

LITERATURE AS CULTURAL PEDAGOGY: EXPLORING HAN IN KOREAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical role of literature in teaching culturally embedded philosophical concepts in Korean language education, with a particular focus on the concept of *han*. While cultural instruction in Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) classrooms often relies on textbook definitions or communicative explanations, such approaches are insufficient for conveying the historical depth, emotional complexity, and symbolic dimensions of *han*. This study argues that literature uniquely enables learners to access cultural philosophy by situating *han* within narrative, historical, and affective contexts. Drawing on theoretical discussions of *han* and analyses of Korean literary texts, particularly division literature and Korean War narratives, the paper demonstrates how literary narratives embody and transmit this sentiment. In addition, the study proposes concrete classroom strategies for teaching *han* through literary texts, illustrating how guided reading, contextual discussion, and interpretive activities can be incorporated into language instruction. A close examination of Yun Heung-gil's *Jangma / Rainy season* serves as a pedagogical example, showing how narrative structure, symbolism, and character perspective allow learners to encounter *han* as a lived and interpretive process rather than a fixed definition. The paper concludes that literature is an indispensable medium for

¹ This work was supported by the **Seed** Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2022-INC-2250001).

teaching cultural philosophy in Korean language education, fostering deeper cultural understanding, intercultural empathy, and more meaningful communication.

Keywords: *Korean language education, literature-based pedagogy, cultural instruction, han, intercultural learning.*

Introduction

Culture education is a vital component of language learning because it provides the context, values, beliefs, and philosophies that shape how a language functions in everyday life. Mastery of grammar and vocabulary alone is not sufficient, as meaningful communication depends on understanding cultural norms, idiomatic expressions, politeness strategies, and nonverbal cues that differ across societies. Learning the underlying philosophy of a culture its views on respect, individuality, community, time, and human relationships allows learners to grasp the deeper meanings behind words and behaviours. Such cultural and philosophical insight not only helps prevent misunderstandings but also enables learners to become more confident, empathetic, and effective communicators. For this reason, integrating culture with language education is widely recognized as essential, and literature has been identified as an important medium for conveying cultural dimensions that are otherwise difficult to access.

A crucial but often underemphasized aspect of cultural education is engagement with cultural philosophy: the underlying systems of values, worldviews, and emotional logics that shape how people interpret experience and interact with others. Philosophy influences the ways how societies understand concepts such as hierarchy, harmony, freedom, individuality, and relational responsibility. For example, Confucian principles in East Asian cultures emphasize social harmony, moral hierarchy, and collective responsibility, shaping indirect communication styles and expectations of restraint and respect. In contrast, many Western philosophical traditions prioritize individual autonomy, self-expression, and directness. When language learners understand the philosophical foundations of cultural behaviour, they are better equipped to interpret not only what is said but why it is said in a particular way. This enables responses grounded not merely in linguistic accuracy but in cultural empathy and interpretive depth.

While existing research has emphasized the importance of culture in language education and the pedagogical usefulness of literature, this paper advances a more specific claim: literature does not simply transmit cultural information but uniquely enables access to cultural philosophy particularly culturally embedded emotional structures through narrative, symbolism, and historical context. Certain cultural concepts cannot be adequately taught through communicative practice or textbook

explanation alone because they are rooted in collective memory, emotional experience, and philosophical worldviews. This study adopts a conceptual and pedagogical approach rather than an empirical research design. Drawing on existing theoretical discussions of *han* and scholarship on literature-based language education, it examines how literary narratives can function as a pedagogical medium for conveying culturally embedded philosophical concepts. The analysis of Yun Heung-gil's *Rainy Season* (장마/*Jangma*) is intended as an illustrative case that demonstrates how *han* is narratively embodied and can be pedagogically activated, rather than as evidence derived from classroom experimentation or learner data.

1. Definitions and characteristics of han

Han has been variously defined across Korean studies and cultural scholarship, reflecting both its conceptual complexity and its centrality in Korean emotional life. The *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* characterizes *han* as

a folk term referring to a complex state in which the frustration of desire or will, the collapse of one's life that follows, and the resulting tense, obsessive, and compulsive mental attitude become intertwined with wounds both conscious and unconscious, a knot of emotion; an emotional coagulation.

