap'yŏng* used the vernacular verses of cantos 1 to 16 and the last canto; the *Ch'wip'unghyŏng* used the vernacular verses of cantos 1 to 8 and the final one.<sup>435</sup> All the vernacular verses of these pieces, including those that were not performed in the suite, were recorded in the Annals. Considering that the *Ch'ihwap'yŏng* was

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<sup>434</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, volumes 140 to 145.

<sup>435</sup> As pointed out by Cho Kyu-ik (2015:30-57), the selection of specific cantos in the *Pongnaeŭi* also implied a different meaning associated with each piece of the suite. Thus, although using a selection of cantos from the *YK*, the *Pongnaeŭi* should be considered as a separate work from the latter.



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The reading of the verses of the *YK* seems thus to have remained limited to the scholar-officials who received the copies of the text and to the professional performers who sung a selection of them as part of a suite in a ceremonial setting whose audience was limited to those who had access at court. While the officials read the complete text, including the notations and commentary, singers performed exclusively the verses included in the suite. It is difficult, however, to know if the performance of the vernacular verses had a diffusion outside of the court and the circle of the scholar-officials.

#### III.2. Buddhist Texts

The vernacular alphabet immediately got a special connection with Buddhism in the years after its invention. Two out of the four surviving texts compiled using the vernacular script during the reign of Sejong were indeed related to Buddhism. These texts were the *Sökpo sangjöl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Articles on the Record of Sakyamuni, 1447) (henceforth *SP*) and the *Wörin ch'ön'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 (Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers, 1447) (henceforth *WK*).

##### III.2.1. Compilation and printing

The information we possess about the compilation and printing history of these two texts derives for the most part from the preface contained in the later *Wörin Sökpo* 月印釋譜 (The Buddha and the Record of Sakyamuni, 1459) (henceforth *WS*), a later text that united the revised versions of the *SP* and the *WK*.<sup>438</sup>

According to this preface—titled *Öje Wörin Sökpo sŏ* 御製月印釋譜序 (The King's Preface to the Buddha and the Record of Sakyamuni)—King Sejo 世祖 (r. 1455-1468) compiled the *SP* when, after the death of his mother, the Queen Consort Sohön 昭憲王后 (1395-1446), Sejong (his father) ordered him to compile and translate the Record of Sakyamuni (*Sökpo* 釋譜) to pray for the repose of her

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<sup>438</sup> This is also reflected in the title of the book (*Wörin Sökpo* 釋譜詳節), that unites the first parts of the titles of the *Wörin ch'ön'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 and the *Sökpo sangjöl* 釋譜詳節.

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soul (*ch'uch'ŏn* 追薦). The *SP* was thus compiled by Sejo (at that time Prince Suyang) as a devotional work in memory of his mother. We can read below the relevant passage of the original text containing the *kugyŏl* lines—made with the insertion in the original *hanmun* text of Korean functional items written with the vernacular script—and the version in vernacular followed by my English translation:<sup>439</sup>

WS preface:10b:3-7 (*kugyŏl* lines):

世宗이謂予 ㅎ샤디 薦拔이無如轉經이니 汝宜撰譯釋譜 ㅎ라 ㅎ야시닐

WS preface:11a:1-4 (vernacular lines):

世宗이날드려니 ㅎ샤디 追薦이轉經곤 ㅎ니 업스니네 釋譜를 ㅎ링 ㅎ라 翻譯호미맛당 ㅎ니  
라 ㅎ야시닐

Sejong said to me “since we do not have any Sutra to be read (*chŏn'gyŏng* 轉經)<sup>440</sup> during the ceremony for the repose of the soul (*ch'uch'ŏn* 追薦) [of late Queen Sohŏn], it is right that you compile the Record of Sakyamuni (*Sŏkpo* 釋譜) and translate (*pŏnyŏk* 翻譯) it.”

This passage links the compilation of the *SP* to the death of the Queen Consort Sohŏn. Furthermore, Sejo seems to present the compilation of this text as the result of an order received from his father (Sejong). From the lack of more context in the original text, however, it is not clear if it was Sejong who took the initiative to assign the compilation of this text to his son or if it was Sejo who decided to carry out this project and Sejong only authorized it. As Kang Sin-hang (2003:332) points out, the following passage in the Annals, where Sejong explains the decision to compile a Buddhist work for the departed Queen to the disagreeing

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<sup>439</sup> *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* preface:10b-11a. I have not copied the notes with the explanation of the meaning of single Chinese characters.

<sup>440</sup> The term (*chŏn'gyŏng* 轉經) has been interpreted by Yi Ho-kwŏn (2001:20) as meaning the “reading of a sutra” (*tokkyŏng* 讀經). Kim Ki-jong (2018:132) further interpreted this term as implying the reading of only selected passages of a sutra, a practice that was called *chŏndok* 轉讀, and not the reading of its entire text. The significance of this term in relation to the reading and performance of the *SP* will be discussed below.

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Royal Secretariat (*Sŭngjŏngwŏn* 承政院), suggests that the latter might be the case:<sup>441</sup>

今中宮卽世兒子輩爲成佛經予許之議于政府皆曰可

[...] Now that the Queen has left this world, my sons have expressed the intention to compile a Buddhist Sutra, and I have authorized it. I have discussed this with the Government, and they all consented. [...]

If the Buddhist Sutra to which this passage refers is the *SP*, it means that Sejong did not order its compilation but only approved it. Moreover, by using the plural word “sons” (兒子輩) it suggests the involvement of not only Prince Suyang but also, at least, another of his sons. However, Yi Ho-kwŏn (2001:22-23) points out that this passage might refer to the practice of the copy of sutras (*sagyŏng* 寫經), that is mentioned in other subsequent entries in the Annals, and not specifically to the *SP*. Further information on the compilation of the *SP* can be found in an entry of the Annals dated 1446 and stating that Kim Suon 金守溫 (1410-1482) was ordered to supplement (*chŭngsu* 增修) the record of the Buddha (*Sŏkkabo* 釋迦譜).<sup>442</sup> As pointed out by Yi Ho-kwŏn (2001:24), the record of the Buddha mentioned here might refer either to the *SP* or to the Chinese biographies of the Buddha used as base texts in the compilation of the *SP*.<sup>443</sup> In both cases, Kim Suon seems to have had a role in the compilation of the *SP*. A possible confirmation of this can be found in a later notice in the Annals stating that Kim Suon used to “translate” (*yŏk* 譯) Buddhist texts with Prince Suyang and Prince Anp'yŏng.<sup>444</sup> From these various records, we can thus surmise that the compilation of the *SP* was carried out through the leading initiative of Prince Suyang and, likely, with the collaboration or assistance of Kim Suon and Prince Anp'yŏng.

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<sup>441</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 111:23a (28/3/26) [1446].

<sup>442</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 114:21a (28/12/2) [1446].

<sup>443</sup> As mentioned in the *WS* preface (11b-12a), the Chinese biographies of the Buddha used as base texts for the compilation of the *SP* were the *Shijia pu* 釋迦譜 by Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) and the *Shijia shipu* 釋迦氏譜 by Daoxuan 道詵 (827-898).

<sup>444</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 121:44a (30/9/8) [1448].

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Of the 24 total volumes of the *SP*, only ten have survived (volumes 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24).<sup>445</sup> The text is in vernacular and written in a style that mixed vernacular script and Chinese characters (called by Korean scholars *kuk'anmun honyong* 國漢文混用). Contrary to the *YK*, there is no *hanmun* version, nor a vernacular *kugyŏl* version of the original *hanmun* text as can be commonly found in *ŏnhae* texts. The very existence of an underlying *hanmun* version is still scholarly debated.<sup>446</sup> Since we know that Sejo based his work on the collection of pre-existing Buddhist texts written in *hanmun*,<sup>447</sup> it seems thus reasonable to suppose that he first compiled his work in *hanmun* and then translated it in Korean vernacular using the vernacular script. The term “translate” (*pŏnyŏk* 翻譯) is also used by Sejong in ordering (or perhaps only allowing) the compilation of this text in the passage of the preface of the *WS* seen above. Furthermore, we find it used in the preface of the *SP* to describe the compilation of the text:<sup>448</sup>

*SP* preface:5b (*kugyŏl* lines)

又以正音으로就加譯解호노니

*SP* preface:6a (vernacular lines)

또正音으로써곧因호야더翻譯호야사기노니

Furthermore, using the correct sounds (i.e. the vernacular script) I followed [the *hanmun* text] and intervened with a translation and explication.

The Chinese characters are followed by pronunciations written with the vernacular script and printed with small-size types that adhere to the prescribed pronunciations of the *Tongguk chŏngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country).<sup>449</sup> The sentences are followed by explanatory notations printed with middle-size types. Even in these notations, Chinese characters are followed

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<sup>445</sup> Volumes 3 and 11 are a reprint of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>446</sup> For an overview on the debate surrounding this issue, see King (2018:7-8).

<sup>447</sup> See Kim Ki-jong (2005) for a discussion on the “based scriptures” of the *SP*.

<sup>448</sup> *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* preface:5b-6a. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo*.

<sup>449</sup> On the *Tongguk chŏngun*, see III.3.

by prescribed pronunciation written with the same small-size types of the main text. Each episode—that can be divided into different sentences—is separated by a circle (○). In Figure 18 is the right side of the first folio in vol. 6. The first line contains the title of the volume, lines 2-6 present the first episode and the corresponding half-sized notations, while lines 7-8 contain the first sentence of the second episode and part of its notation.

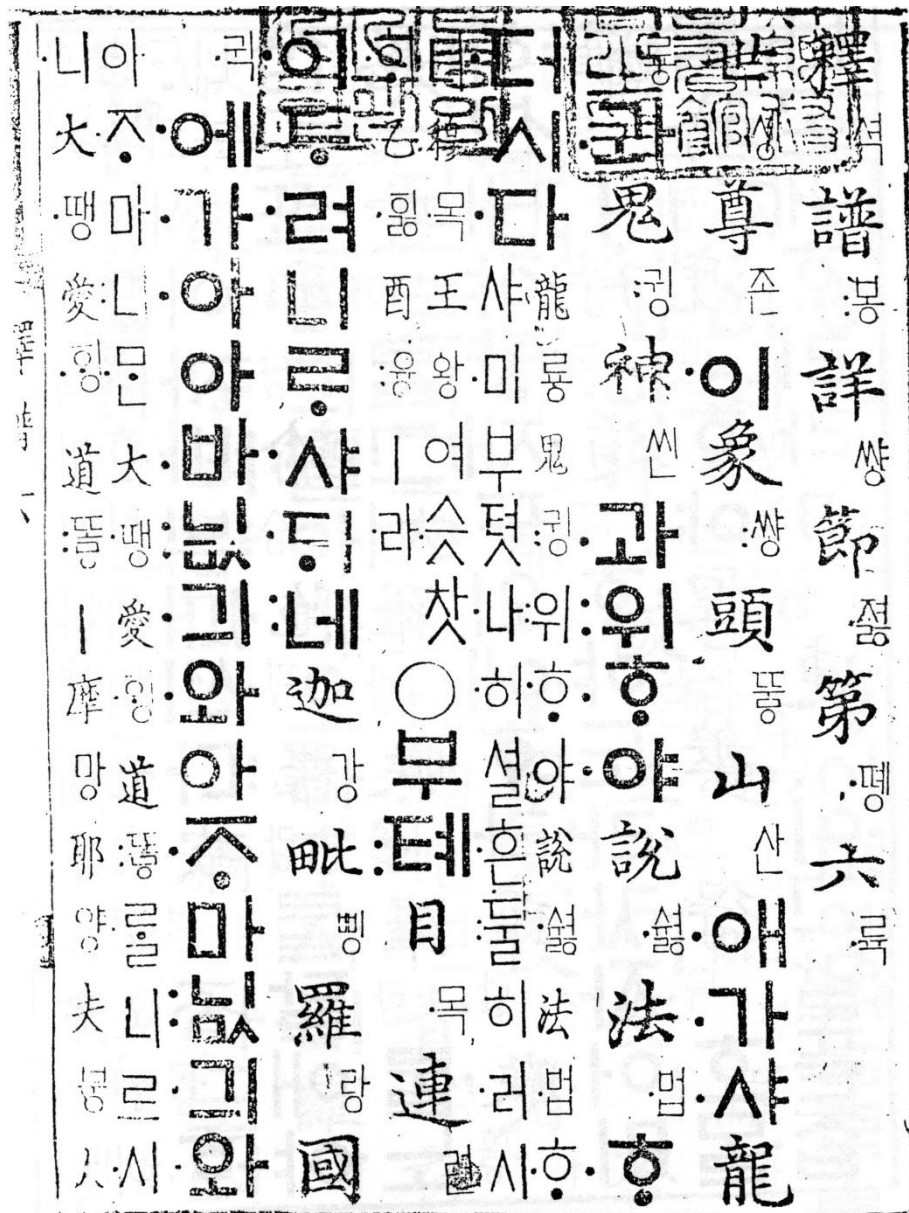


Figure 18. Sökpo sangjöl 6:1a. Yökchu Sökpo sangjöl 역주 석보상절 (Sökpo sangjöl, translated and annotated), vol. 6. Seoul: Sejong taewang kinyöm saöphoe 세종대왕기념사업회, 1991.



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Below is the transcription and translation of the first episode of volume 6, including the corresponding notation, that can be seen in Figure 18 (lines 2-5):

世尊尊이象쌍頭뚝山산애가샤龍룡과鬼귀神신과위호야說說法법호더시다

SYEY-CWON<sub>i</sub> SSYANG-TTUW-SAN<sub>ay</sub> kasya LYONG<sub>kwa</sub> KWI-SSIN<sub>kwa</sub> wi  
hoya SYUYELQ-PEP hotesita

Sejon<sup>450</sup> went to Mount Sangdu and preached a sermon to the dragons and spirits.

龍룡鬼귀위호야說說法법호샤미부텃나히설흔둘히러시니穆목王왕여긔찾히乙酉酉  
용 | 라

LYONG-KWI<sub>wihoya</sub> SYUYELQ-PEP<sub>hosyami</sub> puthyes nahi syelhuntulhilesini  
MWOK-NGWANG<sub>yesuschas hoy</sub> QILQ-YU<sub>ila</sub>

When preached a sermon to dragons and spirits, the age of the Buddha was thirty-two and was the year *Ŭryu*<sup>451</sup> of the sixth year of King Mu<sup>452</sup>.

We can turn now to the compilation of the *WK*. According to the preface of this work, Sejong became personally engaged in its compilation after seeing the *SP*:<sup>453</sup>

WS preface:12b-13a (*kugyŏl* lines):

乃進호스보니賜覽호시고輒製讚頌호샤名曰月印千江이라호시니

WS preface:13a (vernacular lines):

進上호스보니보물주스오시고곧讚頌을지스샤일후물月印千江이라호시니

<sup>450</sup> Sejon 世尊 is another name of the Buddha. Literally means “the World [most] Honoured”.

<sup>451</sup> The year *Ŭryu* 乙酉 was the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of the traditional sexagenary cycle.

<sup>452</sup> King Mu 穆王 was the fifth king of the Zhou dynasty.

