

## Being Korean in Buton? The Cia-Cia's Adoption of the Korean Alphabet and Identity Politics in Decentralised Indonesia

SEUNG-WON SONG

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin, South Korea  
swsong@hotmail.com

**Abstract.** This study<sup>1</sup> investigates the motives behind the adoption of *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet, by the Cia-Cia ethnic group in Baubau, Sulawesi, Indonesia. The import of *Hangeul* exemplifies how Indonesian peripheries have tried to form their own regions as distinctive entities against the nation. Their attempts to do so expand beyond the nation in hopes of emerging as new centres in a decentralised Indonesia, in which new power dynamics can be negotiated. Furthermore, this case portrays how the local population copes with growing ethnic identities and the mission of modernisation simultaneously.

**Keywords and phrases:** *Hangeul* in Buton, Cia-Cia ethnic group, Indonesia's identity politics

### Introduction

In August 2009, Amirul Tamim, the Mayor (2003–2012) of Baubau City on Buton Island, located in the south-eastern part of Sulawesi, announced that the Cia-Cia ethnic group in the region had just adopted *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet, as a transcription tool for its ethnic language. This ethnic group, with a population of approximately 60,000, lives primarily in the Buton district and the nearby islands; however, one-third of the ethnic group now resides in Baubau.<sup>2</sup> This export of *Hangeul* was initiated by the Hunmin Jeongeum Society,<sup>3</sup> a scholarly association consisting of several linguists in Korea. For the past decade, this association has attempted to export *Hangeul* to a number of remote areas in countries such as China, Nepal and Thailand. Since July 2009, three elementary schools in the Sorawolio and Bugi sub-districts, which are the major residential areas of the Cia-Cia community in Baubau, began to teach students in 4th grade and above the Cia-Cia language with the *Hangeul* script, helping approximately 300 students learn to read *Hangeul*. In addition, the street signs in this area are now written in both Roman and Korean characters.

This adoption of *Hangeul* broke some records in Indonesia and Korea in terms of their respective writing traditions. Since its creation in 1443, the *Hangeul* script had only been used in the Korean language, establishing this exportation as the first case in the language's history. In the case of Indonesia, certain Indonesian kingdoms in the classical age borrowed parts of the Indian and Arabic alphabets to write their own languages. In the beginning of the 20th century, nationalists in

Indonesia adopted the Roman alphabet for *bahasa Indonesia* (the national language). The successive adoption of these scripts was the result of the age-old connections between these regions resulting from, for example, trade, religious networks, immigration and colonial control. In this regard, the import of *Hangeul* is unusual because Baubau and Korea did not have any contact whatsoever prior to this case.

Furthermore, the adoption of *Hangeul* is the first break with the language policy of the previous New Order regime under President Suharto (1966–1998), whose primary goal was national unity through centralisation. Together with *Pancasila*, the state ideology, which placed national unity as the highest value in Indonesian society, *bahasa Indonesia* was emphasised as the chief medium for bringing diverse ethnic and religious groups into the nation-state and the symbol of nationalism. This specific emphasis does not mean, however, that hundreds of regional languages were swallowed up by the national language. Although institutional support was lacking for the development of these languages, many local languages have also thrived as the key media sustaining ethnicities. However, under the New Order's atmosphere in which ethnicity was depoliticised and anything related to ethnicity was forced to remain as only a cultural element, it was unlikely for a region to adopt a foreign alphabet without any sanctions from the centre during this time period.

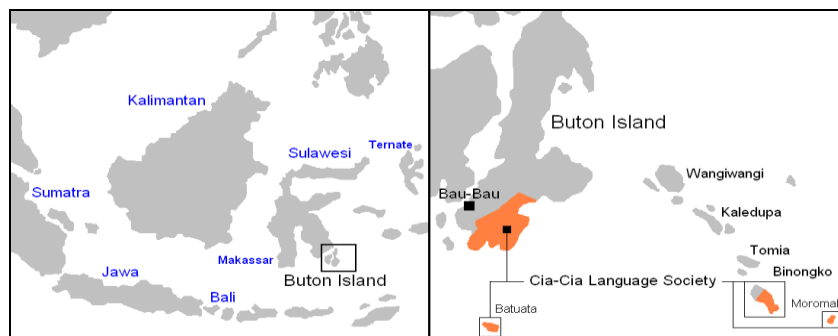
This paper aims to increase understanding of the dynamics behind the adoption as well as the internal requirements for the adoption of *Hangeul* in Baubau city. The *Hangeul* project was devised by the local elite in Baubau as a means to fulfil more essential political and economic goals. This study has significance because the *Hangeul* project is not merely an accident of history but rather a prism through which observers can understand the societal changes taking place in the peripheral regions of Indonesia in the decentralised post-Suharto period. In particular, the study reveals how the relationship between the central and local regions has experienced rapid changes and how these peripheral regions have developed survival methods during this period.

Several questions will be addressed. First, under what socio-political context was *Hangeul* imported? Second, who were the main forces behind its adoption? Third, what eventual goals do the officials in Baubau city hope to achieve in adopting the *Hangeul* script? Fourth, how did the people of Baubau, especially the Cia-Cia community, react to this project? Finally, what are the implications for current regional politics in Indonesia?

### A Brief Introduction to Baubau City and the *Hangeul* Project

Near the end of the 13th to the early 14th century, the Malays from Johor on the Malay Peninsula and the Chinese began to settle in Buton.<sup>4</sup> They formed four villages known as Patalimbona, which were later extended to nine villages called Siolimbona. With its 6th ruler's adoption of Islam in 1491, Siolimbona became the Buton Sultanate. Buton (or Butung), in the traditional period, was also referred to as Wolio. This Sultanate lasted until 1960, 15 years after this region was integrated into the Indonesian republic in 1945. In 1950, the territory was turned into the Buton district, which was subjugated to Southeast Sulawesi Province (*Propinsi Sulawesi Tenggara*).<sup>5</sup>

Throughout history, Baubau maintained its central position in the region. It was the capital of the Buton Sultanate, the administrative centre of the Buton district and the provincial capital from 1960 to 1964 (Hamjah Pallaloi 2011, xxi). Later in 2001, with the revision of administrative districts, Baubau achieved its status as a city autonomous from the Buton district.



**Figure 1.** Location of Buton and the Cia-Cia spoken language area

In Baubau, there are six ethnic groups, namely, the Wolio, Cia-Cia, Muna, Suai, Kalisusu and Moronene, of which the two most dominant groups are the Wolio and the Cia-Cia. The major religion in this region has been a form of Islam that includes an amalgam of Shia and Sunni sects. In addition, the religion borrows facets of other religions and beliefs such as Hinduism, Buddhism and local animism (Schoorl 2003, 11–12). The most prominent feature of the city's cultural heritage is its natural, asphalt-made fortress that has three km long walls. During the Sultanate, this fortress divided the state territory into the inner and outer areas. The former functioned as the administrative centre, occupied mostly by the ruling classes and the latter, which was composed of 72 autonomous villages called *Kadie*, was occupied by the commoners and their ruling elites.

The Buton Sultanate gained prosperity during Europe's involvement in the Indian Ocean Trade in the 17th and 18th centuries as a transit port in the sea route connecting the west part of the archipelago to the Maluku islands (the Spice Islands). In 1613, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the officer of the *Verenigde Oost-indische Compagnie* (VOC, the Dutch East India Company), recorded his visit to Buton in a letter sent to Banten (place in Java, where there was a VOC trading post) and said that "this is a big *negeri* (state) with a sizable population. It has some good wood which satisfies our expectation" (Yusran Darmawan 2008a, 2). Coen saw Buton as a strategic area for dominating the sea route to Maluku. David Hughes defined the Butonese as one of the most wide-ranging of the six maritime ethnic groups (*suku*) in Indonesia, namely the Bajau, Makassar, Bugis, Butonese, Mandarese and Madurese (Hughes 1984, 152).