This definition emphasizes *han* as an accumulated emotional condition formed through lived experience rather than a discrete or momentary feeling.

Kim's theory of Hanism interprets *han* not simply as an emotion but as a foundational Korean worldview embedded in ancient linguistic and cultural formations [Kim 1986]. Kim defines *han* as a core identity-term whose semantic field oneness, wholeness, brightness, and inclusiveness reflects a nondualistic, nonorientable structure that resists fixed boundaries [Kim 1986: 17–18, 23]. By tracing *han* to the prehistoric term *gadanagan*, Kim positions it as an enduring cosmological principle within Korean intellectual history [Kim 1986: 20], one that shaped Buddhism and Confucianism through its nondualistic logic while distinguishing Korean thought from Chinese dualistic frameworks [Kim 1986: 24–25]. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that *han* cannot be reduced to a single emotional definition. Rather, it emerges as both a culturally embedded emotional complex and a philosophical principle that functions as an interpretive key to Korean identity, social experience, and intellectual tradition [Kim 1986: 33–34].

Recently, in Contrast Park similarly defines *han* as resentment, suffering, identifying it as one of the core components of Korean emotional culture alongside *heung* and *jeong* [Park 2021: 244–45]. He conceptualizes *han* as a deep wound of the heart produced by injustice and oppression [Park: 2021: 245], one that manifests in diverse emotional and social forms throughout Korean life [Park 2021: 245].

Importantly, Park also highlights *han*'s potential for transformation, noting that it can convert into communal exhilaration and solidarity in moments of collective movement [Park 2021: 247–248]. Within traditional emotional theory, *han* resonates with Confucian affective classifications, particularly *ae* (哀), the category of grief within the Seven Emotions [Park: 254], situating *han* within a broader East Asian philosophical framework of emotion.

More recent theoretical approaches interrogate and expand these understandings. Sam Han critically examines *han* as an essentialized identity construct [Han 2021: 1–2], tracing its modern formulation to colonial discourse and its subsequent entanglement with ethnonationalism [Han 2021: 2–3]. By reframing *han* through the lens of *ressentiment* [Han 2021: 3–4] and emotional epistemology [Han 2021: 4–5], he situates the concept within structures of historical injury, power, and collective memory, emphasizing its political and discursive dimensions rather than treating it as a timeless national essence.

2. Literature for cultural education

Literature has long been recognized as pedagogically valuable in language education. Researchers [Hadaway et al. 2002] identify three key benefits: literature contextualizes language through authentic use, reflects social factors across genres, and provides natural, meaningful language through imagery and description [Hadaway 2002]. Lovrović likewise notes that literature is well suited to the language classroom because it frequently addresses diverse cultural issues [Lovrović 2021]. In more recent research, Lah argues that literature plays a crucial role in foreign language education by offering learners authentic language input, opportunities for interpretation and meaning-making, and access to intercultural and pluricultural dimensions that textbooks alone cannot provide [Lah 2022: 162–163]. In Korean language education, sustained scholarly discussion has led to broad agreement on the role of literature in cultural instruction [Shin 2006: 3], and literary works and films containing Korean cultural elements are now among the most widely used resources for integrating culture with functional language learning [Cho 2005: 288].

In the past, literary texts were the central materials of language education that emphasized foreign-language reading and intellectual training [Hwang 2007: 7]. Literature reflects both specialized and popular values and knowledge of the target-language society; therefore, through literature learners can understand not only the target society but also the pluralization of values and knowledge and the problem of communication in modern society [Hwang 2007: 8]. Thus, literature is crucial for holistic education, helping learners understand society, values, and communication beyond technical language skills. Also, teaching literature in Korean language

classrooms supports learners' understanding of both Korean culture and their own, fostering pluralistic and comparative perspectives. [Hwang 2005: 298–300]. The literary text should be introduced even to intermediate level of learners and literary education should contribute to learners' deeper understanding of Korean society and culture while strengthening their communicative competence in Korean [Yoon 2003: 137]. Thus, for literature in KFL, instructional goal is not literary expertise but the development of vocabulary, communicative ability, and sociocultural competence, with culture-related components at the core of the curriculum [Hwang 2005: 278]. Learners themselves identify cultural understanding, insight into Korean ways of thinking, and language development as central aims of literary education [Hwang 2007: 7]. Accordingly, Korean literature education is positioned as a central component of Korean cultural education, integrating language, culture, and literature [Jeong et al. 2011:4]; [Shin, 2006:3].

