



# Reflections on a Curriculum for ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature: Definition, Scope, Terminology, Grammar, and Textual Examples for Anglo-American Universities<sup>1</sup>

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A Sino-Korean literature textbook for English-speaking college students, currently under development, should aim to highlight the unique characteristics of the history of Sino-Korean literature, offering distinct value compared to previous textbooks that primarily focus on Chinese classics. This paper outlines the design of a curriculum for teaching ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature in a single chapter of the new textbook, which was developed to address the mismatches between literary Chinese and vernacular Korean. The proposed curriculum is divided into two parts, each with three sections, and is designed to systematically convey the history, scope, and grammatical features of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature. Part I addresses the historical context of Korean literature and examines how to define and delineate the boundaries of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature. This part includes: Section 1, an explanation of the linguistic reasons behind the invention of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature; Section 2, an overview of the historical development of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature; Section 3, a justification for selecting *Idu* as a representative style among other Korean Sinographic writing systems. Part II focuses on approaches for teaching the grammatical elements of *Idu* and incorporating textual examples that demonstrate its practical usage. This part includes: Section 4, an introduction to the basic elements of *Idu*; Section 5, an analysis of the grammatical structure of *Idu*; Section 6, textual examples illustrating the use of *Idu* in historical contexts.

**Keywords:** Sino-Korean literature, Korean-style Sinographic literature, *Idu*, *Hyangch'al*, *Kugyöl*, *Wasaogan*

## Introduction: The Distinct Characteristics and Difficulties of Teaching ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature

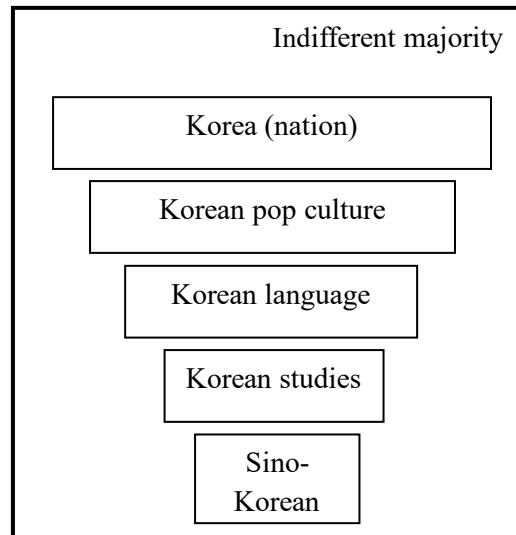
Since the early dispatch of missionaries to China and the establishment of Sinology as a modern academic discipline, the methodology for teaching Sinographic literature (Classical/Literary Chinese) has been widely debated in the West, resulting in numerous high-quality college textbooks. Within this context, it is crucial to delineate the unique characteristics of Korean literary history as distinct from Chinese literature,

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a translated and revised version of my previously published paper, "Han'guksik hanmunü k'örik'yullöme taehan tansang: Yöngmigwön taehak kyojae hwaryonghal chöngüi, pömwü, yongö, munböp, yemun" [한국식 한문의 커리큘럼에 대한 단상: 영미권 대학 교재에 활용할 정의, 범위, 용어, 문법, 예문], originally published in *East Asian Journal of Sinology* no.20, in 2025.

the traditional progenitor of Sinographic writing. One pedagogical approach involves introducing masterpieces that reflect the specific emotions and historical experiences of the Korean people. Another approach should focus on ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature, which was established and modified by the influence of the Korean language.<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on the latter, discussing a curriculum specifically designed for ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature.

On October 22, 2024, the Korea University Institute for Sinographic Literatures and Philology and the MIT Comparative Global Humanities Initiative jointly hosted a workshop at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The session focused on the design of a handbook and a textbook for Sino-Korean literature (Sinographic works by Korean authors), during which participants examined existing textbook structures and potential content from various perspectives. This paper, stemming from those discussions, explores the development of a specific chapter for the upcoming textbook. The proposed curriculum for ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature is premised on the student having received sufficient training in ‘orthodox’ Sinographic literature (standard classics) in the textbook’s preceding chapters. The primary objective of this chapter is to broaden the student’s understanding of Korean literary history by highlighting the distinct characteristics of the ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic tradition.

To effectively teach Sino-Korean literature, one must first understand the unique disciplinary position it occupies. A useful analogy can be drawn from the field of business administration: the concept of the ‘marketing funnel.’ This model illustrates that the number of actual purchasers—those who have navigated various stages of consideration—is significantly smaller than the initial pool of potential customers who simply recognize a product. As researchers and educators tasked with ‘selling’ Sino-Korean literature to a wider audience, we can apply this funnel model to the way we design and implement Korean studies curricula.



Numerous public and private surveys indicate that Korean popular culture—widely known as the ‘Korean Wave’—is the primary driver of international interest in Korea.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> While this paper uses the term ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature to encompass both modified Sinographic writing systems and the literary practices developed by the Korean people, the primary discussion focuses on the latter. Writing systems such as *kugyŏl* do not constitute ‘literature’ in the narrow sense—as will be discussed later—but are included here to provide a comprehensive overview of Korean literary history.

<sup>3</sup> Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, 2024 *Haeohallyusilt'aejosa* (Seoul: Korean

In terms of accessibility and recognition, the influence of pop culture is unparalleled. Aside from established scholars who often transition into the field from Chinese or Japanese studies, it is unrealistic to expect an average college student to discover Pyŏn Kyeryang 卞季良(1369-1430) before BTS. It is far more natural to envision a progression where an initial interest in pop culture motivates a student to learn the Korean language, which then serves as a gateway to specialized Korean studies.

However, Sino-Korean literature requires rigorous training in the Sinographic writing system and a profound understanding of pre-modern East Asian literature, history, and philosophy, making it the least accessible discipline within the field. While concrete statistics are scarce, Korean universities clearly exhibit a ‘funnel’ effect regarding graduate students; enrollment dwindles in a sequence from Korean language education to modern literature, then to pre-modern literature, and finally to Sinographic literature. Currently, most universities lack dedicated departments for Sinographic literature, and specialists within Korean Language and Literature departments are increasingly rare.