Unlike other fortresses found in Southeast Asia, which were constructed by European trading forces, the Baubau fortress was built by the local people to defend themselves against the expansionism of the nearby kingdoms of Gowa and Ternate. While the former was a constant threat, the relationship between Buton and Ternate fluctuated. When Gowa expanded its power over the eastern part of the region, Buton and Ternate cooperated to repel Gowa's attacks. When Gowa was silent, however, Buton was forced to yield to Ternate's demands for slaves or territories (Susanto Zuhdi 1999, 7–8). Eventually, in the 17th century, Buton became part of the military alliances of Bone (under the legendary hero Arung Palaka) and the VOC, both of which were the staunch enemies of Gowa. This alliance then defeated Gowa in 1669 (Schoorl 2008, 45–68). Following this victory, Buton enjoyed its status as an independent kingdom during the *Pax Netherlandica* until the 19th century (Schoorl 2008, 45). At the same time, however, Buton had to contend with the VOC's demands in unequal treaties. In 1906, with the Asyikin-Brugman Treaty, which was signed between Sultan Asyikin and the Dutch Resident, Brugman, Buton became a Dutch colony (La Ode Rabani 2010, 43). Until the formation of the Republic of Indonesia, Buton remained under Dutch authority. Following a suggestion from Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, who visited numerous regions in Indonesia and persuaded local leaders to become integrated into the Indonesian Republic, Sultan Muhammad Falihi (r. 1938–1960) decided to merge the region into the republic, which resulted in the abolition of the Sultanate in 1960.

Unlike other regions, such as Makassar, Ambon, or Ternate, Baubau remained remote and unknown to most Indonesians during the New Order era. In the absence of any major industries aside from natural asphalt, nickel mines and the export of *trepan* (sea cucumber), the region remained marginal and seriously underdeveloped. Until now, cargo ships regularly delivered most of the indispensable industrial products from Surabaya or Makassar. The once-

prosperous region and hub of the spice trade during the Buton Sultanate was reduced to a poor area, with employment restricted to farming and fishing.

With the achievement of autonomous status, however, the Baubau officials began to make serious efforts to develop the region in various ways. It was at this juncture that the *Hangeul* project began, with the inauguration of the 9th International Symposium of Manuscripts (*Simposium Internasional Pernaskahan ke-9*) on 5–8 August 2005, which was the first international event in the contemporary history of Baubau. The participants included Chun Tai-Hyun, a Malaysian language specialist and the then-Deputy Chair of the Hunmin Jeongeum Society of Korea. During his city tour after the symposium, this specialist joked to mayor Tamim that a local language that he had heard reminded him of Korean. Tamim explained that it was the Cia-Cia language, which was on the verge of extinction because it did not have a writing system. Chun Tai-Hyun suggested that the *Hangeul* script could be used as the writing tool for the dying Cia-Cia language which Mayor Tamim responded positively.

Concerns over the disappearance of local languages have been raised in many countries and it is in this context that some Korean linguists, since the 1990s, have been trying to export *Hangeul* to ethnic groups such as the Lahu in the border area of Thailand and Myanmar, the Oroquen and the Luoba, the Evenks in China and some other groups in remote areas of Nepal. The aim was to preserve local languages by adopting the *Hangeul* script. In 2007, these linguists organised the Hunmin Jeongeum Society, whose mission statement is as follows:

Writing systems have been central to the transmission and development of human cultures. Hunmin Jeongeum, or *Hangeul*, has been recognised as a truly creative, highly scientific writing system by the international linguistics community. It was invented in the spirit of love and compassion for humanity by King Sejong in the 15th century.<sup>6</sup> Continuing in the original spirit of the invention of the Korean alphabet, we hereby launch the Hunmin Jeongeum Society. We will undertake various activities in support of research on Hunmin Jeongeum and other writing systems and reach out to illiterate people to help them adopt a writing system appropriate to their own language. The Hunmin Jeongeum Society has two major objectives: Firstly, the society will stimulate worldwide research on human writing systems including Hunmin Jeongeum. Secondly, the society will make every effort to accelerate the study of endangered languages lacking an alphabet and to offer their native speakers a writing system that is tailored to the needs of their languages. In this new

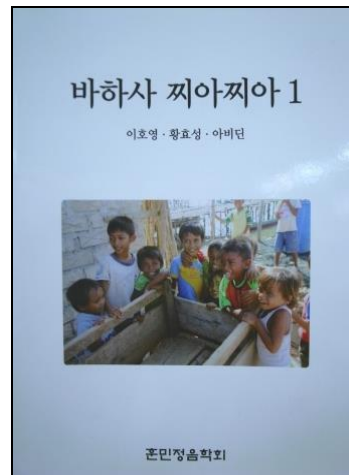
century, on the well-laid foundation of past research, the Hunmin Jeongeum Society will strive to share the cultural heritage of Korea with the world and to make a greater contribution to the development of linguistics through promotion of the study of the world's many languages and writing systems.<sup>7</sup>

However, all of the projects launched by the Hunmin Jeongeum Society prior to the case of the Cia-Cia group have failed, often due to the indifference of local authorities. In China, the Northeast China Project, which was an attempt to claim the histories of the early Korean kingdoms of Gojoseon, Koguryo and Balhae, in the national history of China, stalemated the project (Yonhap News, 6 August 2009).

In August 2008, the representatives of the Hunmin Jeongeum Society, including Chun Tai-Hyun and Lee Ho-Young, the then-chair of the organisation, visited Baubau. During their visit, they reached an agreement with mayor Tamim and the representatives of the two sub-groups of the Cia-Cia community regarding the utilisation of *Hangeul* in Baubau as well as the training of several Hangeul teachers. This oral agreement was later signed on 29 September 2010. Based on this agreement, Lee invited two English teachers from the Cia-Cia communities in Baubau to Seoul<sup>8</sup> in December 2008 and developed a *Hangeul* transcription system for the Cia-Cia language and created a teaching manual entitled *Bahasa Cia-Cia I*.



**Figure 2.** A street sign transcribed in the Roman and Korean alphabets



**Figure 3.** Teaching manual *Bahasa Cia-Cia I*

After six months, Lee Ho-Young and his colleague returned to Baubau. He read aloud the Cia-Cia language from the *Hangeul* script in front of the Cia-Cia leaders. They were impressed to hear the words of the Cia-Cia language being almost correctly delivered in *Hangeul*, without the loss of meaning. Then, the Cia-Cia began their studies in *Hangeul* in an elementary school in the Sorawolio area.

As was previously discussed, the official reason provided by the Hunmin Jeongeum Society and Baubau City for the adoption of *Hangeul* was the "mission" to rescue the language from the precipice of extinction by providing a writing tool. Nevertheless, it is too simple to conclude that illiteracy was the only cause of the language's near extinction. Other reasons included the dominant economic and cultural influences of the nation state. Generally speaking, the loss of ethnic languages can be attributed to any combination of the various external pressures of differential economic power, military takeover, globalisation, cultural expansion, differential food resources, immigration or religious conversion within a nation state. In such new conditions, small-scale societies are not able to depend on their traditional ways of living but are instead forced to adopt certain cultural elements of the mainstream ethnic group for survival. Accordingly, members of such societies have also had to learn official languages. Inevitably, they endure a transitional period of bilingualism, which, in most cases, does not last long and the ethnic languages soon become extinct.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, in the case of Indonesia, the monolingual policy and especially the new curriculum introduced in 1975, which suspended the instruction of local languages, accelerated the extinction of local languages (Chun 2010, 185). Although local language education was revived in 1989, the Indonesian Ministry

of Education also passed a law that enhanced English language classes. Consequently, local language education began to decline once more.