<sup>453</sup> *Wŏrin Sŏkpo*, volume 1: 12b-13a.

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I presented [the *Sōkpo sangjöl*] to the king, he looked at it and, immediately, composed songs of praise that named *Wōrin ch'ōn'gang chi kok*

Of the total three volumes of the original *WK*, only the first one (*sang* 上) has survived and is today preserved at the Janseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies.<sup>454</sup> This volume consists of 194 cantos. Each canto contains only the verses written in vernacular, without any *hanmun* version, commentary, or interlinear notation.<sup>455</sup> Furthermore, contrary to the *SP*, Chinese characters are placed after the corresponding pronunciation written with the vernacular script and have a smaller size. This is a unique feature that cannot be found in other vernacular texts of the period. In Figure 19 it is possible to see the first page of the first folio with the title of the volume (line 1), canto no. 1 (lines 2-5) and the first part of canto no. 2 in the remaining lines.

Below is the transcription of the first canto with romanization and translation:<sup>456</sup>

피其韻一

의巍의巍 석釋가迦뵤佛 무無량量무無번邊공功득德을 겁劫겁劫에어느다슬벌리

*KKUY QILQ*

*NGUY NGUY SYEK-KA-PPULQ MU-LYA MU-PON KWO-TUK\_ul KEP-KEP\_ey  
enu ta solfoli*

Canto 1

Magnificent and noble Śākyamuni virtues, limitless and boundless in *kalpa* after *kalpa*,<sup>457</sup> how can they all be reported?

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<sup>454</sup> The other volumes, although not extant, have been reconstructed from the *Wōrin Sōkpo*.

<sup>455</sup> The existence of a *hanmun* version is still debated. For an overview on this issue, see King (2018).

<sup>456</sup> *Wōrin ch'ōn'gang chi kok*, 1:1a.

<sup>457</sup> The *kalpa* (*kōp* 劫 in Korean) is a Sanskrit Buddhist term indicating an extremely long period of time that goes beyond human conception.

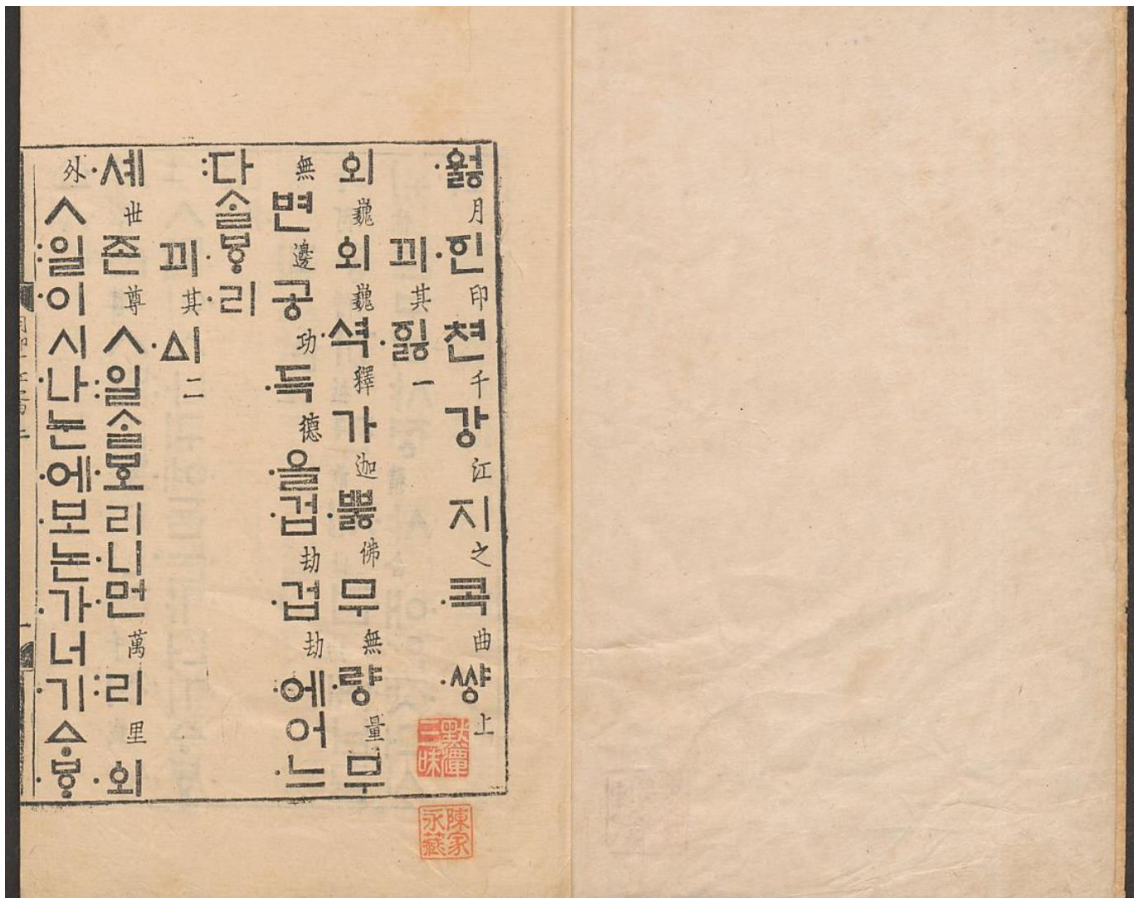


Figure 19. *Wörin ch'ön'gang chi kok sang* 月印千江之曲上 (Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers, vol.1), 1a. Janseogak Archives 藏書閣, Academy of Korean Studies.

Both the *SP* and the *WK* were printed with the same metal movable types (*kŭmsok hwalja* 金屬活字).<sup>458</sup>

### III.2.2. Use of the texts and significance of the vernacular script

The current scholarship on the topic provides different kinds of explanation for the use and significance of the vernacular script in Buddhist texts. One opinion stresses the Buddhist faith of the compilers as the primary reason for their compilation. Kim Jong-myöng (2007), for example, interprets the compilation of vernacular Buddhist texts as closely connected to the Buddhist faith of Sejong. Kang Sin-hang (2003) similarly considers Buddhist faith as an essential factor in

<sup>458</sup> Yi Ho-kwön (2001:28).

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the compilation of these texts. However, according to him, more than the faith of Sejong, that he sees presented in the Annals more as a protector and sympathizer of Buddhism than as a genuine Buddhist believer, was the faith of Prince Suyang (later King Sejo), that is presented instead as a staunch Buddhist, that was most relevant. Now, the positive attitude/faith toward Buddhism was a necessary condition for the compilation of the *SP* and *WK*. However, it seems to me that this explanation might not be enough to explain why these texts were compiled in the vernacular. A Buddhist faith might as well have been expressed through the compilation of Buddhist texts in *hanmun*. In other words, it remains to explain what was the role that the vernacular script was intended to have in these texts. If we fail to do that, its use in these texts remains coincidental and without any specific reason. Furthermore, the different use of the vernacular script in these two texts calls attention and seems to need more careful consideration.

Other scholars explain the employment of the vernacular script in fifteenth-century Buddhist texts from the perspective of the diffusion and promotion of the vernacular script.<sup>459</sup> Seen from a different angle, the compilation of these texts has also been interpreted as a part of the activities for the revival of Buddhism in the early Chosŏn society.<sup>460</sup> However, as far as the *SP* and the *WK* are concerned, although they could have a positive impact in the diffusion of the vernacular script and the promotion of Buddhism in the society, it is difficult to see this as their primary aim. The reason resides in their modality of printing with movable types. Movable type printing allowed to save time and resources since positioning types on the frame took much less work and human resources than the carving of blocks and saved the cost of the blocks themselves. However, it seems to have not been considered an apt choice for a text aimed to have a wide distribution. This is pointed out by Sejong himself when he ordered the printing of the *Chronicle of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳, Kr. *Chwa chŏn*) in 1431.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> This opinion can be found, for example, in the works of Kim Sŭr-ong (2012) and Kim Mu-bong (2012).

<sup>460</sup> See, for example, Yi Pong-ch'un (2001).

<sup>461</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 51:21a (13/2/28) [1431].

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○上謂左副代言尹粹曰左傳學者所當觀覽用鑄字印之則未能廣布宜令刊板使之廣行  
The king to the left assistant transmitter (*u-pudaeön* 右副代言): “The *Chronicle of Zuo* is something that all scholars should read. If it is printed using cast types (*chujja* 鑄字) it will not be possible to propagate it widely. Carve it with woodblocks and distribute it widely.”

We would thus have expected a block-print for a work that was aimed to have a wide diffusion,, as it had been done for the *SH* and the *YK*. A block-print, although requiring more time and resources for its preparation, allowed the print of a much higher number of copies. Furthermore, blocks could be re-used for later reprints. Although movable type printing could still have guaranteed a certain diffusion of these texts, this type of printing might not have been the best choice if the primary objective was to guarantee a wide diffusion. To the contrary, it seems to have been the most logical choice if the objective was to have a limited number of copies printed in a short time, as it was the case if they were needed for a specific Buddhist ceremony.

To fully understand the significance of the vernacular script in the *SP* and the *WK*, we can thus try to switch our attention to the actual employment of these texts. As we have seen, the *SP* was compiled to be used for the ceremony for the repose of the soul (*ch'uch'ön* 追薦) of the late Queen Sohön and was intended to be a *chön'gyöng* 轉經. This term has been interpreted by Yi Ho-kwön (2001:20) as referring to the practice of “the reading of a sutra” (*tokkyöng* 讀經) and by Kim Ki-jong (2018:132) as meaning the reading of only selected passages of a sutra, a practice that was called *chöndok* 轉讀, and not the reading of its entire text.<sup>462</sup> From this, it is possible to deduce that the *SP* was intended to be read aloud by several monks gathered together during the Buddhist ceremony for the repose of the soul of the queen.<sup>463</sup> The receivers of the written text were thus the monks, who had to read it aloud to the people gathered to attend the ceremony, who listened to it.

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<sup>462</sup> According to Kim Ki-jong (2018:132), by doing this it was possible to get merits by reading the highest possible number of sutras in a limited time.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

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The vernacular script had thus an essential role in this reading process of the text. That this text was primarily intended to be orally delivered to a mass of people might also explain the absence of the *hanmun* text and the style that, when compared to *ŏnhae* texts of the period, is considered closer to a natural and colloquial spoken Korean.<sup>464</sup>

In discussing the significance of the vernacular script in the *SP*, we should also consider the role of the *ŏnhae* version of the first section (*ponmun*) of the *HC* believed to have been originally attached to it.<sup>465</sup> Today we can only find this text at the beginning of the first volume of the later *WS* since the first volume of the *SS* has not reached us. This version consists of a *kugyŏl* version followed by the explication of words used and, finally, a translation in vernacular. This text is interpreted by An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:204) as a textbook to learn the vernacular script by totally beginners. Its placement at the beginning of the *WS* (and thus the *SP* as well) is explained with the need for the readers of these books to study first this script. However, An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:205) himself notices how the text was difficult to be used by new learners of the script since the pronunciations of the letters were given by using the pronunciations of the *Tongguk chŏngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country, 1448). Furthermore, the structure of the text seems to be conceived for readers who did not know Chinese characters but were proficient in the vernacular script. The text could hardly have been used by illiterates to learn the script and, considering how the notes provide the meaning of fundamental Chinese characters as “country” 國 and “language” 語,<sup>466</sup> the compilers of the text could not have assumed that the readers knew *hanmun*. This text might thus have been placed at the beginning of the *SP* to introduce its readers, who already knew the vernacular script, to the origin of

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<sup>464</sup> King (2018:8) defines the language of the *SP* (and that of the *WK*) as “less compromised by ‘*hanmun* translation-ese’ than other texts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and thus more ‘natural’ and closer than other such texts to colloquial spoken Korean.”

<sup>465</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:204-5)

<sup>466</sup> See II.3.1.

this script, similarly to the preface of the text that recounted the reason and background of its compilation.

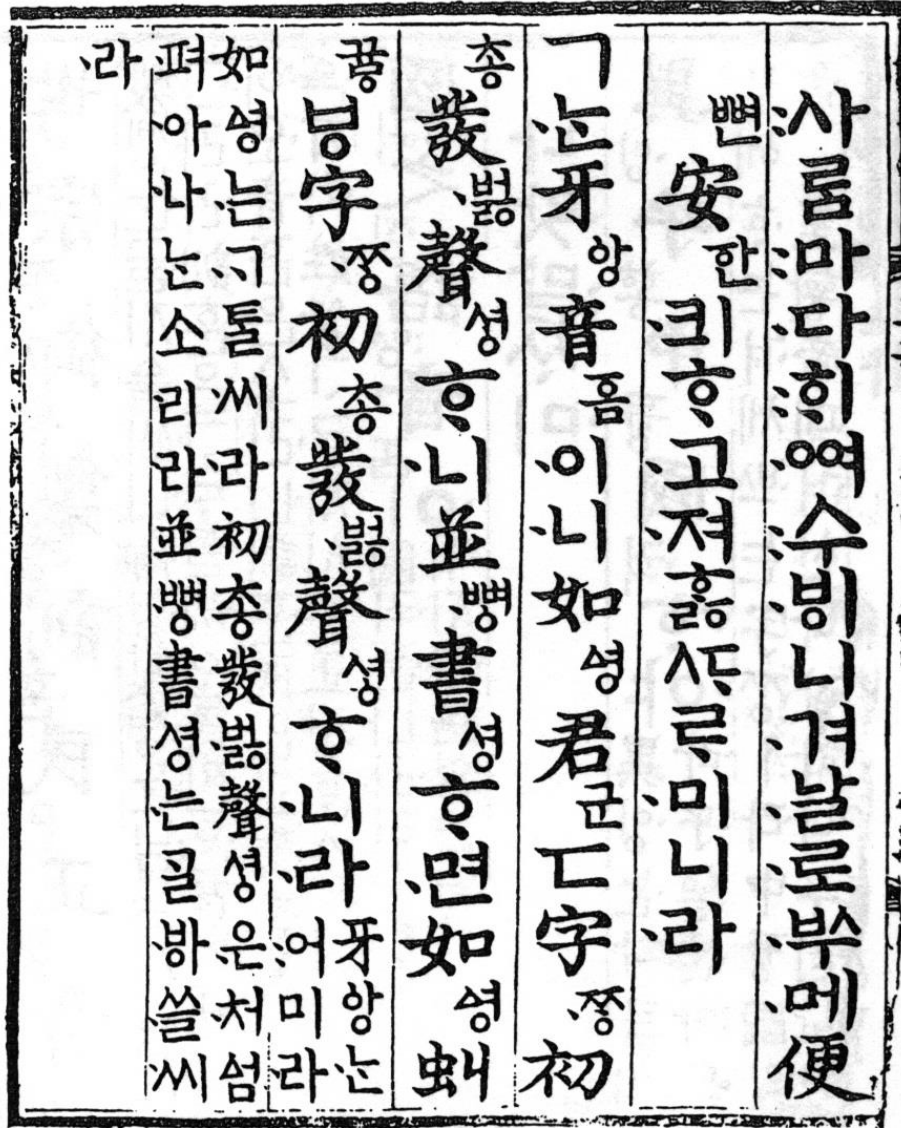


Figure 20. *Sejong ŏje Hunmin chŏngŭm* 世宗御製訓民正音, 3b. In *Wŏrin Sŏkpo* 月印釋譜, vol.1. Photographic reproduction from *Yŏkchu Wŏrin Sŏkpo che-1* 嶽州 월인석보 제 1 (The Buddha and the Record of Sakyamuni, translated and annotated, volume 1). Seoul: Sejong taewang kinyŏm saŏphoe 세종대왕기념사업회, 1992.