Nonetheless, the steady increase in interest in Korea at the university level is encouraging. In 2002, only 5,211 students were enrolled in Korean language courses at institutions of higher education in the United States.<sup>4</sup> By 2021, that number had surged to 19,270, ranking Korean among the top ten most-studied foreign languages.<sup>5</sup> While 2003 statistics from the California State University system showed that heritage learners accounted for 90% of Korean language enrollment,<sup>6</sup> it is reasonable to infer that the nearly fourfold increase since then has been driven primarily by non-heritage learners. Given this trajectory, we can expect a corresponding rise in the number of students pursuing Korean studies—and more specifically, Korean classics—as their proficiency and interest in the language deepen. Indeed, this shift is already visible; in 2024, I taught an exchange student from Spain in my Korean Philology and Book History course, a subject traditionally considered highly specialized.

While a vast amount of research has been published on teaching Korean as a foreign language (KFL), the curriculum for Sino-Korean literature—and specifically ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature—remains largely unexplored.<sup>7</sup> The inherent nature of this

Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, 2024); Nam SoonHyeon, “Taehaksaengüi hallyuinsikkwa kukkaimijiga yuhaksaeng suyonge mich'inün yŏnghyang: uwŏlgam maegaehyogwa,” *Social Science Review* 55 (2024): 1-18.

<sup>4</sup> “2004 Modern Language Association Report,” as cited in Ross King, “Pungmi taehagüi han'gugŏ han'gungmunhak kyoyuk hyŏnhwang,” *Haeoe Han'gukhak Paeksŏ* (Seoul: Eulyoo Publishing, 2007), 283-284.

<sup>5</sup> Modern Language Association, “Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in US Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2021,” (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2023), 5; 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ross King, “Pungmi taehagüi han'gugŏ han'gungmunhak kyoyuk hyŏnhwang,” *Haeoe Han'gukhak Paeksŏ* (Seoul: Eulyoo Publishing, 2007), 286.

<sup>7</sup> On FutureLearn, a paid online education platform, Sungkyunkwan University offers a course titled “Introduction to Korean Philosophy.” This course includes a session on “Korean Writing Systems

discipline makes it difficult to adopt the methodologies used in general Korean language instruction, which typically prioritize communicative proficiency and participatory activities. In my own training for ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature, I did not use a formal textbook; instead, I spent over three years deciphering primary source documents from *Yangban* clan collections, learning to navigate cursive scripts and *Idu* through direct immersion. This approach mirrors the traditional method of using canonical texts as the sole instructional tool for Sinographic literature. However, such a method is highly inefficient for international students, who often lack a foundational knowledge of Hanja, the mechanics of Sinographic writing systems, and the broader historical context of Korean studies.

Given these circumstances, this paper proposes a structured textbook chapter for ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature and outlines its framework as follows:

Textbook Chapter: ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature	Part I: Context	Section 1: The Motivation for Recording Vernacular Korean Using Chinese Characters and the Characteristics of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature
		Section 2: The Historical Development of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Writing Systems
		Section 3: The Significance of <i>Idu</i> among ‘Korean-Style’ Writing Systems
	Part II: Grammar	Section 4: The Basic Elements of <i>Idu</i>
		Section 5: A Survey of the Grammatical Structure of <i>Idu</i>
		Section 6: <i>Idu</i> in the Everyday Life of the Chosŏn

The first chapter of this paper, which addresses ‘Part I’ of the textbook chapter, examines how to define ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature and establishes its pedagogical scope within the literary-historical context of Korea. The second chapter, discussing ‘Part II,’ explores how to explain grammatical elements and utilize illustrative texts to teach the *Idu* script, the quintessential writing system of the ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic tradition.

### What to Teach: Establishing the Pedagogical Scope and Historical Context of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature

Scholars of Sinographic literature recognize a distinct ‘Korean-style’ that diverges

Before Hangeul,” which provides brief explanations of *Hyangch'al*, *Kugyŏl*, and *Idu*. Additionally, courses such as “Readings in Middle and Early Modern Korean,” taught by Professor Ross King at the University of British Columbia, have addressed subjects like *Kugyŏl*, *Idu*, and the complexities of translation. Beyond these examples, I will refrain from discussing other programs involving ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature at North American universities that fall outside the scope of my current knowledge.

from the standard Sinographic traditions developed throughout Chinese literary history, such as the archaic Qin-Han style or the Tang-Song style. This ‘Korean-style’ is a hybrid system designed to accommodate vernacular Korean pronunciation, indigenous vocabulary, and native grammatical structures.<sup>8</sup> While a dedicated curriculum is required to fully explain its dynamic development, such an undertaking is often unrealistic given the time required for mastery and the heavy burden it places on both instructors and students. Instead, this paper proposes that a specific chapter be integrated into the broader Sino-Korean literature curriculum. To implement this, the pedagogical scope of the ‘Korean-style’ must be clearly defined and its limitations justified.

This chapter outlines the structure of ‘Part I’ of the proposed textbook, which primarily establishes the historical context of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature. ‘Part I’ is divided into three sections. The first section serves as an introduction to the entire curriculum, examining the historical and linguistic factors that drove the development of this style. The second section traces its historical evolution, providing clear definitions for the various sub-styles within the ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic system. The third section justifies the textbook’s focus on the Idu script as the central pedagogical theme among these various sub-styles. Ultimately, ‘Part I’ is designed to provide students with a foundational understanding of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature and provide learning objectives.

