

KING SEJONG THE GREAT 세종대왕 (1397-1450): HIS CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF THE *HANGEUL* ALPHABET AND LAW

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Received: 23rd July 2021/ **Revised:** 27th March 2022/ **Accepted:** 30th March 2022

How to Cite: Iswanto, S., Kusnafizal, T., Haikal, M., Azis, A., & Kesuma, T. B. (2022). King Sejong the Great 세종대왕 (1397-1450): His contribution in the field of the *hangeul* alphabet and law. *Humaniora*, 13(2), 165-175. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v13i2.7567>

ABSTRACT

The research aimed to describe the life history of King Sejong the Great and his contribution to the field of alphabet and law, especially law for convict, marriage, and heir. The method applied in the research was the historical method. The results show that Korea is in a golden age because of his policies during his leadership. His most outstanding contribution is the hangeul alphabet which gradually replaced idu and hanja. In addition, in the field of law or policy regarding prisoner sentences, the law must be fair and adjusted to the age limit, and the community must understand the law. Marriage law where women can only marry when they are 14 years old. The last is the law of heirs, which divides fairly and is no longer patriarchal. These policies are related to moral ethics, virtue, truth, and wisdom based on Confucianism.

Keywords: *Sejong the Great, Joseon dynasty, hangeul, law, Korea*

INTRODUCTION

Korean history is one of the histories of regional studies of East Asia. The nation and state's history flanked by two big countries, namely China and Japan, has gone through a long history. The Korean nation is recorded to have passed through several ages, namely the Old Stone, New Stone, Bronze, Iron, and the current Modern Age. Based on archaeological evidence, early Korean settlements appeared for the first time in the area of the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria.

The Korean nation is one of the nations originating from a nomadic nation that migrated from around the Northwest of mainland China to the Korean Peninsula. At that time, they moved from one place to another. By classification, the Korean people are part of the yellow-skinned race group who are descendants of the Altaic or Proto-Altaic tribes. Their language is also related to the Altaic or Altai language family.

Some experts also believe that the Koreans still have a relationship with the Mongols and Japan.

From the calculation of the year, the Koreans were estimated to have inhabited the Korean Peninsula since the Paleolithic Age, or about 40.000 to 50.000 years ago. However, their presence on the Korean Peninsula actively began around 3000 BC by forming these tribes. Later, the tribes became the forerunner of the next Korean people. The early Korean people were centered around the coast and rivers. They later spread to the interior of Korea. However, archaeological evidence shows that their culture only developed in the Neolithic Age, which only appeared around 6000 and lasted until 1000 BC. The Bronze Age is estimated to have lasted from 1000 to 300 BC. At this time, they already had knowledge in making mirrors, bells, and earrings mostly made for kings' accessories and complementing religious ceremonies. The pattern then became better because of the influence of China, and it

was all imitated by the Koreans. China's influence was so strong because, at that time, it was closely related to territorial expansion, trade relations, and the spread of religion. Then according to Kim (2020), it was through Korea that Chinese influence entered Japan, starting with cultural exchanges, trade, political contacts, and military confrontation.

The Korean nation continues to develop until it finally shows a leadership style in the form of a kingdom. The first kingdom is estimated to have appeared in the Bronze Age; the kingdom is the Kingdom of Gojoseon (Gochoson), centered in the Liaoning (Chaoxian) area, China. The Kingdom of Gojoseon is also referred to as an ancient kingdom that rules northern Korea in the second half of the first millennium BC. Gojoseon culture was the most advanced at that time in this part of the Korean Peninsula. In Korean mythology or *Samguk yusa*, Gojoseon was founded in 2333 BC by Dangun Wanggeom, the son of Lord Hwanung and a female bear who turned into a woman. The Gojoseon Kingdom was the forerunner to the formation of centralized states in the next period.

After Gojoseon fell in 108 BC due to an attack from the Han Empire from China, its culture and population continued and became the basis for the formation of the three kingdoms. Many Gojoseon people migrated to the Korean Peninsula and several other areas. They later founded the three kingdoms: Buyeo, Dongye, Okjeo, and Samhan. This period was also often referred to as the Proto Three Kingdoms or Buyeo Period and the Kingdom of the North, namely the Han State (Manhan, Jinhan, and Byonhan). The three kingdoms were patriarchal in a form that was still part of the ancient kingdom of Korea and continued to grow until the first year after AD.

After the first century, all the countries of the patriarchal kingdom, especially Samhan, grew. This development resulted in the merging of states and kingdoms, especially Samhan, which gave rise to three major kingdoms, namely the Koguryo or Goguryeo Kingdom in Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, the Baekje Kingdom, and the Silla Kingdom growing on the banks of the Han River and parts of the Kyongju Plain. In subsequent developments, the three kingdoms were united by the Silla Kingdom (Jae, 2019). After that, there were other kingdoms, such as Gaya (Kaya) in the Nakdong river valley of South Korea. Then these kingdoms merged and were called the Three Kingdoms Period. Silla, which once conquered Goguryeo and Baekje, formed a unitary state in the inner region of the Korean Peninsula, its territory stretching from the Daedonggang river to Wonsanman. The Goguryeo refugees later founded the Kingdom of Balhae in 698 AD. This period was known as the North-South Country Period. In the next period, the first dynasty in Korean history came, namely the Goryeo Dynasty (918), which replaced Silla and Goryeo. Then, Goryeo itself was replaced by the Joseon Dynasty (Choson), which was founded in 1392. The Joseon Dynasty itself was a dynasty that emerged in the modern era and was

the last in Korean history.

