KR

LITERATURE COURSE

Korean Literature

A guide to Korean writing from the early songs to the Nobel Prize, built from open sources.

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

KOREAN LITERATURE

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Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Korean Literature? Scope, Translation & Sources

In October 2024 the Nobel Prize in Literature went to a Korean writer for the first time. Most readers of this course will meet Korean literature the way the committee's English-speaking audience did: through a translation. This chapter sets out what the course covers, how the sources divide the subject, what translation changes, and how to tell record from legend before the chapters begin.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from three Wikipedia articles: *Korean literature* (read in full, about 3,000 words of body text), *Literature Translation Institute of Korea* (lead, history, programs, periodicals, library) and *Han Kang* (lead, career, awards and works; the last 16,000 characters were not read). I read no books, no Nobel Committee text and no Korean-language sources. The *Korean literature* article carries a "needs more citations" banner dated March 2024, and I say where it tags a claim. The titles, dates and names in the course outline were a sketch from memory, and I checked the ones used here against these articles. The grouping and the sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

What Counts as Korean Literature?

The article's lead says Korean literature "is commonly divided into classical and modern periods, although this distinction is sometimes unclear." It also says "For much of Korea's 1,500 years of literary history, it was written in Hanja", the Chinese characters. So the first thing to know is that writing in Korea has meant writing in more than one script and, for a long time, in more than one language. Chapter 3 covers that story in full; the script itself is the subject of Korean Alphabet 1.

The article lists what it covers:

- **Oral literature:** ballads, legends, mask plays, puppet-show texts and *pansori* (storytelling in song), defined as texts transmitted orally before Hangul existed.
- **Poetic forms:** *hyangga*, the Goryeo songs (*byeolgok* and *changga*), *sijo* and *gasa*, plus short-lived forms.

- **Prose:** myths, legends and folktales, literary miscellany, and fiction in Chinese and in Korean.
- **History in order:** early Joseon (including *Yongbi eocheonga*), late Joseon, modern literature, Japanese rule (1910 to 1945) and national division.

The Course at a Glance

Chapter	Period or form	The question it asks
2	Myths, songs and the early kingdoms	What survives, and what is only reported?
3	Chinese characters and Hangul	Who could write, and in what?
4	Sijo and gasa	How does a short form carry a feeling?
5	Joseon fiction and performance	Who wrote, who read, who listened?
6	Enlightenment, colonial rule, modern poetry	What did writers do under censorship?
7	Division and war	How is a divided country written?
8	Industrialisation, dissent, memory	What did writing do under military rule?
9	Contemporary writers and the translation boom	Who is read abroad, and why?
10	Capstone	How do the periods answer each other?

Scope

The course follows the rule for the Korea courses: South Korea first, and the whole peninsula for the periods before the 1945 and 1948 division. The *Korean literature* article treats North and South Korea under separate headings with separate main articles. It says post-war South Korean literature often addresses ordinary people's lives and national pain, that some North Korean writers are appreciated in the South, and that both Koreas held a joint literary congress in 2005. It also mentions that the poet Cho Ki-chon moved to North Korea, with no detail. It says nothing about North Korean literary policy, so Chapter 7 will carry only a short, factual note, drawn from open sources, and no more.

Reading in Translation

Almost everything in this course is read in English, so one fact belongs at the start: you are always reading a translator's choices. The sources give a few markers of how that field has grown.

- **The older direction.** The article says "the earliest modern Korean translation of a fiction work" was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, translated into Korean by James Scarth Gale and his wife Gibson in 1895. That is translation into Korean, not out of it. The article's footnote also mentions an 1885 manuscript, *Corean Tales*, which it describes as "western-influenced" and not a translation, so I do not treat it as a counter-example.
- **Early English anthologies.** It names *Flowers of Fire* (1974) as one of the first English anthologies and says translation quality and range have improved. A claim that literature in English was largely ignored until the 1980s is tagged "citation needed", so I report it only as the article's.
- **Other languages.** It says the translation institute has promoted translations into German, Spanish, French and Polish.