### Section 1: Factors Behind the Emergence of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature and Its Key Features

The impetus for the development of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature mirrors the motivation behind the invention of *Hangeul*: the fundamental linguistic mismatch between the vernacular Korean language and the Chinese writing system. To render spoken Korean using *Hanja*—a script originally designed to represent the Chinese language—three primary challenges had to be addressed. First, how to transcribe indigenous Korean vocabulary. Second, how to denote Korean grammatical elements, such as postpositions and inflections. Third, how to arrange these characters to reflect Korean sentence structure (syntax), which differs significantly from that of Chinese.<sup>9</sup>

As previously stated, Section 1 serves as the introduction to the curriculum. This section aims to address the three aforementioned questions, enabling students to comprehend the definition, characteristics, and historical context of ‘Korean-style’

<sup>8</sup> Sim Kyungho, “Han'guk hanmunsanmunsa sōsurūi chemunje,” *Journal of Korean Literature in Classical Chinese* 64 (2016): 60; 62; Sim Kyungho, “Kūndae ijōn han'gukhanmun sōsa munch'eūi chungch'ūngsōng,” International Conference Commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Korea Comparative Literature Association. Keynote speech in 2019.12.7.; Sim Kyungho, “Han'guk hanmunsanmunūi sōsulmunch'e mit susanollwiwa yōksamunhwajōk kinūng,” *Journal of Korean Literature in Classical Chinese* 87 (2023): 10; 12-15.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Yupum. “han'gugūi hanja ch'ajap'yogibōbe tachan munjahakchōk chomyōnggwa kyoyuk pangānūi mosaek,” *The Journal for the Study of Humans and Culture* 15 (2009): 13-14.

Sinographic literature. For the purposes of this paper, the discussion regarding the first challenge—indigenous Korean vocabulary—will be deferred. The second challenge concerns the typological distinction between Chinese, an isolating language, and Korean, an agglutinative language that relies on combinations of word stems and affixes to express grammatical inflections. The following example illustrates this concept.

**The second problem:** How do we mark the grammatical elements of vernacular Korean?

Chinese is an isolating language, meaning that each word consists of a single morpheme and lacks inflection. However, Korean is an agglutinative language, meaning that each word consists of multiple morphemes and displays inflection or derivation. Korean words are a combination of a word stem—which has lexical meaning and remains unmodified during inflection—and identifiable affixes—which indicate inflection or derivation. Here is the example.

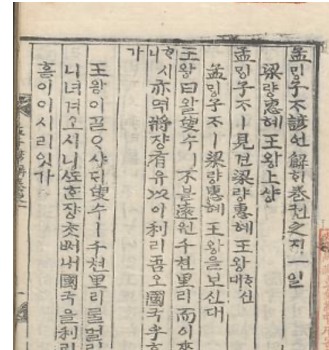
\*Ancient Chinese: 王 / 何 / 必 / 曰 / 利 / (The Mencius 孟子)

\*Late 16th century Korean: 王은 / 엇디 / 반ㄷ·시 / 利르·르 / 니르·시ㄴ·떡엇고 /<sup>ws</sup> (The Vernacular Translation of the<sup>ws</sup> Mencius 孟子諺解)

#ws : word stem #a : affix

\*Modern Korean: 왕은 하필 이로우을 말씀하십니까? [Wangŭn hap'il iroumŭl malssŭmhashimnikka]

In the illustrative sentence, it is notable that each Chinese character represents a single word. In contrast, in the medieval Korean translation, each word consists of multiple characters, including a word stem and affixes, despite efforts to preserve the original text's structure. In the original text, the noun “王” [king] is an independent word. However, in the Korean translation, the noun requires a subject case marker, “은.” The verb “曰” [speak] presents an even more complex case. The basic verb form “니르다” [MK: 말하다] is broken down into the word stem “니르” and the affix “다,” which is then replaced by a series of affixes: “시” (honorific), “ㄴ니” (affix ordering generalization), and “엇고” (interrogative). This raises the question: how did Korean people mark grammatical elements like “은” or “시” before the invention of Hangeul?



The Vernacular Translation of the Mencius  
Image by the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies

The third challenge requires a more sophisticated explanation. Generally, Chinese is described as having a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure, while Korean follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure. However, in oracle bone script, bronze inscriptions, and pre-Han written sources—from a period when the written and

vernacular languages were not yet fully distinct—SOV patterns are observed in Chinese, particularly in interrogative sentences. Some scholars, primarily in Chinese academia, argue that ancient Chinese treated SVO as the ‘orthodox’ structure just as modern Chinese does. Others, mainly outside of China, contend that ancient Chinese originally possessed an SOV structure similar to its sister language, Tibetan, and only later transitioned to SVO.<sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of the textbook, it is unnecessary to settle these academic debates. Instead, the curriculum should emphasize that the contemporary users of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature were clearly aware of the structural difference between SVO and SOV. Evidence for this can be found in the *Taemyǒngnyul chik'ae* (大明律直解; The Direct Interpretation of the Great Ming Code). Many entries in this text show a deliberate restructuring of the original Ming Code’s SVO sentences into an SOV format.<sup>11</sup> This modification demonstrates that a clear conceptual distinction between SVO and SOV structures already existed by the 14th century, when the *Taemyǒngnyul chik'ae* was likely published. By utilizing such primary sources to substantiate examples, the curriculum can effectively introduce the essential characteristics of the vernacular Korean and ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic systems while acknowledging key academic discourse.

**The third problem:** how do we mark the grammatical structure of vernacular Korean using the Sinographic writing system?

Literary Chinese after the Han period clearly shows a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. However, there has been debate about whether ancient Chinese always used the SVO structure or whether it originally followed a subject-object-verb (SOV) structure, similar to its linguistic relative, Tibetan, and gradually adopted the SVO structure. It is true that some pre-Han literature displays a SOV structure on limited occasions. See below.