Behind the long history of Korean civilization, some significant figures or humans fill that history. Throughout Korean history, the figure of a king is familiar, but uniquely throughout history, there are only two kings recorded to receive posthumous titles as "The Great King", namely King Gwanggaeto the Great from Goguryeo and King Sejong the Great from Joseon or Choson. However, the name Sejong might be able to beat the name Gwanggaeto because his name was very famous among Gwanggaeto and other Korean kings. There is no doubt that Sejong, who is the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty during his reign, has a myriad of achievements that brings Korea to its golden age. Science developed tremendously, and at that time, the agriculture community was also quite advanced because it was supported by the knowledge created by Sejong's scholars.

One of the contributions Sejong that are still used today is *hangeul*. In addition, he has a role in the development of science, technology, literature, and medicine, all of which have greatly impacted Korea and its people. This idea makes society literature very reformative which changed the characters of Chinese characters and Chinese script. Sejong has also made many ideas about music using asymmetrical terms combining traditional and court music (Park, 2018b). The music also teaches *hangeul* alphabet characters.

Because of this, King Sejong is currently the number one person in Korean history. He is highly respected and appreciated for his comprehensive evaluation of his achievements. Linguistic researchers from the University of Oxford stated that *hangeul* was ranked first with language characters that included rationality, science, and creativity. In addition to the *hangeul* alphabet, Sejong is also very concerned about the law or rules. Confucianism and his bachelor's degrees from various fields of science make him able to make laws that are different from the previous kings. No wonder Sejong gets the title of "King the Great". His name not only appears in oral form, history books, and literary books but to commemorate him, the Korean government also builds a statue of Sejong right in front of the Gyeongbokgung palace, Seoul (Figure 1). In the entertainment media industry, Sejong has also been featured in several Korean films or dramas, one of which is a film entitled "The King's Letters," which was released in July 2019 and directed by Jo Chul Hyun. King Sejong and the creation of his reign continue to be scrutinized by historians, linguists, jurists, anthropologists, and other scholars. In South Korea, the name Sejong is even used as the name of the institute, namely *Sejonghakhadang*.

In several universities in Indonesia, studies on King Sejong appear in the course of History of East Asian Regional Studies. Studies on King Sejong appear in the section on Korean History studies. Unfortunately, the lack of sources in Indonesian makes it difficult for students to learn and understand the life of King Sejong and his contribution to the Korean nation and state. In fact, the golden age of

Korea is when King Sejong leads Korea. Therefore, the research explores to dig up information about King Sejong (Yi Do) of the Joseon Dynasty (1397-1450). The purpose of the research is to describe his life history, his contribution to the *hangeul* alphabet, and his contribution to the field of law, such as the law on a convict, marriage, and heir (inheritance).



Figure 1 The Statue of King Sejong the Great Near Gyeongbokgung Palace
(Source: <https://alchetron.com/Sejong-the-Great>)

METHODS

The research aims to reveal the life history and contribution of King Sejong (1397-1450), who ruled the Joseon Dynasty in Korea. The focus of the research includes three sub-themes, namely biography, the creation of the *hangeul* alphabet, and its contribution to reforming the law, especially the punishment of convict, marriage, and heir. The method used is the historical method.

The historical method is used to conduct research on data and facts objectively to suit the research objectives so that they can be scientifically proven. According to Gottschalk in Iswanto, Zulfan, and Suryana (2020); Iswanto, Nurasiah, and Kesuma (2021); Kusnafizal, Azis, and Iswanto (2020), the historical method is a process of examining and critically analyzing the relics of the past. All of the past is described and rearranged into something that actually happened, which here must be clear by giving a time limit on the past that will be described. The stages in historical research include topic selection, heuristics, source verification, interpretation of facts, and historiography.

