

Doubts of cultural identity essay sample

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Introduction

Joseon Korea has been a flourishing kingdom since the ancient times. Despite being a neighbor to the power Chinese empire, the kingdom was able to establish its cultural identity that is distinct from the rest of the countries in the East-Asian region. However, a quote from a scholar during the reign of King Sejong in 1444 stipulates doubts about the country's distinct heritage cultural heritage drawn from the idea of shared institution and writing system with China. The question of cultural identity arises from a realization that not all aspects that defines a unique heritage exist such as form of writing. Anything that was shared cannot be considered as original. This assumption was based from the Joseon scholar's statement, which questions the origins of the Korean writing system in comparison to its neighbors. The discussion will focus on the responding to the Joseon scholar's quote through the lenses of cultural identity. At this point of the discussion, it can only be assumed that the matters of concern expressed in the quote are the notion that the Korean cultural heritage or writing was a borrowed culture from the Chinese.

Roots of Cultural Identity in the Writing System

The unnamed scholar from Joseon Korea wrote:

“ As we share with China at present the same writing and the same institutions, we are startled to learn of the invention of the Korean script. Only such peoples as the Mongolians, Tanguts, Jurchens, Japanese, and Tibetans have their own writings. But this is a matter that involves the barbarians and is unworthy of our concern. It has been said that the

barbarians are transformed only by means of adopting Chinese ways; we have never heard of Chinese ways being transformed by the barbarians.” (de Bary, Sources, 575-6).

Emanating from this statement is admittance to the fact that Joseon shares some of the cultural attributes from China such as institutions and writing. Ascertaining this assumption encompasses a realization of the origins of the Korean script. Lee (2003) describes the origin of the Korean script as a fragment of the extant linguistics encompassing an influx of sinograph words (17). Tracing back such origin is quite difficult as the historical records of the Korean texts are scarce, but the oldest possible reference to the origins of the writing system was *Kyunyo chon* that emerged in the 11th century. Based on the short findings, it is apparent that the roots of the Korean language are Chinese in nature. The early forms of script was then developed as the Joseon Kingdom continues its autonomous existence away from the massive Chinese ruling dynasty.

On the other hand, one may argue that although the Korean script has originated from the Mainland China, its development happened in Joseon and its inhabitants was able to establish their own identity by tinkering its adopted language system. Having said that, it can be assumed that the foundations of Korean language and the text in particular were built from the seeds of the Chinese language. To better understand the point of argument that is being conveyed in this discussion it is important to consider the technical aspects of the Korean scripts and its attribution to the Chinese ways. In 1440, King Sejong employed several scholars to form a group that will create a writing system that is simpler and more suitable for the

Koreans. The need to establish a better version of the idu has resulted to the creation of the new system called Hangui.

Apparently, the new form of writing system did not stand alone as distinctly original as possible because some of its elements were still adopted from hiragana and kanji in Japanese alongside with hanja characters in South Korea (ancientscripts. com). It can be recalled from the bamboo annals and documents pertaining to the member of the Shang dynasty's imperial family named Kija who fled to North Korea from China to establish his own dynasty (Chun-gil Kim). The legendary sage king was said to have established Kija Choson and maintained the virtuous customs of his Chinese heritage on rituals, literature, and music (Chun-gil Kim). However, king Sejong believes that in order to establish a true Korean heritage is to create its distinct writing system that discards the Chinese. On the other hand, it seems that not all of the king's subject is in favor of new system, whereas, the devising of the new writing system reduces the Koreans to the status of barbarians. Going back to the statement of the Jeoson scholar, his disagreement to abandon the Chinese ways is like abandoning the fragrance of storax in exchange for the obnoxious smell of a mantis. Furthermore, the scholar believes that such abandonment of the Chinese ways is an embarrassment to an enlightened civilization. There is a level of reservation towards the adaptation of the new writing system expressed by the Joseon scholar evidently with calling the change as barbaric way. There is so much admiration towards the Chinese tradition emanating from the Joseon scholar, which encompasses an assumption that the devising of the new language was for the purpose of influencing the Chinese. At some extent the thoughts

about calling the Koreans barbarians for devising a new writing system that is not entirely Chinese is a dagger stabbed to his own chest. The Joseon scholar is a Korean subject and citizen with no compassion towards his own cultural identity, thus calling the Koreans barbarians is the same as the same calling himself like one.

One can only assume that the king's decision to create a new writing system is to plant the seeds of Korean heritage that can be owned by Koreans. One civilization established separately from the Chinese and adopted a new identity that is not Chinese cannot be called an entirely different entity if it still upholds borrowed values and cultures. One cannot call himself a true American if he speaks and acts Greek. Being called a Korean, a Japanese, a Chinese, or an American is like being called according to the appropriate cultural identity. For example, if one has a power to create entirely different specie of fish that can glide when out of the water using the cells of bird specie; the resulting creation cannot be called a bird just because the biological foundation was a bird. The new specie was meant to be a fish, although it bears a bird-like attitude in gliding, it is still not a bird.

The analogy when applied to the opposition for devising a new Korean writing system is like making a fish out of a bird's components. The Korean civilization was created independent from China and despite the adoption of some Chinese traditions, the civilization is Korean and never a Chinese. Moreover, just because one independent state creates its own writing system it does not means it's a barbarian. It is like saying that China alone is a legitimate civilization and the rest of the world is barbarian hostiles. There is a great deal of belittling of his own civilization coming from the Jeoson

scholar. There is so much attachment to the Chinese that scholar forgets to remember that he is living and breathing the Korean air and walking on Korean on the Korean soil. The attitude expressed by the Jeoson scholar in his statement is a testament to the lack of self-efficacy and sense of nationalism.