The institute behind many translations

The *Literature Translation Institute of Korea* (LTI Korea) is, per its article, a South Korean nonprofit founded in 1996 by the government "with the aim of promoting Korean literature and culture overseas". It began as the Korean Literature Translation Fund, was renamed a translation institute in 2001, became a special corporation in 2005 and was placed under the Literature Promotion Act in 2016. It lists:

- **Translation grants**, each quarter, for fiction, poetry, plays, nonfiction, children's and young adult books, genre fiction and graphic novels. Since 2014 it first funds a sample translation, and the rest of the money follows once the translator and author sign a deal with an international publisher.
- **Publication grants** to foreign publishers who have bought rights to works translated with its support.
- Forums abroad, the Seoul International Writers' Festival every other year, translation academies in seven languages, a public library (opened 2007) and an English magazine, *Korean Literature Now*, with a circulation of about 5,000.

The article's figures come mostly from 2010 to 2012 sources and several of its links are dead, so I give them as history, not as the institute's current size. My reading, and not a claim in the

article: because a state-funded body helps choose and pay for translations, what reaches English readers is partly shaped by that funding. The sources say who is supported and how; they do not say what is left out.

A Recent Case: Han Kang

> **The Nobel Prize in 2024**
>
> The *Han Kang* article says she is a South Korean writer born on 27 November 1970 in Gwangju, who taught creative writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts from 2007 to 2018. The Swedish Academy awarded her the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature for her "intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life", and the article says she is the first Korean and the first Asian woman to receive it. In 2016 she won the International Booker Prize for *The Vegetarian*, translated by Deborah Smith, the first Korean-language novel to win; the prize was shared by author and translator. Her works named there include *The Vegetarian*, *Human Acts*, *The White Book*, *We Do Not Part* and *Greek Lessons*. The article records mixed international reactions to the Nobel win and a widely celebratory response in South Korea; it gives no detail, and I add none.

Two things for the course. First, the Booker was shared by the translator, which shows how the book arrives in English through a second author's work. Second, the article names more than one translator across her books (Deborah Smith for three of them, and different translators for *Greek Lessons* and *We Do Not Part*), so the English "voice" of one author is more than one person's. I do not compare translations; I did not read them.

Record and Legend

As in the course on Korean screens, the habit is to ask what a claim rests on. The article offers several useful examples:

- **Early histories.** It gives *Samguk sagi* (1146) and *Samguk yusa* (1285) as dates, with a "citation needed" tag on that sentence.
- **What survives.** Of the *hyangga*, only 25 survive: 14 in the *Samguk yusa* and 11 in another source, the *Gyunyeojeon*. The count is the article's.

- **The first Hangul text.** It presents *Yongbi eocheonga* (125 cantos) as "the first piece of Korean text to depart from a long history reliant on Chinese characters."
- **Firsts.** It calls Kim Sisup's *Kŭmo sinhwa* the "first known" classical Korean fiction, a hedged phrase, and says *sijo* "are thought to have been popular with common people".
- **Censorship.** A claim that uncensored Korean publishing became impossible once the Government-General took over the newspaper *Taehan Maeil Shinbo* (July 1904 to May 1909) carries a "citation needed" tag.
- **Pansori.** It says five pansori texts survive, from twelve *madang*.

The habits for this course: separate what survives from what is described; treat "first" as a claim; and say whether a date, a count or an attribution is tagged.

Where to Read

I have not checked which of the works named in this course are available in English, in which edition or in which library. The articles name translators for only a few, so I give titles in English where the sources do and the Korean title alongside. Your public library catalogue, and a bookshop's translated-fiction shelf, are better guides than my memory; the LTI Korea article says its own library opened to the public in 2007, but I did not check whether it can be used from the United Kingdom.