We should also consider that some of the theoretical explanations contained in this *ŏnhae* version of the *ponmun* section of the *HC* could have been an essential reference for the actual reading of the *SP*. The explanation of the tones, for example, could have been used in this sense. But even more crucial could have

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been the explanation of some extra consonants that were absent in the original *HC* and that were added in this version. These consonants were created by modifying the original “incisor sounds” (*ch’iũm* 齒音: ㄸ, ㅌ, ㅍ, ㅍ, ㅍ) of the vernacular script by elongating the final extremities of one of their strokes. In this way, it was possible to distinguish the consonants that in traditional Chinese phonology were indicated as “apical incisors” (*ch’iduũm* 齒頭音), corresponding to dental sounds, from the “upright incisors” (*chǒngch’iũm* 正齒音) that corresponded to palato-alveolar sounds and were not distinguished in the Korean language.<sup>467</sup>

Table 6. Modification of the original incisor sounds (first line) in apical incisors and upright incisors (left and right column of the second line respectively) by elongating the final extremities of their strokes.

齒音		ㄸ		ㅌ		ㅍ		ㅍ		ㅍ	
齒頭音	正齒音	ㄸ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ	ㅍ

The explanation of these consonants was added at the end of this *õnhae* version. Its lines are divided, similarly to other *õnhae*, in (a) original *hanmun* text with the inserted pronunciation of Chinese characters (in smaller characters) and Korean functional elements in the vernacular script; (b) notes in a smaller font; (c) vernacular translation. Below is the text with my analysis and translation.<sup>468</sup>

(1)

(a) 漢音 齒聲은 有齒頭正齒之別  
한음 齒聲은 有齒頭正齒之別

CHINESE\_SOUNDS\_INCISOR\_SOUNDS-top.

HAVE\_INCISOR\_HEAD CORRECT\_INCISOR\_OF\_DISTINCTION-  
do-conj.

<sup>467</sup> These modified incisors were also used for the transcription of the pronunciations in the *Hongmu chǒngun yǒkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions), see III.3.2. For a table with the correspondences between the Korean letters and traditional Chinese initial consonants, see Ledyard (1997:38).

<sup>468</sup> *Sejong õje Hunmin chǒngũm* 世宗御製訓民正音, 14a-15b. In *Wõrin Sõkpo* 月印釋譜, vol.1.



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- (b) 漢音은中國소리라頭는머리라別은글힐씨라

漢音 are the sounds of China

頭 is head

別 is to distinguish

- (c) 中國國 소리엿 니쏘리는 齒頭와 正齒왜 글히요미 잇느니

The incisor sounds of Chinese have a distinction in apical incisors

(*ch'idu* 齒頭) and upright incisors (*chǒngch'i* 正齒)

(2)

- (a) ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ 字는 用於齒頭하고

ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ \_CHARACTERS-top. USE\_FOR\_INCISOR\_HEAD-do-conj.

- (b) 이 소리는 우리 나라 소리에서 열브니 혓 그티 웃닛 머리에 다쁘니라

Since these sounds are shallower than the sounds of our country, the tip of the tongue touches the upper part of the teeth.

- (c) ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ 字는 齒頭소리 에 쓰고

The letters ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ are used for the apical incisors' sounds.

(3)

- (a) ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ 字는 用於正齒하느니

ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅈ ㅊ \_CHARACTERS-top.

USE\_FOR\_CORRECT\_INCISORS-do-proc.-conj.

- (b) 이 소리는 우리 나라 소리에서 두터브니 혓 그티 아랫 닛므유메  
다쁘니라

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Since these sounds are thicker than the sounds of our country, the tip of the tongue touches the lower part of the gums.

- (c) ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅍ ㅍ 字중는 正正齒칭ㅅ 소리에 쓰느니라

The letters ㄸ ㅌ ㅍ ㅍ ㅍ are used for the upright incisors' sounds.

(4)

- (a) 牙양舌썸脣순喉嚨之聲字중는 通通用용於漢韓音음ㅎ느니라

MOLAR\_LINGUAL\_LABIAL\_LARYNGEAL\_OF\_CHARACTERS-top. COMMON\_USE\_FOR\_CHINESE\_SOUNDS-do-*proc.-decl.*

- (b) (no notes)

- (c) 엄과혀와입시울와목소리엿字중는 中韓國國소리에 通통히 쓰느니라

The letters of the molar, lingual, labial, and laryngeal sounds use the same Chinese sounds.

The reason for the addition of this explanation can be found in the use of these modified consonants for the transcription of mantras in the *SP*. These were Sanskrit utterances called *Dharani* (*tarani* 陀羅尼 in Korean) or *chinön* 眞言 “true words” that were traditionally recited for religious purposes without translating them due to the belief that a translation in another language would have harmed their sacredness.<sup>469</sup> Since they entered the Korean peninsula passing from China, they used to be phonetically transcribed with Chinese characters.<sup>470</sup> In the *SP* we can find for the first time these mantras transcribed with the vernacular script. See, for example, the following mantras contained in volume 21:<sup>471</sup>

<sup>469</sup> An Chu-ho (2003:69).

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> *Sökpo sangjöl* 釋譜詳節, 21:23a. From *Yökchu Sökpo sangjöl che-21* 역주 석보상절 제 21 (*Sökpo sangjöl* vol. 21, translated and annotated). Seoul: Sejong taewang kinyöm saöphoe 세종대왕기념사업회, 2012. Retrieved from <http://db.sejongkorea.org/>

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安爾언싱(一) 曼爾환싱(二) 摩禰뫼녕(三) 摩摩禰뫼뫼녕(四) 旨隸<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(五)  
 遮黎第<sup>ㄹ</sup>령뫼(六) 賒咩<sup>ㄹ</sup>뫼(七) 賒履多瑋<sup>ㄹ</sup>령뫼뫼(八) 羶帝<sup>ㄹ</sup>뫼(九)  
 目帝목뫼(十) 目多履목뫼(十一) 娑履<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(十二) 阿瑋娑履엥뫼<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(十三)  
 桑履<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(十四) 娑履<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(十五) 叉裔<sup>ㄹ</sup>링(十六) 阿叉裔엥<sup>ㄹ</sup>링(十七)  
 阿耨膩엥경녕(十八) 羶帝<sup>ㄹ</sup>뫼(十九) 賒履<sup>ㄹ</sup>령(二十) [...]

Framed in blocks are the syllables presenting the modified consonants. To the best of my knowledge, there is no available photographic reproduction of volume 21 of the *SP*; thus passage quoted above comes from a transcribed copy in a modern edition. However, this part of the text was also recorded in volume 19 of the later *WS*. Photographic reproduction of this text is available and, as can be seen in Figure 21, although the orthography used for the pronunciation of these mantras shows some differences (most notably the absence of the terminal consonant ㅇ) the modified incisor sounds were maintained from the *SP*.<sup>472</sup>

The use of these modified consonants in the mantras of the *SP* shows that there was particular attention in the transcription of these utterances, probably because their very function depended on the correctness of their pronunciation. The part of the *HC ōnhae* containing the explanation of these sounds was thus instrumental for providing the correct reading of these parts of the text. Considering that, as argued by Chŏng U-yŏng (2005), there is the possibility that this vernacular edition of the *HC* had been compiled initially without the last part explaining the incisor sounds and printed as an independent work, the presence of this additional final part might have been a significant reason for the inclusion of the *HC ōnhae* in the *SP*.

<sup>472</sup> The *WS* and the *SP* present several other differences, whose details goes beyond the topic of this research. For example, the *WS* is a woodblock print while the *SP* is a movable type print.

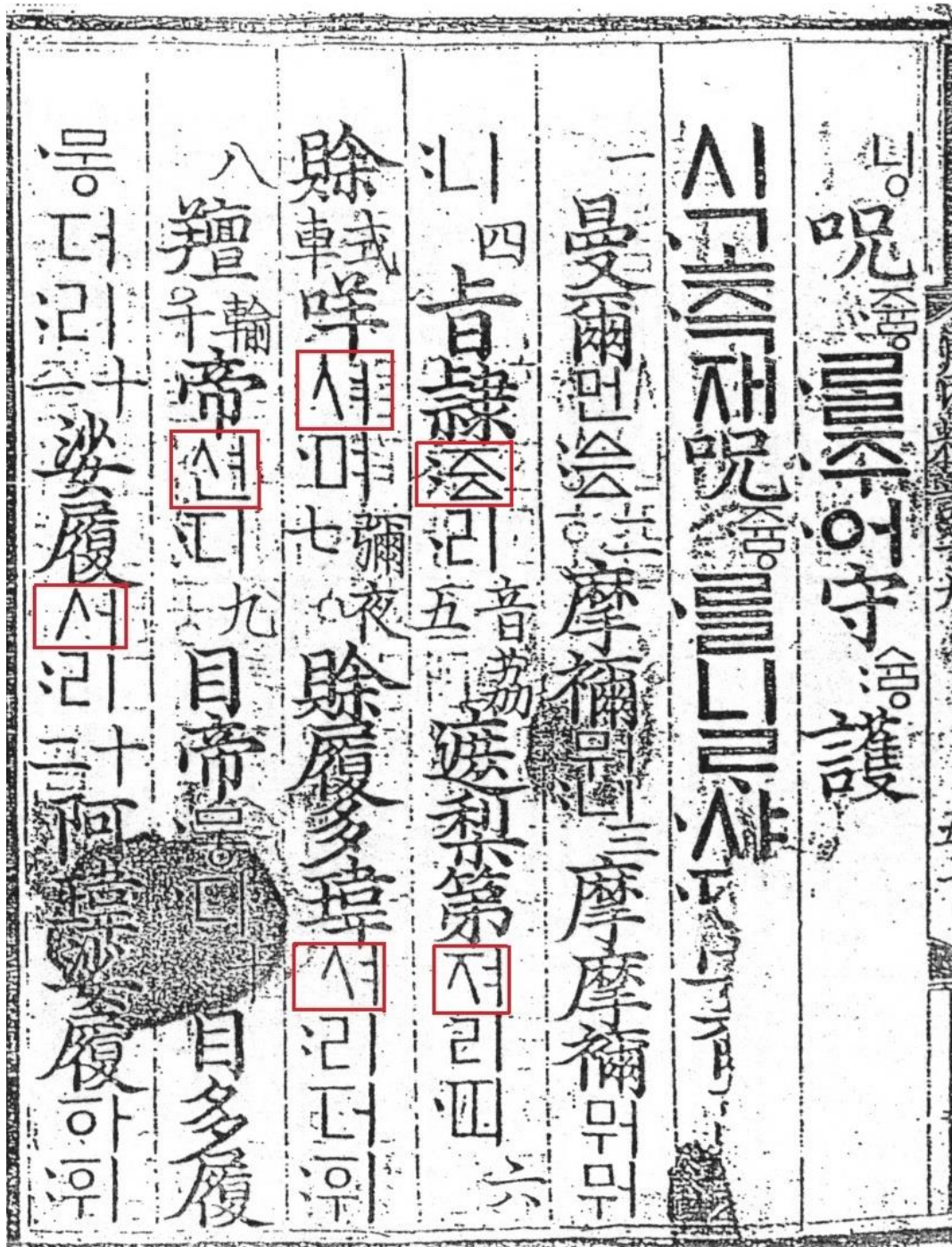


Figure 21. *Wörin Sökpo* 月印釋譜, vol. 19, 57a. Photographic reproduction from *Yökchu Wörin Sökpo che-19* 역주 월인석보 제 19 (The Buddha and the Record of Sakyamuni, translated and annotated, volume 19). Seoul: Sejong taewang kinyömsaöpohoe 세종대왕기념사업회, 2008.

The compilation of the *WK* was closely related to that of the *SP*. Its text, however, shows a very different structure. It has no notations, and the vernacular script is visually prominent. The Chinese characters have only a supporting role,

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not much different from the practice used in modern Korean texts to insert Chinese characters between parenthesis to clarify the meaning of a word when needed.<sup>473</sup> Furthermore, the text has no preface that might give us information on its intended use. However, we can attempt some consideration based on what we know.

The first thing we should notice is that the verses of this work were titled as "songs" (*kok* 曲) and they were thus intended to be performed with music. During the reign of Sejong, we do not have any record about their performance, but a later episode recorded in the Annals reveals that Sejo, out of affection for his father, ordered to give the text of the *WK* to dancing girls so that they could sing it:<sup>474</sup>

又命永順君溥授八妓諺文歌詞令唱之卽世宗所製月印千江之曲

[The king] instructed Prince Yǒngsun [Yi] Bu (永順君 溥) to give the vernacular songs (*ǒnmun kasa* 諺文歌詞) to eight [female] entertainers (*ki* 妓) so that they could sing the Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers (*Wǒrin ch'ǒn'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲) compiled by Sejong.

This entry is revealing of how the text was used for a performative purpose. Considering how Sejong wrote the *WK* in connection to the *SP*, it seems likely that the text was intended to be used, if not in the same Buddhist ceremony for the repose of the soul of the queen, in a similar performance intended to honour her memory, similarly to what Sejo later did to honour his father. That the text was mainly intended for performative purposes might explain why it does not contain any preface or explanatory notation, and also why the Chinese characters have only an auxiliary position in it. It should also be noted that when the text was later attached to the *WS*, it radically changed its form. The vernacular pronunciations switched in an auxiliary position after the Chinese characters and printed in a smaller size. Moreover, notations were added to the verses, and the

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<sup>473</sup> An Pyǒng-hŭi (2007:226).

<sup>474</sup> *Sejo Sillok* 世祖實錄, 46:19a (14/5/12) [1468].

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text in prose of the *SP* accompanied the songs contextualizing them and functioning as a sort of commentary. The result of these changes was a text that radically changed its function as well, becoming more apt to be used as a material for reading and probably aimed to a readership of monks who had a basic knowledge of Chinese characters to teach them the life of Buddha and the Buddhist doctrine.<sup>475</sup>

A further noteworthy characteristic of this text is its orthography. The verses of the *WK* are characterized by a morphophonemic orthography (in Korean, *hyöngt'aeümsojök p'yogiböp* 形態音素的表記法) that reflected the underlying morphemic structure of the language. This was different from the exclusive use of a phonemic orthography in the *SP* and the vast majority of other fifteenth-century works. In a phonemic orthography, when nouns or verb stems ending with a consonant were followed by a particle or a suffix beginning with a vowel, the final consonant of the name or verb stem was moved to the following initial syllable of the particle or suffix in place of the zero consonant *○*.<sup>476</sup> In a morphophonemic orthography, on the other hand, the final consonant of a noun or a verb stem was not moved to the next syllable and, thus, the morphological elements remained separated. Korean scholars call this orthography *punch'öl* 分綴 (separately interwoven). Examples of this orthography in the *WK* are:

Noun + particle	Verb stem + suffix
눈에 <i>nwun_e</i> (1a, canto 2)	담아 <i>tam.a</i> (2a, canto 4)
일어나 <i>il.isini</i> (1a, canto 2)	
형님을 <i>HYUYENG nim_ol</i> (2a, canto 4)	
증을 <i>cuz_ul</i> (69b, canto 189)	

Another morphophonemic feature of the orthography of the *WK* is the distinction for the consonants pronounced as unreleased. This is the same orthography seen in the *YK* that did not follow the indication of the *HC haerye*

<sup>475</sup> Kim Ki-jong (2018:132).