These stages can be described: (1) choose a topic according to available sources and documents. The sources are related to King Sejong (1397-1450) and his contribution to Korean civilization. (2) Heuristics or collecting sources, where the source in question is related to the topic in the form of documents, archives, and relevant literature studies such as books, journals, theses, and newspapers. The most widely used sources in this writing are journals. (3) Verification or criticism of sources that have been collected to determine their authenticity. Verification is done by conducting internal and external criticism of the source. Internal criticism is carried out on the inside or the content of the data,

while external criticism is done on the outside, such as the origin of the source. (4) Interpreting or interpreting verified sources to obtain and compile interrelated historical facts. (5) Historiography or historical writing is outlined in the form of historical writings about King Sejong the Great and his contributions only in the areas of the alphabet and law.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

King Sejong was born on May 15 (April 10 according to the Lunar Calendar) in 1397 with the birth name Do or Yi Do/To (Jae-Woong, 2018; Park, 2018b). As a child, he was also called Won Chong. He was the fourth king of Joseon or Choson Dynasty of Korea, which reigned from 1418 to 1450. Sejong was born in Hanseong (now Seoul), to be precise, at the Royal palace of Joseon Hanseong. He was the third son of King Taejong (Yi Bang-Wo), who was the third king of the Joseon Dynasty. His mother was Queen Wongyeong, a noble child of the Yeoheung Min clan or house of the Goryeo Kingdom. Sejong is also the grandson of King Taejo (Yi Seong-Gye or Yi Dan), who was the founder and first king of the Joseon Dynasty after Taejo succeeded in overthrowing the Goryeo Dynasty with his sons Taejong and Jeongjong (Yi Bang-Gwa) the second king of the Joseon Dynasty. Regarding King Taejo, It can be traced through the *Sillok Taejo*, who founded the Joseon Dynasty (Park, Lee, & Park, 2016).

Although Sejong was born as the third son, in fact, Sejong is the sixth of nine children. Sejong has three older sisters, two older brothers, one younger sister, and two younger brothers. Sejong was different from his brothers since he was more intelligent and genius than his brothers.

Sejong, born and raised in the royal palace, has been fond of reading various types of books since childhood. He was so diligent in his studies that he often felt tired. Even though his life was full of abundance, he continued to learn even until he was an adult. According to him, an affluent life would be useless without learning or knowledge because if humans do not learn, they will not become fully human. No wonder in his room, there were many books from various disciplines. His passion for reading sometimes made him forget the time, even to take a rest. The teachings of Confucianism were so strong that he had become a Confucianist who greatly respected his parents. This respect had been seen since he was a child. Because of that, Sejong, who since childhood was called very different from his brothers. Among the court nobility and society, the figure of Sejong was recognized as the most intelligent and wise son of King Taejong.

Since childhood, his father (King Taejong) loved him more than his older brothers, namely Yangnyeong and Hyoryeong. King Taejong and Queen Wongyeong always paid more attention to Sejong because of his respect for them. Coupled with Sejong's perseverance

in studying from a young age, he had extensive knowledge that added value to why Sejong was more concerned with his parents and the palace.

At the age of 12, Sejong was appointed as a prince and was given the title of prince of Chungnyeong (Jae-Woong, 2018). Two years after the title was given or right at the age of 14 years, Sejong married Shim On. When Queen Shim On was 18, her first son was born. His first son was named I Hyang, who later became better known as Munjong. When Munjong was two years old, King Sejong was blessed with his second son, I Yu, who later became known as Sejo. Later, his two sons also became kings in the Joseon Dynasty.

Queen Shim On was originally from Cheongsong and was a descendant of the ruling aristocracy in Cheongsong. Shim itself was a Korean family name in the Cheongsong area, and the name was also one of the clans there. After marrying King Sejong, Queen Soheon got the title of Empress Shim; since then, her name has been better known as Queen Soheon.

After getting married, at the age of 16, Sejong received the title of Grand Prince (Sejong Dae Wang). In June 1418, Sejong was sworn in as Crown Prince of the Joseon Kingdom in Yangnyeong. Since then, Sejong has officially become the royal heir to the royal throne. The inauguration was certainly something unique because Sejong, who was the third child and still has an older brother, actually won the trust of the Crown Prince. It is because he was smart and wise. In addition, he got the title because his two older brothers were not worthy of being king, and one of his older brothers Prince Yangnyeong even had his title as Crown Prince had to be removed for doing something wrong.

In August 1418, Sejong ascended the throne to become the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty. At that time, Sejong was already 21 years old, and his name changed to King Sejong (Jae-Woong, 2018). Even though Sejong had officially become king, his father's control was still visible. Sejong, a graduate of a Confucian-based university, indeed could not refuse his father's orders and continued to obey him. It lasted until his father died, which according to historical records, was due to illness.

After being released from his father's control, Sejong began to make various policies that he thought were right and could advance his society. The influence of Confucianism which was so strong in him had also made him in making any aspect of policy based on the teachings of Confucianism. According to Lew and Gregg (2020), all aspects were fully developed well during his leadership. These developments started from the political, cultural, and regional expansion aspects, such as the Amnok (Yalu) and Tuman (Tumen) river areas. At that time, Sejong also formed the northern boundary of Korea.

In addition, the wise Sejong also mobilized many scholars to carry out scientific research, and the results were used for the general public. The main goal was to be able to advance Korean society in various aspects. Thus, it was not surprising that,

during his leadership, especially the field of science was very developed. Lew and Gregg (2020) have said these scientific discoveries were widely promoted, and various kinds of scientific inventions such as rain gauges, large-scale printing of books, and book printing using metal-coated versions were also the first in world history. One of the most famous figures of that era is Lee Cheon. His contributions to the science of astronomy made significant progress during the reign of King Sejong.

