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The National Institute of the Korean Language
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The Korean Alphabet, Hangeul

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1. Introduction

The Korean alphabet, known in Korean as *"Hangeul"* (Unique and Great Alphabet) is really outstanding and unique in many respects and it certainly deserves to be more widely and appropriately known.

Many renowned linguists and phoneticians in the East and West have been unanimous in praising the Korean alphabet Hangeul, and some of their complimentary comments may be summarized as follows: The Korean alphabet Hangeul is:

1) "The greatest masterpiece of human intellect",

2) "A phonetic alphabet that is unique in that it is created on the basis of the human speech organs. No other alphabet in the world shows this",

3) "A truly scientific alphabet ever created and unrivalled by any other",

4) "A simple and geometrically balanced alphabet",

5) "The most efficient alphabet known to us, especially, the one used in North Korea (where Chinese characters are not used)",

6) "A remarkable alphabet that displays the organic principles, which were utilized by Bell and Sweet in devising an organic and visible alphabet at a much later date, i.e. about 600 years later in England",

7) "An alphabet so simple and easy to learn that a bright child can master it in one morning and a normal child in a fortnight. No wonder, the illiteracy rate in Korea is incredibly low, i.e., close to zero".

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Korean alphabet is that it provides clear-cut and ready answers to the following inquiries: *Who, Why[for Whom], When, Where, and How* the Korean alphabet was invented and officially promulgated. Let me deal with each of these before I go on discussing the most striking linguistic features of the Korean alphabet.

2. History of Hangeul, the Korean Alphabet

2.1. King Sejong the Great Invented Hangeul

King Sejong
[Photo by King Sejong the Great Memorial Society]

King Sejong the great(1397-1450), the fourth king of the Lee dynasty, created a new phonetic alphabet in the 15th century. A distinguished phonetician and linguist himself among others, the king took up the historical task of creating a new writing system for the Korean people. Despite ill health and eye disease from which he suffered perennially, the King devoted himself to the task for several years. It could be surmised that in the course of the venture the king was helped to certain extent by some of the brilliant scholars around him such as Jeong In-ji, Sin Suk-ju, Lee Gae, etc., but all the documented evidence confirms that the King was the dominant project leader singularly responsible for the making of a new writing system that was named "Hunminjeongeum [訓民正音]", which means *"Right Sounds to Teach the Nation"* or *"Teaching the People the Right Sounds"*.

2.2. Jeongeum was Promulgated in 1446

The king Sejong invented the new alphabet of 28 letters in 1443 in the 25th year of his reign. But care was taken by the king to test the new alphabet before he made it public. After three years of test period, the new alphabet Hunminjeongeum(Jeongeum for short) was officially promulgated at the king's command by *Jiphyeonjeon*, "*Hall of the Worthy*" in 1446, in the form of a 33-page book written in Chinese.


訓民正音
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
使人人易習便於日用耳
ㄱ 牙音 如君字初發聲
並書 如虯字初發聲
ㅋ 牙音 如快字初發聲
ㆁ 牙音 如業字初發聲
ㄷ 舌音 如斗字初發聲
並書 如覃字初發聲
ㅌ 舌音 如呑字初發聲
ㄴ 舌音 如那字初發聲

***Hunminjeongeum*(1446) by King Sejong**

The book Jeongeum consists of two parts. The first part, written by King Sejong himself, contains a preface stating his purpose for creating the new alphabet followed by the main text, in which each of the 28 letters as well as the examples of consonant-vowel combinations are explained and illustrated. The second part, written by Jeong In-ji and seven other scholars, consists of six chapters: *1) the Design of the Letters,* which expounds the phonetic and philosophical principles by which the new letters were made, *2) the 17 syllable-initial consonants, 3) the 11 medial vowels, 4) the syllable-final consonants, 5) the combination of the letters,* which demonstrates how the initials, medials, and finals are assembled to form syllables, and *6) examples of the use of the letters,* exemplifying words written with the new letters. These are followed by a postface by Jeong In-ji.

Thus, Hangeul is unique among the world's writing systems in having been created *at a specifiable time(When), by identifiable inventor(Who), for Whom(and Why), Where, How, and without any direct influence from already existing writing systems, to ultimately become a national writing system in Korea for over 600 years.* Moreover, it is worth noting that no other writing systems have ever been promulgated at the command of a king in the form of a book.