2.1. Literature in KFL: Case of han

The pedagogical role of literature becomes especially significant when addressing culturally embedded emotions such as *han*, which cannot be adequately conveyed through linguistic explanation alone. Literature functions as a vital medium for cultivating cultural literacy, without which both every day and specialized communication are prone to breakdown [Yang et al. 2010: 111]. Textbook explanations of *han* are inherently limited because they reduce a lived, historically grounded emotional experience to brief definitions detached from cultural context.

Scholarship consistently emphasizes that *han* encompasses layered emotions, including sorrow, resentment, powerlessness, and unresolved injustice, as well as unconscious wounds, inherited affective patterns, and culturally specific modes of expressing and transforming suffering. These experiential and historical dimensions resist reduction to definitional summaries. As Kim demonstrates, a simple “insert-the-concept” approach is pedagogically insufficient for conveying *han* [Kim 2019: 64–65]. Similarly, Ryu argues that philosophical terminology must be understood within the broader contextual and historical background of the text in which it appears [Ryu 2017: 293]. *Han* is embedded in Korea's historical conditions and articulated through folk songs, pansori, humour, ritual practices, and everyday storytelling, functioning as a dynamic process rather than a fixed concept. For this reason, surface-level textbook explanations cannot capture the depth, variability, or emotional resonance that constitute *han*.

Because *han* is formed through historical experience, emotional accumulation, and cultural memory, literary texts play a crucial pedagogical role in Korean language education. As Jeong notes, even in language-centred classes, cultural and literary elements inevitably enter instruction, while linguistic elements cannot be excluded

from culture-centred classes [Jeong 2011: 3]. This interdependence underscores that access to *han* requires immersion in emotional, social, and historical contexts rather than isolated explanation.

Textbooks are therefore limited in their capacity to transmit *han*, whereas literature conveys it through narrative structure, imagery, and representations of lived experience. As Shin emphasizes, literary works provide discourse contexts and patterns that Korean language textbooks cannot adequately supply [Shin 2006: 4]. Literary engagement also prompts active participation in meaning-making; as Shin observes, literary texts encourage readers to reconstruct meaning through interpretation [Shin 2006: 4–5]. Through this process, learners internalize cultural emotions rather than merely recognizing them at a conceptual level.

In this way, literature enables a form of emotional understanding that supports deeper cultural communication. As Shin concludes, literature in Korean language teaching aims to help learners understand Korean emotions so that they can understand and communicate with Korean people more deeply [Shin 2006: 6]. By situating *han* within narrative and aesthetic experience, literature allows learners to encounter its emotional and philosophical dimensions as culturally lived realities rather than as abstract cultural knowledge.

2.2. Examples from partition literature and Korean war narratives

Partition literature and Korean War narratives provide especially powerful sites for engaging with *han* because they depict historical experiences such as separation, war, displacement, and collective trauma, that constitute its modern emotional foundations. Through these narratives, learners encounter forms of suffering and resilience that challenge their own cultural assumptions. As Shin notes, the language of literary activity is characterized by its use of fiction and symbolism. It uses language not merely in a literal, referential sense but in layers of meaning [Shin 2006: 5]. These layers enable readers to perceive emotional and historical realities that expository texts cannot fully convey.

Literary representations of division and war make visible the lived reality of collective Korean trauma, including colonization, national partition, family separation, and the devastation of the Korean War experiences widely recognized as fundamental sources of *han*. Because literature engages imagination and invites interpretive participation, it enables learners to internalize the emotional weight of these historical conditions. As Hall argues, Literary texts, in their representations of people, events and cultures, offer possibilities for engaging with identities, values and ideologies beyond learners' own [Hall 2005: 194–195]. Partition fiction and war narratives thus create spaces in which learners can witness how ordinary individuals navigate extreme historical circumstances, fostering deeper cultural empathy.

