



The Korean alphabet, commonly known as *Han'gŭl*, has been called one of the great intellectual achievements of humankind. Experts agree few writing systems can match its simplicity and efficiency, its elegance and intelligence. The only alphabet completely native to East Asia, Han'gŭl distinguishes itself among writing systems of the world with its scientific qualities and unusual linguistic fit to the Korean language. Most strikingly, the theoretical underpinnings of the language, as well as the time and circumstances of its creation, are clearly known and recorded. Han'gŭl was invented in 1443 and promulgated in 1446 by King Sejong (1418-1450), sage ruler of the Chosŏn kingdom, or Yi dynasty (1392-1910). The promulgation document was accompanied by a scholarly commentary that provides explanations and examples for teaching the new alphabet.

This collection of essays, written by some of the most active scholars of the Korean writing system is the first book-length work in English. It addresses the cultural-historical and theoretical-linguistic background of the Korean alphabet. The book includes an introductory chapter by the editor (Young-Key Kim-Renaud), arguments for Sejong's "personal creation" of the script (Ki-Moon Lee); Asian and domestic linguistic and socio-cultural background leading to the invention of the script (Gari Ledyard); principles under which each symbol was created (Pyong-Hi Ahn; Sang-Oak Lee); sound values and phonological changes of Korean vis-à-vis the writing system (Sinhang Kang; S. Robert Ramsey); structure of phonological units and featural analysis of the script (Young-Key Kim-Renaud; Chin-Wu Kim); systematic presentation of orthographic divergence between the two Koreas (Ho-min Sohn); and experimentations with Korean writing in Russia and the USSR (Ross King). Four appendixes prepared by the editor include a description of the alphabet, introduction to romanization systems, photographs of pages of the proclamation with translation, examples of contemporary publications in North and South Korea. An instructive commentary by eminent linguist Samuel Martin follows, offering perceptive comments on the essays as well as a discussion of Martin's own research findings on the script.

*The Korean alphabet* will stimulate great scholarly interest among linguists and those working on different areas of Korean studies, as well as East Asia cultural historians.

김영기가 편집한 이 책 (<한글의 역사와 구조>)은 한글을 세계에 알리는 영어로 된 첫 단행본으로 이기문, 안병희, 강신항, 이상익, 김진우, 손호민, 김영기 등 국내학자 또는 외국에서 활동하는 한국계 학자들과 Gari Ledyard, S. Robert Ramsey, Ross King, Samuel E. Martin 등 세계 석학들이 한글의 역사와 그 구조를 언어학적, 역사적, 철학적, 미학적, 실용적, 정치적, 이상적 다 관점에서 연구한 중요한 서적으로 여러 학술지와 도서관학지와 인터넷에 올린 글에서 아래에 보는 바와 같이, 많은 찬사의 서평을 받았고, 세계 제 대학에서 글자에 관한 과목, 언어학 관련, 인문학 관련, 그리고 동아시아 문화를 다루는 과목들의 교과서로 채택되고 있다.

"A superb work of scholarship, of particular interest to linguists and students of the Korean language. Recommended for comprehensive language and East Asian studies collections." – K.W. Berger, Duke University, *Choice*

"*The Korean Alphabet* is likely the most illuminating book on these matters in the English language. In addition to its eleven chapters, it includes a commentary by Samuel E. Martin. The readers of this journal are referred to his learned and insightful remarks, which add to the volume's high quality and have more to say about it than any review possibly could – 'a rich bounty of distinguished essays that give us new and important information not only about the creation of that remarkable script but also about the Korean language itself, as revealed in the orthography that grew out of the letter symbols when they were put to use.' A very good book." – Florian Coulmas, Duisburg University, Germany, *Korean Studies*

"For all students or devotees of han'gŭl, this book should prove to be an immeasurably helpful source of a wealth of hitherto inaccessible information, and a powerful impetus for further research." – Joe J. Ree, Florida State University, *Acta Koreana*