Gaps in what I read

The *Han Kang* article was cut off near the end (the last 16,000 characters were not read), and its details about a 2026 bookstore and about her family come from news reports I did not check, so I left them out. I read no article on the Nobel Prize itself, on Korean Wikisource or on individual translators. The *Korean literature* article is brief on modern periods and says nothing of contemporary writers beyond a few lines, so Chapters 8 and 9 will need other articles. I give no figures for how many Korean books are translated, because the articles do not.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List the main forms of Korean literature in the article (oral, poetic, prose) and give two examples of each. Explain what the article means by "classical" and "modern", and what it says about that division.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe what LTI Korea does and when it was founded, then say why some of its figures should be treated as history and not as current facts.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick three claims from the "Record and Legend" section and for each say what it rests on (a date, a count, a hedge or a "citation needed" tag) and how you would check it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Divisions:** classical and modern ("sometimes unclear"); oral, poetic, prose
- **Scripts:** Hanja for much of 1,500 years; *Yongbi eocheonga* (125 cantos) as the first text to depart from it
- **Early works:** *Samguk sagi* (1146), *Samguk yusa* (1285), 25 surviving hyangga
- **LTI Korea:** founded 1996; renamed 2001; special corporation 2005; Literature Promotion Act 2016
- **Han Kang:** born 1970 in Gwangju; International Booker 2016; Nobel Prize in Literature 2024
- **Method:** separate surviving from described; treat "first" as a claim; watch the tags
- **Check:** what is available in English, and who translated it

Next chapter: Myths, Songs and the Early Kingdoms.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Myths, Songs and the Early Kingdoms

The oldest Korean literature is not a shelf of books. It is a foundation story told in a thirteenth-century monk's collection, a royal history written in Chinese, and twenty-five songs, many of them known only because someone copied them down centuries later. This chapter looks at what each of those is, what the sources say about it, and where they leave the reader unsure.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Dangun* (lead, myth and interpretations, dates, historical perception, appearances), *Samguk yusa* (lead through the collections section), *Samguk sagi* (lead, description, background, sources, contents) and *Hyangga* (the article body). I read no book, no primary text and no Korean-language source. Wikipedia's pages on the song *Seodong yo* and on *Cheoyongga* returned errors, so I do not tell the stories behind those songs. The same names are spelled in more than one way across these articles; I give the forms they use and note when they differ. The article on Dangun says its "Historical perception" section lacks citations, so I treat it as less verified. The sentences marked as my reading are mine.

Dangun: A Foundation Story

The *Dangun* article tells the myth in these steps. Hwanin, a heavenly lord, has a son, Hwanung, who wants to live on earth. Hwanung descends to Taebaeksan with 3,000 followers and founds a settlement, teaching laws, medicine and farming. A tiger and a bear ask to become human. Hwanung tells them to eat only garlic and mugwort and avoid the sun for 100 days. The tiger gives up; the bear endures and becomes a woman, Ungnyeo. She prays under a sacred birch tree for a child, Hwanung marries her, and their son, Dangun Wanggeom, founds the kingdom of Joseon, later called Gojoseon, with a walled city, Asadal, near Pyongyang. The article adds that the location is disputed.

Where the myth is recorded

- The earliest recorded version is in the thirteenth-century *Samguk yusa*, which, the article says, claims to cite a lost Korean record, *Gogi*, and China's *Book of Wei*. The article notes

that the surviving *Book of Wei* has no Dangun record.
- Similar versions appear in *Jewang un-gi* by Yi Seunghyu (1224 to 1300) and in later Joseon texts.

Dates and uses

The article says Dangun's rule is usually dated to 2333 BCE, based on the *Tongguk tonggam* (1485), and that other sources tie his reign to the legendary Emperor Yao with varying details. It records that South Korea's old Dangi era began in 2333 BCE, and that North Korea dates the founding to the early thirtieth century BCE and, after a 1994 excavation of a supposed tomb, now claims he was a real historical person, which the article says Kim Il Sung insisted on. That is all this course says about North Korea in this chapter. The lead calls him the "legendary founder and first king of Gojoseon", and the article says South Korean scholarship treats him as a head of Gojoseon society with priestly traits.

My reading, not stated in the article: a story that was written down some three thousand years after its supposed date, and that governments later used to date their own founding, is a good first example of why this course separates the story from the record.