\*天下之父歸之，其子焉往？ (Mencius, “Li Lou”)

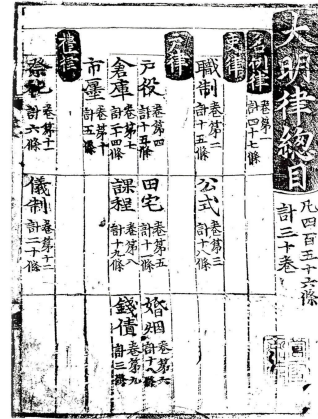
\*吾誰與爲親？ (Zhuangzi 莊子, “The Adjustment of Controversies”)

\*梁王卽終，欲誰立？ (Shiji 史記, “Hereditary houses, Liu Wu of Liang”)

<sup>10</sup> Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 25-26; Lee Sun Hee, “Yanghan chǒnhu sigi kodae chunggugō ōsun pyōnhwae kwanhan sogo 1,” *Chinese Literature* 44 (2005): 320-321.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Young-Su, “Iduwa iduhanmun pōnyōk koch'al,” *Soonchunhyang Journal of Humanities* 27 (2010): 100-103.

Therefore, it is important to note that the use of SVO in Chinese and SOV in Korean is a general tendency. However, pre-modern Korean clearly recognized this distinction. *Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae* (The Direct Interpretation of the Great Ming Code), published around 1395, is a translation of a Chinese law book made before the invention of *Hangeul*. In many sections, Korean translators rearranged the Chinese characters to align with the syntax of vernacular Korean. See below. Words with an underline are *Idu* scripts, which mark affixes. We will discuss this topic later.



*Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae*

Image by the Kyujanggak  
Institute for Korean Studies

\*凡 / 擅入 / 太廟門及山陵兆域門 / 者 / 杖 / 一百 /  
(*Taemyŏngnyul*, “Trespassing the royal ancestral shrine”)

\*凡 / 太廟門及山陵兆域門 / 良中 / 擅入 / 爲在乙良 /  
者 / 杖 / 一百 / 齊<sup>0</sup> (*Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae*<sup>v</sup>大明律直解)

## Section 2: Historical Development of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature

This section provides a diachronic account of the historical development of various sub-styles of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature, establishing a rationale for the pedagogical scope of the curriculum.

The existing Korean textbook provides a detailed account of the historical development of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature.<sup>12</sup> Based on this work, newly planned textbook for Anglo-American learners aims to outline specific sub-styles while explaining their periods of usage and subsequent transitions. To enhance clarity, this section will feature a chronological table to visualize historical progression, supplemented by images of representative artifacts.

The following table provides a provisional overview of the usage dates for Chinese characters, orthodox Sinographic literature, and ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature. The final textbook will employ professional design tools to improve visual accessibility while maintaining academic rigor by carefully distinguishing between confirmed historical dates and estimated periods where philological or archaeological evidence remains unavailable.

<sup>12</sup> Sim Kyungho, *Han'guk Hanmun'gich'ohaksa* (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2012), 71-96; 183-247.

(Before 400 BCE -108 BCE) Kojosŏn		(57 BCE-668CE) Three Kingdoms	(698-926) Northern and South Period (Unified Silla and Parhae)	(918-1392) Koryŏ	(1392-1910) Chosŏn
	(108 BCE-313 CE) Nangnang (Lelang Commandary of Han Dynasty)				
Use of Chinese characters from circa 300 BCE					
Writing in orthodox Sinographic literature					
Borrow pronunciation and meaning of Chinese characters to record indigenous Korean vocabulary ( <i>Ch'aja</i> )					
Modified Sinographic literature in vernacular Korean grammar structure					
<i>Hyangch'al</i>					
<i>Kugyŏl</i>					
<i>Idu script</i>					

This section is required to demonstrate the distinct characteristics of various ‘Korean-style’ writing systems using historically significant illustrative texts. It begins with the Imsin Sŏgisŏk 壬申誓記石 “Imsin Year Vow Stone”, an early example of Sinographs rearranged to follow Korean grammatical structure. To this end, the new textbook draws extensively from existing textbooks and reference books on these systems. For instance, *Han'guk Hanmun'gich'ohaksa* (The History of the Fundamentals of Sino-Korean Literature) and *Idu Sajŏn* (Idu Dictionary) provide detailed explanations of variant style literature.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, within Korean linguistics, *Kugŏui Yŏksa* (The History of the Korean Language) and *Kugŏ Munbŏpsa* (The History of Korean Grammar) offer critical analyses of the grammatical elements

<sup>13</sup> Sim Kyungho, *Han'guk Hanmun'gich'ohaksa* (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2012); Dankook University Academy of Asian Studies, *Idu Sajŏn* (Yongin: Dankook University Press, 2020).

of *Idu* and *Kugyŏl*.<sup>14</sup> In Western academia, Ross King’s detailed treatment of *Idu* concepts and grammar provides invaluable insights for an Anglo-American audience, as it reflects a Western pedagogical perspective.<sup>15</sup> The following excerpt presents King’s definition and formal analysis of *Idu* script.

*Idu* 吏讀 proper, in which a more or less stable subset of sinographs was used primarily as phonograms to record vernacular Korean forms—mostly nominal particles and verbal suffixes and endings, but also including a small number of nouns and adverbs—in certain genres of official documents (especially administrative and juridical texts) that were written exclusively in these sinographs, but typically in Korean verb-final word order.

### Section 3: Rationale for Focusing on *Idu* Script within ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature

As previously outlined, the new textbook provides a step-by-step account of the historical and linguistic development of these ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic systems. Upon reaching this stage, students will understand how pre-modern Koreans adapted Sinographs (*Hanja*) in diverse ways to record the Korean vernacular. Before proceeding to ‘Part II,’ which focuses on the full-scale demonstration of application of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature, the final section of ‘Part I’ clarifies the rationale for selecting a specific sub-style. By doing so, it defines the curriculum’s scope and establishes clear pedagogical objectives.

