

The Legacy of Hangul: Emancipation, Social Transformation, and Culture

During the 15th century, in the Joseon Dynasty period, Classical Chinese writing dominated written communication. This writing system was complex and difficult for most of the population to learn, making education accessible primarily to the aristocratic elites and men. Women and less privileged social classes faced additional barriers in learning the Chinese writing system, leading to increased inequality in access to knowledge and education.

In this context, in 1443, King Sejong the Great, along with a team of scholars, created Hangul. The goal was to develop a more accessible writing system that would allow the entire population, regardless of social status or gender, to learn to read and write more quickly and effectively. Hangul is based on a phonetic system, meaning each character represents a specific sound, which facilitated the achievement of its creation's objective.

Although Hangul represented a revolutionary advancement, its popularization faced several challenges. The aristocrats and elites of the time resisted abandoning the Classical Chinese writing system, considering it more prestigious. Hangul, finally proclaimed in 1446, gained traction especially among the lower classes and particularly among women, becoming a tool for empowerment and social change.

Several women of the Joseon era used Hangul to challenge gender norms and make their voices heard. The ease of learning to read and write allowed women, who previously had limited access to education and knowledge, to quickly acquire linguistic skills and expand their intellectual horizons. Additionally, it offered a more effective form of written communication that provided women of the time with the freedom to express their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations, thus fostering self-expression and communication.

The popularization of Hangul enabled women to gain a tool of autonomy, granting them the knowledge to manage their personal affairs independently, record information, and make decisions.

With Hangul, women began to actively participate in the creation of literature. Through poetry, stories, and songs, women's influence in Korean culture grew significantly, and their voices began to be recognized and valued.

Examples include:

- **Heo Nanseolheon (1563-1589):** A prominent poet of the Joseon era. She wrote numerous poems in Hangul, contributing to its promotion and popularization, and became a distinguished literary figure whose work continues to be valued today.
- **Sin Saimdang (1504-1551):** Although better known as a visual artist and calligrapher, Sin Saimdang also wrote poetry and prose in Hangul. Her dedication to the arts and writing inspired other women to express themselves through Hangul.

The legacy of Hangul is not limited to its role as a writing system; it has been a catalyst for social transformation, especially in terms of gender equality and access to education. Its creation and adoption allowed women to overcome educational barriers, actively participate in cultural and literary life, and contribute significantly to the development of Korean society. Today, Hangul is

not only a symbol of Korea's identity but also a testament to the power of language as a tool for emancipation and social change.

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