

The History of the Research into Hunminjeongeum

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The study of Hunminjeongeum obtained more precision, owing to the discovery of a copy of the *Hunminjeongeum Haerye* in 1940. This paper briefly describes the current of the study, limiting its discussion to the study of Hunminjeongeum as a writing system.

During the Joseon Dynasty, the issues in spotlight were about how the sound of Sino-Korean should be referred to in Hunminjeongeum and how the transcription should be put into practice regarding indigenous words, Sino-Korean words and other foreign vocabulary. Also, the origin of Hunminjeongeum was one of them and it still attracts attention today.

Hunminjeongeum, along with the Reformation of Gabo in 1894, was assigned an official name 'Gukmun', the national character of the Empire of Daehan (Korea). Since then, great interest was directed towards the use of Gukmun and Hanja (the Chinese character), identification of the property of the obsolete sound '·', unification of the orthographies, etc.. In addition, 'Hannaramal', the language of the Empire of Daehan, was shortened to 'Hanmal' during this period, and 'Hannarageul', the character of the Empire of Daehan, to 'Hangeul', which is still in wide use. The controversy over the use of 'Sinjeong Gukmun', the newly rectified national character, led to the establishment of the Institute of the National Character, where ten themes concerning characteristics of Hunminjeongeum and its use were dealt with in much depth. Important discussions and research continued to be conducted until the Society of Korean, led by pupils of Ju Si-kyung, reformed Hangeul Orthography in 1933. There were numerous controversies thrown in especially against the orthographic theory by Park Seungbin and his followers, amid which active study was carried out in 1930s on the document *Hunminjeongeum*.

With the discovery of a copy in 1940, Hunminjeongeum came to be discussed with broader topics, whereas the study before 1940s was mainly about the use of

characters. The topics included the discussion of its origin, existence of native letters prior to Hunminjeongeum, the principles of the letter designs, motives and purposes of invention, academic background, the number of letters, Hunminjeongeum as a feature system, and a link between Hunminjeongeum and the transcription system of borrowings etc.. Hunminjeongeum has been examined deeply and broadly enough to be said that there are now few subjects left to be mentioned.

The studies so far have characteristics of both the internal study and the comprehensive study, the former being based on the document *Hunminjeongeum* itself, and the latter being obtained through comparing and contrasting Hunminjeongeum and other writing systems. The two approaches again enabled both a microscopic analysis through the entire understanding of *Hunminjeongeum*, and a comprehensive study from the perspective of history of the world's writing systems in which Hunminjeongeum was considered to be the outcome of the eastward advance of some alphabetic writing systems.