Two Books from the Goryeo Period

	Samguk sagi	***Samguk yusa***
Compiler	Kim Pusik (the article also spells him Kim Busik)	The Buddhist monk Il-yeon (the main compiler, per the article)
Date	Completed 1145 (the lead); infobox gives 4 February 1146	"around 1280" (the article); my chapter 1 source gave 1285
Language	Classical Chinese	Not stated in the part I read
Outlook	Confucian scholar-statesman	Buddhist; about 49.5% of the text is Buddhist material
Structure	50 books: Silla (12), Goguryeo (10), Baekje (6), tables (3), monographs (9), biographies (10)	Two books, five volumes, nine parts
Myths	The article does not discuss them	Opens with Dangun; mixes myths, legends, folktales and Buddhist

	Samguk sagi	*Samguk yusa*
		stories

Samguk sagi

The article says it draws mainly on the *Gu Samguksa* and older records such as the *Hwarang Segi*, most of which are lost, and quotes extensively from Chinese dynastic histories. It does not cite Japanese chronicles such as the *Kojiki*, and the article offers, as a possibility only, that the compiler may not have known of them or chose not to cite them. It says the reconstruction of the Goguryeo language is "tentative". The article uses two spellings of the compiler's name and two dates for completion and does not reconcile them.

Samguk yusa

"Yusa" means a supplementary text, meant to add to the *Samguk sagi*. The article calls it "the earliest extant record of the Dangun legend". It says the earliest extant printed edition is from 1512, and it preserves fourteen *hyangga*. It warns that "the reliability of *Samguk yusa* is questionable", because of its mythical content and the roughly six centuries between the Three Kingdoms period and its composition. Some scholars think Il-yeon wrote only the fifth fascicle, and a disciple, Muguk, may have expanded the compilation; a chronology in the 1512 edition may be a fourteenth-century addition. It focuses mainly on Silla's upper class, with commoners as about eight percent of narrative protagonists.

> **Where the sources disagree**
>
> Chapter 1's source (*Korean literature*) dates the *Samguk sagi* to 1146 and the *Samguk yusa* to 1285. This chapter's articles give 1145 (with 1146 in the infobox) and "around 1280". I do not choose. A reader who needs a date should say which article it comes from. The same goes for the spelling of names: Dangun, Tan'gun and Dangun Wanggeom; Il-yeon and Iryeon; Kim Pusik and Kim Busik.

Hyangga: Songs in a Borrowed Script

The *Hyangga* article describes them as "poems written using Chinese characters" in a system called *hyangchal*, during the Unified Silla and early Goryeo periods, and says they are sometimes called "Silla songs". The name combines the character for "back-country" or "rural village", which

the Silla people used for their own country, with the character for "song". Only a few survive: 14 in the *Samguk yusa* and 11 by the monk Kyunyeo (tenth century). A late-ninth-century collection, the *Samdaemok*, is lost. That agrees with Chapter 1, which gave 25 survivors.

What they are about

The article says 18 of the 25 reflect Buddhist themes, and death is another major theme, with many eulogies for monks, warriors and family members. It names four with approximate dates: *Seodong yo* (about 600), *Cheoyong ga* (about 879), *Heonhwa ga* (about 702 to 737, by an old herdsman) and *Mo Jukjilang ga* (about 692 to 702), and lists others such as *Jemangmae ga* and *Won wangsaeng ga*. Authorship is uncertain for some, for example *Won wangsaeng ga*.

Form and the problem of reading them

- **Forms.** Since Shinpei Ogura's 1920s work they have been grouped as single-quatrain, two-quatrain or ten-line forms. Kim Sung-kyu (2016) proposed only two (a single quatrain and a two-tercet form) and argues that apparent eight-line forms come from a line lost in transmission.
- **Uncertainty.** The article says "The structure of hyangga is not completely understood." The only contemporary comment on their form is ambiguous, and a key phrase "remains unresolved".
- **Readings.** The same poem can be read as ten lines or as six, and translators such as Peter H. Lee and Alexander Vovin read the form differently. The article gives no single authoritative reading.
- **Dating.** They are "believed to have been first written in the Goryeo period, as the style was already beginning to fade", which the article states without detail.

For an English reader, that last point matters. The poems were written with Chinese characters used to spell Korean sounds and meanings, so even the text has to be deciphered before it can be translated. I do not quote a translation here, because I read none and the article gives none.