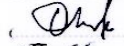
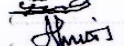


MUSYAWARAH KELUARGA BESAR MASYARAKAT ADAT CIA CIA LAPORO DAN CIA CIA KAISABU KECAMATAN SORAWOLIO KOTA BAU BAU		
BERITA ACARA		
PERSETUJUAN PENGGUNAAN AKSARA HANGUL DALAM BAHASA CIA CIA LAPORO DAN CIA CIA KAISABU KECAMATAN SORAWOLIO		
<p>Pada hari ini, <i>Rabu</i> tanggal <i>Dua Puluh Sembilan</i> Bulan <i>September</i> Tahun <i>Dua Ribu Sepuluh</i> bertempat di Baruga Kelurahan Bugi, Kecamatan Sorawolio, Kota Bau-Bau Kami Keluarga Besar Masyarakat Adat Cia Cia Laporo dan Cia Cia Kaisabu Kecamatan Sorawolio bersepakat dan setuju untuk mengadaptasi AKSARA HANGUL untuk digunakan sebagai aksara dalam Bahasa Cia Cia Laporo dan Cia Cia Kaisabu di Kecamatan Sorawolio yang ditanda tangani oleh Tokoh Masyarakat Adat Cia-Cia Sorawolio dengan pertimbangan sebagai berikut</p>		
1	Bahwa Bahasa Cia Cia adalah bahasa lisan dan belum mempunyai aksara tersendiri sehingga dapat mengalami kepunahan sebagaimana bahasa-bahasa lokal lainnya,	
2	Bahwa Aksara Hangul dapat mendukung penulisan dan pelafalan dalam bahasa cia cia	
3	Bahwa untuk menjaga keaslian bahasa cia-cia agar terhindar dari pengaruh bahasa lain, maka bahasa cia-cia harus memiliki aksara tersendiri untuk dijadikan bahasa tulisan yang dapat dipelajari secara terus menerus dari generasi kegenerasi,	
4	Bahwa dengan adanya aksara dalam bahasa Cia Cia Laporo dan Cia Cia Kaisabu di Kecamatan Sorawolio, maka masyarakatnya dapat membukukan bahasa-bahasa sastra, ceritera rakyat, sejarah dan budayanya,	
5	Bahwa dengan di adaptasinya Aksara Hangul dalam bahasa Cia Cia Laporo dan Cia Cia Kaisabu Kecamatan Sorawolio, maka Tata Bahasa Cia Cia akan dapat terpolo dan terformulasikan secara baik.	
<p>Demikian Berita acara ini dibuat dan ditanda tangani bersama pada tanggal, bulan dan tahun sebagaimana tersebut diatas</p>		
TOKOH ADAT MASYARAKAT CIA-CIA LAPORO DAN CIA CIA KAISABU KECAMATAN SORAWOLIO		
N A M A	J A B A T A N	T A N D A T A N G A N
1 LA WAHE	PARABELA KAISABU	
2 LA TOASI	PARABELA KARYA BARU	
3 LA AMILA	PARABELA BUGI	
4 LA PIARA	PARABELA GONDA BARU	

Figure 4. Written agreement in its original form

James Scott further suggested that illiteracy was a deliberate strategy for certain groups in society to avoid incorporation into states. In particular, the hill tribes living in the non-state spaces, which Scott referred to as *Zomia*, were mostly the "runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who [had], over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys – slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics and warfare" (Scott 2009, ix). According to Scott, these people avoided state intervention and thus the loss of literacy and of written texts is understood as a "more or less deliberate adaptation to statelessness" (Scott 2009, 24).

Nevertheless, under the mission of "saving the dying language from its eternal extinction", several official explanations have been provided by the Baubau



officials and Hunmin Jeongeum Society as to why the *Hangeul* script is suitable for this mission.<sup>10</sup> The first explanation is found in the effectiveness of *Hangeul* as the transcription tool. *Hangeul* is a phonetic symbol system composed of 24 letters (14 consonants and 10 vowels), which is easy to learn and transcribe. In addition, Baubau officials and the Hunmin Jeongeum Society argue that *Hangeul* is more appropriate than the Roman alphabet for transcribing Cia-Cia. Cia-Cia uses implosive /p/ and /t/ sounds, while *bahasa Indonesia* does not. Thus, if these words are transcribed using the Roman alphabet, they make plosive <p> or <t> sounds. For instance, the Cia-Cia word /popa/, written in Roman script as *popa*, is confusing to the Cia-Cia community because it can be read with either a plosive /p/ or an implosive /ɓ/. If we transcribe this word in *Hangeul*, /popa/ can be transcribed as **포파** and the implosive /p/ sounds correct (Chun 2010, 174).

However, there are also limitations to transcribing every pronunciation of Cia-Cia in *Hangeul*. To solve these problems and to be able to transcribe these particular pronunciations, Lee Ho-Young revived the old Korean characters that are not currently used. Examples of these characters include the /r/ and /l/ sounds. As *Hangeul* does not clearly distinguish between /r/ and /l/ sounds, transcribing these sounds can cause confusion. Accordingly, Lee suggested the utilisation of **ㄹ**, a defunct letter in the *Hangeul* alphabet, to transcribe /l/, while using the letter **ㄷ** to only represent the sound /r/. The utilisation of **ㄹ** (double **ㄷ**) however, caused another problem because current computer keyboards do not provide this letter. Accordingly, as a temporary solution, **ㄹ** is being transcribed in *Hangeul* with the addition of the script **을**, which is pronounced as /eul/. For instance, /lima/ is transcribed in *Hangeul* as **[을리마]**, which can be transcribed in Roman as [eul][li][ma] by pronouncing /eul/ very weakly. In another example, Lee and his colleagues revived the letter /ㄹ/ from the older *Hangeul* alphabet to represent the sound /v/, as there is no /v/ sound in the current Korean language.

A third explanation of the ease with which the *Hangeul* script was adopted is the phonetic system, which makes *Hangeul* convenient to use when working with computers. As one of the regional development plans proposed by Mayor Tamim was the creation of a "cyber city", the potential effectiveness of *Hangeul* as an electronic medium was regarded as highly beneficial.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these functional reasons, the positive image of Korea held by the Baubau people has also influenced their decision to adopt *Hangeul*. The first contributor to this image was *Hallyu*, the Korean wave, which landed in Baubau in the early 2000s. Originating from the popularisation of Korean dramas and pop music, *Hallyu* has resulted in a keen awareness and appreciation of Korean popular culture as well as Korea in general across much of Southeast Asia.

Another other important factor regarding the country's image is Korea's rapid economic growth. Korea has been regarded by many Southeast Asians as the model country in terms of economic development.

Nevertheless, all of these official explanations are somewhat superficial and they do not adequately explain several matters. First, the adoption of a foreign script does not easily match with local strategies in current Indonesian socio-political settings. One of the major characteristics apparent in the peripheral regions is the voluntary effort to enhance ethnic and regional identities and in this regard, Baubau is not exceptional. However, the adoption of a foreign writing system can be regarded as a weakening of the influence of regional or ethnic identities.

Second, as addressed earlier, the import of *Hangeul* can be considered by the Indonesian government and the public to be a challenge to the status of *bahasa Indonesia* (which is written with the Roman alphabet). *Bahasa Indonesia* as the symbol of the state goes back to the Dutch colonial period in the 19th century. In his collection of essays, Anthony Reid argued that the *Melayu* (Malays), which originally referred to the ruling elite in Melaka and "itself was of very mixed origins, undoubtedly including Chinese in the early part of the 15th century and coastal Javanese at its end" (Reid 2010, 86), was used by the colonial forces as the image of their newly acquired colonial territory. In addition to this ethnicity, Malay, as a useful auxiliary language for communication, was adopted as a second language by the Dutch in 1895. It was also the Dutch scholar C. A. van Ophuijsen who created the standardised Roman alphabet spelling system in 1901 (Lowenberg 2000, 138).

The emphasis on the Malay ethnicity and language was inherited by the Indonesian nationalists in a Youth Congress in 1928 (Lowenberg 2000, 137), when the youth groups from various ethnic, regional and religious backgrounds agreed on one language (*satu bahasa*), race/nation (*satu bangsa*) and nation (*satu negara*). Inheriting the Dutch tradition, the Malay identity and language became key aspects of the image of the Indonesian Republic, together with Islam and the Indonesian Revolution (Reid 2010, 25–26). Thus, for over a hundred years, *bahasa Indonesia* and its Roman alphabet have been symbols of the political community, which is why there is sensitivity around issues regarding *bahasa Indonesia*.

Accordingly, when news of the Cia-Cia's adoption of *Hangeul* was publicised, the general response of the Indonesian government can be best described as anxiety over the possible breakdown of Indonesian national unity. This anxiety can be more specifically described as a concern over whether ethnic nationalism, which had been subdued with state nationalism in the past, was re-emerging and whether it would damage state nationalism in the future.