<sup>476</sup> See III.1.2.

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where it was stated that only eight letters could be used in terminal position: ㄱ (*k*), ㅇ (*ng*), ㄷ (*t*), ㄴ (*n*), ㅍ (*p*), ㅁ (*m*), ㅅ (*s*), and ㄹ (*l*). In the *WK* we can also find the letters ㅈ (*c*), ㅊ (*ch*), ㅊ (*z*), ㅊ (*th*) and ㅊ (*ph*) used in terminal position. Below we can see some examples of this morphophonemic orthography:<sup>477</sup>

꽃 *kwoc* (3a, canto 7)

코 *koz* (10a, canto 26)

낱 *nath* (15a, canto 40)

뽕 *pwuph* (15a, canto 40)

노 *noc* (18a, canto 49)

This issue is further complicated by the fact that, by analyzing the original text of the *WK*, it was possible to discover that the final consonants ㅈ (*c*), ㅊ (*ch*), ㅊ (*z*), ㅊ (*th*) and ㅊ (*ph*) were added later correcting the original text after its print. In other words, these words were initially printed using only the eight final consonants letters stated in the *HC* and, only after the printing of the text, corrected.<sup>478</sup> These corrections made on the text suggest that particular importance was attached to this specific orthography.

The choice of using such a morphophonemic orthography is usually explained by the close link that this text had with Sejong.<sup>479</sup> It has been pointed out that the only two texts of the period ignoring the rule of the eight consonants only in terminal position expressed in the *HC haerye* are the *WK* and the *YK*.<sup>480</sup> However, this still does not explain why Sejong preferred this different type of orthography. Should we assume an intrinsic “superiority” of this morphophonemic orthography used in the *WK*, and supposedly sustained by Sejong, perhaps considering it more advanced because closer to the one used today? Instead, I would argue that there was no better choice in absolute terms and that the type of orthography chosen might not only have reflected a personal

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<sup>477</sup> For a complete list, see An Pyŏng-hŭi (1992:11-12).

<sup>478</sup> On the issue of the corrections made on the *WK*, see Lee Ki-moon (1997), An Pyŏng-hŭi (1992) and Ok Yŏng-jŏng (2018).

<sup>479</sup> See An Pyŏng-hŭi (1992) and Lee Ki-Moon (1997).

<sup>480</sup> In the *YK*, however, we cannot find examples of *punch'ŏl* 分綴 orthography. It can thus be said that the *WK* shows a more prominent use of morphophonemic orthography.

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preference of the writer but also have implied a different type of expected reading by the target of the texts. A morphophonemic orthography was more apt for a visual reading since it allowed to easily recognize the morphological structure of the terms without the need to articulate the text orally. This means that it also allowed a faster reading. The downside was that it required a morphological knowledge of the language and was thus more difficult to understand for readers who did not have this type of knowledge. The majority of the “ignorant people” who had no or limited familiarity with writing would have found it easier to vocalize the text and understand it with their ears instead that with their eyes. A phonemic orthography that showed the language as it was heard was more apt for them since a morphophonemic one would have constituted a complication. On the other hand, this phonemic orthography was less transparent if not vocalized and required more time to be visually interpreted.

If a phonemic orthography was better suited for an oral and aural interpretation of the text, we might wonder why using a morphophonemic orthography for the verses of the *WK*, that were intended to be vocalized as songs, and not a phonemic one. The overall limited cases showing a morphophonemic orthography do now allow to draw any conclusion, but we can try to present some possible answers to its partial use. Firstly, contrary to the *SP* that was intended to be directly read and recited during a Buddhist ceremony, the verses of the *WK* were likely intended to be *memorized* by the singers. Thus, the performance of the text did not derive from its direct reading. For this reason, a phonemic orthography might not have been considered as particularly helpful for such a case. A second consideration is that these female performers must have possessed far superior literary skills than ordinary people. Those who had performed the *hanmun* verses of the *YK*, for example, must have been familiar with Chinese characters. Furthermore, later records in the Annals of King Sejo show that female performers (*yōgi* 女妓) wrote and submitted songs (*kayo* 歌謠) to the king during a tour of inspections in different provinces.<sup>481</sup> Although it is

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<sup>481</sup> *Sejo Sillok* 世祖實錄, 22:5b (6/10/13); 22:8a (6/10/15); 22:15b (6/11/4) [1460].



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not clear if these songs were written in *hanmun* or with the vernacular script, they clearly show that these performers possessed skills in the literary composition of songs. The knowledge necessary to grasp a morphophonemic orthography could thus have been considered within their means.

In conclusion, in both the *SP* and the *WK*, the vernacular script seems to have been intended for performative purposes. The *SP* was probably aimed at the Buddhist monks who were supposed to recite the text during the Buddhist ceremony for the death of the queen Consort Sohön. The vernacular script not only allowed them to understand the text better but also, and perhaps more importantly, to read and mediate it for the people attending the ceremony. The *õnhae* version of the *HC* containing the explanation of the incisor sounds was also instrumental in providing the correct vocalization of the *mantras* recorded in the text. The *WK*, on the other hand, shows a more prominent use of the vernacular script, that could be explained with the need to make it more easily accessible to the performers who might have used it as a sort of script to memorize and execute the verses. The vernacular script allowed both texts to reach a higher number of people that would have been possible if they had used only Chinese characters, but this did not necessarily imply a direct reading of these texts. More importantly, it made it possible to mediate the texts to the audience who assisted the ceremony/performance.

#### III.3. Phonological Works and Chinese Language Learning

After the invention of the vernacular script, many efforts were devoted to phonological researches on the correct pronunciation of Chinese characters. The result was the application of the new script in the compilation and publication of Chinese characters' dictionaries as the *Tongguk chõngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country, 1448) and the *Hongmu chõngun yõkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions, 1455). The first was a dictionary that aimed to indicate a standard Korean pronunciation of

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Chinese characters, the second a Korean edition of a Ming Chinese dictionary with the transcription in the vernacular script of the Chinese pronunciation of the characters. Furthermore, interest in the Chinese language led to the application of the new script in Chinese language textbooks as the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 (Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children, 1453).

#### III.3.1. Compilation and printing

The intention to use the new alphabet for the transcription of the pronunciation of Chinese characters can be already seen in the project of the “translation” with the vernacular script of the *Gujin yunhui juyao* 古今韻會舉要 (Kr. *Kogŭm unhoe kŏyo*, Abridged Collection of Rimes of the Ancient and Modern; henceforth *Yunhui*) that had started in the second month of 1444, just a couple of months after the first announcement of the vernacular script.<sup>482</sup>

This project seems to have caused an immediate discord among some of the scholars of the Hall of Worthies. In the protest memorial that was submitted to the king by Ch'oe Malli and other scholars of this institution just four days after the assignment of this project, one of the critics that were moved in the fifth point was precisely on the use of the new script to edit Chinese rime dictionaries:<sup>483</sup>

今不博採群議驟令吏輩十餘人訓習又輕改古人已成之韻書附會無稽之諺文聚工匠數十人刻之劇欲廣布其於天下後世公議何如

But now you do not listen to different opinions. You suddenly instruct [in the vernacular script] a dozen of low-level officials (*ibae* 吏輩), hastily edit the rime dictionaries (*unsŏ* 韻書) compiled by the ancients, inserting in them the baseless vernacular script, gather a dozen of workers to carve it, and suddenly desire to promulgate it everywhere. What will the world and future generations think about this?

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<sup>482</sup> See II.2.1.

<sup>483</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:19b (26/2/20) [1444].

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The submission of a protest memorial just a few days after the starting of the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui* seems hardly a coincidence, suggesting that the use of the vernacular script concerning Chinese characters' dictionaries was a significant reason for the opposition of some scholars of the Hall of Worthies to it.

This disapproval of the use of the vernacular script to edit Chinese characters' dictionaries is one to which Sejong directly answers in the dialogue that he had with the submitters of the memorial immediately after reading it:<sup>484</sup>

且汝知韻書乎四聲七音字母有幾乎若非予正其韻書

Furthermore, are you familiar with the rime dictionaries (*unsǒ* 韻書)? Do you know the four tones (*sasǒng* 四聲) and the seven places of articulation of sounds (*ch'irŭm* 七音)? If I do not correct the rime dictionaries, who will do that?

Here Sejong answers the submitters of the memorial by stressing their lack of knowledge about rime dictionaries and phonology. With the final sentence “if I do not correct the rime dictionaries, who will do that?” he also seems to show a strong sense of personal commitment by presenting the editing of the rime dictionaries as something unavoidable and utterly necessary. It should also be noted that both the memorial and the answer of the king do not mention specifically the *Yunhui* but only make reference to rime dictionaries (*unsǒ* 韻書) in general. This suggests that the main issue resided not specifically in the *Yunhui* but, more generally, in the use of the vernacular script to edit Chinese character's dictionaries, probably meaning that this project was already part of more far-reaching phonological researches on the pronunciation of Chinese characters.

Of this specific project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui*, nothing is heard anymore after this brief reference in the Annals, but the work made on it probably resulted in the compilation of the *Tongguk chǒngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country, henceforth *TC*). Among the authors of this work, there was the same group of scholars who had been assigned to the project of the

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<sup>484</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:19b (26/2/20) [1444].

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“translation” of the *Yunhui* and who had also compiled the *HC* (Sin Sukchu, Ch'oe Hang, Sŏng Sammun, Pak P'aengnyŏn, Yi Kae, Kang Hŭian, Yi Sŏllo), plus Cho Pyŏnan 曹變安 (?-?) and Kim Chŭng 金曾 (?-?). The *TC* was completed in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of 1447 and then printed and distributed among the different provinces (*to* 道), to the State Academy (*Sŏnggyungwan* 成均館) and the Four Schools (*Sa Pu Haktang* 四部學堂) of the capital in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of 1448.<sup>485</sup> A complete edition is today preserved at the Konkuk University Library in Seoul. It comprises six volumes and contains a Preface (*sŏ* 序) written by Sin Sukchu (that is also recorded in the *Annals*)<sup>486</sup> and an index (*mongnok* 目錄) with all the 91 rimes grouped in 26 rime sets.<sup>487</sup>

This dictionary aimed to set a standard Sino-Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters. The compilers could not present the pronunciations of the *Yunhui*, or of any other Chinese riming dictionary, as they were since would have been too different from the actual Korean pronunciation. The pronunciations of the *TC* were thus not only based on the study of the pronunciations found in existing Chinese riming dictionary but were also, and perhaps more importantly, based on the collection and analysis of the most widely used current pronunciations among Korean speakers. As stated in the preface of this text written by Sin Sukchu:<sup>488</sup>

[...]旁採俗習博考傳籍本諸廣用之音協之古韻之切字母七音清濁四聲靡不究其源委以復乎正 [...]

(We were ordered) to carry out an extensive collection of the popular practices [of pronunciation] and to consider the transmitted texts, to employ the widely used

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<sup>485</sup> The date of the completion of the dictionary is recorded in the preface of the text written by Sin Sukchu and in *Sejong Sillok*, 117:22a (29/9/29) [1447]. The printing and distribution in *Sejong Sillok*, 122:5a (30/10/17) [1448].

<sup>486</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 117:22a (29/9/29) [1447].

<sup>487</sup> One rime set usually grouped three or four rimes that differed only in tone (except for set no. 3 that grouped only two).

<sup>488</sup> *Tongguk chŏngun sŏ* 東國正韻序.

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sounds (i.e., pronunciations) as the basis and adapt them to the *panjöl*<sup>489</sup> readings of the old rimes (*koun* 古韻), to carefully look into the characters mothers (*chamo* 字母), the seven sounds (*ch'irūm* 七音), the clear and muddy [sounds] (*ch'öngt'ak* 清濁) and the four tones, (*sasöng* 四聲) leaving nothing out, [all this] to recover what was correct [in pronunciation].

The overall result was what Lee and Ramsey aptly define as “a theoretical construct representing a compromise between the Chinese rime tables and dictionaries and the Sino-Korean readings used in Korea.”<sup>490</sup>

The attention to the Korean situation is reflected in the drastic reduction of the number of the initial consonants, that used only 23 initials (the same of the *HC*) out of the traditional 36 of Chinese rime tables. Another characteristic of the *TC* is that it employed a different organization of the characters, that were classified by rime set first and not by tone as it was common in traditional Chinese rime dictionaries. As pointed out by Ledyard (1997:49), this kind of arrangement was more convenient for Korean learners since in many cases it would have been precisely the tone what they needed to know and the *TC*, by collecting all characters differing only in tone together in one place, making it more comfortable this type of research. A further peculiarity of the *TC* is that for the classification of the characters in the rime it followed the same order of consonants given in the *HC*.

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<sup>489</sup> The *panjöl* 反切 (Ch. *fanqie*) system used one character to indicate the initial consonant and a second character to indicate the rest of the reading.

<sup>490</sup> Lee and Ramsey (2011:127).

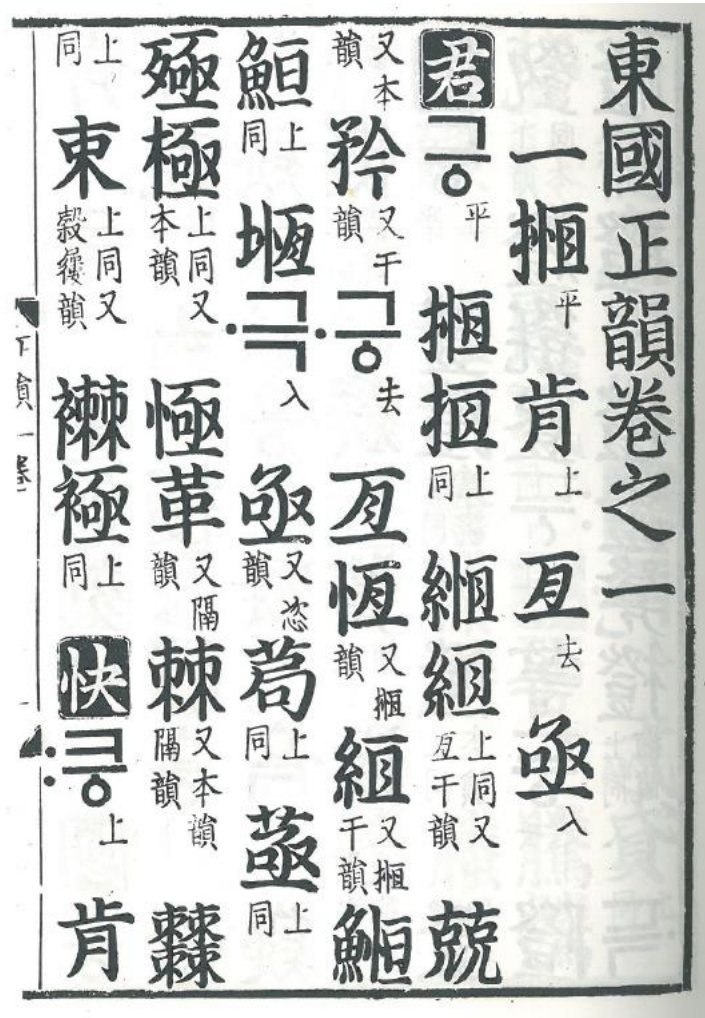


Figure 22. *Tongguk chǒngun* 東國正韻, 1:1a. Photographic reproduction from *Tongguk chǒngun* 東國正韻. 1992. Seoul: Konkuk Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu.