> **Gaps in what I read**
>
> I read none of the primary texts or any translation. The articles for *Seodong yo* and *Cheoyongga* returned errors, so I tell no story behind a single song. The *Dangun* article's "Historical perception" section is untagged for citations, and the *Samguk yusa* and *Samguk sagi* articles do not agree on dates or spellings. I did not read about the Goguryeo and Baekje songs, early Chinese-language poetry by Korean writers, or the *Gyunyeojeon* itself.

The Gojoseon, Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods are only a frame here, not history; I give no dates for them beyond what the articles state.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Retell the Dangun myth in six sentences, then say where it is first recorded, what that record claims to cite, and why the article says the claim cannot be checked.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the Samguk sagi and the Samguk yusa on compiler, outlook, structure and treatment of myth, and name two places where this chapter's sources disagree with each other or with Chapter 1.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain what a hyangga is, how many survive and where, and why a single hyangga can be read in more than one way. Name two themes and two named examples with their approximate dates.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Dangun:** son of Hwanung and the bear-woman Ungnyeo; founder of Gojoseon; traditionally dated 2333 BCE (*Tongguk tonggam*, 1485)
- **Earliest record of the myth:** *Samguk yusa*, which cites a lost *Gogi* and the *Book of Wei* (which has no such record)

- **Samguk sagi:** Kim Pusik, 1145 or 1146, Classical Chinese, 50 books
- **Samguk yusa:** Il-yeon, around 1280, Buddhist outlook, 14 hyangga
- **Hyangga:** poems in *hyangchal*; 25 survive (14 and 11); 18 of 25 Buddhist; structure "not completely understood"
- **Examples:** *Seodong yo* (about 600), *Mo Jukjilang ga* (about 692 to 702), *Heonhwa ga* (about 702 to 737), *Cheoyong ga* (about 879)
- **Check:** dates and spellings by article; who deciphered a poem and how

Next chapter: Writing in Chinese, Writing in Hangul.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Writing in Chinese, Writing in Hangul

Korean literature was written for most of its history in a script that was not made for the Korean language. This chapter follows the problem and the answers the sources describe: writing in Classical Chinese, adapting Chinese characters to spell Korean, and then, in the 1440s, a new alphabet and the first long poem written in it. The script itself is the subject of Korean Alphabet 1; this chapter is about what it meant for literature.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Literary Chinese* (lead, function, pronunciation; the page is about Classical Chinese in general and the last 16,000 characters were not read), *Idu script* (lead, history and summary), *Hunminjeongeum* (lead, history, content, versions, legacy) and *Yongbi eocheonga* (lead, historical background, implications). I read no primary text and no Korean-language source. The *Idu script* article is marked as a stub, and the *Literary Chinese* article carries a "needs more citations" banner. Chapter 1's article, *Korean literature*, supplies the 1,500-year figure. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

Writing in Chinese

Chapter 1 gave the *Korean literature* article's line that "For much of Korea's 1,500 years of literary history, it was written in Hanja." The *Literary Chinese* article explains why a language like that could spread. It says Literary Chinese "represented the only known common form of writing for a long time" in the countries that used it, that adoption "came mainly from diplomatic and cultural ties with China", with conquest, colonisation and migration playing smaller roles, and that it served as an "international auxiliary language" for civil administration and scholarly communication. It adds that speakers of other languages later "similarly abandoned" it in favour of their own, with no Korean timeline. That article says almost nothing specific about Korea: it does not cover Korean ways of reading Chinese, the civil service examinations in Korea or when its use declined there. I read nothing on those, so I make no claim.

Writing Korean with Chinese characters: idu

The *Idu script* article describes idu, "official's reading", as a writing system for Korean using Chinese characters. In it, characters carried both meaning and sound: some represented native Korean words or grammatical elements, others Chinese loanwords, and a character used only for its sound lost its Chinese meaning. Korean word order was followed. It says idu arose in the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE to 668 CE), and that it was developed by Buddhist monks, a claim the article gives without a source. Its main dated use was official documents and the examinations from 958 to 1894 CE, and it helped Koreans read Chinese government documents and was used to translate Chinese texts such as the Ming legal code.

