

King Sejong the Great

The Everlasting Light of Korea

More than any single accomplishment, King Sejong expanded the realm of possibility for the citizenry of Korea, providing the gift of inspiration. This king's almost unlimited capacity for innovation and demonstration of humanity set a standard that still stands impressive in the present, and will likely continue to impress in the future. Wide-ranging contributions to the fields of law, medicine, language, and art inspire all to develop broad minded and inclusive approaches to problem solving and goal setting. The story of King Sejong's life is a great tool for education, and the transmission of his achievements is a valuable resource for inspiring optimism and self-confidence.

King Sejong's development of the Hangeul alphabet remains the great legacy of his dedicated and selfless efforts to eliminate illiteracy among all classes of Korean citizens. By creating an alphabet that is easy to learn and phonetically logical, he sought to create a lasting achievement that could be enjoyed by rich or poor. The massive task of implementing such a cultural project, and providing the resources that it would require, demonstrates an uncommon foresight and dedication to scholarly ideals. Although one can compare King Sejong's accomplishments in language and music with comparable developments in the West—developments which King Sejong's advances predate—perhaps the more significant factor is that a powerful monarch intended such goals at all. King Sejong's selfless dedication to his people is a great tribute to Korea's national identity and universal humanity.

The eager importation of knowledge from other cultures (such as China) also demonstrates King Sejong's openness to any source of benefit for his people. The distribution of information through the innovation of copper-plate type-face design not only saved money, but sped up the rate of communication, and therefore education. Sejong's creation of the Jade Hall as a center for his scholars serves as a terrific symbol of this commitment to education, historical study, and scholarly investigation.

The strength of King Sejong's personal character emerges through his social innovations and legal reforms. Accepting fault when none other was to blame and seeking justice despite the risk of official embarrassment are also impressive attributes that historical documents demonstrate. The institution of the right to legal appeal remains a cherished privilege in many societies to this day. King Sejong's recognition of the rights to maternity leave—for both mother and father—is an accomplishment still unparalleled in most modern societies. He also took pains to develop medical science and care accessible to all; the role of government in medical care is an issue that remains controversial in countries like the United States, even today. This ruler's willingness to suffer with his people in times of famine further sets King Sejong apart from most leaders, historical and contemporary.

King Sejong enjoyed the benefits of a long reign under relatively peaceful and stable conditions. But far from being complacent, he took the opportunity to advance his nation's technology and strengthen the character of its society. The Great King's gifts to his people should be seen as not only a series of remarkable triumphs during his own lifetime, but as a legacy left to

inspire future generations. His example encourages anyone to strive for maintenance of health, respect for justice, expansion of knowledge, and strength of character.