Jeongeum originally consisted of 28 basic letters as listed below(with approximate phonetic values given in square brackets);

1) 17 consonants :

(1) ㄱ[k], (2) ㄴ[n], (3) ㄷ[t], (4) ㄹ[r/l],
(5) ㅁ[m], (6) ㅂ[p], (7) ㅅ[s], (8) ㅇ[mute],
(9) ㅈ[ʤ], (10) ㅊ[tʃ], (11) ㅋ[kh], (12) ㅌ[th],
(13) ㅍ[ph], (14) ㅎ[h],
< (15) ㅿ[z] (16) ㆆ[ʔ], (17) ㅇ[mute] >

2) 11 vowels :

(1) ㅏ[a], (2) ㅑ[ja], (3) ㅓ[ʌ], (4) ㅕ[jʌ],
(5) ㅗ[o], (6) ㅛ[jo], (7) ㅜ[u], (8) ㅠ[ju],
(9) ㅡ[ə], (10) ㅣ[i], < (11) ㆍ[ɔ] >

However, four letters given in brackets(Consonants Nos. 15-17 and Vowel No. 11) have dropped out of use, leaving 24 basic letters; 14 consonants and 10 vowels in the modern Korean alphabet.

The book Hunminjeongeum was designated as National Treasure No. 70 to ensure its preservation, and it was also registered in UNESCO's *Memory of the World* in October 1997 as an important world heritage.

2.3. Jeongeum was Created for the People

The Korean alphabet was created with the express purpose of providing the Korean people with an easy and efficient writing system, compared to the Chinese characters that were difficult even for the upper class Koreans to learn and use in their everyday life. Ordinary Koreans simply could not afford to learn the Chinese characters since it took so much time and efforts, in fact many years, just to learn the basic Chinese characters for everyday use. Furthermore, the Chinese characters were not only unsuitable but also inconvenient to express the linguistic structure of Korean words and sentences.

The King explicitly pointed out the reason why he decided to create a new alphabet in the following sentence as shown in the preface of the book "Jeongeum": *"The Korean language being structurally different from the Chinese language, my poor subjects(Koreans) have difficulty expressing themselves in Chinese. Therefore I have decided to create a new alphabet of 28 letters so that my people can freely and easily learn and use it for their every day life."*

2.4. Promulgated in Seoul, the Capital City

Jeongeum was invented and officially promulgated in Hanyang, now the Capital City of Seoul, Korea. It has been made possible for all of us to identify all the details of the making of Jeongeume including the exact date of the invention and the place of official promulgation thanks to the original copy of the book Jeongeum that was found in 1942 in Andong, South Korea.

2.5. Created after Years of Intensive Research

The King Sejong did not simply exploit his own linguistic knowledge and intuition to create Jeongeum. He was so concerned with the task that he sent his scholars China and India to search and obtain such advanced knowledge of Phonetics, Phonology and Linguistics as would be useful for the making of the new Korean alphabet.

3. Characteristics of the Korean Alphabet

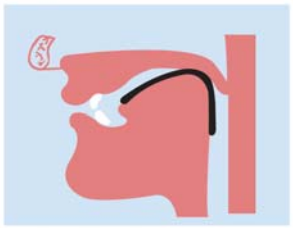
The Korean alphabet exhibits a number of characteristics and merits that are not normally found in other writing systems of the world.

3.1. Phonetic and Linguistic Orientation

1) Consonant letters

The shapes of the basic consonant letters were modelled on the actual shape of the articulatory organs involved in pronouncing the relevant sounds. The five basic consonant letters were created first by the King as follows:

Velar



→ [ㄱ]
[k]

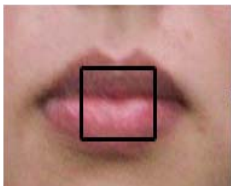
<ㄱ> **[k]** represents the velar sound since it resembles the shape of the tongue touching (blocking) the "molar teeth"("soft palate" in modern terminology).

Alveolar nasal

→ [ㄴ]
[n]

<ㄴ> **[n]** represents the "lingual" sound(alveolar sound in modern phonetic terminology) since it depicts the tongue (tip) touching the upper teeth or teeth ridge.

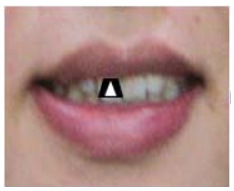
Labial



→ [ㅁ]
[m]

<ㅁ> **[m]** stands for the bi-labial sound since it symbolizes the shape of the lips.