The article offers two definitions. In the broad sense idu covers several ways of writing Korean with Chinese characters, including *hyangchal*, used for the vernacular poetry of Chapter 2, and *gugyeol*. In the narrow sense it means only the system developed in Goryeo (918 to 1392). It also notes that the Chinese pronunciation was only "approximately" followed. For literature, the point is that the *hyangga* of Chapter 2 belong to the same family of methods, which is why they are hard to read.

The Invention of Hangul

The document and the alphabet

The *Hunminjeongeum* article says the title means "The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People" and that it is an 1446 work that formally introduced the first Korean alphabet. The alphabet was originally also called *Hunminjeongeum*, and is now widely called Hangul (or Chosŏn'gŭl in North Korea, the article's only mention of the North). The term is used in several ways: for the base text only (the preface and letter descriptions, also called *Yeui*), or for the base text plus a commentary, *Haerye*.

Item	What the article says	Hedges
Credited author	King Sejong the Great (reigned 1418 to 1450), author of the base text and "significantly involved" in creating the script	Records of early development are sparse
First presented	12th month of 1443 (Korean calendar), roughly December 1443 to January 1444	
Publication	Base text claims the 9th month of 1446; the *Haerye* postface is dated to the first ten days of	The exact date is not known; 9 October needs an assumed day

Item	What the article says	Hedges
	that month; 9 October is Hangul Day	(10th)
Commentary	*Haerye*, by scholars led by Chŏng Inji	Lost and forgotten, possibly by the early 16th century
Rediscovery	The "Kansong copy" in 1940; National Treasure 1962; UNESCO Memory of the World 1997	A second copy (Sangju) surfaced in 2008 and its discoverer has refused to show it

The stated reason

The preface says the sounds of the language differ from Chinese characters, so that many ordinary people could not express what they wanted to say. The article gives its wording: "The sounds of our country's language are different from those of the Middle Kingdom." The preface says Sejong designed 28 letters so people could learn them easily and use them every day. That is what the document says about itself. The article notes that scholarly accounts differ in places (for example, a scholar who reads some apparent translation "mistakes" as attempts to deal with Chinese tones), and that it is unclear whether the *Eonhae* edition first appeared in *Wŏrin sŏkpo* (1459). The article does not mention opposition to the new alphabet, so I say nothing on it.

The First Work in Hangul: Yongbi eocheonga

The *Yongbi eocheonga* article calls this fifteenth-century Joseon epic poem "the first work written in Hangul", and says it records the first Korean writing in Hangul beside Hanja after a long period of writing only in Chinese characters. It gives 1447 as the publication year, and 125 cantos. It names Chŏng Inji, An Chi and Kwŏn Chae as authors, with Sŏng Sammun and Pak P'aengnyŏn writing the preface. It concerns the Joseon dynasty and its predecessors and justifies the change from Goryeo to Joseon: its dragons stand for six ancestors from Mokjo through Taejong, and the dynasty's rise is framed through the Mandate of Heaven. The article also notes its value for understanding the Jurchens and the Confucian ideas of the time, and says it was designated Korean Treasure No. 1463 in 2006.

> **What the sources do and do not say**
>
> The two articles agree that the new alphabet's first major use was a dynastic poem commissioned by the court, written in Hangul and Hanja together (*Yongbi eocheonga*,

1447), not a poem for ordinary readers. My reading, not a claim in either article: the first use of the script was official, even though its preface speaks of ordinary people. The articles I read do not say who learned the script, how fast it spread, or whether women and commoners wrote in it, so Chapters 4 and 5 will have to look for that. Chapter 1's article also called this poem "the first piece of Korean text to depart from a long history reliant on Chinese characters"; I note that wording is a little different from "first work written in Hangul" and I do not choose between them.