Hall further emphasizes that literature, for some, is a way of representing and preserving the collective experience of a community or nation [Hall 2005: 13]. Korean narratives of division and war function in precisely this way, serving as repositories of collective emotional memory. They preserve not only historical events but also the embodied pain, longing, unresolved grief, and perseverance that shape the emotional landscape of *han*. Through sustained engagement with these texts, learners gain access to the intergenerational and communal dimensions of Korean suffering, dimensions that cannot be understood through definition or explanation alone.

Accordingly, partition literature and Korean War narratives play a crucial pedagogical role by offering learners experiential entry into the emotional and historical roots of *han*, enabling engagement with Korean identity, memory, and cultural philosophy at a depth unattainable through non-literary approaches.

3. Selecting appropriate texts

Having established that literature uniquely enables access to *han* as a cultural-philosophical structure rather than a lexical concept, this section focuses on the principles for selecting such literature for pedagogical use in KFL classrooms. Prior research emphasizes that instructional texts must align with learners' proficiency levels while clearly revealing Korean cultural characteristics. Yoon argues that instructional materials should both match learners' proficiency and interests and foreground cultural features, recommending modern essays, novels, and poetry [Yoon 2002: 59]. Similarly, Yoon proposes progression according to proficiency, moving from contemporary prose to poetry and classical or modern literature, and emphasizes the pedagogical value of serious literature over popular texts [Yoon 2011: 436]. Shin further notes that novels are particularly suitable due to their narrative familiarity [Shin 2012: 231].

Building on these insights, this paper offers a contention that two considerations are especially critical when selecting literary texts for teaching cultural philosophy in KFL classrooms: learners' Korean language proficiency and their capacity for cultural interpretation.

3.1. Criteria for choosing texts across proficiency levels

As discussed in Section 2 above, *han* is a culturally embedded emotional structure expressed indirectly through narrative, imagery, and character psychology. For this reason, literary text selection plays a decisive role in determining how effectively learners can access and interpret this sentiment. Pedagogically effective materials are therefore modern literary works written in accessible contemporary Korean that reflect Korean society and culture while fostering learner engagement through

narrative depth and literary significance [Hong Myeong-hi 2020: 219]. However, the very richness that makes literature effective also necessitates a staged approach aligned with learners' linguistic and interpretive development.

Language proficiency significantly shapes learners' ability to access cultural meaning, particularly when engaging with emotionally nuanced concepts such as *han*. Research notes that understanding Korean literary works depends primarily on learners' Korean proficiency. As learners' language ability increases, more cultural and literary elements can be incorporated [Jeong et al. 2011]. Beginner learners typically lack the linguistic foundation needed to process metaphor, symbolic language, or historically embedded emotional references. At this stage, translated texts whether in English or learners' mother tongues are pedagogically appropriate, as they allow learners to encounter narratives embodying *han* without the cognitive burden of decoding unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary.

This approach aligns with findings that view Korean proficiency as important but not absolute for cultural learning. For such education to be successful, learners need basic Korean comprehension... Yet in cultural education, Korean language itself is not an absolute requirement [Yang et al. 2010: 124]. Even at lower proficiency levels, learners can access *han* through narrative atmosphere, emotional resonance, and character experience rather than linguistic precision alone.

At the intermediate level, learners possess sufficient proficiency to begin reading Korean originals, though translation support remains beneficial. A dual-text approach enables learners to encounter the linguistic texture of *han* while maintaining comprehension. At this stage, learners begin to recognize how Korean expressions of sorrow, restraint, endurance, and regret differ from those in other languages. As noted, to understand spiritual or deeper aspects of culture, a certain level of Korean proficiency is necessary [Yang et al. 2010: 112]. Intermediate learners are also better equipped to interpret indirect communication, silence, ambiguity, and symbolic natural imagery features frequently associated with *han*, such as the emotional heaviness of monsoon rain in *Rainy Season* (장마/ *Jangma*).