In Figure 22 we can see the right side of the first folio of the first volume. After the title with the number of the volume in the first line (東國正韻卷之一), we find the name of the rimes that are grouped in the first set (拊, 肯, 互, 亟) with the corresponding tone printed in a smaller character (平, 上, 去 and 入). These names correspond to the first character with that rime that can be found in the dictionary and they are listed as such in the index as well. This first set comprises rimes ending with the terminal consonant - ㅁ / ㄱ (-ng/k)<sup>491</sup> and containing the vowels - u, | i and ·| oi. It thus starts with the first of these sub-groups ( ung / uk) dividing it by initial consonants. These initial consonants are indicated with the

<sup>491</sup> The consonant ㄱ k is used for the entering tone only.

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same characters used in the *HC* and follow the same order.<sup>492</sup> Furthermore, they are printed with engraved mobile types that make the characters to visually stand out on a black background. In the third line, we thus find the character 君 that indicates the initial consonant ㄱ *k*. Below this character, we find the pronunciation of the first rime in the even tone with this initial consonant written with the vernacular script (*kung* ㄱ), and following all the corresponding Chinese characters. As can be seen, on the same page it was possible to find all the characters having the same pronunciation that differed only in tone.

Parallel to the work done on the *TC*, the phonological studies of Sin Sukchu and other scholars proceeded, and continued even after the publication of the latter, with researches on the contemporary Chinese pronunciations. These researches would eventually result in the compilation of the *Hongmu chǒngun yōkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions) (henceforth *HMY*), a vernacular Korean edition of the original *Hongwu zhengyun* 洪武正韻 (The Correct Rimes of Hong Wu, 1375), a Ming Chinese riming dictionary whose compilation had started at the very beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) to set a standard pronunciation of Chinese characters.

To accomplish these researches missions in China were organized to gather firsthand data and make inquiries. In the *Annals*, the first record of these missions is dated 1445, around one year after the beginning of the project of the “translation” of the *Yunhui*, and reveals that Sin Sukchu, Sǒng Sammun and Son Susan 孫壽山 (?-?) were sent to Liaodong 遼東 in China to investigate about the rime dictionaries (*unsǒ* 韻書).<sup>493</sup> The *Annals of Sejong* do not provide details of this visit other than this brief notice, but in the *Pohanjae chip* 保閑齋集 (Collected Works of Pohanjae), that collects the works of Sin Sukchu, we can find more information on it. The appendix of this text contains various bibliographical accounts of Sin Sukchu written by his contemporaries. They are all very similar, and this trip to Liaodong is mentioned in many of them, revealing that Sin

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<sup>492</sup> See II.3.2.

<sup>493</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 107:3a (27/1/7) [1445].

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Sukchu met with Huang Zan 黃瓚, an exiled former scholar of the Hallim Academy 翰林院.<sup>494</sup> We can see below the relevant passage taken from the account written by Kang Hŭimaeng 姜希孟 (1424-1483):<sup>495</sup>

本國語音註僞正韻失傳時適翰林學士黃瓚以罪配遼東乙丑春命公隨入朝使臣到遼東見瓚質問音韻公以諺字翻華音隨問輒解不差毫釐瓚大奇之自是往還遼東凡十三度  
The pronunciations (*ōŭm* 語音) of our country were inaccurate and could not communicate the standard rimes (*chōngun* 正韻). Just in time the Hallin Academy scholar Huang Zan was exiled to Liaodong for having committed a crime. In the spring of the year *Ŭlch'uk* (乙丑, i.e. 1445), Sin Sukchu<sup>496</sup> was ordered to join an embassy to the [Chinese] court and go to Liaodong to see [Huang] Zan and inquiry about the sounds of rimes (*ŭmun* 音韻). Sin Sukchu by using the vernacular letters (*ōnja* 諺字) to transfer (i.e., transcribe) the Chinese sounds (*hwaŭm* 華音) could immediately solve what he asked and, since he did not make the slightest mistake, [Huang] Zan found that exceedingly admirable. Since then, he went to Liaodong a total of thirteen times.<sup>497</sup>

Particular interesting is the passage mentioning how Sin Sukchu used the vernacular script to transcribe the Chinese pronunciations he asked about and how, by doing this, he did not make any mistake, causing the admiration of Huang Zan. This suggests how the new script was already usable and highly efficient for such a phonological purpose as the transcription of the pronunciation of Chinese characters.

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<sup>494</sup> The Hanlin Academy was a Chinese institution established since Tang times in charge of the compilation of royal edicts and diplomatic documents, as well as the compilation of historical publications.

<sup>495</sup> *Pohanjae chip* 保閑齋集, *purok* 附錄 (appendix), 文忠公行狀.

<sup>496</sup> In the original text Sin Sukchu is indicated as *kong* 公.

<sup>497</sup> This number of thirteen trips seems very high but is also repeated in the other bibliographical accounts from the same source. In one account it is also said that Sin Sukchu went to Liaodong three times in the same year. Ledyard (1998:396) suggests that the number of thirteen might have arisen from a mistake in the transcription of this sentence indicating three trips in one year (一年三往). In the preface to the *HMY* (see below) Sin Sukchu says that he was dispatched to China 7 or 8 times.



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This trip to Liaodong did not suffice to solve all the issues that Sin Sukchu and the other scholars were trying to clarify. Not only they had to return there other times, but the preface of Sin Sukchu to the *HMY*, that is recorded in the *Pohanjae chip*, says that their researches brought them as far as to the Ming capital:<sup>498</sup>

然語音既異傳訛亦甚乃命臣等就正中國之先生學士往來至于七八所與質之者若干人燕都爲萬國會同之地而其往返道途之遠所嘗與周旋講明者又爲不少以至殊方異域之使釋老卒伍之微莫不與之相接以盡正俗異同之變

However, the sounds of the language already differed, and the misrepresentations were severe. Thus, we were instructed to get them right by inquiring teachers and scholars in China. We went and returned a total of seven or eight times, and there we inquired some people. Yōndo (i.e., the Chinese capital, today Beijing), the place where ten thousand countries assemble, is a long way to go and return, but those with whom we soon made connections and clarified things were not few. We met envoys from different directions and strange lands, even commoners as Buddhists, Taoists and soldiers, we came in contact with everyone. By doing this, we attempted to clarify the difference between standard (*chǒng* 正) and popular (*sok* 俗) [pronunciations].<sup>499</sup>

Furthermore, they also questioned envoys arriving in Korea:<sup>500</sup>

且天子之使至國而儒者則又取正焉凡謄十餘稿辛勤反復竟八載之久而向之正罔缺者似益無疑

When the envoys from the Son of Heaven (i.e. from China) reached the country (i.e. Korea), if a learned man (*yuja* 儒者) was among them, we approached him to get the standard [pronunciations]. Generally, we worked hard and went over and

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<sup>498</sup> *Hongmu chǒngun yǒkhun sǒ* 洪武正韻譯訓序. In *Pohanjae chip* 保閑齋集, fascicle 15.

<sup>499</sup> As we shall see, in the *HMY* are also recorded the “popular pronunciations” (*sǒgŭm* 俗音) of the characters, that better reflected the actual contemporary Chinese pronunciation of the time based on the northern dialect.

<sup>500</sup> *Hongmu chǒngun yǒkhun sǒ* 洪武正韻譯訓序. In *Pohanjae chip* 保閑齋集, Fascicle 15.

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over again (literally, more than ten times) on the original text. In the end, after eight years, it was corrected, and imperfections ended to cause concern.

This encounter with Chinese envoys to sought clarifications on the *HMY* is also recorded in the Annals and dated 1450. Here it is reported in more detail that Sŏng Sammun, Sin Sukchu and Son Susan—thus the same scholars that made the trip to Liaodong—were sent to meet the Chinese envoys to ask them about the rime dictionaries (*unsŏ* 韻書) immediately after their reception and that Sŏng Sammun and Sin Sukchu spent a long time discussing the *HMY* with them.<sup>501</sup>

The first result of these phonological researches on the pronunciation of Chinese characters was the *Sasŏng t'onggo* 四聲通攷 (A Comprehensive Study of the Four Tones). This work has not survived, but we have some information on it from other later texts. In particular, Ch'oe Sejin 崔世珍 (1468-1542) used this text as a base to compile his *Sasŏng t'onghae* 四聲通解 (Comprehensive Explanation of the Four Tones) in 1517. In the preface of this later text, it is said that Sejong had initially directly ordered the translation of the *HMY* but that, when that proved to be too bulky, commanded to Sin Sukchu a shorter version and named it *Sasŏng t'onggo*. This dictionary must thus have been completed during the reign of Sejong and, when the *HMY* was finally completed, it was attached to it.<sup>502</sup>

The compilation of the *HMY* started thus during the reign of Sejong but was completed only in 1455, after the death of the king. This dictionary resulted in 16 fascicles divided into 8 books as the original *Hongwu zhengyun*.<sup>503</sup> Today only the last 7 books survive and are all preserved at the Korea University Library in Seoul.

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<sup>501</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 127:22a (32/1/3) [1450].

<sup>502</sup> That the *Sasŏng t'onggo* could be found at the beginning of the *HMY* is recorded in the preface of the latter.

<sup>503</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:212-13) argues that the text had a further head-volume (*kwŏnsu* 卷首) containing the preface written by Sin Sukchu, the introductory remarks (*pŏmnye* 凡例) and the *Sasŏng t'onggo*. The reason is that the number of pages of the *Sasŏng t'onggo* alone (estimated as around 100 leaves) would have been too many to be attached to the first book of the *HMY*. An Pyŏng-hŭi also suggests that the introductory remarks might have been mistakenly attributed to the *Sasŏng t'onggo* by Ch'oe Sejin because contained in a separate volume with the latter, but were in truth referring to the *HMY*.

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This dictionary, contrary to the *TC*, aimed to transcribe the Chinese pronunciation of characters. It maintains the organization of the original dictionary and presents the transcriptions of the pronunciations of characters written with the vernacular script. These pronunciations were written in the original Chinese edition with the *panjöl* 反切 system, that used one character to indicate the initial consonant and a second character to indicate the rest of the reading. Furthermore, it also adds the “popular pronunciations” (*sögyüm* 俗音) of the same characters that better reflected the actual contemporary Chinese pronunciation of the time based on the northern dialect. To faithfully transcribe the Chinese pronunciations of this dictionary were also used some extra consonants that were absent in the original *HC* and were created by modifying the original “incisor sounds” (*ch'iüüm* 齒音: ㄸ, ㅌ, ㄲ, ㄴ, ㄷ) by elongating the final extremities of one of their strokes.<sup>504</sup> In this way, it was possible to distinguish the consonants that in traditional Chinese phonology were indicated as “apical incisors” (*ch'iduüm* 齒頭音), that corresponded to dental sounds, from the “upright incisors” (*chöngch'iüüm* 正齒音) that corresponded to palato-alveolar sounds and were not distinguished in the Korean language.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> These consonants were also used for the transcription of the *dharani* in the *SP* and explained the *HC önhæ*. See III.2.2.

<sup>505</sup> For a table with the correspondences between the Korean letters and traditional Chinese initial consonants, see Ledyard (1997:38). For a comprehensive discussion on the process of adaptation of the Korean vernacular script to represent the Chinese pronunciation of characters, see Yu Hyo-hong 俞曉紅 (2014).

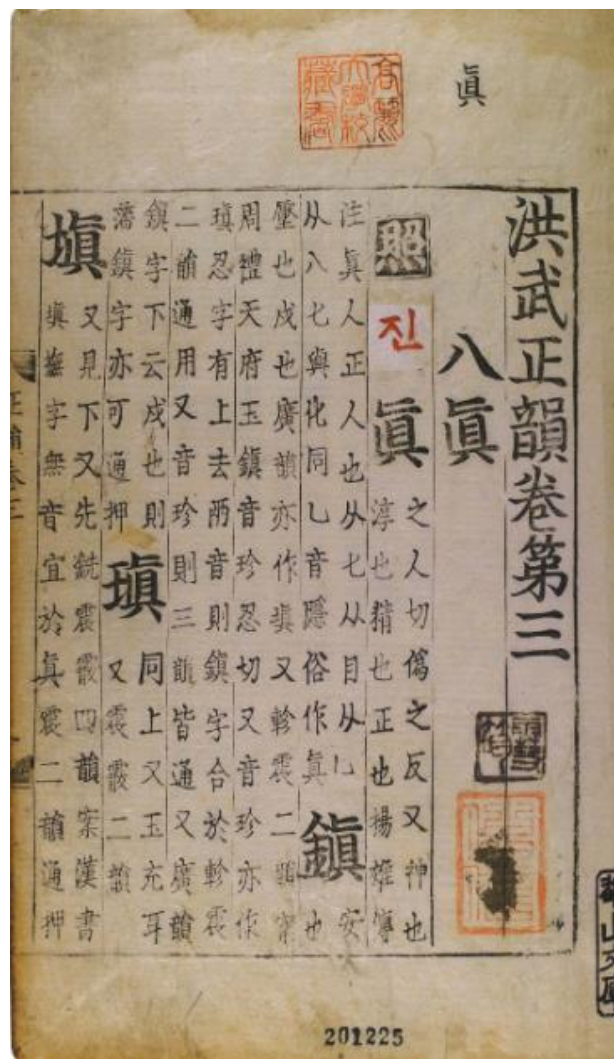


Figure 23. *Hongmu chǒngun yǒkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions), 3:1. Source: <http://www.heritage.go.kr/>

In each rime, the characters are grouped by an initial consonant, indicated by Chinese character mother (*chamo* 字母) printed with engraved (*ǔmgak* 陰刻) movable types so that they stand out on a black background.<sup>506</sup> Following is the transcription in the vernacular script of the standard pronunciation (*chǒngǔm* 正音) of the corresponding small-rime (*soun* 小韻, i.e., the pronunciation of the rime with that initial consonant), normally printed with movable types in relief

<sup>506</sup> In the original Chinese edition of the dictionary the character mother indicating the first consonant was not present. Black dots, however, separated the groups of characters with different initial consonants.