Agriculture under Sejong's reign was also very developed. The agricultural pattern from the glorious Goryeo period underwent a change in the Sejong era, where farming knowledge no longer used the rotational method but had been applied throughout the country with the support of new knowledge (E-don & Kane, 2019). As in 1441, the invention of the "*Chugugi*" rain gauge was the first in the world. In the following year, 1442, a national network of rainfall observers was created (an office that manages weather and rainfall). King Sejong distributed Chugugi to 350 rainfall observation stations across the state, even to the smallest towns and villages. The goal was to make it easier for the public to get information and rainfall records (Cho et al., 2015). At that time, taxes were also applied. The tax value was based on each region's soil fertility level and productivity. It was also one of the reforms by King Sejong and was made based on the results of a deliberation process that lasted for seven years. Advances in geography at that time also contributed to the existence of King Sejong Station on King Georgeo island, which was the outpost of the present day. The station was also used as a place to measure changes in the time of day and night (Juhari, Kasran, & Jusoh, 2017). Until now, researchers still use it. The construction and alteration of buildings such as altars are also extraordinary (Park, 2018a).

In the field of literature, King Sejong also established the basic studies of classical Chinese, such as phonology and how to compose literature. It also defines the scope of the compiled classical text with which the main classical form commentary collection is. Because of that, Sejong is also known as the founder of the basic Joseon culture and formed a pattern of speculation (Sim, 2019).

The field of health is also developed, where most have doubled from before his leadership. Standards must be raised, and all people must be served. Medicines are also strengthened by using original ingredients (Kim, Park, & Seo, 2019). The medical literature that developed in the period after Sejong was also part of the medical development during Sejong's time (Shin et al., 2018). Medicine and culture are combined, one of which was the implementation of sacrificial ceremonies for pestilence also reappears (Seo et al., 2017; Shin, 2017). At that time, medical science was also growing sharply. Various drugs were discovered and recorded. These advances made the Empire of Japan many cultures from the Joseon Dynasty ideologically adopted (assimilated) with Japanese culture, which made Japan more civilized.

In fact, the theory of art history was oriented by the Japanese Empire. As a result, it still remains under Japanese influence to this day. This is also the case in the arts, which in the end, also the neighboring country, namely Japan, assimilated a lot of Korean customs and culture.

King Sejong's most famous discovery to date was the formulation of the Korean alphabet, *hunminjeongeum*, which is then better known as *hangeul*. The alphabet had replaced *idu* and *hanja*, which were adopted from China and, at that time, were considered difficult. Only certain groups were able to use it; since *hangeul*, all groups had begun to read. The birth of *hangeul* also led to massive book printing in Korea. Thus, that was very extraordinary in the long course of Korean history and only some of the many developments during his leadership. Perhaps the notes put forward by Bae and Kim (2020) on the development of complete records from the late Joseon Dynasty were detailed as part of the contributions of King Sejong's time.

Sejong died on April 18 (February 17 according to the lunar calendar), 1450 AD, at the age of 52 due to illness and after ruling Korea for 32 years. His reign brought tremendous scientific and technological progress. All fields of study developed, including rites and rituals, music, geography, astronomy, medicine, etc. No one can match the name Sejong in the history of Korean civilization. Sejong is still highly respected today and is one of only two Korean kings to receive the posthumous title of King the Great.

Most of the historical records of East Asia mention that China is a dominating power and has a great influence on Japanese and Korean culture. Chinese culture entered Korea so quickly and has been going on since the Three Kingdoms period, namely Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. It continued until the New Silla, Balhae, Goryeo, and early Joseon times.

One of China's most powerful influences on Korea is the use of letters. Korean have always used Chinese characters in making various kinds of writing. Chinese characters have a high level of difficulty being expressed in Korean, and because of that, Korean began to use *idu*, which borrows the sounds and meanings of Chinese characters to write Korean. Korean conveyed the sounds of their language into Chinese written form because they did not have their own writing system. At first, they used the same grammatical order as Chinese to convey Korean. However, as they became more familiar with classical Chinese characters and language, they began to attempt to deconstruct elements of the Chinese writing system so that they could express the original Korean sounds in their own Korean way. Thus, this lending system is referred to as *idu*. Therefore, *idu* can be said to be an ancient Korean writing system that represents the Korean language using *hanja*. The manuscript was thought to have been developed by Buddhist monks with the aim of recording Korean words through their equivalent Chinese meanings or sounds. It means that *idu* is a recording of the meaning and expression of the

Korean language by borrowing Chinese but reading it with Korean sounds. It can be seen in several studies that discuss it, such as Baek (2017), Mulyaman, Virgianita, and Candra (2021), and Yoo, Kim, and Ahn (2012).