Gaps in what I read

The *Literary Chinese* article is general and says little about Korea, and I did not read about Korean ways of reading Chinese (*hundok*, *gugyeol* as a method), the civil service examinations or the decline of Chinese writing in Korea. The *Idu script* article is a stub. I did not read about opposition to Hangul, the number of letters in the script today, early Hangul prose or poetry beyond *Yongbi eocheonga*, or the *Eonhae* translations. I give no verse from *Yongbi eocheonga* because I read none and the article gave none for me to check. The article gives 1447 and does not support an earlier date I had in my outline.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain why Literary Chinese spread beyond China according to the article, and say what the article does not tell you about Korea.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe idu: how it used Chinese characters, when it arose, how long it was used, and the broad and narrow meanings of the term. How does it relate to the hyangga of Chapter 2?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Using the Hunminjeongeum and Yongbi eocheonga articles, say what the document is, who is credited, what reason it gives, which dates are uncertain, and what the first major work in Hangul was. State one thing the articles leave open.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Hanja era:** "for much of Korea's 1,500 years of literary history" (*Korean literature*)
- **Idu:** Chinese characters for Korean; Three Kingdoms origin; documents and exams 958 to 1894; narrow sense Goryeo (918 to 1392)
- **Hunminjeongeum:** 1446; Sejong credited; presented 1443; 28 letters; *Haerye* by Chŏng Inji and others
- **Preserved:** Kansong copy found 1940; National Treasure 1962; UNESCO 1997; Hangul Day 9 October (an assumed day)
- **Yongbi eocheonga:** 1447; 125 cantos; Chŏng Inji, An Chi, Kwŏn Chae; dynastic poem; Treasure No. 1463 (2006)
- **Check:** who could read and write the new script, and when

Next chapter: Sijo, Gasa and the Poetry of Joseon.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Sijo, Gasa and the Poetry of Joseon

After Hangul, the poetry of Joseon settled into two main forms: a short three-line song, the sijo, and a longer, running form, the gasa. Both were meant to be sung. This chapter looks at what the sources say about each form, three poets named in them, and the places where the articles contradict or hedge themselves.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Sijo*, *Gasa (poetry)*, *Yun Seon-do*, *Hwang Jini* and *Jeong Cheol*. I read each article's main text; the page I first tried for gasa returned an error, and the second was a short article. I read no primary poem and no translation, and I quote no poem: the translations in those articles may be in copyright, and I cannot confirm otherwise from the pages. All five articles carry maintenance tags ("needs more citations" or similar) and several give tagged or uncited claims, which I report as the articles' claims. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

Sijo

The *Sijo* article says it "emerged during the Goryeo dynasty, flourished during the Joseon dynasty, and is still written today." The earliest surviving sijo is dated to the late fourteenth century. The name *sijo* came later, from a nineteenth-century restoration movement, and modern sijo is dated to after 1876.

Form

- Three lines of about 14 to 16 syllables each, or 42 to 48 in total. Each line has four groups of syllables, and the first half of the third line is a "twist".
- The same article also says sijo is "an accentual verse form, not syllabic". That sits awkwardly with its own syllable counts, and I do not reconcile them.

Kinds

The article names *pyeong sijo* (the standard form), *ossijo* (one line expanded), *sasol sijo* (several lines expanded, narrative or chatty), *yeon sijo*, *sijo chang* (the sung form) and modern sijo.

Who wrote it

Early sijo was mostly written by elite *yangban* men. *Gisaeng* (professional entertainers, among them Hwang Jini and Yi Maechang) were also prominent, and *sasol sijo* was written by women, yangban, *chungin* and commoners. Kim Cheontaek compiled an important anthology in 1728; the article calls his birth date only "almost certain". Early sijo often treated Confucian loyalty, nature and political upheaval; gisaeng poems focused more on love and longing; *sasol sijo* added humour and everyday life. The article describes gisaeng poetry as "a rare blend of emotional freedom, ironic perspective, and technical mastery." The debate over whether modern free-form works count as sijo is, per the article, unresolved. It carries a "needs more citations" tag, with "citation needed" on parts of its account of English-language sijo.

Gasa

The *Gasa (poetry)* article says it "was a form of poetry popular during the Joseon period", usually sung, and "popular among yangban women". It says gasa were "a bit longer than sijo poems", built on parallel lines each split into units. It says the form emerged in the Goryeo period as a vocal genre derived from *jeongga* and was borrowed from Chinese *tz'u* or *fu* forms.