Defying the Old with the New

The new Korean script was regarded as a novelty and deemed useless for the government. However, the king responds with words of questioning such as comparison of idu by Sol Chong being based on alien sounds to the new writing system. It cannot be stressed enough that the objective of the improving the current system was to make it useful for the people. It can be recalled that old system was difficult for the people to follow, thus, only assumption that can be taken from the misunderstanding of the system is illiteracy. Furthermore, the king points out that the scholars believes in the works of Sol Chong, but rejects a similar work of the sovereign. This response encompasses a similar frustration that anyone in the position as the king would feel given the opposition to the devising of the Korean script.

Moreover, the utility that the new Korean script constitutes an objective not only limited to simplifying the old writing tradition, but to create a system that can be truly Korean and not Chinese. When thinking about creating system that is unique to the sovereign, it is apparent that the objective of his majesty is to create an identity.

Identity is composed of several attributes and elements that represent a common characteristic to the people. It is synonymous to culture as writing reflects enables the people to create expressions of thoughts, creativity, and

fosters immediate learning. Writing reinforces the common form verbal communication, writing enable historians to capture the defining moments of time and without all would leave the past buried in time. Adopting a new writing style is a daunting task where one should learn the intricacies and the technicalities involved in the process. The academes for instance rely on writing to hand down knowledge from one generation to another. The absence of a universal language that speaks in characters and figures will render knowledge to remain stagnant (Nasiri).

This is true enough for the sovereign Korea during the Jeoson era. The purpose of standardizing the writing system is to flourish the current state of social and political situation in the kingdom. Ignorance brings chaos and what's better to alleviate ignorance is to educate the people. However, educating the people with a rather confusing writing system hinders the objective improving their own lives and ultimately the economic progress of the entire kingdom. Going back to response of the king, one of the most important arguments made by the king is that the new writing system does not violate the old practices of phonetic value. Such argument gives testament to the importance of change for the sake of social progress. The king as subject to corrections viewed the old writing language practices. However, the scholars do not want to defy the rules of the old practices. In the real world, change is inevitable, without change, progress will not foster and the state of things will remain stagnant until changes introduce new opportunities. Furthermore, the rejection of the new Korean script is an obvious denial of the scholars to king of his objective to establish a sovereign identity through language.

Attribution to Culture Enrichment

The importance of a writing system to national culture revolves around literature. In a book by George and Nehru (2006), the Korean literature was described as a strong fortress that prevents the dissolution of the people's spiritual life (50). Such strength of the Korean literature as described in the book suggests that the creation of the Korean script was instrumental in today's current state of the country's literary prose. Imagining that the king of Jeoson has not persuaded the devising of the new Korean script in 1440, it would appear that the country's current literature would still be relatively Chinese. If that could have been the case, Korea as a country will not be able to hold itself proud of its cultural heritage knowing that the sovereign was not able to create a writing system that can be called distinctively Korean. Furthermore, the Chinese and Koreans will share any indications of cultural achievement in literature, as compared to achieving literacy success that can be owned by the latter because the literary foundations were built by Korean principles.

The development of the standardized writing system is a natural occurrence in an evolving advance civilization. It can be recalled that the oldest recorded civilization was Mesopotamia from 5, 000 years ago. This is when a form of writing defined the ancient civilization of its sophisticated nature. The same sophistication and advancement can be achieved by any civilization provided that it was able to device its own progress by enriching its own communication mechanism. With the founding of a universal platform for communication in a form of a writing system, monumental opportunities for the civilization to further its progress is imminent. There are

several things that the statement from the Jeoson scholar can be learned. One of which is the to see one's self in comparison with another, which reflects a level of value that one gives to himself. The scholar mentioned that only the Chinese, the Japanese, and other nations have their own unique writing system. It is an indication that the scholar lacks the self-value and pride towards the opportunity of creating a cultural mark.

The time that the king Jeoson ordered the ratification of the current writing system, the kingdom have already counted several centuries of existence. It is an indication that for the longest time the kingdom has to rely to its Chinese roots for a writing system when the system itself is a fundamental part of a nation's identity and much more in establishing a cultural foundation. The 13th century Korea can already be identified as an advanced society where the people are basically progressing in the society and finding a common identity. Furthermore, an advanced society is that encompasses an intricate function that fosters an ability to contribute in the areas that gives statement to progress such as agriculture and architecture. Securing the future of the kingdom's legacy requires a strong establishment of identity. Furthermore, the world already saw how an advanced society that designates a stable ruling power towards the benefit of the people.

Culture embodied in an established writing system is required to creating an independent economy and nurture people to become specialists. This is because culture and language is one of those central elements that can be used to expand technology and the field of science that in return will create a more complex social organization. Social sophistication often reflects on the intricacies of the arts, literacies, and science.

Conclusion

The quoted statement of the Jeoson scholar is a testament to the lack of foresight to the importance of having a national identity through language. A writing system is essential for a country such as Korea or the kingdom of Jeoson for that matter because it is the opportunity for its civilization to strengthen its encompassing culture driven by social progress. On the other hand, the adoption of the new system could have been made more distinct from its Chinese, which will further exemplify the eagerness of the kingdom as a whole into unifying its society. Furthermore, branding the sovereign as barbaric for negating the linguistic contribution of the Chinese to Korean script is an understatement, which demonstrates lack of self-efficacy into making a difference in building a nation with a strong cultural background obtained from an equally strong system of writing.

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