Indeed, right after the news of the Cia-Cia's adoption of *Hangeul* was released nationwide in Korea, Nicholas Dammen, the then-Indonesian ambassador to Korea, questioned the necessity of the utilisation of *Hangeul* and said that the Cia-Cia people could have used the Roman alphabet instead of *Hangeul*. He also added that this adoption of *Hangeul* could possibly arouse ethnic jealousy among other nearby ethnic groups if Korea's support for and interest in the Cia-Cia increased (The New York Times, 12 September 2009). Although the news about the Cia-Cia's adoption of *Hangeul* was not released by the major media in Indonesia, some bloggers who heard this news responded that it was ruining Indonesian nationalism.<sup>12</sup> This concern was shared by the Korean government, which was reluctant to support the project fully, although many Koreans expressed their great pride over *Hangeul* being used for another ethnic group and showed their willingness to support this initiative.<sup>13</sup> The Korean government was afraid that its support might ruin diplomatic relations with Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>

The importation of *Hangeul* by Baubau officials was thus a sensitive issue. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the perceived benefits outweighed any potential disadvantages. Baubau's desire to adopt *Hangeul* must have arisen from internal socio-political dynamics caused by the launch of the democracy and regional autonomy in the early 2000s.

### **Democracy and Regional Autonomy as the Background for the Adoption of *Hangeul***

During the New Order, the Indonesian government controlled the nation not only in administrative and economic spheres, but also in the cultural realm. In this highly centralised administration, it was simply unthinkable that an ethnic group or a city would be able to adopt a foreign script without any consultation with the central government. What enabled Baubau to proceed with the *Hangeul* project was the promulgation of democracy and regional autonomy, which fundamentally changed Indonesian society after the collapse of Suharto's rule.

After the monetary and political crisis of 1997 and 1998 and following the subsequent chaotic period of *Reformasi*, Indonesia entered a new era, which was characterised by democratisation, decentralisation and regional autonomy. At the beginning of the new era, it was expected that the changes would stimulate greater accountability and reinforce civil society (Aspinall and Fealy 2003, 1–14). However, there were also pessimistic opinions about the effects of democracy and decentralisation, which were depicted as a "negative transition from order to disorder" (Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, 1). Mostly, the concerns were focused on the rise of local powers, which could be unaccountable, unresponsive and unrepresentative, unlike what the supporters of democracy expected (Hadiz 2010, 1–12). A fundamental concern was over whether these

local powers would break the boundaries of the political community and the current ethnic balance.

Under such circumstances, regional autonomy began with the passing of a series of regional autonomy laws during the short presidential term of B. J. Habibie (May 1998–October 1999), who had replaced Suharto after his resignation. By guaranteeing freedom of the press and allowing the formation of political parties, Habibie set in motion a referendum in East Timor for independence and also allowed increased autonomy in Aceh to placate the vehement demands for separation from Indonesia. This action brought about similar demands for autonomous rights in other regions, which resulted in a nationwide call for decentralisation.

Decentralisation brought about changes in patterns of local leadership. Previously in the New Order regime, as a centralising strategy, local leadership was dominated by people from the centre. In many cases, active or retired military officers were appointed as regional governors, city mayors and leaders of rural districts in areas outside their hometowns. However, following the passage of Law 22/1999, local elites were no longer nominated in Jakarta but were directly elected by regional parliaments. This heightened regional autonomy aimed to bring "more accountability to the local levels and develop policies to reflect local interest" (Sakai, Banks and Walker 2009, 3–4).

The most remarkable aspect of the decentralisation process was *pemekaran*, which literally means "blossoming". *Pemekaran* is the practice in which the central government allows the division of provinces and districts into small administrative units when the regions themselves request it and it is only allowed if their demands are assessed to be reasonable and helpful to the local management. Due to *pemekaran*, numerous new autonomous provinces, districts and sub-districts have been created,<sup>15</sup> including Baubau. Given these new centre-regional relations, the few remaining responsibilities for the central government included "national defense and security, foreign policy, fiscal and monetary matters, macro-economic planning, natural resources, justice and religion" (Ray and Goodpaster 2003, 13). Meanwhile, regions had autonomy with respect to "public works, education and culture, health care, agriculture, transport, industry, trade, investments, environmental issues, cooperation, labour and land" (Ray and Goodpaster 2003, 13). Among these categories, the inclusion of "education and culture" in the realm of regional autonomy should be emphasised, as it signifies that there should be no official hindrance to Baubau's adoption of Hangeul as an aid for the preservation of local languages, being that it is a matter of education and culture.

However, as Nordholt and van Klinken have noted, decentralisation did not mean that Indonesia was becoming a so-called "night watch state", because a regional dependence on the central government was maintained. Nordholt and van Klinken argued that Law No. 25, which was passed together with Law No. 22, maintained a centralist character by allowing the central government to maintain its grip on the main sources of revenue in the regions. The main sources of income controlled by the central government were "namely 80% of the income tax, value added tax, import duties and export taxes and foreign aid, while it still controls a sizable number of government enterprises" (Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, 13). Nordholt and van Klinken further argued that the current regional autonomy was not centrifugal in character as it was in the 1950s, when various regional revolts and central factionalisation caused great chaos:

...behind the fervour of local identity movements lay not a desire to secede but rather to outdo rivals in loyalty to Jakarta, which was still the source of cash. Indeed Jakarta offered new provinces as perks to loyalist in the regions in order to outmanoeuvre the separatists (van Klinken 2006, 23–50, in Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, 20).

The local position, in this regard, answers the question of whether the adoption of *Hangeul* reflects a local reaction against centralism or the nation-state itself, which was resented by many outer islanders as only benefiting Java. Indeed, cases exist elsewhere in Southeast Asia in which a local region or an ethnic group has imported a foreign culture as a reaction against the central government. For instance, there has been a recent sharp decline in the practice of the Akha traditional religion. Many of the Akha people, who live in the remote highlands in Thailand, recently abandoned *zah*, their traditional religion, while accepting Christianity, which had been introduced decades ago but was neglected. Kammerer argued that the reason for this change in religion was that the economic lives of the Akha became increasingly difficult and they suffered from the financial burden of sustaining the worshipping ceremonies of their ancestors; thus, they finally recognised the need to adopt the Thai way of life (Kammerer 1990, 284). Kammerer went on to examine the reason that the Akha did not adopt Thai Buddhism after their traditional religion had disappeared. She argued that the Akha recognised a certain inequality between themselves and the Thais residing in the lower valley and as a reaction against mainstream Thai society, the Akha adopted a foreign religion (Kammerer 1990, 285). While adopting Christianity, the Akha continued to sustain the Akha language, traditional costume and patriarchal tradition, which meant that their adoption of a foreign religion did not necessarily mean the ruin of their ethnic identity.

As in the case of the Akha, the relationship between Baubau and the central Indonesian government has not been favourable, although this is not a unique case whatsoever, as can be observed in the histories of peripheral regions during the New Order era. Aside from Baubau being a collaborator of the VOC, which was considered to be an enemy of Indonesia by the nationalists,<sup>16</sup> there are multiple reasons why Buton was marginalised during the republic era. Initially, in the process of suggesting to the last Sultan that Buton be integrated into the republic, Sukarno promised that he would establish the Buton Province and that its border would be delineated according to the sphere of influence of the previous Buton Sultanate. However, this promise was never kept. Furthermore, in 1964, Baubau had to yield its central position in the Sulawesi Tenggara Province to Kendari, which was never economically or culturally superior to or more developed than Baubau (Riwanto Tirtosudarmo 2008, 344). A rumour circulated that a military officer originating from Kendari was involved in the process of switching the provincial capital and this incident is still remembered by the Butonese as the initial cause for the region's subsequent underdevelopment.<sup>17</sup>

A more fundamental reason for the backwardness of Buton in the Republic Order was related to the allegation that this region had been the stronghold of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI [Indonesian Communist Party]) in the 1960s. The nation-wide purging of alleged PKI members that lasted for several years began in Jakarta in the early hours of October 1, 1965, when six Indonesian Army generals and a lieutenant were murdered by a small group of conspirators in the army. Suharto accused the PKI of an attempted coup and soon mass killing began, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of alleged communists. Through this carnage, Suharto consolidated his control over the central state apparatus and eliminated his rivals, namely, Sukarno, the political Left, Sukarnoism and the social bases of Guided Democracy (Kammen and McGregor 2012, 3–11). Kammen and McGregor further argued that, from a broader perspective, this incidence was the "reorganisation of social forces and the reintegration of Indonesia into the capitalist world economy" which, thus, can be referred to as a counter-revolution (Kammen and McGregor 2012, 11).