While a specialized textbook dedicated to ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature could theoretically cover all sub-style variants, this paper proposes a curriculum for a single chapter within a broader textbook. Consequently, it is necessary to prioritize certain content to fit within this limited scope. Given these practical constraints, this paper identifies the *Idu* script as the primary focus for ‘Part II.’ To justify this selection, ‘Section 3’ presents both a ‘negative’ rationale (the reasons for excluding other sub-styles) and a ‘positive’ rationale (the unique literary and historical significance of *Idu*).

The ‘negative’ rationales for excluding sub-styles other than *Idu* from the curriculum are clear. First, the primitive forms of modified Sinographic writing that adopted Korean SOV syntax emerged during the early Three Kingdoms period—the formative era of Sinographic literature on the Korean Peninsula. This sub-system coexisted with orthodox Sinographic literature before eventually being absorbed into the *Idu* script. Second, philological evidence for *Hyangch'al* is scarce, and its decipherment remains a subject of intense academic debate. Third, *Kugyŏl* is not a system for full-scale composition; rather, it functions primarily as an auxiliary tool to facilitate the comprehension of existing Sinographic texts.

The ‘positive’ rationales for focusing on the *Idu* script are rooted in its profound

<sup>14</sup> Kim Moo Rim, *Kugŏui Yŏksa* (Seoul: Hankook Publishing House, 2004); Hong Jongseon, *Kugŏ Munbŏpsa* (Paju: Acanet, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Ross King, “*Idu* in and as Korean Literature,” *The Routledge Companion to Korean Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 123-140.

historical, cultural, and literary significance. *Idu* was inextricably linked to the daily lives of the Korean people throughout the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods. Its usage is widely documented in texts concerning politics, administration, economics, and social affairs. Given its role in administrative and legal contexts, individuals across all social strata either required a command of *Idu* or had to employ intermediaries who did.<sup>16</sup> This ubiquity is best exemplified by *Kim Chi* 金祇, the translator of the *Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae*, who noted that because the Korean people were so accustomed to *Idu*, its use was inevitable when translating the Ming Code.<sup>17</sup>

Recent scholarship has highlighted the phenomenon of ‘diglossia’—the coexistence of universal Sinographic literature and local vernacular languages in pre-modern East Asia.<sup>18</sup> Moving beyond these established frameworks, the newer concepts of ‘multiglossia’ and ‘hyperglossia’ have been proposed to account for the various writing systems that coexisted across different social strata.<sup>19</sup> These terms emphasize a complex internal layering of scripts rather than a simple binary or spectrum. The *Idu* script, which functioned as an intermediate system between Sinographic literature and *Hangeul* and was utilized across all strata of pre-modern Korean society, clearly exemplifies this state of ‘multiglossia.’ Moreover, *Idu* did not merely permeate Korean life for practical purposes; it also served as a tool for literary expression. It is therefore evident that a comprehensive understanding of pre-modern Korean culture requires a foundational knowledge of *Hangeul*, Sinographs (*Hanja*), and *Idu* in their entirety.

### What to Teach: Presenting Grammatical Elements and Illustrative Texts of ‘Korean-Style’ Sinographic Literature

While Part I established the literary-historical context and pedagogical scope of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature, Part II provides a comprehensive analysis of the *Idu* script, the tradition’s most representative style. This part is also divided into three sections. The first introduces the fundamental principles of character borrowing (*Ch'aja*) and identifies frequently used characters, serving as an intro to the grammar curriculum. The second section details the methods for notating indigenous Korean vocabulary and grammatical inflections through *Idu*. Finally, the third section presents primary sources—ranging from economic documents to fables—as illustrative texts to examine the practical application of *Idu* in historical real-world contexts.

<sup>16</sup> Sim Kyungho, *Han'guk Hanmun'gich'ohaksa* (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2012), 207; 238-240.

<sup>17</sup> *Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae*, Kim Chi, “postscript”: “況我本朝三韓時，薛聰所製方言文字，謂之吏道，土俗生知習熟，未能遽革，焉得家到戶諭，每人而教之哉?”

<sup>18</sup> Jamie Jungmin Yoo, “Hanja munhwagwŏn'gwa yangch'ŭng ōnŏui munje,” *The Society for Korean Language & Literary Research* 47.2 (2019): 27-46.

<sup>19</sup> Ross King, “Ditching 'Diglossia': Describing Ecologies of the Spoken and Inscribed in Pre-modern Korea,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 15 (2015): 1-19.

Section 4: *Ch'aja* Characters and the Formation of the *Idu* Script

This section represents the initial stage of the *Idu* curriculum. It explains the principles of phonetic and semantic borrowing of Sinographs—specifically, how their sounds and meanings were adapted to form the *Idu* script and its vocabulary. The textbook draws extensively from existing scholarship, including the *Idu Sajŏn* (*Idu* Dictionary), while utilizing the *Idu Yongnye Sajŏn* (*Dictionary of Idu* Examples) from the Academy of Korean Studies as its primary reference. As the *Idu Yongnye Sajŏn* documents a vast range of vocabulary and provides crucial insights into the structural principles of the script, it serves as a cornerstone for this section. An example of this resource is provided below.

<p>표제어: 只 (*entry)          읽는법: ㄱ (*pronunciation)          뜻 1: -기. 명사형어미. 爲只爲. (*meaning)          뜻 2: 부사어 말음표기. 대체적으로 ‘ㄱ~기’ 를 표기하였다. 故只, 並只, 須只, 唯只, 曾只 등.          뜻 3: 강세를 나타내는 ‘-ㄱ’. 爲良只</p>
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However, two challenges must be addressed when adapting the *Idu Yongnye Sajŏn* for the new textbook. First, the *Idu Yongnye Sajŏn* organizes its entries in *Hangeul* alphabetical order rather than by grammatical category. Consequently, it is more effective for the authors to curate a selection of fundamental *Idu* elements based on planning curriculum. The primary criteria for this selection should be frequency of use and grammatical significance. In addition to ‘只’ mentioned above, other high-frequency characters include ‘爲’, ‘以’, ‘是’, ‘良’, ‘矣’, ‘乎’, ‘段’, ‘如’ and ‘亦’. A curated list of twenty to thirty such characters should be sufficient to enable students to decipher the majority of college-level *Idu* vocabulary.