At the advanced level, learners can engage fully with original Korean literary texts that express historically shaped emotions. Literature addressing colonial history, war trauma, family separation, class inequality, or generational suffering becomes pedagogically appropriate. As Jeong and Shin states, at the advanced level, works that express Korean people's unique emotions shaped by historical and cultural differences should be selected [Jeong et al. 2011: 12]. Advanced learners are capable of interpreting unresolved endings, moral ambiguity, and philosophical reflection and dimensions of *han* that cannot be conveyed through language instruction alone but require sustained narrative engagement.

3.2. Cultural relevance and pedagogical considerations

Beyond proficiency, cultural relevance is essential in selecting texts for teaching *han*. Because *han* is inseparable from Korea's collective memory and historical experience, selected works must meaningfully reflect Korean values, emotional resilience, and social relationships. This aligns with the principle that understanding culture is closely connected to the aims of literature education, so cultural elements must be treated as important when selecting literary works [Jeong et al. 2011: 11]. Selection cannot be based solely on linguistic simplicity or genre; rather, it must account for how texts represent historical trauma, emotional endurance, and relational suffering.

As emphasized earlier, at the advanced level, works that express Korean people's unique emotions shaped by historical and cultural differences should be selected [Jeong et al. 2011: 12]. However, selection cannot follow rigid or reductive criteria. As Jeong and Shin note, it is not appropriate to classify literary works using simple principles; their selection requires consideration of multiple elements. [Jeong et al. 2011: 4]. Effective selection requires attention to narrative style, symbolic structure, emotional depth, and pedagogical goals. Literature expressing *han* often communicates meaning through restraint, silence, inherited sorrow, and unresolved grief, features that demand careful and multidimensional consideration.

Balancing linguistic accessibility with cultural depth is therefore essential. Beginners benefit from translated narratives that introduce emotional tension and endurance; intermediate learners can engage with dual-text formats; advanced learners can explore the full cultural and linguistic complexity of Korean literary expressions of *han*. Through such calibrated selection, literature becomes an indispensable medium for cultural-philosophical education.

4. Sample types of texts suitable for teaching han

A representative literary text suitable for teaching *han* is Yun Heung-gil's short story *Rainy Season* (장마/ *Jangma*), which encapsulates the emotional and historical conditions that give rise to this sentiment. Heung Myeong-hi notes that *Rainy Season* (장마/ *Jangma*) can be used to teach *han* as well as other advanced-level affective concepts such as *eong*, *sinmyeong*, and son preference. The narrative centres on Kim Dong-man's family during the Korean War and depicts ideological and familial conflict between maternal and paternal grandmothers whose sons fight on opposing sides.

The narrative follows the young protagonist Kim Dong-man's family during the Korean War and centres on the fraught relationship between his maternal and paternal grandmothers. Their ideological and familial tensions emerge from the fact that their sons serve on opposite sides of the conflict: one as a South Korean

officer and the other as a partisan fighter. Although the families initially coexist peacefully, wartime losses gradually intensify mutual suspicion, grief, and resentment. The maternal uncle's death deepens the maternal grandmother's anguish, leading her to pronounce a curse against partisans. This provocation enrages the paternal grandmother, rupturing whatever fragile harmony had existed between them. Further conflict arises when the paternal uncle briefly returns home but is forced to flee after a misunderstanding, and the protagonist accidentally reveals his visit to the authorities. The consequences of this disclosure exacerbate the emotional strain within the household. As the war continues, both sides of the family assume the paternal uncle has been killed, yet the paternal grandmother clings to a fortune-teller's prediction that he will return. The story reaches its symbolic climax when a wounded snake enters the home. Interpreting the snake through shamanistic belief as the reincarnation of someone who died bearing deep resentment, the maternal grandmother performs a ritual-like intervention to calm the creature and guide it away. This ritual moment signifies the release or temporary easing of accumulated sorrow, allowing the two grandmothers to achieve a brief reconciliation grounded in shared suffering. Shortly afterward, the paternal grandmother dies, and the monsoon finally recedes, marking the end of a period of grief, ideological strife, and emotional turbulence.