In 1969, when suspicions against PKI members peaked in the South Sulawesi region, a rumour circulated that a Chinese ship containing weapons had landed in Sampolawa Bay in Buton on its way to Java. Suharto's army soon landed to investigate (Saleh Hanan 1999). The ship was never found, as the government later confirmed, but the army seized 40 officials, including the *Bupati* (District Head) of Buton, Muh Kashim. After being tortured, Kashim was brutally murdered, although the security authorities claimed that he committed suicide. After this incident, the Butonese suffered from various forms of enduring oppression (Yusran Darmawan 2008a, 29). Many Butonese, who were accused of being PKI members, were dismissed from their jobs and important administrative

positions were dominated by Suharto's military men who were mostly from Makassar or Medan (Yusran Darmawan 2008b, 215). In response to the oppression and the various sanctions, many Butonese emigrated to other regions and changed their Butonese names, i.e., to Javanese names, to avoid any discrimination due to their background.<sup>18</sup>

The New Order era was regarded by the Butonese as a lost chance for growth and ethnic identity. Most of the Butonese believed that the "false" accusations of some Butonese being PKI members were the result of the longstanding ethnic rivalry that had developed in the southern Sulawesi region, particularly with the Makassarese and Bugis. During the republic era, the Makassarese and Bugis began to emerge as strong forces in the region through their participation in the army. In particular, Makassar became an important army centre, with Navy and Air Force commands as well as the Regional Police command for South and Southeast Sulawesi (Burhan Djabier Magenda 1989, 685). However, few Butonese were involved in the Army. Many Butonese said that they felt the army was not their job, but a more fundamental reason for their non-participation was that they failed to compete with other ethnic groups for power in the army. The leadership at the military base in Buton was therefore dominated by the Makassarese and Bugis migrants under the control of the Military Regional Command (Kodam) Hasanuddin. Accordingly, without the backing of the army, the Butonese became an easy target for the PKI incident in 1969. Many Butonese argued that the PKI incident was engineered by some people from South Sulawesi who desired to control this region, particularly the natural asphalt mine in the region (Yusran Darmawan 2008b, 217). They also believed that the first Makassarese Bupati, Colonel Zainal Arifin Sugianto and his successors had intentionally stifled the development of the region and killed the culture and identity of Buton because of historical resentment regarding the earlier subjugation of Gowa.<sup>19</sup> In spite of this unfavourable history, however, it would be inappropriate to simply conclude that the adoption of *Hangeul* is an indirect expression of anti-government sentiment, because for Baubau, sustaining a good relationship with the centre is important, particularly in light of its continuing budgetary dependence. In addition, current regional politics, as discussed earlier, are not centrifugal in nature. Rather, the motive for importing the *Hangeul* script is related more to local economic and social issues, which will now be investigated.

### **The Mission of Regional *Pembangunan* and the Idea of Establishing the Buton Raya Province**

At the heart of Baubau's adoption of *Hangeul* was certainly the economic goal of developing the region. As Ariel Heryanto has noted, *pembangunan* was one keyword of the New Order and the other was *Pancasila* (Ariel Heryanto 1988, 1–

24). The New Order's concept of *pembangunan* can be defined as a state-led development project, based on the ideas of modernisation, secularism and national unity, which were represented by the ideal of *Pancasila*. *Pembangunan* not only referred to economic achievements, but covered virtually everything, including cultural values, as represented in the 6th Five-Year Development Plan (1994–1999), in which the idea of "culture" was broadened to include "values". According to this plan, "cultural endeavours" should support development, while foreign values that threaten development and national identity and unity should be rejected (Hooker 1999, 263). From this standpoint, *bahasa Indonesia* was a symbol not only of national unity but also of the strong agenda of *pembangunan*.

In the new era of regional autonomy, however, the meaning of *pembangunan* has been, for the first time in Indonesia's history, turned into something that is determined by the local people, even if it cannot be applied to all areas of life. The *Hangeul* project can be understood as part of local *pembangunan* project, revealing the goals and characteristics of the local people in Baubau. In this period of regional autonomy, the issue of survival has emerged as the primary concern for each individual region. However, not every region has been able to adopt such a successful approach. After becoming financially independent from central control to a significant degree, the economic gap between rich and poor regions has become 50 times as wide (Hofman 2003, 34; Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, 16). Economically less-tenable regions have inevitably become dependent on the central government again or have sometimes been compelled to ask to become subject to the previous province. In contrast, rich regions have broadened their opportunities for achieving active economic success.

These rich regions have often created transnational networks and sourced foreign partners and funds to attract foreign investment. These social modes were certainly not the norm during the New Order period, when people in the local regions were merely the recipients of national development projects. In this sense, it is undeniable that the *Hangeul* project was motivated by Baubau's economic interest in attracting Korean investment to the city with this cultural exchange. Baubau's officials have repeatedly expressed their desire to have closer relations with Korea, especially in terms of economic support.<sup>20</sup> For example, Baubau officials and officials from the Seoul city government have discussed the possibility of developing a resort on a small island, Makassar (Pulau Makassar), near the city. However, the plan has not come to fruition.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, there is another strategic reason for Baubau to develop an international network with Korea. More than positioning itself as an autonomous city, Baubau wants to take an extra step towards decentralisation within the *pemekaran* process: the new establishment of the Buton Raya Province (Propinsi Buton Raya), which would be equivocal to the previous concept of the Buton Province.



More importantly, Baubau wants to be nominated as the administrative centre of the new province. Thus, the Butonese want to develop their region in order to emerge as a hub in eastern Indonesia.<sup>22</sup>

To meet this goal, Baubau needs to appeal to the central government by demonstrating its successful management of the city as proof of its capability to successfully run the new province once it is created. Many new regions created through *pemekaran* have failed to run their regions successfully,<sup>23</sup> and since 2007, the central government has intensified the screening process and has restricted *pemekaran* applications.<sup>24</sup> Under these circumstances, the *Hangeul* Project has a deeper meaning for Baubau because it was the city's first international project since gaining autonomous status. Such international events are important to the central government when judging whether a region can successfully run itself autonomously. Indeed, many local areas are eager to hold international events and establish international relationships to keep their autonomous statuses and survive in the competition with other local areas.<sup>25</sup> At this point, it is also worth noting that some other regions, including Tana Toraja in the Central Sulawesi and Buton District, have also expressed their willingness to import *Hangeul* from the members of the Hunmin Jeongeum Society for apparently the same reasons as those of the Baubau elite.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, through the importation of *Hangeul*, the people of Baubau have indeed made some remarkable changes and have benefitted. First, the city of Baubau and the Cia-Cia ethnic group have made their names known not only to Koreans but also to the world press.<sup>27</sup> Second, this project has ignited the fervent nationalism of the Koreans, which has resulted in their intense interest in the Cia-Cia ethnic group. Many Korean companies, academic institutes and individuals have promised to provide economic benefits, including computers and books, to the Cia-Cia ethnic group. The Hunmin Jeongeum Society has promised Baubau officials to establish a Korean Centre. Third, Baubau has established numerous exchange programs and has signed Memorandums of Understanding with various institutions. For example, the Rural Development Administration in Korea has published a book on traditional agricultural methods used in Baubau, which was written in Indonesian, English and the *Hangeul*-transcribed Cia-Cia language.<sup>28</sup> The Seoul Metropolitan Government has invited several people from Baubau to teach them *Hangeul* annually for a period of one week to two months. In addition, the people of Baubau have been able to visit Korea through various invitations to academic and cultural events. Third, this network with Korea has generated new dreams for the people in Baubau that one day this cultural exchange will bring greater economic opportunities, such as working or studying in Korea. Such transnational networking could never have been imagined in Baubau prior to 2000. Thus, the socio-economic context was the most significant factor behind the adoption of *Hangeul*.