Dental



→ ㅅ[ㅅ]
[s]

<ㅅ> **[s]** represents the dental sound since it depicts the shape of the front tooth (incisor).

<ㅇ> represents the throat sound since it symbolizes the shape of the throat: [ㅇ/ㆆ].

As was pointed out by Professor E.J. Henderson of University of London, this was exactly what Melville Bell and Henry Sweet had in mind when they tried to devise Visible/Organic Speech in the 19th-20th century in Europe; that is about five centuries later than King Sejong. Notice the striking similarity in the shape of some symbols of the two different organic alphabets.

Inventors East & West / Organic Phonetic Symbols	King Sejong's Korean Alphabet (15th Century)	Henry Sweet's Organic Alphabet (20th Century)
Open Throat(Glottal)	< ㅇ >	< O >
Tooth Shape(Incisor)	< 人 >	< ∪ >
Voice Bar(Voiced)	< ㅡ >	< | >

Organic Symbols Devised in Korea and Europe

2) Vowel letters

Vowel letters were devised mainly on the basis of the oriental philosophical principles of *In* (negative) and *Yang* (positive). The King devised three basic letters <ㆍ>, <ㅡ> and <ㅣ>, symbolizing respectively 'heaven'(天), 'earth'(地) and 'man'(人) and assigning phonetic values to them as follows:

Three Basic Vowel Letters:

< ㆍ > [ɒ] - "symbolizing heaven(round)"

< ㅡ > [ɯ] - "symbolizing earth(flat)"

< ㅣ > [i] - "symbolizing man(upright)"

Notice that, although the King Sejong stated that he devised the basic vowel symbols on the basis of the three philosophical elements, what he actually applied was a set of articulatory factors, i.e., the shape of the tongue in the mouth and the shape of the oral cavity formed in the mouth by the tongue position. Thus, the tongue shape of < ㅣ >(man) is similar to the vertical line that is formed by the tongue body; the tongue shape of <ㅡ> (earth) similar to the horizontal line that is formed by the tongue surface and the round and hollow oral cavity created by the retracted tongue.

3.2. Systematic Derivation of Symbols

Most Korean graphemes are derived systematically from the basic consonant and vowel letters by addition of extra diacritical marks. For instance, the twelve remaining consonant letters were derived by adding to each of the five basic letters one or more additional strokes or symbols which indicated other relevant phonetic features or different manners of articulation at homorganic points of articulation.

e.g. <ㄴ> → <ㄷ> → <ㅌ> → <ㄸ>

[n] → [t] → [th] → [t']

It is interesting to note that the basic letter <ㄴ>[n] symbolizing dental / alveolar articulation is shared by all of the derived homorganic letters representing dental / alveolar sounds.

Similarly, the other vowel letters were derived by different manners of combinations of the three basic letters:

<ㅏ> [a] ← <ㅣ> + <ㆍ>
<ㅑ> [ja] ← <ㅣ> + <ㆍ> + <ㆍ>
<ㅓ> [ʌ] ← <ㆍ> + <ㅣ>
<ㅗ> [o] ← <ㆍ> + <ㅡ>
<ㅜ> [u] ← <ㅡ> + <ㆍ> etc.

3.3. Functioning as Phonemic Symbols

Korean alphabet, although formulated on a purely phonetic basis, is in fact a phonemic alphabet in its actual application and usage. And there is sufficient evidence(e.g., recognition of three positions, initial, medial an final, in the syllable and the statements concerning the distribution of sounds at the three positions, etc.) that the king had already completed some kind of preliminary phonological analysis of Korean according to the phonemic principle not far removed from that of modern linguistics, even though he did not actually use the term 'Phoneme' as against 'Phone' or 'Sound'. Thus, the fact that the king used one and the same consonant symbols, say, /ㄱ/(k) in the intial and medial and final positions, despite their allophonic differences (voiceless initial, voiced medial and voiceless unexploded final), is an undeniable evidence that he was clearly aware of the phonological principles.