The transcription of pronunciation presents another challenge. I suggest that the new textbook adopt the McCune-Reischauer (MR) system, which has a long-standing history in Anglo-American academia, rather than the Revised Romanization (RR) system introduced by the Korean government more recently. However, while MR is superior for reflecting actual pronunciation, it also accounts for phonological shifts such as voicing and liaison. This causes a discrepancy between the notation of isolated *Idu* elements and their appearance within combined vocabulary. For instance, in MR, the initial consonant ‘ㄱ’ is transcribed as the unvoiced [k], whereas RR uses the voiced [g]. Regarding the *Idu* script, the element ‘去’ (modern Korean: 거) is transcribed as kō in the MR system. However, the affix ‘爲去乙’ is transcribed as hagōnŭl in corresponding MR. Such inconsistencies between element-level and word-level notation must be carefully managed when utilizing the McCune-Reischauer system.

### Section 5: The Grammar of the *Idu* Script

Following the previous section on the basic elements of *Idu*, this section examines *Idu* vocabulary. Generally, *Idu* vocabulary is categorized into native Korean nouns—such as *pun'git* (分衿; distribution of assets) and *tyegim* (題音/題辭; administrative verdicts)—and functional morphemes, including grammatical suffixes and particles. To maintain a concise curriculum, I suggest explaining specific nouns individually in the footnotes of the illustrative texts in the final section. This allows the current section to focus exclusively on a systematic explanation of *Idu* grammar.

The *Idu Sajŏn* (*Idu* Dictionary), published by the Academy of Asian Studies at Dankook University, is a foundational reference for the study of *Idu* grammar. As the most recent and comprehensive compilation of *Idu* vocabulary, it boasts the largest collection of entries to date. The dictionary systematically documents *Hangeul* transcriptions and real-world usage from a vast array of historical sources—including *Yusŏp'ilji* (儒胥必知), the representative *Idu* manual of the late Chosŏn period—and provides rigorous grammatical analysis. Furthermore, the appendix includes lexical statistics derived from these extensive example texts. A new textbook chapter on ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature should ideally prioritize *Idu* terms based on their frequency of use, making the statistics in *Idu Sajŏn* an essential resource. The following example illustrates the dictionary’s method for explaining entries.

爲去乙 ㅎ거늘 (\*entry)  
 (이) 하거늘 <朝鮮, 集成>, 한거을 <集成>, ㅎ거늘 <羅麗, 物譜, 儒必, 吏文, 吏便>, ㅎ거를 <吏師>, ㅎ건을 <經禱> (\**Idu* form)  
 (현) 하거늘. (\*modern transcription)  
 (형) 爲/동사+去/보조어간+(ㄴ/동명사어미)+乙/연결어미(\*grammatical structure)  
 (용) 向前 寺段 殘爲甚 接人 不得是如 爲去乙 禪師中延 奏請造排 教第中 僧矣 身乙 寺以主 差備 教等 用良 成造 始終 次知 排置爲遣 <1198年 長城 監務官貼文> ... (\*example in texts)

The ‘(형)’ (morphology) section of the *Idu Sajŏn* is particularly noteworthy for its analysis of grammatical structures. However, because the dictionary is organized alphabetically by *Hangeul*, it requires prior knowledge of *Idu* pronunciation to locate specific entries. To make *Idu* elements—such as pronunciation, structure, and meaning—more accessible to college-level learners, I suggest a different organizational approach for the new textbook. Vocabulary should be categorized by ‘head characters’ (root characters), with all derived forms listed alphabetically within each category. For example, the *Idu* term ‘爲去乙’ would be placed under the head character ‘爲’ (to do/be). This structure is illustrated below.

Head Character	Idu Term	Pronunciation	Grammatical Structure	Meaning
爲	爲	하 [ha] 하고 [hago]	爲 Verb	To do
	爲有臥乎所	하잇누온<오+ㄴ>마 [ha/it/nu/on<o+n> /pa] [Hainnuonba]	爲 Verb +有 Verb +臥 Auxiliary stem +乎 Auxiliary stem) (+ㄴ Verbal noun suffix) +所 Bound noun	What has been done
	爲遣	하고 [ha/ko] [hago]	爲 Verb +遣 Connective ending	After doing
	爲去乙	하거늘<ㄴ+을> [Ha/kö/nül<n+ül> [Hagönül]	爲 Verb +去 Auxiliary stem (+ㄴ Verbal noun suffix) +乙 Connective ending	Even though
	...	...	...	...

As illustrated above, terms are organized alphabetically based on the character immediately following the head character. This arrangement is more user-friendly for look-ups than a system categorized by grammatical inflection. To address the pronunciation issues discussed in the previous section, both element-level and word-level transcriptions are provided; however, element-level pronunciation serves as the primary criterion for alphabetical order. The morphological analysis is based on the *Idu Sajön*, followed by a final explanation of the term's meaning. As the character '爲' is a foundational *Idu* verb with numerous significant derived forms, such high-frequency terms should be prioritized when selecting representative vocabulary for the curriculum.

#### Section 6: Documents, Literary Works, and *Idu* in Daily Life

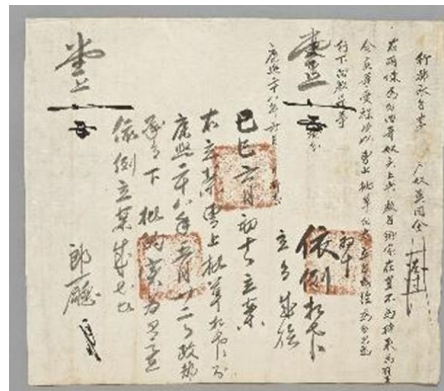
The final section synthesizes previous lessons by allowing students to examine the application of *Idu* in primary sources. It features documents—the primary domain of the script—as well as Chosön-era fables that were specifically designed as pedagogical tools to teach complex administrative formats in a more engaging manner.