However, such economic determinism does not fully explain why the Baubau elite adopted *Hangeul*, especially because, at first glance, adopting *Hangeul* does not appear to fit in with the region's efforts to reconstruct its regional identity. In the next section, the relationship between modernity and regional identity as pertinent to the importation of *Hangeul* is examined.

### **Regional Identities and the Adoption of *Hangeul***

As in other regions in Indonesia, the apparent aim of *pembangunan* in Baubau appears to be the reconstruction of regional identities and the revival of local traditions. In general, these identities are, not surprisingly, based upon primordial ties, such as ancestry, religion and ethnicity. During the New Order era, the expression of such identities in the public domain was considered to be anti-Pancasilaistic; such expression was thus out of fear that it would possibly break up the nation. In the post-Suharto period, however, such identities have been freely expressed and, furthermore, have been politicised for the local benefit. In the case of Baubau, regional autonomy was certainly regarded as a vital chance for recovering regional and ethnic identities, which were once contained within the larger, southeastern Sulawesi identity.

In the processes of re-emergence, primordial identities often collided, for instance, between different ethnic groups or religious groups who live adjacently. Bloody ethnic and religious conflicts occurred in the regions of Poso, Ambon, Maluku and Kalimantan during the chaotic period right after Suharto's downfall.<sup>29</sup> However, in Baubau, while the regional identity is certainly growing, none of the conditions for ethnic or religious conflicts appear to be present. Here, the mix of religions is largely homogeneous, based on the Islamic beliefs of multiple ethnicities and it has not caused any serious societal schisms. Instead of ethnic or religious identities, the regional identity is based on ancestry and the memory of the historical Buton Sultanate. While they have been subjugated by the administrative division of the Republic, the Butonese have sustained a strong identity, which is distinguishable from other ethnic groups at the provincial level. This identity, which was suppressed during the New Order period, has been politicised by the shift in local power relations in the post-Suharto period. Moreover, this identity has been intentionally strengthened by the Butonese to "secure privileged access for their communities in the allocation of economic resources and government positions" (Eindhoven 2007, 69) with respect to other ethnic communities. The Butonese identity is also manifest in their strong desire to establish the Buton Raya Province.

To achieve such political goals, the Baubau elite has been eager to reconstruct the "glorious past" of the Buton Sultanate and to revive their *adat*, or traditional customs. *Adat* was once suppressed and de-politicised by the New Order regime

(Schefold 1998, 259–280), but in post-Suharto Indonesia, it emerged as the political tool with which to accomplish the political goals of ethnic groups in the regions (Eindhoven 2007, 69). For instance, in the name of *adat*, the Dayak in West Kalimantan renewed political and cultural self-recognition and consolidated their power against outsiders in the region. In the Mentawai Archipelago, the revival of *adat* became the tool with which the Mentawaians came to dominate the natural resources in the region, which were previously dominated by the Minankabauans (Eindhoven 2007, 69). In Bali, *adat* was used as a tool of resistance against the government's mega tourism, which was feared to bring reckless development in the region (Davidson and Henley 2007, 1).

The Baubau elite have also consolidated their efforts to revive *adat* and the memory of the Buton Sultanate. In 2006, as an organisation in charge of reviving *adat*, the traditional council of the Buton Sultanate, called *Majelis Sarana Wolio*, was established. The members of the council discussed the revival of the sultan and the traditional legislatures. Consequently, on 21 May 2011, an historic ceremony was held to inaugurate the sultan and the nine legislatures.<sup>30</sup> The other *adat* organisation member revealed that it had a plan to install the *adat* police, who would have a similar function to the *pecalang*, the traditional guards who maintain security and manage traffic flows during religious and customary ceremonies in Bali.<sup>31</sup>

It is notable that these elites, who have led the revival of Butonese identities, come mostly from the traditional aristocratic classes of the Sultanate. Traditionally, there were two aristocratic classes. The first class was the *Kaomu*, which was the class in charge of administration and also the class from which the sultans were chosen. The second group was the *Walaka*, which was in charge of legislation and the election of the sultans. The commoner class was known as the *Papara*, while slaves or bondsmen were referred to as the *Batua*.

In this caste system, it is interesting that the Wolio ethnic group generally formed the aristocratic classes (Rudyansjah 2008a, 106). In essence, the history of the Buton Sultanate was the history of the Wolio; in fact, this region was once called the Wolio State. The Wolio group was the ruling class of the Buton state as well as the people living "inside" the fortress. Some *Kaomu* and *Walaka* officials were sent to the autonomous *kadie* to administer the region and they sometimes married non-Wolio women, i.e., those from the Cia-Cia group, which resulted in the mixed blood of the *Kaomu* and *Walaka* groups. Mixed blood was not considered to be pure and thus people from these groups could not be elected as sultans. The Wolio language was used as the *lingua franca* in the region and was transcribed using the Arabic script and the orthography was called *Buri Wolio*.

The ruling elite lost their privilege as the controlling class in society when the Buton Sultanate was integrated into the republic. Nevertheless, during the republic era, the elites continued to sustain their inherited lands and comparatively good economic positions compared to other societal groups.<sup>32</sup> The elite class received a higher education in urban areas, such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta or Makassar and made strong connections with army officers in the local region and the capital. When Baubau became an autonomous region in the post-Suharto period, these traditional elites dominated administrative positions. In the local elections, no single candidate team emerged from the non-aristocratic class since local leadership positions were open to the local population in the post-Suharto era. Amirul Tamim himself was from the *Walaka* background and he teamed up with a person from the *Kaomu* class in the mayoral election of 2001. In 2010, the Regional Parliament of Baubau consisted of 25 members, 18 of whom had an aristocratic background, four who were from *Papara*, one who was a Chinese Indonesian and one who was Bugis. However, apparently, the small number of non-aristocratic members was controlled by the aristocracy as well. Throughout history up to the present, these aristocratic local elites have consolidated their power in society via various mechanisms, for instance, by keeping the strong tradition of aristocratic endogamy and by strengthening *adat*, through which the position of the aristocracy is privileged. In various *adat* ceremonies, aristocrats still sit in an area segregated from other members of the society.

At first glance, this revival of traditional identities led by the traditional elites seems to run against the adoption of *Hangeul*, which is a foreign cultural element. Nevertheless, the adoption of *Hangeul* did not seem to bother these elites for two apparent reasons. First, these elites were also the products of the New Order's education and *pembangunan* policies. While they consider their ancestry and tradition to be the centripetal force for regional development, they are simultaneously trying to embody the core of the national Indonesian middle class culture (Nordholt and van Klinken 2007, 29). For them, the current revival of traditional identities does not necessarily mean a simple return to the past. Rather, what the local communities are trying to do is not, to borrow the words of Smith, to "recreate the past in the present", but rather to use the past as an "inspiration and a means for renewing decayed or fragmented societies, so as to make them viable and confident in the face of the pressures of modernity" (Smith 2004, 204). In short, rather than reviving the past wholesale, current local areas are selecting some elements of their past while abandoning some other aspects if those elements are not needed to achieve their current political and economic goals.

A case in which the local elites intentionally revived a traditional element of society for the sake of others is found in Minako Sakai's study. Dealing with the social changes that occurred after the launch of the regional autonomy in the

Sumatran provincial capitals of Medan, Padang and Palembang, Sakai argued that in autonomous regions, local elites have particularly enhanced the Malay identity that is based upon Islamic identity – the identity of the dominant group in the past – to attract an investment from the Malay communities in Malaysia and Singapore (Sakai 2009, 63). These elites in Sumatra have sought a transnationally shared identity for the purpose of economic gain (Sakai, Banks and Walker 2009, 6). Sakai noted that anti-Javanese sentiment, especially resentment against state-led development during the New Order era, enhanced the expression of Malay identities in the region (Sakai 2009, 73). Specifically, Sumatra's efforts are an outcome of resentment towards the state's inefficiency in the attention it paid to local people and, in addition, of their resolution that their welfare, in the future, will be taken care of by themselves.

As in the case of Sumatra, the local elites in Baubau do not seek a simple return to a purely traditional past. They desire for the city to become cosmopolitan, like Seoul and Hong Kong, by establishing transnational networks as well as gaining investment from Korea. Accordingly, the *Hangeul* project can be regarded as an effort to import a foreign element to reconstruct the regional tradition, which is compatible with the political and economic goals of the elite group. This incident is also an implicit reaction against the Java-centric *pembangunan* and its emphasis on *bahasa Indonesia* and the Roman alphabet, if not a reaction against the Indonesian nation-state itself.