3.4. Syllable Block Writing

Another important characteristic of Korean alphabet is found in the spelling principle decreed by the king, according to which letters were to be combined, in accordance with the prescribed rule, into syllable blocks and not in a linear succession as in European languages. In other words, graphemes are arranged syllabically in such a way that each syllable has a distinct geometrical shape. For instance, syllables like <mak>'curtain', <nun>'eye', <salm>"life" and <hwal>"bow" would be arranged in actual writing as follows:

1) <mak>"curtain"<막> ← <ㅁ>[m] + <ㅏ>[a] + <ㄱ>[k]>
2) <nun>"eye":<눈> ← <ㄴ>[n] + <ㅜ>[u] + <ㄴ>[n]>
3) <salm>"life":<삶> ← <ㅅ>[s] + <ㅏ>[a], <ㄹ>[l] + <ㅁ>[m]
4) <hwal>"bow"<활> ← <ㅎ>[h] + <ㅗ>[o] + <ㅏ>[a] + <ㄹ>[l]

Notice that the graphemic layout of the intitial, medial and final sounds are different in the four types of syllables quoted above:

1) left-right-bottom
2) top-middle-bottom
3) left-right-bottom left-bottom right
4) top-middle-bottom-right-bottom

With these three characteristics of Jeongeum taken into consideration, the Korean alphabet may be characterized as *a phonemic alphabet based on phonetic principles and spelt syllabically.*

The total number of Korean <V>, <CV>, <VC> and CVC type of syllables that can be generated by combination of 19 initial consonants, 22 medial vowels and around 22 final consonants amounts to more than 10,000 theoretically possible syllables, although not all of them are actually used in Korean speech and writing, but they can be used, when necessary, in transcribing foreign speech sounds.

3.5. Universal Visible Speech

Hangeul is not simply an alphabet of one country, korea. It has every right to be named a global alphabet for all human beings in the world, regardless of race, creed and language.

Hangeul can serve as a phonetic theory contained in the phonetic text book since it tells us explicitly how and where a certain sound is actually pronounced in the mouth. For instance, <ㄱ> accounts for the shape of the tongue in the articulation of [k] in the mouth. The same is true of <ㅁ> where one knows immediately that it stands for bi = labial sound [m]. And of course, this applies to all speakers in the world irrespective of race and linguistic background. In this sense the Korean alphabet Hangeul may well be regarded as an outstanding "Universal Visible Speech" for all nations and races.

4. Organic Alphabet of Distinctive Features

-Distinctive Features Embedded in Vowels-

It is interesting to note that the Korean alphabet has a kind of *distinctive feature theory* of the 20th century linguistics incorporated in it. In fact, that Jeongeum of 1446 was created on the basis of practically the same kind of distinctive feature theory that was initiated and developed by Jakobson, Chomsky and Halle in the 20th century linguistics. For instance, the notion of distinctive feature and binary opposition is clearly demonstrated by the articulatory and auditory(acoustic) description given in Jeongeum of the phonetic values of the three basic vowels, which may be tabulated in the table below.

Features \ Vowels		< ㅣ > [ɪ]	<ㅡ> [ə~ɯ]	< · > [ɒ]
Articulatory (Tongue)	Retraction	−	−	+
	Advance	+	−	−
Auditory (Voice)	Shallow	+	−	−
	Deep	−	−	+

Notice that the two distinctive features *"tongue retraction"*, which refers to the *tongue movement (articulatory)* and *"deep voice" (grave) vocal quality* as against "*shallow voice" (acute)*, which relates to the *auditory (acoustical) impression,* are shown to interact to characterize and define the vocalic quality of each of the three vowels as well as the phonetic relationships among them.

5. Towards Future:

International Korean Phonetic Alphabet (IKPA)

The Korean alphabet is so systematic and versatile in structure that it can easily lend itself to deriving new letters. For instance, one can derive a new symbols such as [b], [d], [g], [z], [f], [v] that are lacking in the current Korean script, from the relevant Korean letters by adding a stroke or a small circle to, or subtracting a stroke from, a Hangeul letter.