Rainy Season (장마/ *Jangma*) is exemplary for *han* instruction because it intertwines personal grief, intergenerational conflict, historical trauma, and symbolic release. Its layered representation of war, familial rupture, and ritual reconciliation offers learners an experiential entry point into *han*'s narrative, emotional, and cultural dimensions.

5. Classroom strategies

Having established criteria for selecting texts that embody *han*, this section demonstrates how literary narratives such as *Rainy Season* (장마/ *Jangma*) can be pedagogically activated in the KFL classroom to facilitate experiential and interpretive learning.

5.1. Guided reading, discussion, and contextual support

Yun Heung-gil's *Rainy Season* (장마/ *Jangma*) functions as an effective pedagogical resource because it allows learners to encounter *han* within a layered narrative rather than through abstract definition. Through guided reading and structured discussion, learners observe how *han* forms, accumulates, and transforms over time.

First, the story foregrounds unresolved sorrow rooted in both personal and historical tragedy. The maternal grandmother's grief over her son's death in the Korean War and the paternal grandmother's desperate hope for her missing son depict

sorrow that cannot be resolved or released. These portrayals help learners understand *han* as an emotion that accumulates over time rather than a momentary feeling.

Second, ideological division shapes familial conflict and reveals the social and historical origins of *han*. The breakdown of kinship ties caused by opposing political allegiances illustrates how national trauma intrudes into intimate family relationships, leaving enduring emotional wounds [Kim 2008]. This allows learners to recognize *han* as a product of collective historical experience rather than individual psychology alone.

Third, resentment intertwined with love emerges as a key emotional pattern. The maternal grandmother's curse against partisans and the paternal grandmother's anger reveal how grief transforms into layered resentment, illustrating the complex emotional structure central to *han*.

Fourth, shamanistic symbolism introduces the metaphysical dimension of *han*. The Rainy Season presents shamanism and the irrational worldview associated with it as a force capable of resisting ideology [Bae 2011]. The appearance of the wounded snake, possibly embodying a wronged ancestor, reflects the belief that unresolved suffering persists beyond death. This scene offers a culturally grounded way to discuss *han* as an emotion tied to ritual, belief, and the afterlife.

Fifth, much of the story's emotional force is conveyed through silence and restraint rather than explicit expression. Suppressed gestures and unspoken pain reflect the internalized nature of *han* and provide learners with insight into culturally specific modes of emotional expression.

Sixth, the calming of the snake symbolizes ritualistic release and the possibility of transformation. This moment initiates reconciliation between the two grandmothers and demonstrates how *han* may be acknowledged and gradually transformed through compassion rather than confrontation.

These elements can be reinforced through contextual support: historical grounding in the Korean War situates *han* within collective trauma; symbolic analysis highlights cultural embeddedness; interpersonal conflict reveals how *han* circulates within families. Literary immersion enables learners to experience *han*'s emotional atmosphere directly, aligning with research suggesting that cultural concepts are most effectively learned through narrative engagement.

5.2. Activities for interpreting emotional and cultural layers

To deepen engagement with *han* as a cultural-philosophical framework, classroom activities should emphasize interpretation, symbolism, and contextual awareness rather than memorization.

First, emotion mapping encourages learners to identify both explicit and implicit emotions in selected scenes, helping them conceptualize *han* as a layered emotional structure rather than a single feeling.

Second, perspective rewriting tasks ask learners to rewrite a short passage from another character's viewpoint, focusing on unspoken or suppressed emotions. This activity highlights the inward and restrained nature of *han*.

Third, symbolism identification involves analysing elements such as rain, snakes, and seasonal imagery to uncover their cultural meanings, reinforcing the symbolic expression of *han* [Eom 2014].

Fourth, comparative translation analysis allows intermediate and advanced learners to compare Korean expressions with their translated equivalents, drawing attention to emotional nuances that may be lost or altered in translation.

Finally, guided discussion using instructor-led questions directs learners' attention to emotional subtext, ideological conflict, and evolving relationships between characters, fostering critical reflection on how *han* operates within the narrative.