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(*yanggak* 陽刻).<sup>507</sup> In the note, printed with smaller characters, is the original indication of the pronunciation indicated with the *panjöl* system. In some cases, the “popular pronunciation” (*sogŭm* 俗音) written with the vernacular script was provided after the *panjöl* reading. When the compilers deemed it needed, a note on the pronunciation was added. These notes on pronunciation seem however to have been limited to the cases when the sound of a particular Korean letter had not an exact correspondence with the original Chinese pronunciation. The remaining part of the note corresponded to the original edition.

Another text that was aimed at the study of Chinese language but that, unfortunately, has not reached us, was the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 (Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children). The original work from which this Korean version derived was the *Tongjasŭp* 童子習 (Training Manual for Children, 1404), a Ming manual for children compiled by Zhu Fengji 朱逢吉 (?-?). The first mention of this text in the Annals is dated 1430 and records that the *Tongjasŭp* was presented, among other works, as a text for the study of both Chinese clerical writing (*hanihak* 漢吏學) and translation (*yökhak* 譯學).<sup>508</sup> According to An Pyöng-hŭi (2009:404), this suggests that the text to which this entry is referring to was an edition written in vernacular Chinese (Ch. *baihua* 白話) that was compiled in Korea, and not the original text written in *hanmun*. This Korean edition was thus not a manual for children anymore but a manual for the study of the Chinese language. From this text probably derived the one compiled with the vernacular script during Sejong's reign.

The only information about this manual compiled with the vernacular script comes from its preface (*sö* 序) written by Söng Sammun, that was later included in volume 94 of the *Tongmunsön* 東文選 (Collected Literary Works of the East, 1478). According to this preface, this text was compiled by Sin Sukchu, Cho Pyönan, Kim Chŭng and Son Susan, all scholars who also participated in the

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<sup>507</sup> As can be seen in Figure 23, in the third volume of the Korean edition that has reached us some of the pronunciations written with the vernacular script were cut away.

<sup>508</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 47:28a (12/3/18) [1430].

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compilation of the *HMY*. The work started during Sejong's reign and was probably completed between the 6<sup>th</sup> month of 1453 (when Sin Sukchu obtained the position of *u pusŭngji* 右副承旨 by which he is named in the preface) and the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the same year (when his position changed again).<sup>509</sup> As for how the text was organized, the preface gives only the following explanation:<sup>510</sup>

以正音譯漢訓 細書逐字之下 又用方言 以解其義

With the correct sounds (i.e., the vernacular script) we transcribed the Chinese readings and inserted them under each character using smaller writing. Furthermore, using the local language (*pangŏn* 方言) (i.e. Korean), we explicated their meaning.

This suggests that the text had the Chinese pronunciation of each character indicated with the vernacular script in smaller characters and, following, a vernacular version.

#### III.3.2. Use of the texts and significance of the vernacular script

What was the reason that led Sejong and his assistants to compile these phonological works as some of the earliest projects about the newly invented script? What was their function and how they were intended to be used? To discuss this, we should consider the *TC*—that, as we have seen, dealt with the vernacular Korean language by prescribing a correct pronunciation of Sino-Korean readings of Chinese characters—separately from the other phonological works aimed to learn the Chinese language, as the *HMY* and the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp*.

Starting our discussion with the *TC*, the preface to this work reveals how its compilation originated from the confusing situation of the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters at the time. One of the consequences of this was that it often led teachers to assimilate wrong readings and, in turn, transmit them to their

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<sup>509</sup> *Tanjong Sillok* 端宗實錄, 6:38a (1/6/8) and 8:12a (1/10/11) [1453].

<sup>510</sup> *Chik'ae tongjasŭp sŏ* 直解童子習序. In *Tongmunsŏn* 東文選, vol. 94.

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students. From here the need to correct this situation as soon as possible before it passed the point of no return. We can read here the related passage:<sup>511</sup>

世之爲儒師者往往或知其失私自改之以教子弟然重於擅改因循舊習者多矣若不大正之則愈久愈甚將有不可救之弊矣

In the world, those who teach Confucianism sometimes realize the errors in the pronunciations, correct them by themselves and teach them to the students. However, since making corrections using one's judgement is not easy, many remain trapped in their old behaviours. If we do not make corrections on a large scale, things will get worse over time. And in the future, we will not be able to correct these bad habits.

There was thus a particular concern for the correct reading of these characters in the study of Confucian texts, that was considered particularly important in an educational context between teacher and student. However, we might wonder why the absence of a "correct" pronunciation caused so much alarm. The meaning of Chinese characters did not depend on their pronunciations, and a text could be read and understood regardless of the readings used (or even by not pronouncing them at all). But as expressed by the following passage, the right pronunciation of characters was regarded as a prerequisite for the study of Confucian texts:<sup>512</sup>

況乎書契未作聖人之道寓於天地書契既作聖人之道載諸方策欲究聖人之道當先文義欲知文義之要當自聲韻聲韻乃學道之權輿也而亦豈易能哉

Furthermore, before writing (*sŏgye* 書契) was created, the Way of the Sages (*sŏngin chi to* 聖人之道) relied on Heaven and Earth. However, after writing was created, the Way of the Sages was thoroughly recorded in books. In order to investigate the Way of the Sages, it is necessary to know first the proper meaning of writing (*munŭi* 文義). And to understand the essence (*yo* 要) of this meaning, it is necessary

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<sup>511</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 117:22a (29/9/29).

<sup>512</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 117:22a (29/9/29).

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to start from the sound of Chinese characters (*sǒngun* 聲韻). This is to say that the pronunciation of Chinese characters is at the very base of the study of the Way. How can we easily teach it?

The correct pronunciation of Chinese characters was thus considered an integral and essential part of the study of Confucian texts. Knowledge of the “meaning of writing” (*munŭi* 文義) was only a part of the equation, but to understand the “essence” (*yo* 要) of that meaning it was necessary to know the proper pronunciations of the characters first. From this perspective, ignoring the right pronunciations of Chinese characters would have mined at its very base the knowledge of the Confucian texts that were at the foundation of the state's ideology.

This importance given to the correct pronunciation of Confucian texts can be understood if we consider it as linked to an oral reading practice of these texts. As seen in Chapter I, the vocalized reading of Confucian texts in an educational context was an established practise that can be traced back to the Silla period, when Sŏl Ch'ong used to teach the Nine Classics to his students. Sejong himself, as we have seen, used to attend lectures on Confucian texts in the Classics Mat (*kyōngyōn* 經筵). However, this emphasis on the correct pronunciation might also suggest a more specific influence of the “method of reading” (*dushu fa* 讀書法) expressed by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), whose development of Confucian thought had the most influence in Chosŏn Korea. Zhu Xi's thoughts on reading are expressed in the section of the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Conversations of Master Chu, arranged topically) dedicated to “learning” (*xue* 學),<sup>513</sup> where he emphasizes “reading out loud” (*du song* 讀誦) as a significant principle of “learning”. We know that Sejong himself had studied the *Zhuzi yulei* during his royal lectures at the Classics Mat early in his reign.<sup>514</sup> He and the scholars of the Hall of Worthies must thus have been familiar with the teachings contained in this text, and we might wonder if this influenced the emphasis put on the correct pronunciation

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<sup>513</sup> In fascicles 10 and 11.

<sup>514</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 14:9b (3/11/24) [1421].



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in the study of Confucian texts that we find in the *TC*. These pronunciations would have made it possible to accurately read the words of the sages and, by experiencing them orally and aurally, and not just visually, truly understand the essence of their meaning.

There is, however, also another perspective from which we can interpret the compilation of the *TC*. This is to consider its significance in the process of promotion and diffusion of the alphabet. Sök Chu-yön (2010), for example, points out that the employment of the new vernacular script to indicate the pronunciations of Chinese characters produced a strong influence on the ruling class as well. As we have seen, mastering the pronunciation of characters was considered a prerequisite in the study of Confucian texts. The *TC* promoted the learning and use of the vernacular letters among those members of the ruling class that were most contrary to it by using the new letters to set a standard for the pronunciation of characters. In other words, to master the new standard pronunciations, the scholar-officials had to learn the vernacular script first. The *TC* presented the new letters as a necessary tool for the right knowledge of the Chinese characters and, consequently, of all its related Confucian literature and knowledge. A strong connection was forged. Furthermore, the publication of the *TC* can be also considered pivotal in the institutionalization of the new letters, since it presented a uniform pronunciation that was employed as a standard for all the subsequent publications. In other words, according to Sök Chu-yön, it realized two conditions that are considered necessary in the process of institutionalization: uniformity (*tonghyöngsöng* 동형성) and repetition (*panboksöng* 반복성).<sup>515</sup> That its pronunciations fell in disuse after a few decades should thus not necessarily be interpreted as a failure of the whole project. To the contrary, it could be meant that the alphabet had reached a certain diffusion that made these pronunciations to be finally considered as obsolete. In other words, that the *TC* had managed to successfully contribute to the diffusion and institutionalization of the new alphabet.

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<sup>515</sup> Sök Chu-yön (2010:208-209).

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When Sejong ordered the *TC* to be distributed he also instructed to not force its use but to let scholars use the prescribed pronunciations according to their judgment since popular pronunciations had been used for a long time and could not be easily changed:<sup>516</sup>

○頒東國正韻于諸道及成均館四部學堂仍教曰本國人民習熟俗韻已久不可猝變勿強教使學者隨意爲之

In ordering the distribution of the *Tongguk chǒngun* to the different provinces, the *Sǒnggyungwan* and the Four Schools, [the king] instructed as follows: "The people of our country are used to the popular pronunciations, so they cannot be suddenly changed. Do not force their instruction and let scholars learn them according to their judgment."

It might seem quite surprising that, after all the efforts invested in this project, the king did not more actively encourage to use the new pronunciations but, instead, allowed scholars not to employ them. However, it seems to me that his statement perfectly reflects his vision and policy regarding the vernacular script. In the preface to the *HC* Sejong had written: "I simply desire to make everyone easily learn and conveniently use them (the vernacular letters) daily."<sup>517</sup> That he did not force the usage of the new prescribed Sino-Korean pronunciations seems perfectly coherent with this statement. Moreover, if we consider the opposition that the invention of the new alphabet aroused among the ruling class, a strategy of encouraging the use of the new alphabet but not forcing on the ways to use it seems wise. In other words, he gave scholars and officials a tool to "conveniently use" the new script in their studies of the Chinese characters and its related Confucian knowledge, but he did not force them.

This strategy of not forcing the usage of the dictionary seems to have been very effective. In 1460, ten years after the death of Sejong and during the reign of Sejo 世祖 (1455-1468), the Ministry of Rites (*yejo* 禮曹) submitted to the king a

<sup>516</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 122:5a (30/10/17).

<sup>517</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 113:36b (28/9/29): 新制二十八字欲使人易習便於日用耳

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proposal to insert the *TC* in the *mun'gwa* 文科 (“literati category”), the highest civil service examination, a suggestion was readily accepted by the current king.<sup>518</sup> This means that the scholar-officials themselves, without any order from above, requested to make compulsory the study of the *TC* and thus, indirectly, of the alphabet itself. This also seems to suggest that scholars had used the pronunciations of this dictionary during all those years.

The *TC* had thus a crucial role in the language policy of Sejong and the diffusion of the vernacular script in the years following its invention. Its pronunciations, although partly artificial, seems to have found a certain diffusion, if not an application, among the elites that attended the schools of the capital and the State Confucian Academy (*Sönggyungwan*). In 1460 it also became part of the civil service examination (*mun'gwa*). These pronunciations were strictly followed in all the publication during the reign of King Sejo and started to fall in disuse only during the reign of King Söngjong 成宗 (1469-94). But during that period, it seems to have contributed to the diffusion and institutionalization of the new vernacular script in the Korean society, involving specifically the upper classes that were more hostile to it. Seen from this perspective, the usual interpretation given to this text as a “failure” in its attempt to reform the pronunciation of Chinese characters might be worth to be reconsidered or, at least, moderated.

The other phonological works that were compiled during Sejong's reign were intended to be used for the study of the Chinese language. As seen in I.3.1, knowledge of the Chinese language had been since the establishment of the dynasty pivotal in the diplomatic relations with Ming China. It was the need to study it that had led to the establishment of the *Sayögwön* 司譯院 (Office of Interpreters), where the Chinese language remained the most important curriculum. This importance of Chinese language in the relations with China is asserted in the preface of the *HMY* as the reason for its compilation.<sup>519</sup>

以吾東國世事中華而語音不通必賴傳譯首命譯洪武正韻

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<sup>518</sup> *Sejo Sillok* 世祖實錄, 20:35a (6/5/28).

<sup>519</sup> *Hongmu chöngun yökhun sö* 洪武正韻譯訓序. In *Pohanjae chip* 保閑齋集, vol. 15.

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[King Sejong] seeing that our Eastern Country had served China for generations but that the sounds of the language could not communicate [with them] and that dependence on interpreters was necessary for communication, ordered as a first thing to translate (i.e. transcribe with the vernacular script) the *Hongwu zhengyun*.

The same reason is given in the preface of the *Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children* (*Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習), that also contains more detailed information on how both these texts originated from the need to communicate with China:<sup>520</sup>

我東方在海外言語與中國異因譯乃通自我祖宗事大至誠置承文院掌吏文司譯院掌譯語專其業而久其任其爲慮也蓋無不周第以學漢音者得於轉傳之餘承授既久訛繆滋多縱亂四聲之疾舒衡失七音之清濁又無中原學士從旁正之故號爲宿儒老譯終身由之而卒於孤陋我世宗文宗慨念於此既作訓民正音天下之聲始無不可書矣於是譯洪武正韻以正華音又以直解童子習譯訓評話乃學華語之門戶命今右副承旨臣申叔[……]以正音譯漢訓細書逐字之下又用方言以解其義

Our Eastern Direction (*tongbang* 東方) (i.e. Korea) is situated on the other side of the sea, and the language is different from China. Translation is thus needed to communicate. From the time of our ancestors, we have served the great (*sadae* 事大) with sincerity and established the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence (*Sŭngmunwŏn* 承文院) in charge of clerical writing (*imun* 吏文) and the Office of Interpreters (*Sayŏgwŏn* 司譯院) in charge of translating the language (*yŏgŏ* 譯語). By devoting themselves to their duties, and by being at that task for a long time, there was nothing that they could not fully express. However, those who study Chinese pronunciation (*hanŭm* 漢音) have learned wrong things that have been transmitted to them. This went on for a long time, and mistakes increased. Vertically, the four tones increased or reduced their speed becoming confused; horizontally, the clearness and muddiness of the seven sounds got lost.<sup>521</sup> Since

<sup>520</sup> *Chik'ae tongjasŭp sŏ* 直解童子習序. In *Tongmunsŏn* 東文選, vol. 94.

<sup>521</sup> This passage is referring to the traditional Chinese rime tables (*undo* 韻圖), that distributed syllables vertically according to their tone and horizontally according to their initial consonant.

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they did not have a Chinese scholar at their side to correct them, even renowned scholars and experienced interpreters went on like this, trapped in their mistakes for their whole life until they passed away.