More importantly, the *Hangeul* project does not, in practice, touch the essential elements of the past, which are vital to reconstructing regional identities in the present. As discussed earlier, the most critical elements of the past are the memories of the Buton Sultanate, in which the Wolio ruling class assumed a central role. Notably, it was not the Wolio but the Cia-Cia who became the target of the Hangeul Project. More specifically, while the initiators of this project, namely, the mayor and most of his government officers, were the Wolio, the Cia-Cia have been the passive recipients of the project.

In traditional times, the Cia-Cia people were located at the margins of society. Their origin is not clearly known, but many people assume that their ancestors might have come from somewhere in China, as their faces resemble the Chinese, especially in that their eyes do not have double eyelids – one of the major characteristics of the Malay race. Their marginality is also observed in the lack of attention given to the existence or roles of the Cia-Cia in the history books on Buton. Although there was also a Cia-Cia aristocratic class, which was the product of mixed marriages with the Wolios who were sent to *Kadies*, the Cia-Cia usually belonged to the commoner class. This class was in charge of defence and lived outside the fortress, mainly in the hilly areas. In spite of their comparatively large population and that most of them are now living in the

lowlands due to the New Order's resettlement policy,<sup>33</sup> which enforced the mixing of the hill people with other ethnic groups in the lowlands in the 1970s, the Cia-Cia community continues to be recognised by other ethnic groups as "forgotten beings" or "the others", who are talented in the craft of black magic. The hill-residing Cia-Cia people, who come to the city to sell some mountain products, are particularly known for carrying mysterious white wood coolie racks, which can cause fatal itching to people who touch them. Outsiders believe that the Cia-Cia have special knowledge about how to cure the itching, which is secretly preserved amongst only them. The Cia-Cia are also well-known for their skills with cursed dolls. These practices are what Scott referred to as one of the weapons of the weak, which are designed to scare the dominant group (Scott 1985).

One reason that the Cia-Cia community has not had its own writing system is thus found in its marginalised social status in the past. In particular, as Scott noted, their position as outsiders to the central authority could be one of the reasons for their illiteracy. In the contemporary era, in the vortex of the regional misfortunes caused by the region's regression during the Suharto era, the Cia-Cia people experienced extreme poverty and naturally did not have any opportunity to send their children to formal schooling.<sup>34</sup> Most of the people living in the Sorawolio and Bugi sub-districts are illiterate and live without electricity. This poverty and illiteracy prevented the Cia-Cia from preserving their local languages by adopting a writing system. In an interview, one of the representatives of the Cia-Cia community said that they had never tried to transcribe their language into other scripts such as Arabic or Roman. However, one interviewee among the group revealed that he once found a cassette tape recording of the Cia-Cia's traditional song in the Roman alphabet. Yet, he could not pronounce the language properly as it seemed it was randomly transcribed by someone without expertise in transcription. Thus, there were no official or systematic efforts to transcribe the language into the Roman or any other alphabet. It appears that the marginality of the Cia-Cia in the greater society and its history was an important reason why the Wolio elites in Baubau accepted *Hangeul* easily without considering further aftereffects.

The Cia-Cia community clearly did not consider the adoption of *Hangeul* as a threat to their community identity. For the Cia-Cia people, the new utilisation of a script was considered to be a case of institutional support to preserve their history and culture, which had never been written down and, furthermore, to raise their socio-economic mobility with possible Korean support. In addition, as with the Akha case in Thailand, the utilisation of *Hangeul* was not considered to be a threat the ethnic identity, but rather as a springboard to revitalise their community. This community had never had a community organisation, but after adopting *Hangeul*, they established the Cia-Cia Community. The representative

of this community organisation has since revealed that he has received numerous calls from other Cia-Cia people living outside Baubau enquiring about the effectiveness of using *Hangeul*. Inspired by the sudden fame of the Cia-Cia, these people, who had not previously had a strong sense of ethnic affiliation, became consciously concerned with the issue of ethnicity.<sup>35</sup> *Hangeul* is enhancing the ethnic identity and homogeneity of the Cia-Cia community. They consider the utilisation of *Hangeul* to be one of their few paths to inclusion in the mainstream of society via the economic and cultural support that has been facilitated through networking with Korea and preserving their local language. In sum, the issue of *Hangeul* as a foreign element did not seem to bother the local elites because its import was considered to be a way of joining modernity without harming the vital traditional elements necessary for reconstructing the regional identity.

### Conclusion and Posthumous Analysis

In an investigation of the Baubau elite's adoption of *Hangeul*, this study has explored local political dynamics in the peripheral regions of Indonesia in the era of regional autonomy. Two motives for this adoption were identified. First, the *Hangeul* project is the first international network project of Baubau city, which was one of the *pembangunan* agendas pursued by the local aristocratic elites in the city. Such a project is important not only for ensuring economic survival, but also for proving to the central government that the elites are capable of running the autonomous area, including the future Buton Raya province. Thus, this is a transnational approach to *pembangunan*.

Second, this project also reflects the effect of the local *pembangunan* policy on Baubau. Unlike the New Order, which emphasised the integration of local areas into the nation state as the primary motto of *pembangunan*, the focus of Baubau's *pembangunan* is on its own direction and local identity. This project also reflects an implicit criticism of the central government's *pembangunan*, which was focused exclusively on Java and a desire for regional self-determination, particularly with regards to the language policy. The *Hangeul* project was accepted with relative ease in Baubau society for two reasons. First, the project was not directly related to the agenda of reconstructing regional identities as it did not concern the essential parts of history, i.e., the Woilo's cultural traditions. Second, the Cia-Cia people regarded this project as a chance to become integrated into mainstream society.

Although it has not yet been officially declared, the *Hangeul* project has almost been halted for the time being, without future promise of restarting. In spite of the strong demand in the Cia-Cia community, only one *Hangeul* teacher, who participated in the development of the teaching materials and two volunteer teachers, who learnt *Hangeul* from the original *Hangeul* teacher, taught *Hangeul*

at elementary schools in Sorawolio and Bugi. The first *Hangeul* teacher stopped teaching classes in Sorawolio in 2011 because the Baubau government did not give him any additional payment for his *Hangeul* instruction, which left only two volunteer teachers who were not professionally trained to teach *Hangeul*. It seems that the government was adamant that unless there was no significant economic benefit for Korea, it would not give any genuine systematic support to the *Hangeul* project. Furthermore, the mayorship of Tamim, who was the primary actor behind the adoption of *Hangeul*, is now over, which casts a shadow on the future of the *Hangeul* project.

Some internal conflicts in the Hunmin Jeongeum Society over dominance in the leading roles for this attractive project have deterred the project's expansion. The two initiators of the project, Chun Tai-Hyun and Lee Ho-Young, had to withdraw their membership from the association due to competition from others. In addition, in spite of all the early rosy promises of economic support from the Korean people, no major or institutional support has yet been received, except for the provision of some computers and some opportunities for certain people, particularly those who were loyal to the mayor, to visit Korea.

To revive the project, the Hunmin Jeongeum Society has attempted to gain the Korean government's support, but the government has been reluctant to give support partly due to its concern for possible damage to diplomatic relations with the Indonesian government. Instead, the Ministry of Culture in Korea agreed to allow one Korean university to install the Sejong Hakdang (Sejong Academic Institute) at the University of Muhammadiyah in Baubau. However, this institute, which has been installed in many other countries, teaches the Korean language rather than the alphabet of the Cia-Cia language. Accordingly, most of the students in the course were not from Cia-Cia communities. By the end of August 2012, as the one-year contract between Korean University and the Ministry of Culture in Korea had terminated, the Sejong Hakdang was shut down, mainly due to budgetary problems (Chosun Daily, 9 October 2012). Consequently, all of the rosy promises to establish the Korean Centre and other economic projects were dropped without further discussion.