The creation of *idu*, which adopted the *hanja* character itself, was developed by Seol Chong as a means of self-expression. Until the tenth century, *idu* was indeed a means of written communication, and *hanja* was the Korean language system, as well as other phonetic systems, such as *hyangchal* and *gugyeol*, which were used for more than a thousand years. The writings of *idu* during the Silla era were said to be more vulgar and rude. During the Goryeo period (918-1382), there was a definition of *idu* that limited it to the prose of a practical nature in the public and private domains, such as administrative documents and religious dedication. Meanwhile, *hyangchal* only refers to poetic expressions and lyrics in prose. During the Goryeo Dynasty, *hyangchal* was mostly used to write poetry and literature. In general, those who could use and pronounce *idu* and *hyangchal* were only certain groups, such as scholars, writers, religious leaders, and nobles. All of that lasted until the Joseon/Choson Dynasty.

Even though Koreans have been able to create *idu*, historically, Korean still have a hard time understanding it. This impacts people who mostly have difficulty memorizing the written language of *idu* because only intellectuals can memorize it. *Idu*, which has emerged since Goguryeo, has made not all levels of society able to use Chinese characters (*hanja*), so communication difficulties arise. Helping people live comfortably by acquiring new knowledge and information through writing is the main goal of creating *hunminjeongeum*. Then, it is better known as the *hangeul* alphabet (Figure 2), which can also be read in Kim (2021).



Figure 2 The Basic Consonants of *Hangeul* and How They Depict Their Own Pronunciation
(Source: <https://gwangjunewsgic.com/arts-culture/korean-culture/hangeul-has-its-day/>)

The creation of *hangeul* grows along with the emergence of an awareness of the homogeneity of the Korean nation during the reign of King Sejong. According to several studies, the creation of *hangeul* itself cannot be separated from the role of Jiphyonjon

scholars. King Sejong strives to create letters that are easier to learn, read, and write by all levels of society. On the one hand, research states that *hangeul* is created by King Sejong himself without the help of others. It is possible that the hypothesis is correct, considering that several documents provide an overview of King Sejong's excellent knowledge of linguistics. Maybe even if there is help from Jiphyonjon scholars, it is just for discussion, while the rest, King Sejong, does more research in Heumgyeonggak. It also caused much controversy in the future from scholars about the creation of *hangeul* (Pae, 2020).

During the reign of King Sejong, *idu*'s writings, considered very difficult, were gradually abandoned. The *hangeul* project itself was finally completed at the end of December 1443 or January 1444 and was inaugurated in 1446. At the beginning of its appearance, *hangeul* itself was documented in the *hunminjeongeum*. The *hangeul* alphabet is only increased from 28 Chinese characters, but it is a tremendous improvement (Hannah, 2019). The introduction of *hangeul* itself did not go smoothly; at the end of 1443, when King Sejong introduced the 28 alphabetic symbols to be used in writing Korean, not all scholars or court officials agreed with the new alphabet because it was considered less profitable. This led to a debate of opinion, especially from a group of educated employees headed by Ch'oe Malli. Then the *hunminjeongeum* document was published for the first time in 1446 in the form of a wooden block edition, where the original print was bound into one book consisting of two parts. Since the invention of the script *hangul* in 1443 and its promulgation in 1446, classical Chinese characters are no longer really used, especially in constructing literary works. However, some of the royal elite rejected *hangul* and chose to continue to favor Chinese characters or writings. They thought they would lag behind China because of these changes (Yan & Kiaer, 2020). Over time, *hangeul* can be accepted even though it takes a long process and time.

Hangul itself is a phonemic alphabet arranged into syllable blocks. Each block consists of 24 *Hangeul* (*Jamo*) letters, each consisting of 14 consonants and 10 vowels. The block slightly resembles Chinese writing. The 28 alphabetic symbols in the next development are reduced to 24 letters (*Jamo*) because four letters (*Jamo*) are considered obsolete and do not need to be used again. While the name *hangeul* is initially often referred to as *hunminjeongeum*, which means "the right voice to be taught to the public", then there is a change to *hangeul*. The new *hangeul* name existed between 1910 and 1930 which was created by Chu Si-gyeong. He did a lot of research on the Korean writing system that has been around since the 15th century (Sejong's time). Linguistically, *hangeul* comes from two words, namely *han*, which means big, one, highway, and Korean, and the word *Geul* which means writing or letters. Thus, if it is combined, the words mean "Korean letters". In North Korea, *hangeul* itself is referred to as *Joseongul* (Lim, Lee, & Sin, 2018).

The *hangeul* alphabet has also become famous for its linguistic, musical, philosophical, and other values. All the gratitude to the role of King Sejong and his research institute team, who really appreciate communication so that it can finally be distributed. Through palace music combined with traditional also contains elements of *hangeul* (Hannah, 2019). *Hangeul* is currently one of the world's most superior characters and languages. *Hangeul* has scientific values and a high level of efficiency when compared to other languages. The creation and arrangement are made with the correct language system. The consonants mimic the shape of the vowel organ, which produces positive consonants. The vowels are also arranged in the form of heaven, earth, and the human person. Today, *hangeul* is recognized as a scientific design characteristic, and each system is highly functional. This research can be seen in several research results, such as Verdonshot, Han, and Kinoshita (2021); Mushaev, Mukabenova, and Karmanov (2019); and Sihite and Mahastama (2018).