Our Sejong and Munjong, distressed by that, created the Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People and, for the first time, it became possible to write all the sounds under heaven. Thereupon, the *Correct Rimes of Hong Wu* (*Hongwu zhengyun* 洪武正韻) was translated (i.e. transcribed with the vernacular script) and the Chinese pronunciation of characters (*hwaŭm* 華音) corrected. Furthermore, as for the *Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children* (*Chik'ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習),<sup>522</sup> that teaches the spoken Chinese language (*p'yŏnghwa* 評話) and constituted a gate to the study of Chinese (*hwaŏ* 華語), it was ordered to the *u pusŭngji* Sin Sukchu [...] to translate (i.e. transcribe) with the Correct Sounds the Chinese readings, to insert them with smaller writing under each character, and to explicate its meaning using the local language (*pangŏn* 方言) (i.e. Korean).

This passage reveals how the learning of the Chinese language was at the centre of Chosŏn concerns since necessary to maintain relations with China. It was the need to properly speak this language that caused the new script to be used in the “translations” of the *Hongwu zhengyun* and the *Chik'ae tongjasŭp*. If we take at face value this preface, it also seems to suggest that the vernacular script itself had been created with this aim in mind from the beginning.<sup>523</sup> The situation of the Chinese pronunciations of characters described by Sŏng Sammun is very similar to the one described by Sin Sukchu in the preface to the *TC* about the Sino-Korean pronunciations, with scholars trapped in their old mistakes and the difficulty to

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<sup>522</sup> Kang Sin-hang (2003:241) interprets this passage as referring to the text compiled with the vernacular script. An Pyŏng-hŭi (2009:404), on the other hand, interprets it as referring to the previous version compiled only in vernacular Chinese. This is because, following the logical flow in the writing, the order of “translating” with the vernacular script is only mentioned later.

<sup>523</sup> It should also be noted that this preface presents Munjong as the creator of the script together with Sejong. Munjong, as we have seen in chapter II.2.1, had participated to the compilation of the *Collection of Rimes* when he was Crown Prince by supervising this project immediately after the completion of the script. That he had a role in the creation of the alphabet is thus possible, but the extent of his role remains difficult to assess.

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correct them by themselves. According to Sŏng Sammun, the vernacular script would have solved all this:<sup>524</sup>

學者苟能先學正音若干字次及於斯則浹旬之間漢語可通韻學可明而事大之能事畢矣  
Scholars, by only learning the few letters of the Correct Sounds, after ten days can communicate in Chinese and shed light on the study of the rimes (*unhak* 韻學). And by doing this, they can properly execute their duty in serving the Great (*sadae* 事大) (i.e. maintaining relations with China).

The new script became thus a valuable tool in the study of Chinese since it allowed to transcribe Chinese pronunciations and, therefore, help scholars to master the spoken language, with the final expected result of the improvement of relations with China.

#### III.4. Confucian Texts

Transforming Korea into an exemplar Confucian state had been a central concern of the Chosŏn rulers since the foundation of the new dynasty. The vernacular script was reasonably expected to have a significant role in achieving this objective by increasing the diffusion of Confucian texts. During Sejong's reign, two main projects were carried out to make editions of Confucian-related texts with the vernacular script: the *Four Books* (*sasŏ* 四書) and of the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations).

##### III.4.1. Compilation and printing

The project of making vernacular editions of the *Four Books* by adding vernacular glosses (*t'o* 吐) in the so-called *sundok kugyŏl* style had started earlier during the reign of Sejong.<sup>525</sup> It is thus not surprising that using the vernacular script to

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<sup>524</sup> *Chik'ae tongjasŭp sŏ* 直解童子習序. In *Tongmunsŏn* 東文選, vol. 94.

<sup>525</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:14a (10/4/18) [1428]. This project continued and extended the one of the vernacular editions of the Five Classics that had started during T'aejong's reign. See I.2.3.

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realize an explicated edition of these Confucian texts was immediately considered by the king. A first clue that the king planned to use the vernacular script for an edition of the *Four Books* can be already found in the answer that he gave to the anti-alphabet memorial analyzed in chapter II.<sup>526</sup> Here the king addresses Kim Mun 金汶 (?-1448), one of the submitters of the memorial, criticizing him for having changed his opinion on the vernacular script:<sup>527</sup>

上曰前此金汶啓曰制作諺文未爲不可今反以爲不可

His Majesty: Kim Mun had said that the creation of the vernacular script was something that had to be done. But now, contrary to that, he says that should not be done.

There is no direct reference to the *Four Books*, but since we know from a later entry in the Annals that Kim Mun would be later put in charge of the translation of the *Four Books* with the vernacular script,<sup>528</sup> this passage might have referred to the fact that he had been addressed by the king about this very project.<sup>529</sup> It is also possible that this happened even before the alphabet was completed since it would be difficult to understand such an about-face in only the couple of months from the announcement of the completion of the alphabet and the memorial.<sup>530</sup>

Despite this argument with the king, Kim Mun was reinstated in his position and eventually put in charge of the vernacular edition of the *Four Books*. When he died in 1448, the king immediately designated another scholar, Kim Ku 金鉤 (?-1462), to continue the work.<sup>531</sup> This clearly shows the commitment of the king in completing this project. Unfortunately, it was never completed during Sejong's

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<sup>526</sup> See II.2.3.

<sup>527</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:19b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>528</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 119:19b (30/3/28) [1448].

<sup>529</sup> An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:142).

<sup>530</sup> Ibid. That Kim Mun initially agreed to it but then, after the vernacular script was completed, changed his mind and aligned himself with Ch'oe Malli and the other submitters of the memorial might also explain why he was specifically addressed by the king after the reading of the memorial and was the one who received the heaviest punishment among all the submitters. See also II.2.2.

<sup>531</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 119:19b (30/3/28) [1448].

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reign, and we can only speculate on the possible reasons for this. On the one hand, Kim Mun's unexpected change of attitude toward the vernacular script, and his subsequent death when the project was finally proceeding, inevitably slowed the whole project. On the other hand, the inherent difficulties in realizing a vernacular explication of these texts, that as seen in I.2.3 had already hindered the compilation of their *kugyŏl* version, still probably remained a relevant factor that slowed this new project as well. Explicating these texts did not merely involve a linguistic transfer in vernacular but, more crucially, also an interpretation of them. The ideological weight of these texts in Chosŏn society made this a task of the utmost sensitivity. Be that as it may, there are no other entries in the Annals suggesting that this project was continued by other kings during the fifteenth century. It was only much later, at the end of the sixteenth century, that official vernacular explications of the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* were finally completed during the reign of King Sŏnjo 宣祖 (r. 1567-1608).<sup>532</sup>

The other translation project envisioned by Sejong was that of the *Samgang haengsil-to* (henceforth *SH*). As seen in chapter I, the original *hanmun* edition of this book had been printed and distributed in 1434 to instruct the people according to Confucian moral and ethics, a didactic project expressed in the term *kyohwa* 教化 "transform through education." Through a series of *exempla* in the form of brief stories and related illustrations (*to* 圖), this text presented the right moral behaviour according to what were considered the three more meaningful social relationships in a Confucian society (*samgang* 三綱): king-subject, husband-wife and father-son. A note in the Annals placed after the anti-alphabet memorial reveals how this text was immediately considered by the king to be rendered in vernacular using the new invented script.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> An unofficial vernacular explication of the *Seven Books* (*ch'ilsŏ* 七書), that included the *Four Books* and the *Three Classics* (i.e. the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Classic of Documents*, and the *Classic of Change*), seems to have been made at the turn of the sixteenth century by Yu-Sung-jo 柳崇祖 (1452-1512), a Sarim scholar. But these texts are not extant and nothing more is known about them. See Trauslen (2016:126).

<sup>533</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21b (26/2/20) [1444].



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前此上教昌孫曰予若以諺文譯三綱行實頒諸民間則愚夫愚婦皆得易曉忠臣孝子烈女必輩出矣

Previously His Majesty had said to Chŏng Ch'angson: "If I translate with the vernacular script the *Samgang haengsil* and distribute it among people, then ignorant men and women, everyone will be able to understand it easily, and loyal subjects, filial sons and devoted women will surely emerge!"

This passage reveals that the king had discussed the translation of the *SH* before the submission of the memorial. This might have happened in the two months between the completion of the alphabet and the submission of the anti-alphabet memorial, but it might also have happened before the alphabet was completed, perhaps at the same time that the project of the vernacular edition of the Four Classics was being discussed with Kim Mun.<sup>534</sup> Be that as it may, the plan for the translation of the *SH* shows how Sejong considered the vernacular script a useful tool to instruct the common people on the Confucian ideological values and moral.

It seems that this translated edition of the *SH* was printed only much later, in 1481, during the reign of Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 1469-94).<sup>535</sup> The orthography of the text, however, suggests that its translation might have already started during Sejong's reign and completed before the reign of Sŏngjong.<sup>536</sup>

#### III.4.2. Intended use of the texts and significance of the vernacular script

When Sejong ordered the compilation of the *Four Books* with vernacular glosses (*t'o* 吐) he personally asserted that the objective was to make these texts more accessible to young scholars and more comfortable to teach to students:<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> The likelihood that the projects of the vernacular editions of the *Four Books* and the *SH* were both conceived and discussed before the completion of the alphabet is suggested by An Pyŏng-hŭi (2007:142), who uses this argument to sustain that the invention of the alphabet had not been a secret project carried out by the king alone.

<sup>535</sup> *Sŏngjong Sillok*, 127:7a (12/3/24) [1481].

<sup>536</sup> Ko Yŏng-gŭn (1995).

<sup>537</sup> *Sejong Sillok* 世宗實錄, 40:14a (10/4/18) [1428]. See also I.2.3.

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[...] 予慮後學或失本意以訓諸生若因此而教豈不有益 [...]

"[...] I am worried that younger scholars, not truly understanding these texts, might fear to teach them to students. Would it not be beneficial if they teach using these [annotated versions]?" [...]

It seems thus reasonable that the new explicated editions of the *Four Books* compiled with the vernacular script would have followed the same aim: support for scholars in understanding these texts, especially in their use in an educational context. With the difference that the invention of the vernacular script provided a more efficient and convenient tool to realize this objective. We can find the same aim reflected in the following passages of the postface to the *HC* written by Chǒng Inji.<sup>538</sup>

[...] 學書者患其旨趣之難曉。[...] 以是解書。可以知其義。 [...]

[...] Those who study books experience difficulties in understanding them. [...] If these [letters] are used to explicate books is possible to understand their meaning. [...]

This passage can be reasonably seen as referring to the same young scholars who experienced difficulties understanding these texts mentioned by Sejong. Furthermore, I would argue that it can also be interpreted from the perspective of their students, who could equally benefit in the understanding of these text by listening to the mediated explanations of their teachers based on these newly annotated books with the vernacular script. Unfortunately, it seems that these new vernacular editions were never completed during Sejong's time. Thus, we do not have any information related to their actual use, nor any actual text whose layout and use of the script could be analyzed.<sup>539</sup>

Turning now our attention to the *Samgung haengsil-to* (henceforth *SH*), what was the expected use of its vernacular translation? As seen in Chapter I, the king

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<sup>538</sup> *HC Haerye* 27a and 28a. See also II.3.1.

<sup>539</sup> Later editions compiled at the end of the sixteenth-century risk being too late to be of any use in the present research.

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had been well aware of the difficulties for the original *hanmun* text of the *SH* to reach the illiterate common people, and thus its diffusion had been based on a mediated reading made by instructed people.<sup>540</sup> Was then the vernacular edition meant to allow the ignorant men and women to read the text without the mediation of a teacher? Although this might undoubtedly have happened, we should still consider that a vernacular explication of the text would not have necessarily eliminated the need for a mediated reading. The Annals records in the following way the effect that the king expected the vernacular edition of the *SH* to have:<sup>541</sup>

則愚夫愚婦皆得易曉

Then, ignorant men and women, everyone will be able to understand it easily.

It should be noted that in this passage there is no specific mention to the act of “reading” (*tok* 讀) but only on the “easy understanding” (*ihyo* 易曉) of the text. To be sure, there is nothing wrong in interpreting this expression as reading, but we should ask ourselves if it could also have a broader meaning, especially in this context. For example, we can find this expression used in the same entry of the Annals, specifically in a passage of the fourth point of the anti-alphabet memorial, where it is recorded the argument made by the sustainers of the alphabet (likely including the king himself) that the vernacular script allowed to read testimonies aloud so that even extremely ignorant people could understand them.<sup>542</sup>

今以諺文直書其言讀使聽之則雖至愚之人悉皆易曉而無抱屈者

Now, if their words are written with the vernacular script, these can be read to them. Thus, even extremely ignorant people can easily understand everything and not receive unfair treatment.

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<sup>540</sup> See I.1.

<sup>541</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:21b (26/2/20) [1444].

<sup>542</sup> *Sejong Sillok*, 103:20b (26/2/20) [1444].

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In this case, the expression “easily understand” (*ihyo* 易曉) was used to indicate the result of a mediated reading that allowed the ignorant people to listen to the text that was read to them and easily understand it. Another example of this expression used about a vernacular text can be found in the preface to the *SS*:<sup>543</sup>

庶幾人人이易曉호야而歸依三寶焉이니라

I wish that everyone will easily understand [it], advancing and converting to the Three Treasures (*Sambo* 三寶)

As discussed in III.2.2, this text was aimed to be primarily read by monks during a Buddhist ceremony, while the common people were mostly expected to participate to this ceremony and *listen* the mediated reading made by these monks. Furthermore, in this case, we have also the following translation of the character *hyo* 曉 in the notes:

曉는알씨라

曉 is to know

And the same sentence is translated in vernacular as follows:<sup>544</sup>

사람마다수비아라三寶애나사가블릿고브라노라

As can be seen, the character 曉 is translated as “to know”, and the expression *ihyo* 易曉 is translated as “to know easily” (수비아라), with no specific reference to the act of reading. Hence, I would argue that we should not assume that the vernacular edition of the *SH* was necessarily intended to be directly read by the common people only because written with the vernacular script. Although this might certainly have happened in a limited number of cases, the majority of the population would still have remained illiterate even in the new script, especially after such a short time from its invention and considering the lack of any evidence of an actual policy of propagation of the new script between the lower classes. A

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<sup>543</sup> *SP* preface:6a (*kugyŏl* lines).

<sup>544</sup> *SP* preface:6b (vernacular lines).

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translation of the text with the vernacular script, however, would have made possible not only an increment in the number of the actual readers but also the possibility to more efficiently and conveniently mediate the text to an illiterate audience, increasing the diffusion of the text exponentially.

That a mediated reading was expected to remain a significant use of the vernacular edition of the *SH* is also suggested by how this text was used when it was finally completed and printed during King Sŏngjong's reign. In 1481 the king issued the following instructions for the distribution of the volume titled *Yŏllyŏ-do* 烈女圖 (Illustrations of Devoted Women):<sup>545</sup>

[...]其印諺文三綱行實列女圖若干帙頒賜京中五部及諸道使村婦巷女皆得講習[...]  
Print with the vernacular script the *Yŏllyŏ-do* of the *Samgang haengsil* and distribute the copies to the five districts of the capital and all the provinces. Make that the women in every village and corner are lectured on it.