Not only was the project unsuccessful in becoming firmly rooted institutionally, but it also did not receive national attention in Indonesia. Although the Indonesian government initially responded with sensitivity, it soon decided not to intervene in the matter, in part because Mayor Amirul Tamim met some bureaucrats in the central government and persuaded them that learning *Hangeul* was no different from learning English, Japanese, or Chinese. Furthermore, the small scale and recent stagnation of the project reduced any potential concern from the Indonesian government and the Indonesian public. Unlike the Korean media, which delivered the Cia-Cia's adoption of *Hangeul* as top news in 2009,



the news was not released in the Indonesian media and there was no discussion as to whether it deviated from the ideals of *Pancasila*.

However, it is not difficult to imagine that, if the *Hangeul* project had been successful and had been adopted by other ethnic groups in Indonesia, debate around it would undoubtedly grow in the Indonesian government and in Indonesian society in general. This debate would concern whether the utilisation of a foreign script should be allowed within the realm of regional autonomy or whether it should be dealt with as a special category outside the boundary of regional autonomy. This issue is comparable with some regions' demands for establishing the *shari'a* legal system after the downfall of Suharto, which caused intense debate over whether such an implementation was within the realm of regional autonomy or not. In this case, the hot debate emerged over the deviation from *Pancasila* as established by the New Order regime, which many Indonesians perceived to be an absolute value system. The local fervour to implement *shari'a* law has recently weakened, but this is a good example of differences between the centre and the Indonesian public over what degree of regional autonomy should be allowed. These differences are understandable in the on-going process of negotiation to determine the permissible range of regional autonomy

In all, the *Hangeul* project in Baubau reveals the diversity and creativity with which local areas respond to regional autonomy. The *Hangeul* project illustrates how regions have tried to form a distinctive entity against the nation – even beyond the nation – to emerge as a new centre in a decentralised Indonesia, in which new power dynamics can be negotiated.

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### Notes

1. For this study, field research was conducted in June and July of 2010 and in July of 2011. Numerous people, including the Mayor of Baubau, officials, local intellectuals and Cia-Cia representatives were interviewed, as well as Korean scholars and representatives of the Korean government.
2. The Cia-Cia language is also being used in nearby islands, such as Batatua, Binongko and Moromaho, as well as in Samarinda in the eastern part of Kalimantan.
3. Hunmin Jeongeum (訓民正音) refers to the original name of *Hangeul* when it was created in 1443. The website of Hunmin Jeongeum Society is <http://www.scripta.kr>.

4. The Butonese include ethnic groups on Buton island, the Tukang Besi islands (Wakatobi) and other small islands such as Makassar, Kadatua (Kadatuang), Talaga, Siompu, Kabaena, Batuatas and others. In addition, some people on the Island of Muna, i.e., the Gu, Lakudo and Mawasangka, also refer to themselves as Butonese (Hamjah Pallaloi 2011, xxvi).
5. For further information on the history of the Buton Sultanate, see Ligtvoet 1878, 1–112; La Ode Ichram 1996; Yusran Darmawan (ed.) 2009; Schoorl 2003; 2008; Rudyansjah 2008a; 2008b.
6. King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) of the Chosun Dynasty was the creator of *Hangeul*.
7. <http://www.scripta.kr/scripta2010/en/#>.
8. One of the teachers could not stand the rigorous winter in Korea and went back to Baubau. The other remained in Korea, learned the Korean alphabet and participated in developing the materials during his six-month stay at Seoul National University.
9. For further information about language extinction, see Crystal 2000.
10. Interview with Abidin, a *Hangeul* Teacher at Baubau, on 30 June 2010 in Baubau.
11. Interview with Amirul Tamim on 7 October 2010 in Seoul.
12. See, for instance, the blog of Islam. Visited on October 2009.
13. Koreans' enthusiasm for this issue was reflected in various ways. When the Cia-Cia community first visited Seoul in 2009, their arrival was greeted by a media frenzy and an appearance by Seoul's mayor. One of the visitors was a female student who had learnt *Hangeul*. She wrote her name and the words "Cia-Cia" on a metal plate in Korean and this has been on display in the Cia-Cia section of the Hunmin Jeongeum Museum in Seoul. Every newspaper article was accompanied by numerous opinions, which mostly welcomed the export of *Hangeul*. The Hunmin Jeongeum Society also received numerous calls from various institutes and individuals to help the Cia-Cia learn Korean. Interview with Chun Tai-Hyun, 12 October 2010 in Seoul.
14. Interview with a government officer at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Korea at the 2011 SIEAS International Conference of Research Cluster, 25 March 2011 at Sogang University, Korea.
15. As a result of this *pemekaran*, since 2001, the parliament has allowed for the formation of seven new provinces. The number of new districts and sub-districts increased from 366 to 568 in 2009 (source retrieved from the Statistics Bureau of Indonesia, <http://www.bps.go.id>).
16. The Baubau intellectuals assert that the Republic's dislike of the VOC-friendly regions resulted in the exclusion of the history of Buton from the National History of Indonesia.
17. Interview with Yusran Darmawan, government officer at Infokom (Information and Communication Division) in Baubau, 30 June 2010, Baubau.
18. For instance, the addition of the aristocratic titles La Ode to male names and Wa Ode to female names denotes their origins from Buton. Interview with La Mujur, an engineer and intellectual of Baubau, who had to leave Baubau to avoid various disadvantages during the New Order era, 6 July 2010, Baubau.
19. Interview with Arief Tasila, former history teacher and current Superintendent of Education in Baubau City, 29–30 June 2010, Baubau.
20. Interview with Ibnu Wahid, a Baubau government officer who is in charge of the Hangeul Project, 28 June 2010, Baubau. To understand Tamim's vision of regional development, see Amirul Tamim 2008, 149–164.
21. Interview with Lee In-Bae, the then-director of the division of Culture and Arts at Seoul City Hall, 13 July 2011, Seoul.
22. This plan in Buton Raya Province is now being screened by the parliament.
23. For more info, see Darmawan 2007.

24. Furthermore, by 2009, many analysts stated that the implementation of decentralisation reform and the creation of new regions failed to improve the welfare of local people, which led to Yudhoyono's recommendation for a moratorium on the creation of new regions (*Jakarta Post*, 24 February 2009).
25. Tamim's strategies to develop the region through various methods created a miracle. This small region, which was simply unknown to most Indonesians until the 2000s, was selected by *Tempo*, a prominent magazine, to be one of the "Nine Stars of the Autonomous Regions (Bintang-Bintang Otonomi Daerah)" in 2009. See *Tempo*, 17 August 2009.
26. Interview with Chun Tai-Hyun, 12 October 2010, Seoul.
27. See, for instance, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 September 2009 and *The New York Times*, 12 September 2009.
28. Interview with Kim Hwang-Yong, an employee at the Rural Development Administration, 29 June 2010, in Baubau.
29. See Wilson 2008.
30. This inauguration of traditional rulers faced internal criticisms voiced by a different political faction in the city. These opposing factions argued that the inauguration should be annulled because it did not follow the traditional system of electing a *sultan*. This opposing faction then formed a different *adat* organisation, called the *Lembaga Adat Buton*, which chose another person as the *sultan* on 25 May 2012.
31. Interview with a member of the *Lembaga Adat Buton* in Baubau, 8 July 2011, in Baubau.
32. For a general understanding of the lives of the aristocratic class in the peripheral regions of Indonesia, see Burhan Djabier Magenda 1989.
33. For more information on the New Order's resettlement policies, see Duncan 2004. Some may wonder whether the Cia-Cia group residing in hill areas before the 1970s was one of the *masyarakat terasing* (isolated tribes) that the Indonesian government tried to civilise and integrate into the state through various social engineering projects. Since the traditional era, this community has been an important element of the Buton Kingdom's social structure and current political units, in charge of regional defense and tax payers. Most of them were also *Islamised*, which is a government-defined criterion for "civilisation". Accordingly, while it is true that this community is marginal in terms of their customary and economic positions, they are different from the *masyarakat terasing*, who were subject to forced resettlement into the totally new socio-economic space in the lowlands.
34. Interview with Muhammad Yusni, one of the representatives of the Cia-Cia ethnic group and the founder of the Cia-Cia community, 5 July 2010, in Baubau.
35. Interview with Yusni, 30 June 2010, in Baubau.

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