The *International Korean Phonetic Alphabet(IKPA* for short), devised and published by the present writer in 1971 is the result of one of the serious attempts made by several Korean scholars to invent a truly universal phonetic alphabet by applying the organic principles much more extensively than King Sejong had done. Accordingly, the IKPA symbols are just as simple and easy to learn and memorize as the Korean alphabet, but at the same time they are much more consistent and logical than the IPA symbols, which are unsystematic and arbitrary except in one respect, i.e., retroflex symbols, which are consistently marked by a hook attached to the relevant letters. The organic principles applied in devising the IKPA may be illustrated in the following sample sentences of Korean, English, Chinese, Japanese, French, and Lahu that are transcribed in IKPA:

1. Korean: 하느ᄀᆞᆨᄋᆡ ᄋᆞᆯ음다ᄫᆞᆫ 사ᄆᆞ천ᄂᆡ "한국의 아름다운 삼천리"
2. English: ᄇᆡ:ᄐᆞ키ᄂᆡᄅᆞ ᄂᆡᄅᆞ이ᄃᆡ ᄋᆡ:ᄇᆡᄂᆡᄋᆞ "Beautiful Friday Evening"
3. Chinese: ᄃᆞᆨᄋᆞ시ᄂᆡ시ᄂᆡᄒᆞ ᄂᆡᄒᆞ까ᄂᆞ마 "王 先生, 你好吗"
4. Japanese: ᄃᆞ모모ᄂᆞ ᄒᆞ리가ᄐᆞᄀᆞ고ᄀᆞ자이마ᄉᆞ "どうもありがとうございます。"
5. French: ᄇᆞᆫᄌᆞᆼᄅᆞ 마ᄎᆡ레ᄀᆡ "Bonjour, ma cheri."

The examples given above illustrate the ability of IKPA to transcribe the world's languages.

As can be surmised from the sample IKPA transcriptions illustrated above, IKPA can be used not only as a new international phonetic symbols for linguists and phoneticians to work with in dealing with languages of the world but also as a systematic and useful alphabet for the unwritten languages in the global villages that have no writing system yet.

6. Concluding Remark

The Korean alphabet is a highly sophisticated writing system consisting of sets of interrelated organic phonetic symbols, each set representing either the shape of the organs of speech or their articulatory movements. The Korean alphabet is, in a true sense of the word, a set of phonetic symbols designed to represent the visible speech of human beings.

Serious research works have already been done in the East and West with a view to analyzing and assessing the principles involved in creating the Korean alphabet and attempts have been made to improve and develop it in respect of the forms of the letters and syllable shapes. At the same time movements are now under way to devise Hangeul-based alphabets for the unwritten languages spoken in all corners of the world.

In this connection it may be highly appropriate to remind ourselves that the *"King Sejong Literacy Prize"*, initiated by UNESCO and supported by the Korean government in 1989 in honour of the King Sejong, has been awarded annually to individuals or institutes that have successfully waged a literacy campaign.

The Korean alphabet certainly deserves to be better known to more people in the global village and I hope that it will play a more active role in future in tackling the illiteracy problem throughout the world.

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Saving dying tongues with Hangeul

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1. Introduction

According to the SIL International which offers the most authoritative information on the world's languages, currently 7,359 languages exist on earth. British linguist Andrew Dalby claimed in his book <Language in Danger> that languages of the world disappear at the rate of one for every two weeks. He also predicted that the half of the world's languages would become extinct within this century, and that only about 200 languages would survive on earth within two centuries.

The extinction of a language indicates not only the loss of the diversity of human culture but also the extinction of an important human heritage. Since the awareness of endangered languages had been raised, the documentation of these languages has begun from the mid 1990s in order to pass them down to the next generation. And this movement became much more active during the last decade. In Korea, the documentation of Altaic languages was carried out from 2003 to 2009 by the Altaic Society of Korea, sponsored by Korea Research Foundation.

※ **Major projects for the documentation of endangered languages:**

- 'MIT Indigenous Language Initiative', MIT, USA
- 'The Foundation for Endangered languages', charity organization, UK
- 'DOBES programme', Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Netherlands
- 'The Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project', SOAS, UK
- 'Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL)', NEH (The National Endowment for the Humanities) and NSF (the National Science Foundation), USA
- 'Endangered Language Program', Rosetta Stone, USA
- 'Researches on the Endangered Altaic Languages Project', The Altaic Society of Korea, Korea

However, these projects have a limitation that their main interest lies in recording the languages on the verge of extinction, thereby not being able to prevent the languages from extinction itself. Most endangered languages do not have writing systems and have a small number of native speakers. To preserve endangered languages and to maintain the diversity of human culture, we need to make great efforts to offer writing systems and textbooks to the native speakers of those languages, so that they could teach their indigenous languages in elementary schools.