Since then, it is also possible that many textbooks were compiled for royal lectures during Sejong's time under his command (Bongkyoo, 2020). Many popular novels, especially from China, began to be translated using *hangul*. Chinese vernacular fiction is made with various genres, such as a collection of short stories, novels, romance, history, martial arts, love stories, fantasy, and crime (Pastreich, 2015). *Hangul* is increasingly used in writing, and its opposition is getting forgotten.

This is an extraordinary discovery of King Sejong. *Hangul* was created at his behest and assisted by other scholars. Sejong, who was known to be intelligent since childhood, had extraordinary knowledge and ideas. Sejong has scored Korean history as a glorious and golden history. Thus, Sejong gets honor from society until now.

There are some of the policies or laws made by King Sejong during his reign. This hypothesis is only part of the picture of how Confucianism has influenced Sejong's patterns or ideas in the field of law. It is the researchers' attempt to collect sources related to the policies of King Sejong at that time. Several policies will be described, such as the legal basis is not limited to certain groups, judicial legal decisions based on many testimonies, the law regarding the age of marriage, and the law of inheritance.

Studies on the influence of Confucianism in East Asian countries are indeed very exclusive. Its influence on economic, political, cultural, and social development is tremendous. It is not surprising that Japan, including Korea, can read the history of Confucianism (Kang, 2014). Konghuchu, or Confucianism, was founded by Confucius in the 6th century BC. Confucianism is basically more inclined to moral ethics than belief or religion. His teachings place more emphasis on the teachings of ethics, virtue, truth, courtesy, wise leadership, designed to inspire, and maintain proper family and community arrangements. The teachings of Confucianism, which

was born in China, have entered Korea since the Three Kingdoms, namely Koguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. The evidence can be traced through Chinese cultural texts.

From the Goryeo period until the Joseon period, Confucianism grew in influence in the kingdom and society. Almost all aspects of life are affected (Daehoe, 2020). No wonder that since the early days of Joseon's founding, the ideology of neo-Confucianism has indeed taken root as an ideology in various fields. It can be seen in the political, ritual, social, and intellectual fields. Since then, private academies that teach Confucianism have been established and have received full support from the government bureaucracy.

During the Joseon period, Buddhism was not very developed, which can be seen from its various relics or paintings that reflect very few Buddhist teachings (Myounghee, 2020). Since its inception, the Joseon Dynasty has also applied the teachings of Confucianism, and centralization is the king's power. The kings also fully supported efforts to develop the teachings of Confucianism. The teachings developed since the reign of King Taejo and continued to develop during the next king. However, the Confucian teachings that developed did not necessarily eliminate Buddhism, but these teachings continued to develop in society and the royal court. The political and policy foundations were based on Confucianism. It is stated that although there is an opinion that during the reign of three kings, namely Sejong (1397-1450), Chongjo (1777-1800), and Kjong (1864-1906), and under Queen Munjong (1565), the teachings of Buddhism underdeveloped and suffered enough from the domination of Confucianism. Figure 3 shows the Munmyo temple, the evidence of the development of Confucianism during the Choson period.



Figure 3 The Munmyo Temple, Evidence of the Development of Confucianism during the Choson Period (Source: <https://www.orientalarchitecture.com/sid/407/korea-south/seoul/munmyo-confucian-shrine>)

This can be seen in the Joseon Dynasty, where Confucianism was used as an official ideology and also developed in the education system, ceremonies, and civil administration. Because of this, Confucianism has contributed a lot to the development of the idea of politically moral (king) leadership. Especially the

rational principle of the scholar Zhu Xi (Chu His) was significantly developed at that time. This has also impacted increasing community mobility to manage minorities and determine the choice of leaders. In addition, Shamanism and Buddhism remain beliefs even though Buddhism itself is often under pressure, especially from the royal nobles.

Even though, at that time, Confucian thought was dominant, one should not assume that there was no diversity or creativity from intellectuals (Lew & Gregg, 2020). During Sejong's time, in teaching Confucianism to ordinary people, a book with illustrations of Samgang Haengsildo was published (Kwon & Shin, 2020). Of course, it also became an interesting thing in the development of Confucianism during Sejong's time. However, there is something even more interesting, namely the legal policy made by Sejong based on Confucianism.

It is interesting to see how Confucianism made leaders like King Sejong create policies or laws based on Confucianism. Based on historical records, Sejong himself was a graduate scholar from Sungkyunkwan who was strong in Confucianism. At that time, there was a shift in law due to Confucianism's influence, which was more positive than before. The cruel form of criminal law began to be more cosmological, took into account the moral aspect, and protected the common people.