The Academy of Korean Studies categorizes historical documents into several types: *Kyoryöng-ryu* 教令類 “Royal Edicts”, *Soch'a-kyejang-ryu* 疏筭啓狀類

“Appeals and Reports”, *Ch’ŏpkwan-t’ongbo-ryu* 牒關通報類 “Administrative Communications”, *Myŏngmun-mun’gi-ryu* 明文文記類 “Contracts and Deeds”, *Sŏgan-t’onggo-ryu* 書簡通告類 “Letters and Notices”, *Ch’ibu-kirok-ryu* 置簿記錄類 “Ledgers and Records”, and *Simun-ryu* 詩文類 “Poetry and Prose”. More broadly, these can be divided into official documents—those concerning the sovereign or state administration—and private documents involving individuals, households, local communities, and educational institutions. As it is impossible to introduce the entire range of these documents within the curriculum, it is more effective to select one representative form from both the official and private categories to illustrate the daily lives of pre-modern Koreans.

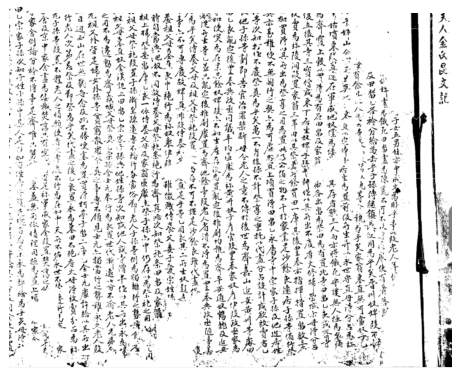
Regarding official documents, many forms—including edicts and diplomatic correspondence—were written in classical Sinographic literature. *Idu*-based documents such as *Komok* 告目 “reports” often consist of strictly formulaic and technical content, which can be too dry for a college curriculum. In contrast, *Soji* 所志 “petitions”, also known as *Palgwal* 白活 document legal disputes between people and administrative offices’ responds to them. These petitions provide a rich historical context and demonstrate the extensive use of the *Idu* script.

The image on the right is the “Yi Tammyŏng soji,” held by the Seoul Museum of History. Dated to approximately 1690, this *Soji* was submitted to the *Ijo* 吏曹 “Ministry of Personnel” by a *Hono* 戶奴 “head servant” named *Maktongsoe* 莫同金 on behalf of his master, Yi Tammyŏng 李聃命 “1646–1701”. According to the text, Yi had left his certificate of appointment for the position of *Tosŭngji* 都承旨 “Chief Royal Secretary” in his hometown; the petition thus requests that the Ministry verify the official court registers and authorize his salary based on those records. In response, the Ministry’s *Ipchi* 立旨 “a simplified authentication” was inscribed on the left side of the document to confirm the request. Although brief, the document clearly illustrates the structural formats of both *Soji* and *Ipchi*, demonstrating the administrative procedures of late 17th-century government offices. Most significantly, it highlights the role of the *Hono*, proving that *Nobi* 奴婢 in the Chosŏn dynasty possessed certain legal rights and that some were proficient in the *Idu* script. Finally, it



“Yi Tammyŏng soji”

Image by the Seoul Museum of History



exemplifies the ‘multiglossia’ of Chosŏn society, where Sinograph, *Hangeul*, and *Idu* coexisted across various social strata.

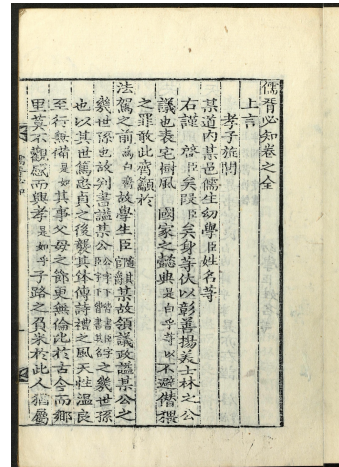
Regarding private documents, possible candidates for the curriculum include *Myŏngmun* 明文 “contracts for land and *Nobi* transactions” or *Punjaegi* 分財記 “inheritance records”, both of which illustrate the economic activities of the era. The image on the right is a *Punjaegi*—designated as Treasure No. 460-2—held by the Sŏae Head House in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hahoe Village. It was drafted in 1594 by Lady Kim of Andong (titled “Chŏnggyŏngbuin”; the upper first rank) to notarize the distribution of property among her five children. Her second son was Ryu Sŏngnyong 柳成龍(1542–1607), the Prime Minister during the Imjin War. The insights this *Punjaegi* provides into the domestic economy of a prominent family, the mid-Chosŏn custom of equal inheritance for sons and daughters, and the economic devastation caused by the war make it a particularly compelling document. However, as the original has sustained damage over time, any textual omissions must be carefully reconstructed if it is to be featured in a textbook.

In addition to the primary documents discussed above, it would be effective to present entries from the manual *Yusŏp'ilji* to allow for a comparison with the standardized formats of such documents. Published in the late 19th century, *Yusŏp'ilji* illustrates the regulated administrative styles of the late-Chosŏn period, making it an excellent secondary reference for the curriculum.