Supported by the Hunminjeongeum Society, we analyzed the language of the Cia-Cia people living without their own writing system in Bau-Bau City in Indonesia. Based upon this analysis, we devised a writing system of the Cia-Cia language using Hangeul, the Korean alphabet, and distributed a Cia-Cia textbook entitled 'Bahasa Cia-Cia 1'. The Cia-Cia language education started at Karya Baru Elementary School in Bau-Bau City from 22 July, 2009. The Cia-Cia language education is expected to be expanded to other elementary schools from mid July, 2010.

2. The progress of Hangeul sharing project with the Cia-Cia people

The Hangeul sharing project of the Hunminjeongeum Society began in May, 2008. At the first meeting held on 8 May, 2008, we chose Bau-Bau City of Buton Island in Indonesia as the target region for our project. Professor Chun Tai-hyun, who strongly recommended Bau-Bau City, wanted to continue his relationship with the people in Bau-Bau after he had first visited there in 2005 for an international conference on philology.

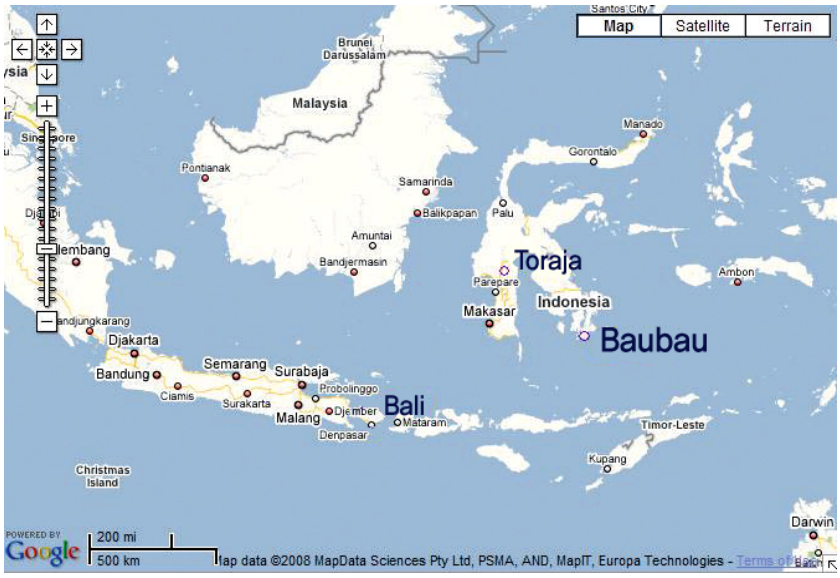

Fig. 1. Map of Indonesia

Before visiting Bau-Bau City, we sent a letter to the mayor of the city to see if he has an intention to sign a MOU for educational and cultural cooperation with the Hunminjeongeum Society. We proposed to carry out the following activities in the letter: 1) the education of the Korean language, 2) devising a writing system of an unwritten local language using Hangeul,

3) introduction of Korean culture to Bau-Bau citizens, 4) running Korea visit programs, and 5) assisting Bau-Bau City's cultural and economic cooperation with Korea. The mayor kindly accepted our proposal and invited us to Bau-Bau City.

Fig. 2. MOU signing ceremony

Four delegates from the Hunminjeongeum Society visited Bau-Bau City on 15-18 July, 2008. Bau-Bau City and the Hunminjeongeum Society signed the MOU at the ceremony held in City Hall on 16 July. At the meeting held after the signing ceremony, the mayor of the city recommended the Cia-Cia language, a major indigenous language in Bau-Bau City. And we agreed to begin the Cia-Cia language education at an elementary school in Sorawolio district, which is the center of the Cia-Cia people, from July, 2009. When we visited the Cia-Cia village in Sorawolio district just after the meeting, the leaders in this village called a meeting and decided to adopt the Korean alphabet to write down their language.

Fig. 3. A tribal meeting held in the Cia-Cia village

On 9-13 November, five officials and two headmasters of Bau-Bau City visited Korea. We tried to show them various aspects of Korea: they visited Hyundai Heavy Industries, Seoul City Call Center, several historical places and traditional restaurants. We also arranged a consultation meeting with a tourism development expert for them.