This passage tells us how the vernacular version of this text was not only intended to be distributed but also to be taught. More details on how this was intended to be accomplished are provided in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典 (The Great Code for State Administration), whose final revision was completed before 1485. In the “support and recommendations” section (*changgwŏn* 獎勸) of the “Code of Rites” (*Yejŏn* 禮典) we can find recorded the following instructions:<sup>546</sup>

○三綱行實翻以諺文令京外士族家長·父老或其教授訓導等教誨婦女小子使之曉解  
Translate the *Samgang haengsil* with the vernacular script. Both inside and outside the capital (i.e. in all the country), the elders and the heads of the households of literati families—or their teachers and instructors—should teach [the text] to women and children, making them clearly understand it.

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<sup>545</sup> *Sŏngjong Sillok*, 127:7a (12/3/24) [1481].

<sup>546</sup> *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典 (The Great Code for State Administration), *Yejŏn* 禮典 (Code of Rites), *Changgwŏn* 獎勸 (support and recommendations), 3:41.

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This documentation seems to confirm that the vernacular edition of the *SH* remained mostly intended to be taught by readers who, acting as intermediaries, used the vernacular text as a reference to convey the text orally to an illiterate audience.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> See Oh Young Kyun (2013), in particular chapter three, for a discussion on how the textual features of the vernacular edition of the *SH* can be interpreted as intended to assist the readers-reciters to read and interpret the stories of the text for an illiterate audience.

## Conclusions

The present study has examined the writing and reading practices that characterized the first half of fifteenth-century Chosŏn Korea. It focused in particular on the period of the reign of Sejong 世宗 (1418-1450), that saw the invention and promulgation of the new vernacular script, aiming to investigate its significance in the context of the written culture of the time. It emerged that, regardless of any linguistic difference and specific aim, vocalization was often a relevant aspect of the reading of a text and made possible, in some instances, what might be called a “mediation” that allowed it to be indirectly conveyed to a larger group of listeners, adding thus a crucial social dynamic to its use. The final argument of this study is that the invention and the first uses of the vernacular script were not just aimed to an improvement of literacy in the population but connected to this oral and social use of texts.

The study started by investigating what was the linguistic landscape of the Korean peninsula before the invention of the vernacular script. The original *hanmun* version of the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations) showed the first example of the oral dimension and mediation of a written text. Its diffusion among the illiterate population relied on the mediation of people of knowledge (*haksikcha* 學識者) who were supposed to instruct (*hundo* 訓導) the ignorant men and women (*ubu ubu* 愚夫愚婦) about the stories in the text. Another example was that of Confucian texts that were read and discussed during specific sessions held in the so-called Classics Mat (*kyŏnggyŏn* 經筵). Both examples are illustrative of how the practice of reading *hanmun* texts was not limited to an individual study but could assume an essential oral and social dimension.

Texts that used vernacular transcription systems were similarly intended to be ultimately mediated by their readers. *Idu* texts as the *Tae Myŏng nyul chikhae* 大明律直解 (Direct Explanation of the Great Ming Code) and the *Yangjam*

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*kyŏnghŏm ch'waryo* 養蠶經驗撮要 (The Essentials for Sericulture Management) were not only more easily understood by the officials who read them but also transmitted to the people who were their final target. In the case of the *Tae Myŏng nyul chikhae* this target was virtually the whole Chosŏn population, while in the case of the *Yangjam kyŏnghŏm ch'waryo* its instructions on sericulture were ultimately directed to the illiterate farmers. In both cases, the mediation of officials was needed to transmit their contents. Even *kugyŏl* annotations, although fundamentally different from *idu*, remained a practice that allowed not just a clarification of the text for its actual reader but also enhanced the possibilities of its mediation. In the case of Confucian texts, this dynamic can be traced to the time Sŏl Ch'ong (655-?) and its practice to annotate these texts in vernacular to teach them to his disciples. The words of Sejong himself reveal how this practice remained ultimately aimed to help scholars teaching these texts to their disciples.

The present study also addressed the importance that was assigned to the study of foreign languages to maintain contacts with neighbouring countries and populations. In particular, vernacular Chinese was considered essential for the relations with Ming China. Confucian texts were thus also read in vernacular Chinese and, possibly, even translated in that language in the so-called *chikhae* 直解 (direct explanation) editions. Furthermore, language manuals were compiled and used to learn foreign languages. Reading out loud was essential in the study of these texts, but the difficulties must have been great. The only way to convey their pronunciations was orally by a teacher who could mediate them and guide the learners in their reading so that they could use them during social interactions with native speakers.

The analysis of the primary sources related to the invention, promulgation, and diffusion of the new script carried out in the second part of this research showed how these same dynamics involving orality and mediation remained behind the intended uses of the new script. Sejong immediately ordered to put it to use in the investigation of the correct pronunciation of Chinese characters. Furthermore, in the protest memorial of Ch'oe Malli emerged the intention to use



the vernacular script in place of *idu* to transcribe the testimonies of people during criminal procedures. This practice would have allowed the resulting written text to be an exact transcription of the statement and, when it was read aloud, to be verified by even an utterly illiterate person. The *haerye-bon* (explanations and examples section) of the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* showed evident attention to realize a script that could express the oral dimension of the language as accurately as possible. Finally, the absence of a policy of diffusion of the script among the general population, combined with the documentary evidence showing a specific diffusion among low-level officials instead, suggested how vernacular texts still had to rely on the mediation of instructed people to reach the illiterate levels of the society. At the same time, the new possibilities of mediation that the new script made possible imply that its effect on the population might have been more immediate than what could be otherwise assumed by only considering the active literacy and circulation of vernacular texts, to which existing studies on the diffusion of the vernacular script have mostly focused.

The final part of this study analysed the use of the new vernacular script in the texts compiled right after its creation during the reign of Sejong. Starting with the *Yongbi ŏch'ŏn ka* 龍飛御天歌 (Songs of Flying Dragons), it has been argued that the new script was not intended to make its verses more easily understandable to its readers but to allow their reading and performance by making them visible on the page. The performative significance of the vernacular script is even more evident in Buddhist texts as the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl* 釋譜詳節 (Detailed Articles on the Record of Sakyamuni) and the *Wŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chi kok* 月印千江之曲 (Songs of the Moon's Imprint on the Thousand Rivers). In the case of the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl*, the new script made possible the oral reading of this text by monks in the context of a Buddhist ceremony, allowing its mediation to the attending audience. While in the case of the *Wŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chi kok*, this study suggests that the vernacular script allowed the performance of its verses by female entertainers. The unusual visual predominance of the vernacular script in comparison to Chinese characters and the peculiar orthography used in this latter

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text—that current scholarship usually explains as a personal preference of Sejong—might have been linked to the way the verses of this text were envisioned to be used by its performers as a script that implied memorization and not a direct reading.

Another use of the new vernacular script was to notate the pronunciation of Chinese characters with a precision that had not been possible before. This found application in the notation of the Sino-Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters with the compilation of the *Tongguk chǒngun* 東國正韻 (The Correct Rimes of the Eastern Country). I argue that the necessity to have a “correct” native pronunciation of these characters was connected to the importance of oral reading in the study of Confucian texts. Noteworthy is that, even in this case, a particular concern was felt about the transmission of this knowledge from a master to his students. The writing of the new pronunciations with the vernacular script allowed thus not only to transmit them to the scholars but also to ensure their correct teaching to students.

Further use of the vernacular script was the notation of the Chinese vernacular pronunciation in the compilation of the *Hongmu chǒngun yǒkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 (The standard rimes of Hong Wu with transcriptions). In this case, the knowledge of the correct vernacular Chinese pronunciation was needed for the study of the Chinese language that was required in the relations with Ming China. The same objective was behind the compilation of the *Chik’ae tongjasŭp* 直解童子習 (Direct Explanation of the Training Manual for Children).

As for the versions of the Confucian classics explicated with the vernacular script, it seems reasonable to suppose that their aim was the same of the previous editions with vernacular glosses (*t’o* 吐): not only to provide texts more easily understandable by scholars but also to allow a better mediation to the students. Even in the *Samgang haengsil-to* 三綱行實圖 (Illustrated Examples of Conduct according to the Three Relations) the use of the vernacular script does not seem to have radically changed the way the text was intended to be used. As was the case with the *hanmun* version, it remained a text intended to be orally read and

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mediated to the illiterate people, including children and women. But the new script surely enhanced these possibilities of mediation.

Considering the different applications of the new vernacular script in such a various textual production, interpreting its function only in terms of “literacy” seems not enough. My analysis not only showed the absence of a clear policy aimed to increase the literacy level among the population but also how most of the texts written with the new script were hardly aimed to be directly read by the illiterate people. The current scholarship has often limited its analysis to the effects of the vernacular script on literacy intended as the individual writing and reading of texts, but by doing that it has often missed an essential part of the significance of the vernacular script in the context of the early Chosŏn period, when orality and social mediation constituted an important part of its writing and reading practices. When seen from this perspective, the creation of the new vernacular script should be better interpreted as having enhanced the possibilities of vocalization and mediation of written texts. This might allow us to understand better the aim and vision behind the invention of Sejong in a way that accommodates its use in such a different, and only apparently contradictory, textual production.

It should also be noted that, when seen from this perspective, there are many cases in which the interpretation of passages related to the writing and reading acquire a different significance. An example is the possible different interpretation of the passage mentioning the many so-called “ignorant people” unable to express themselves in the preface to the *Hunmin chŏngŭm* written by Sejong himself. This passage is usually interpreted as expressing the difficulty for the people to write what they desired personally. However, if we take into consideration the more complex dynamics of mediated writing and reading that have emerged in this study, we should not exclude that this sentence might have also referred to the difficulties in the transcription of their words and the impossibility for them to verify what was transcribed on their behalf. A further example is that of the interpretation of the character *hyo* 曉 that can be found in

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several passages related to the reading and diffusion of texts. The most common interpretation is that of “understand” intended as direct visual reading of the text. However, the analysis of the use of these texts as shown how this character might also be interpreted in the sense of the understanding of a written text that is listened through the mediation of a reader. This is how it was used in the memorial of Ch’oe Malli, and how it might be interpreted in relation to the reading of the *Samgang haengsil-to* and the *Sŏkpo sangjŏl*.

This study inevitably presents some shortcomings due to the limited extant primary sources that have inevitably constrained my analysis. This is particularly noticeable in the investigation of the texts used to learn foreign languages that, for the most part, have not reached us. The analysis was thus grounded only on the few still extant texts and on the information provided in the Annals. This is very unfortunate since, as this study has pointed out in many occasions, the learning of foreign languages and their related writing practices was a crucial part of the linguistic landscape of the early Chosŏn period, that greatly affected the invention and early use of the vernacular script. If more of these texts were available, their complete analysis might reveal much about the learning of foreign languages in fifteenth-century Chosŏn and the use of the vernacular script for this aim. The possible discovery of new material in the near future might make it possible to develop this aspect of the research further.

The lack of early documents written with the vernacular script was another obstacle to the present research. Differently from the official publications, documents related to administration and, in particular, legal procedures are not extant. I do not believe this might affect the general argument of this study on the intended uses of the new script for the mediation of these documents, that clearly emerges from secondary sources as the memorial of Ch’oe Malli. Nevertheless, the absence of any actual written material certainly leaves space for further questions. A first possibility is that these documents have not reached us because not preserved. In that case, their absence does not allow to investigate how they were written and to know their layout and orthography, all aspects that

might reveal much about how they were read and used. But it is also possible that the vernacular script was never actually applied to write this type of documents. This is not implausible considering the opposition this intended use received (as shown in the same memorial of Ch'oe Malli). The possible discovery of new documents and written material in the future leaves, however, hope that this aspect might be deepened in the future.

A different type of limitation was inherent in the temporal scope of this research. The choice to focus on the first half of the fifteenth century, and in particular of the reign of Sejong, was motivated by the aim to investigate the original vision behind the invention of the vernacular script and examine its impact on the writing and reading practices of that period. A most natural addition to this research would then be to temporally expand its scope to take into consideration the following periods. The first step in this direction would be to cover the second half of the fifteenth century, when the compilation of a significant number of other vernacular texts, starting from that of vernacular explications of Buddhist texts, certainly lends itself to further analysis. Such an addition would be valuable because, in comparison to studies focusing on the linguistic changes of the Korean language and vernacular script, studies on the changes in the reading practices and social uses of texts are still mostly missing. More studies focusing on different periods might contribute to better understanding the historical development of the reading practices in the Korean peninsula and, consequently, the significance of specific writing practices in those periods.

A significant contribution in this direction is the recent study of Park Si Nae (2019) that analyzed the practice of reading of the vernacularized editions of Confucian Classics in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. This study argues that these books aimed to “inscribe the voice of an imaginary tutor’s vocalization of the Confucian Classics in the vernacular language for Chosŏn readers to imitate.”<sup>548</sup> Differently from the present study that showed how in the

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<sup>548</sup> Park Si Nae (2019:132).

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conception behind the publication of the first vernacular Confucian texts the real voice of the tutor was still crucial in their mediation, the study of Prof. Park suggests that in these later vernacular editions of Confucian Classics the voice of the tutor came to be inscribed in the text itself, providing Chosŏn readers with vernacular aural proxies that they could emulate. Although in both cases the oral dimensions of these texts was a central aspect, this seems to show a passage from vernacular editions primarily conceived to provide a guide to the tutor for its mediation to listeners to texts that absorbed this voice becoming themselves aural proxies to be vocalized by individual readers. This possible evolution in the use of the vernacular script might be a crucial aspect to be deepened, especially the possibility to delineate a connection with the diffusion of vernacular texts. Equally interesting would be to see how a similar passage might have happened in different types of texts, like foreign language textbooks, literary works, and Buddhist texts.

A further direction of research would be toward a comparative approach aimed to situate in a broader perspective the specific case of the writing and reading practices of the Korean peninsula. The recent studies of Kornicki (2018) and Handel (2019) have done this by analyzing the roles of the vernaculars in the literary Sinitic textual tradition of different East Asian countries. It also seems promising a comparison with the writing and reading practices of different linguistic and cultural areas, as the Arab world and the West.<sup>549</sup> These comparisons, although necessarily showing significant differences, may provide new insights for improving our knowledge of the premodern written culture of the Korean peninsula.

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<sup>549</sup> For studies on the writing and reading practices of the Arab world and the West, see Hirschler (2013) and Cavallo and Chartier (1999).

## Appendix: List of grammatical abbreviations

acc.	accusative
aux.	auxiliary particle
com.	comitative particle
conj.	conjunctive ending
cop.	copula
dat.	dative
decl.	declarative
gen.	genitive
hon.	honorific
imp.	imperative
inf.	infinitive
instr.	instrumental particle
loc.	locative
mod.	modifier
nom.	nominative
proc.	processive
prosp. mod.	prospective modifier
top.	topic
vol.	volitive

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*HMY Honmu chongun yŏkhun* 洪武正韻譯訓 [The Correct Rimes of Hong Wu, with Transcriptions], 1455. <http://www.heritage.go.kr/>

*HC Hunmin chŏngŭm* 訓民正音 [The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People], 1446. Kansong edition. In Kim Sŭr-ong 김슬옹. 2015. *Hunmin chŏngŭm Haeryebon* 훈민정음 해례본 [The *Hunmin chŏngŭm Haerye*]. Seoul: Kyobomungo 교보문고.

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