Although their exact number remains unknown, fictional documents featuring animal protagonists were likely composed for various occasions. The National Library of Korea holds a manuscript titled *Yoram* 要覽, which contains fictionalized documents such as *PiMyogŭmSoji* 婢猫今所志 “The Petition of the Maidservant Cat”. The manuscript in my personal collection features insects and animals in similar roles. While these documents possess the characteristics of fables, they lack a full-scale narrative structure. In contrast, *Wasaogan* 蛙蛇獄案 “The Case of the Frog and the Snake”—widely regarded as the only full-length *Idu* work of fiction—boasts a complete narrative. In this story, a frog accuses a snake of murdering his son (a tadpole), leading to a formal investigation, an autopsy, and a trial. As the plot unfolds, the text presents *Idu* documents that strictly follow real-world administrative formats. Such fictional works were likely composed by those proficient in the *Idu* script,

“Chŏnggyŏngbuin kimssi konmun'gi  
貞敬夫人金氏昆文記”

Image by Academy of Korean Studies



The front page of *Yusŏp'ilji*

Image by Kyujanggak  
Institute for Korean Studies

serving both as entertainment and as a practical means of pedagogical practice.<sup>20</sup>

Utilizing “Wasaogan” as an illustrative text for a new textbook on ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature offers several distinct advantages. The work provides a thorough narration of the Chosŏn administrative process in a murder case—from the initial accusation to the final verdict—while integrating authentic document formats into an engaging narrative.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, it highlights the unique characteristics of a work that blurs the boundary between law and literature.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, “Wasaogan” is already recognized in Western academia; although a complete English translation has yet to be published, existing research papers containing partial translations can serve as a valuable reference for the new curriculum.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

The history of translating and teaching Sinographic literature in the English-speaking world has largely developed in tandem with the history of Sinology. Consequently, most widely used textbooks in the field are currently centered on the Chinese classics. Conversely, Sino-Korean literature has long been underrepresented in the classroom. Encouragingly, however, global interest in Korean culture has surged in recent years. Given this shift, the plan to compile a textbook on “Sino-Korean Literature” for university learners in the English-speaking world is highly timely, as it addresses the growing demand for more profound insights into Korean heritage. Furthermore, this initiative will serve as a foundation for expanding the scope of Korean Studies within the global academia.

This new textbook must distinguish itself from existing resources by highlighting the historical particularities of Sino-Korean literature. ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature—a system designed to bridge the gap between literary Chinese and the spoken Korean language—represents a unique development found only within the Korean tradition. This paper outlined a curriculum consisting of two parts and six sections, designed to provide a systematic and efficient framework for teaching this distinctive writing style.

<sup>20</sup> One study summarizes the existing scholarship on the authorship of “Wasaogan” and identifies Mok T'aerim 睦台林(1782–1840) as the probable author. Jeung Sun hee, “Wasaogan chakchago: moks'aerimgwa kwallyŏnhayŏ,” *The Research of the Korean Classic* 6 (2000): 217-241.

<sup>21</sup> Ross King, “Idu in and as Korean Literature,” *The Routledge Companion to Korean Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 136-137.

<sup>22</sup> Sohyeon Park, “A Court Case of Frog and Snake: Rereading Korean Court-Case Fiction from the Law and Literature Perspective,” *Korea Journal* 59 (2019): 63.

<sup>23</sup> Sohyeon Park, “A Court Case of Frog and Snake: Rereading Korean Court-Case Fiction from the Law and Literature Perspective,” *Korea Journal* 59 (2019): 61-85.

## Part I: Context

Section 1: Motivations for transcribing the Korean language via Sinographs and characteristics of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature

Section 2: The historical development of ‘Korean-style’ writing systems

Section 3: The Significance of the *Idu* Script Within the ‘Korean-style’ Writing Tradition

## Part II: Grammar

Section 4: Core Elements of the *Idu* Script

Section 5: *Idu* Grammar and Syntax

Section 6: Practical Applications of *Idu* in Chosŏn

In ‘Part I’, the curriculum defines “Korean-style” Sinographic literature within the historical context of Korean literature and establishes the scope of instruction.

‘Section 1’ serves as the introduction to the curriculum, clarifying the linguistic necessities that led to the development of ‘Korean-style’ Sinographic literature. To this end, it presents three primary rationales: first, the need to transcribe native Korean vocabulary; second, the requirement to denote the grammatical inflections of Korean as an agglutinative language; and third, the necessity of reconfiguring the word order from the SVO structure of Chinese to the SOV structure of Korean. It is suggested that referencing historical texts such as *Taemyŏngnyul chik'ae* will be highly effective as supplementary material.

‘Section 2’ utilizes a timeline to visualize the evolution and eventual decline of various writing systems—including primitive word-order rearrangement, *Hyangch'al*, *Kugyŏl*, and *Idu*—while explaining the unique characteristics of each.

‘Section 3’ acts as a bridge to formal grammatical instruction by providing clear justification for why, among the various systems, *Idu* is selected as the primary subject of learning. This section explains why *Hyangch'al* and *Kugyŏl* are less suitable for this curriculum. Simultaneously, it emphasizes *Idu*’s crucial role in Korean literary history by highlighting the historical context in which diverse social strata of Chosŏn society utilized *Idu* in their daily lives, forming a ‘multiglossia’ system.

Building on the background knowledge established in ‘Part I,’ ‘Part II’ explains the grammatical elements of *Idu* and examines its practical application through representative texts.

‘Section 4’ introduces the phonetic and semantic usage of the basic Sinographs that comprise *Idu*, along with their methods of composition. This section identifies high-frequency characters and seeks to establish a standardized English transcription system based on pronunciation.

‘Section 5’ systematically presents *Idu* vocabulary used to denote grammatical inflections. While drawing on the morphological analysis and definitions provided in the *Idu Sajŏn*, this section adopts an organizational structure suited to Western

indexing conventions. Specifically, terms are categorized by their 'head characters'— which carry the core meaning— and are arranged alphabetically according to their pronunciation.

'Section 6' utilizes actual *Idu* texts as illustrative examples to verify the practical usage of the vocabulary studied in 'Section 5.' For this purpose, three categories of representative texts are selected: official documents, private documents, and fiction. This paper proposes the following examples: the "Yi Tammyōng Soji," which proves that *Idu* was used extensively across all social strata, including the *Nobi*; the "Chōnggyōngbuin kimssi konmun'gi," which illustrates the domestic economy of the mid-Chosŏn period; and "Wasaogan," a representative *Idu* fable fiction.

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