Fig. 4. Bau-Bau delegation in Kyeongju

Two teachers from Bau-Bau City, Mr. Abidin and Mr. Marwan, came to Korea on 1 December, 2008 to take Korean courses in the Foreign Language Education Institute at Seoul National University. Mr. Marwan failed to adapt himself to the new environment and thus returned to Bau-Bau in mid January. Mr. Abidin also suffered from a serious insomnia and wanted to go back home. With the help of the psychiatrist at SNU Health Center, however, he started to regain stability. We also helped him overcome the homesickness by having meals and having talks with him as often as possible. In return for this, Mr. Abidin successfully completed Level 2 Korean course in the Foreign Language Education Institute at SNU, and could finish writing the first Cia-Cia textbook using the Korean alphabet with us.

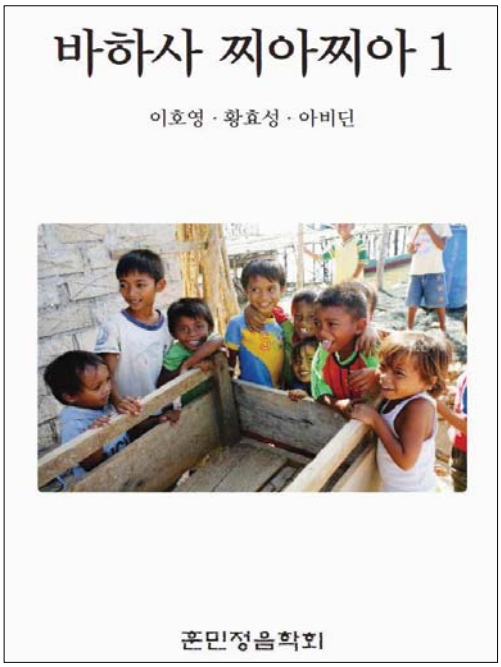

Fig. 5. Cia-Cia textbook

The Cia-Cia textbook was published on 16 July, 2009 and the first Cia-Cia class started at Karya Baru Elementary School in Bau-Bau City on 22 July, 2009. The adoption of the Korean alphabet by the Cia-Cia people got nationwide news coverage in Korean mass media on 6-7 August, 2009. This news created a public sensation among Korean people who have a strong attachment to their alphabet. It also got prominent coverage in foreign news such as New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Voice of America, and NHK.

Fig. 6. The first Cia-Cia language lesson

On 21 December, the mayor of Bau-Bau City and his wife, one official, three headmasters, and two high school students visited Seoul on the invitation of the Hunminjeongeum Society and Seoul Metropolitan Government. During their stay, they signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) for educational and cultural cooperation with Seoul Metropolitan Government. And the Hunminjeongeum Society and Woman Cultural Foundation signed the donation contract for Korean Cultural Center with Bau-Bau City. They also visited several educational institutions and cultural heritages in Seoul and Busan.

Fig. 7. Mayor of Bau-Bau City in Seoul
(A news photo by Yeonhap News)

3. The prospect of the Hangeul sharing project

With the adoption of Hangeul by the Cia-Cia people, an increasing number of individuals, companies, and universities are showing interest in making contributions to them. Signing LOI for educational and cultural cooperation with Bau-Bau City, Seoul Metropolitan has begun to cooperate with Bau-Bau City in order to support the Cia-Cia education as well as the development of Bau-Bau City. In 2010, three public officials were invited to Seoul and attended an IT training program for foreign public officials. And an art troupe consisting of about 9 members will be invited to Seoul to show their traditional dances to Seoul citizens in September. In 2011, Seoul Metropolitan government is planning to offer a development plan for Bau-Bau City, which is expected to stimulate Korean companies to invest in Bau-Bau City.

Fig. 8. Cia-Cia students holding stationery gifts from Korea

So far, we have achieved much more than we had expected in the beginning. However, we are well aware that our activities should not cause any harm to the unity of the Indonesian people. To prevent any kind of problem caused by our project, we are carrying out our project in close consultation with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia.

Using Chinese characters to write down the Korean language was so difficult for Koreans that the majority of Koreans were illiterate before the invention of Hangeul. King Sejong invented Hangeul, so that even common people could easily learn to read and write with Hangeul. We are carrying out our project based on this spirit.

A tribe without a writing system cannot record their history and culture. Moreover, as the education of their mother tongue at school is impossible, the language is very likely to be extinct. We want to save the endangered languages by devising a writing system with Hangeul, writing textbooks, and supporting the education of those unwritten languages, as we did for the Cia-Cia people. We sincerely wish Hangeul adopting tribes to preserve their language and culture, and develop their community through cultural and economic cooperation with Korea.