King Sejong was known to love his people very much, which was not limited to certain classes but was comprehensive. He had a warm love for young and old alike. Sejong was also very concerned about the rights of servants and prisoners. Apart from that, he was also very concerned about welfare and openness to his people and people from other countries. In fact, it contrasted with the situation at that time, where most rulers were oppressive, cruel, and brutal. In carrying out this policy, Sejong also appointed many young scholars to be able to directly practice the ideal politics based on Confucianism. The scholars were mostly from Jiphyonjon. He was also very interested in the teachings of neo-Confucian morality. It has made him collect many stories that described how to behave wisely and faithfully filial son and faithful wife. Being a dutiful son can be seen from how Sejong's attitude in carrying out his leadership was still largely controlled by his father. Because of this respect, it was only after his father died that the new policies began to be implemented both in the palace and society. According to Łukaczyński (2016), in making policies, King Sejong usually would directly conduct a survey and ask the opinion of his people first. Likewise, in the field of law that Sejong applies.

All of Sejong's very distinctive thoughts can be traced from various literary works and books. One of them is about declaring the establishment of the Yukgije institution for the long term, namely for a period of six years. Yukgije was formed with the duties of the chief justice. In addition, in other records, can also be seen various legal policies from Sejong. Here are some of the laws that Sejong made.

First, regarding the law of prisoner and prison, based on Sejong's mindset, how to prevent people from making mistakes or crimes by understanding the law well. He had a dream to empty the prisons. He also deeply regretted that many prisoners were often sentenced to death unfairly in the prison system (Hyun-Mo, 2014). This meant that Sejong really hoped that society would prosper and lead a moral and ethical life so that the level of error/crime could be reduced. Thus, the prison was automatically empty because there was no crime. Morals and ethics must also apply to law enforcers so that they are not arbitrary in punishing prisoners. The hope was one; even if the law existed, the public must understand the law itself. This was also what prompted Sejong to create *hangeul* as a medium to help people understand the law.

One example from historical records is that on November 27, 1430, Sejong made a policy regarding prison and the torture of prisoners. Whereas for people under 15 and over 70 years, it is forbidden to be detained. They would be arrested if the case was murder and robbery. Meanwhile, people under the age of 10 or above 80 years were not allowed to be detained or beaten under any circumstances; even if they were guilty, the verdict must be based on evidence from many testimonies. Anyone who violated the law would be given a penalty. All of this was made to change the previous law, which seemed unfair and unwise. Indeed, basically, the policy in its implementation did not immediately provide significant results, but at least the policy raised Sejong's status in front of the public. Prison and crime rates were decreasing gradually. Coupled with an agricultural system driven by the emergence of science, it had pushed the level of community welfare to slightly increase, which impacted reducing crime. The prison slowly began to empty from the so-called prisoner.

Second, laws or policies regarding marriage. Hee-sook, in her research, provided an overview of marriage during the Joseon Dynasty. Marriage itself had two main goals: to carry out ancestral orders or rituals and become a succession of the father's descendants. The decision to marry at that time was not based on individual decisions but the role of the family (especially parents). Marriage itself was considered as the union of two families from two individuals. It was seen as an opportunity to increase the number of families.

The marriage style at that time must also be referred to as the Confucian style. *Joojagarea*, based on the Chinyoung Chinese marriage system and against the *Namguiyeogahon* marriage, then changed to the Chinyoung and Banchinyoung wedding style, where the groom would go to the bride and return with the bride right after the wedding ceremony (Ahn, 2012). It seemed that previously there was no official regulation by the state regarding the age limit for marriage. In the 9th year of his reign, King Sejong made a legal policy regarding the age limit for a person to be married. A woman could get married when she was 14 to 20 years old. Then, if a daughter in a family was over

20 years old, she would be given a sanction that was not clearly described. However, the punishment could be seen from Sejong's mindset, which also considered women's psychological and reproductive health. Perhaps, this was also to reduce the influence of the *Cheesoohon* and *Namguiyeogah* marriage system (men are only involved in reproduction and do not form families). The legal age of marriage may be closely related to Sejong's policy in which marital status must be recorded by the state. Regarding *Cheesoohon* and *Namguiyeogahon*, it can be seen in the research of Ahn (2012). It can be said that the law regarding age and marriage procedures began to be renewed in Sejong's time by considering several factors, such as norms, ethics, psychology, and reproductive health.

Third, policies or rules regarding heir. As we know, since the time of the Koryo Dynasty, if a woman died, the property left behind would be taken and enjoyed by her husband until he remarried and until the time when he died. In the teachings of Confucianism, the patriarchal system was very prominent. A father had the most power in the household. The relationship between father and son was significant, and they were the ones who were responsible for maintaining the good name of the family. No wonder the inheritance issue was more emphasized on males, especially the first child. The tradition of Confucianism seemed to be a policy that continued to develop until the Joseon Dynasty. Inheritance law looked not very clear. Even though the inheritance was sometimes obtained jointly, the distribution was not that fair. Indeed, judging from the pattern that developed at that time, the wife was always submissive to men. However, this did not mean that inheritance issues were not shared equitably. Girls in a family only got a slightly disproportionate inheritance compared to boys or sons. Likewise, if the wife died, the inheritance would fall into the hands of the first or next son.

