

## King Sejong and Unificationism

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King Sejong[1] is one of the greatest leaders in all Korean history. He is often referred to as one of the most outstanding exemplars for those in the Korean business world. I am descended from him on my Korean side with the surname Yi (李) of Jeonju (全州). King Sejong became a recognized figure because his leadership style aligned with universal principles, which also happen to coincide with our beliefs. I argue that his character and values were also similar to Reverend Moon's.

King Sejong was born on the tenth day of the fourth month in 1397, by the lunar calendar.[2] He was the grandchild of King Taejo of Joseon[3] who established the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897), which arose after the fall of Goryeo (918–1392). King Sejong ascended the throne at the age of 21 as the fourth king of Joseon (r. 1418–1450) after his father, King Taejong of Joseon. At the time of his

ascension, Joseon was still unstable. It was a new dynasty in dire need of a leader with a strong heart and mind in addition to skill. As history has shown, King Sejong more than lived up to what had been expected of him. He played a major role in stabilizing Joseon and is recognized for his exceptional leadership.

His leadership inspired some of the greatest scientific and cultural advancements of his time, including applying advanced arithmetic to farming and calendar development; producing astronomical charts and 347 books of musical scores; as well as developing the Korean alphabet.[4] All this was achieved during the 32 years of his reign.

If we parallel parts of King Sejong's era with ours, we realize that we too are striving to establish a new nation: Cheon Il Guk. That is our ultimate goal. Thus, if we draw out some common basic principles, we may be able to discover that we can learn something from history.



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In 2003, Father explained: "What is the meaning of Cheon Il Guk? Two persons become one. That is the Kingdom of God on earth. Centered on the blessed family we can build the Kingdom of God." In other words, beginning from two single individuals, two families, or two nations, if each unites with the other, centered on God, God's Kingdom, Cheon Il Guk, can be built.

We've all heard this before; we know the routine. Yet for true unity to happen we should extend ourselves to even those who we don't exactly "click" with. Here is another quote by True Father I find applicable to my own life of faith:

"When you can trust someone while he is not trustworthy, when you can serve a person when he is not worthy, when you can love people when they are not lovable, and when you can sacrifice yourself for the sake of people when they are not worth sacrificing for..."[5]

Here, Father is describing God's heart. God had to trust, serve, love, and sacrifice everything for the sake of His children and the world, even when He knew that He could be hurt, betrayed, or rejected. It was the same for True Parents — and the same for King Sejong. King Sejong also lived by the principle of trusting his retainers and laborers, having an attitude of serving the nation and all he came in contact with, loving his people regardless of social status and sacrificing his life and personal emotions for the sake of a greater cause.

One famous example of his attitude can be seen in the creation of the Korean alphabet, officially called *hoonminjeongeum* ("the correct sounds for the instruction of the people"). Up until then, as their written language, Koreans had used Chinese characters, as had the Japanese, Vietnamese and others. Yet, learning these characters was difficult and only the wealthy had the time to do so. King Sejong's wish to develop Korea's own alphabet for the convenience of commoners was one of his deepest passions. His people being able to learn written communication would raise the intellectual, scientific and cultural standards of the nation.

Nevertheless, creating *hoonminjeongeum* proved to be one of the most controversial projects of that time.

King Sejong was a stubborn man; he did not give up easily when he had set his heart on something. In order to build trust and keep a respectful peace among his retainers, he might drop a certain idea, only to pick it up again several years later.

A group of scholars, most notably, Choi Manli, jointly produced a long letter of reasons against disseminating a Korean alphabet. In summary, they argued that since *hanmoon* (Chinese classical literature) was the means by which sages studied neo-Confucian teachings written in Chinese characters, if the people were unable to learn the characters they would remain ignorant of *hanmoon* and thus, ignorant of the world. Perhaps underlying this view, some noblemen didn't want commoners to become knowledgeable, which might threaten their status and power. In any event, King Sejong chose to believe that his retainers were also thinking about what was best for the people, disregarding any negative motives. In the end, it took 13 years for *hoonminjeongeum* to be proclaimed; the Korean alphabet is now considered one of the most ingeniously designed alphabets in the world.