Together, these strategies position *han* not as a vocabulary item but as an emotionally and philosophically embedded cultural system, one that literature is uniquely equipped to convey in the KFL classroom.

5.3. Cross-cultural reflection

Cross-cultural reflection is a core principle of Korean culture education within the KFL classroom. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence emphasizes that language learners must develop not only linguistic proficiency but also critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) in order to engage meaningfully with other cultures [Byram 1997: 50–53]. Similarly, the Council of Europe underscores the importance of incorporating an intercultural dimension into language teaching so that learners can reflect on both their own cultural identities and those of the target culture [Byram 2001: 10–11]. Within this framework, literature occupies a particularly effective pedagogical position because it enables reflective engagement that goes beyond surface-level cultural information.

Literary narratives are especially well suited to teaching *han* in an intercultural context because they allow learners to situate Korean emotional traditions within a broader human framework while critically examining their own cultural assumptions. As Shin suggests, asking learners to find poems from their own cultures that express death and compare them [Shin, 2006: 15/16] encourages learners to connect Korean expressions of sorrow with emotional structures embedded in their own literary and cultural traditions. Empirical research supports the value of such guided reflection, showing that although educators recognize the importance of culture in language education, it often remains underdeveloped without structured opportunities for critical comparison [Nemati et al. 2014: 8–12].

Literature facilitates this reflective process by exposing learners to alternative worldviews and inviting reassessment of their own cultural norms [Hall 2005: 195].

Engagement with Korean literary texts, particularly narratives of war, national division, and generational suffering introduces learners to emotional modes characterized by endurance, restraint, and reconciliation through shared suffering. These modes may contrast sharply with expressive conventions in other cultures, prompting learners to interrogate culturally specific assumptions about emotion, suffering, and resolution.

Through guided comparison, learners can relate *han* to emotional concepts in their own cultural frameworks while also recognizing its distinctive historical and ideological grounding in Korean experience. Such reflection prevents *han* from being perceived as an exotic or isolated phenomenon and instead positions it as a culturally shaped emotional system that both resonates with and diverges from learners' own traditions. Ultimately, integrating literature into Korean culture education enables learners to develop intercultural literacy, empathy, and critical awareness, thereby supporting more meaningful engagement with Korean culture and more effective intercultural communication.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that literature functions as an essential pedagogical bridge for teaching culturally embedded philosophical concepts in Korean language education, particularly the emotionally complex notion of *han*. While language textbooks and communicative explanations often reduce cultural concepts to simplified definitions, such approaches cannot capture the historical depth, symbolic density, and layered emotional structure that characterize *han*. Literary narratives, by contrast, situate these dimensions within lived and imagined experience, enabling learners to encounter *han* not as an abstract term but as an interpretive process shaped by trauma, memory, ideology, and interpersonal relationships.

By examining major definitions of *han*, its historical and philosophical foundations, and its representation in Korean literary traditions, especially partition literature and Korean War narratives, this study has shown that literature provides a uniquely effective space for accessing the emotional atmosphere and cultural logic underlying the concept. The analysis of *Rainy Season* (장마 / *Jangma*) illustrated how narrative structure, symbolism, and character relationships render visible the tensions, accumulated sorrows, and moments of reconciliation that define *han*, offering rich material for contextualized interpretation and discussion.

From a pedagogical perspective, the paper emphasized the importance of a graduated approach to text selection, aligning literary and cultural complexity with learners' language proficiency. Classroom strategies such as guided reading, emotional mapping, symbolism analysis, and comparative translation tasks enable learners to engage deeply with cultural meaning while supporting linguistic development. In

addition, cross-cultural reflection allows learners to situate *han* within broader comparative frameworks, fostering intercultural empathy and critical awareness of their own emotional and cultural assumptions.

Overall, this study offers an argument that literature is not merely a supplementary resource but an indispensable medium for teaching cultural philosophy in Korean language education. By providing access to the emotional, historical, and symbolic dimensions of *han*, literary texts enable learners to develop a more nuanced, reflective, and empathetic understanding of Korean culture, an understanding that is essential for meaningful communication and genuine intercultural competence.

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