Since Sejong's time as king, a new policy or law emerged regarding the distribution of inheritance, especially for husband-and-wife inheritance. At that time, the law itself became a very fierce debate, especially the issue of inheritance from a husband who was a widower that was obliged to return his wife's property to his family if he remarried. Thus, Sejong decided that one-third of the property be returned to the heir of the second wife, and two-thirds would be returned to the first wife's family. The property would be owned by the second wife if she still maintained her chastity. The inheritance given to the heir was also the capital in carrying out the tradition of commemorating someone's death and the capital to support the child. In addition, the policy was also to avoid conflicts that were not in accordance with Confucian philosophy, which emphasized harmony. Therefore, it can be said that the rules during the Sejong period were interpreted positively as rules or laws that greatly contributed to the prosperity era of the Joseon Dynasty. Likewise, highly respected Confucian figures emerged in the following periods, like Soe Gyeongdeok or better known as Hwadan or Master Hwadan, who was a

Joseon period scholar (Sancho, 2020). These figures have more or less gained a more substantial influence than in the period when Sejong was in power. Those were some of the rules or laws that were drawn. There are still many policies implemented by Sejong that contribute to and influence the new order of life in Korean society.

CONCLUSIONS

Sejong is the fourth king of Joseon or Choson Dynasty, Korea. Sejong was born on May 15 or April 10 according to the lunar calendar year 1397 in Hanseong (now Seoul). His birth name is Do, or Yi Do/To, and his childhood name is Won Chong. He is the third son of King Taejong (Yi Bang-won) and Queen Wongyeong of the Yeoheung Dynasty, as well as the grandson of the founder and first king of the Joseon Dynasty, King Taejo (Yi Seong-gye). Sejong, born and raised in the Hanseong palace environment since childhood, is known to like to read books. He studies and reads books in various disciplines, and because of that, since childhood, he has been known by the court nobles as an intelligent child compared to his brothers. According to Sejong, a materially well-off life would be useless without knowledge because it is through learning that humans become fully human and vice versa. Because of that, his parents and some of the palace nobles greatly loved him.

By the time Sejong is 12, he gets the title of prince of Chungnyeong and, at 14, married Shim On (Queen Soheon). From this marriage, they are blessed with two sons, I Hyang (later known as Munjong) and I Yu (later known as Sejo). At 16, Sejong regained the title of Prince the Great (Sejong Dae Wang), and at the age 21, he was appointed as Crown Prince and three months later ascended the throne to become king. Since then, his name had officially changed to King Sejong. During his reign, Korea was in an extraordinary golden age. Science is growing rapidly, and various discoveries have emerged. Various aspects of life also developed, such as the community's economy getting better because science about agriculture was beneficial at that time. In addition, Sejong has also demarcated the territory of North Korea.

Throughout Korean history, the name Sejong has been perhaps the most respected and admired. All of that can not be separated from the concept of a mindset that is so extraordinary. Sejong, who is a scholar from several disciplines, is able to create the Korean alphabet known as *hangeul*. Some records and studies mention that the formulation of the *hangeul* alphabet involves Jiphyonjon scholars, but some records and researches say that *hangeul* is a great work created by Sejong himself. If it is true that it is his own work, then it can be said that Sejong is indeed extraordinary since *idu* and *hanja*, which are Chinese characters, begin to be replaced with *hangeul*. Neither *idu* nor *hanja* is terrible, but both are very difficult to understand or pronounce by ordinary people; only

certain groups understand and are able to pronounce them. By using *hangeul*, all the society can read, and it continues to be used until recently.

Besides *hangeul*, Sejong also changed several policies or laws implemented at that time. The first is regarding the law of convicts. Sejong hopes all prisons are empty; of course, they must start reducing crime rates. He also regrets that the applicable law is unfair, where many innocent people get unfair laws. Therefore, Sejong believes society should know the law and teach a moral and prosperous lifestyle. If both of them work, then the prison would undoubtedly be empty. In addition, there is a new policy whereby persons under the age of 15 and over 70 are prohibited from being detained. Since agriculture developed in society, the number of prisoners has decreased. Second, regarding the law of marriage, where at that time, there was a rule that a woman could marry when she was 14 to 20 years old. Indeed, previous traditions and laws did not exist like that. This policy is based on considerations of women's mental (psychological) and women's reproductive health. Third, regarding the law of heir and closely related to the news, where Confucianism emphasizes more on the patriarchal system, it is natural for boys to be privileged, including in inheritance issues. However, since the rule made by Sejong, the inheritance problem has become more equitable. Although Sejong receives the teachings of Confucianism, he still applies the law of justice. Those are just some of the rules or laws that are drawn. There are still many policies implemented by Sejong that contribute to and influence the new order of life in Korean society.

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