*King Sejong's heart of service to the nation – and the opposition of many nobles to him — is well-depicted in the recent KBS drama Jang Youngsil, about one of Korea's greatest scientists who was sponsored by the king. A press preview of the series is above. The entire 24-episode series can be viewed with English subtitles on YouTube.*

King Sejong sought to maintain the mindset that he was a servant of the people. He was respectful and humble towards people regardless of social status. He was often heard to say, “I am not worthy to be king.”[6] This is a definite indication of his humility even towards those of the lowest status in a country where traditional hierarchy is a basic social norm. It did not matter to him whether they were noblemen, soldiers, farmers, students or elderly people,[7] he sought people out and listened to them, because he knew this was the only way to understand their needs and wants. King Sejong did not boast of his own worth, but instead made everyone he met feel worthy, even if they were not, by any other standard. Therefore, one can imagine the positive or negative responses this would have caused, since such courtesy from a king was out of the ordinary and perhaps even looked down upon. Yet in such a way King Sejong strove to serve and love his people and his nation.

However, King Sejong's life was not without pressure and stress. Every moment, whether awake or asleep, if others were not surrounding him, servants at least attended their king; he had no real privacy. Life in the royal family was not easy; the palace never lacked drama brought on by scandals amongst the princes or others; not to mention the untimely death of several of his own children. King Sejong had to train himself to balance his personal life, family life and public life. He had to learn how to make sacrifices, especially of his personal feelings, in order to stay focused on his purpose.

Not everyone in Joseon felt the same way as he did about the country. Not everyone cared, as long as their lives were not inconvenienced. Perhaps he didn't even receive much recognition from his people at that time or was even as great a leader as we now believe him to be. However, his sacrifice impacted the Korean nation greatly and it wouldn't be the nation it is today if not for him.

King Sejong placed high value in the Heavens and Confucianism,[8] from which were derived the core values of his reign. In the *Analects of Confucius* is a passage that King Sejong was known to live by: “[a leader should] lead himself well, because if a leader is able to lead himself [he is] able to lead the world.”[9] Just as it was to King Sejong, self-mastery is one of the fundamentals for those in any religion or other organization even today. We can easily recognize the same concept in a quotation Father is famous for: “Before seeking to dominate the universe, dominate yourself.” This proves that such a principle does not change with time—700 years in the past or the future.

King Sejong lived by the same principles of mastering himself and extending himself to the world. He learned from the past, developed the present and kept the future in mind while doing so. He lived for the sake of others and for his nation — searching to see from the viewpoint of even the lowest citizen. Hyeonmo Park notes, “Thinking and making decisions based on those who were living under the most socially difficult circumstances brought immense reactions from the people and is an example of humanitarianism.”[10]

Especially within a vertical social structure, such as Korea's, people respond to acts of the heart. These constitute a universal language accepted and respected across any culture, race or status. Awareness of this is something King Sejong and True Parents have in common.

Though King Sejong did not have contact with people as diverse as do we in the modern world, he set an example of how to act with more depth as human beings — to act with respect, care, sincerity, and integrity for the greater good. He was truly a loving and inspiring person to his people. Leader or not, one's heart communicates with hearts. Cheon Il Guk: two becoming one. That is truth and that is reality.

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Painting at top: *King Sejong the Great*

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**Notes:**

[1] The form generally used by Koreans is Sejong the Great (*Sejong Daewang*), which is the short form of his official posthumous title, *Sejong Jangheon Yeongmun Yemu Inseong Myeonghyo Daewang*. His birth name was Yi Do (李禔).

[2] May 15, 1397 by the present-day solar calendar

[3] Birth name Yi Seong-gye (李成桂), the first of the royal Yi tribe.

[4] Hong, Iseop, *King Sejong the Great*, Seoul: King Sejong the Great Memorial Society, 1971 Print.

[5] Moon, Sun Myung, "Becoming a Responsible Person," July 14, 1974

[6] Korea Economy Research Institute, *Korea Economy Research Institute*, 2014, Web. 16 April, 2015.

[7] Shin, Sedon, "Sejong's Communication Leadership," Online video clip YouTube, The Institute for the Future of State (*sic*), 23 February 2013, Web, 10 March 2015.

[8] One of the core teachings of Confucianism is the Three Fundamental Principles in Human Relations: king–subject, father–son, and husband–wife.

[9] Jeon, Gyeonil, *Read Sejong's Code*: Korea Economy News Hangyeong BP, 2003, Print. P. 22.

[10] Korea Economy Research Institute. *Korea Economy Research Institute*. 2014. Web. 16 April. 2015