Two periods

The article divides the history at the Japanese invasion of 1592 to 1597:

	Before	After
Themes	Female beauty, war, seclusion	Moral instruction, travel, banishment, personal misfortunes
Writers	Mostly yangban	Mostly commoners

It names the poems *Suyangsanga*, *Cheosaga*, *Baekgusa*, *Hwanggyesa* (about a woman's longing) and *Maehwaga*, and says Jeong Cheol, a sixteenth-century poet, "perfected the form". It names no woman as an author.

> **Where the sources are inconsistent**
>
> The gasa article describes the form as paired units of four syllables, but elsewhere says the first unit has "three or four syllables". It also says "Only twelve gasa pieces survive to this

day", which carries no citation, and "it is unclear as to how they were sung". It says "Some even consider them to be essays", a view Chapter 1's article also records. Two references in it point to the same Britannica link. For these reasons I give no syllable pattern for gasa and no count of surviving poems.

Three Poets

Yun Seondo (1587 to 1671)

The *Yun Seon-do* article calls him a philosopher, poet, politician and Neo-Confucian scholar, with the art names Kosan and Haeong. He succeeded early as an official, but his blunt manner made enemies and he was banished for criticising powerful people; about thirteen years later he returned to tutor the royal princes, was banished again, and spent most of his life at a rural home writing. His best-known work in the article is *The Fisherman's Calendar* (*Eobusasi*, 1651), a cycle of forty seasonal sijo that the article calls the longest and most ambitious sijo cycle of his period, in which the fisherman stands for a wise person living simply and naturally. It also names *Five Friends*, and calls him "the greatest master of the sijo form". Its details: it gives his age as 85 in one place though the dates imply 83 or 84 (the infobox says "aged 83 to 84"), cites weak sources, and relies on Larry Gross's translations, which may not match the originals.

Hwang Jini (about 1506 to 1567)

The *Hwang Jini* article says she was a famous gisaeng of the reign of King Jungjong, kisaeng name Myeongwol, noted for beauty, wit, intellect and independence, and also for poetry and dance. She was born in Kaesong, but her parentage is uncertain: her mother "was either a *kisaeng* or of *cheonmin* status". "Only a handful of *sijo* ... and *geomungo* pieces exist today", about Kaesong's scenery, lost loves and replies to classic Chinese poems. The article gives several well-known stories as legend or uncited (a coffin that stopped at her house, a riddle only one man solved, mineral water said to flow near her home in 1945) and hedges even her birth story with "The story goes". A claim that her sijo are "the most beautiful ever written" is uncited. It lists later novels, films and television series, and says a crater on Venus is named for her.

Jeong Cheol (1536 to 1594)

The *Jeong Cheol* article gives his dates as 18 December 1536 to 7 February 1594, a statesman and poet who served as Right State Councillor (1589 to 1590) and Left State Councillor (1590 to

1591), with the pen-names Kyeham and Songgang. It lists three gasa by their translated titles, *Gwandong Byeolgok*, *Samiingok* and *Songgang Gasa*, without describing them, and says he is "prominent in the gasa and the sijo". It describes a witty exchange of sijo with the gisaeng Chinok, in which both play on their names. It tags many claims "citation needed" and marks its family and popular culture sections as unsourced.

Gaps in what I read

I read no poem or translation by any of these poets, and I quote none. The first gasa page I tried did not exist under that name, and the second is a short article with uncited claims. I read nothing on Yi Maechang, the 1728 anthology's contents, Heo Nanseolheon or other women's gasa, or the musical settings of either form. The articles give no count of surviving sijo or of Joseon sijo poets. My outline had listed Jeong Cheol's death year as 1593; the article says 1594, and I follow it. This chapter does not say how far Hangul writing lay behind these forms, because the sources I read here do not say.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the sijo form from the article: lines, syllables, the "twist", and the kinds. Then name the inconsistency in the article's own description of the form.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain how the gasa article divides the history of the form, what changed, and three points where the article is inconsistent, unsourced or silent.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose one of Yun Seondo, Hwang Jini or Jeong Cheol, say what the article records and what it marks as legend, uncertain or uncited, and say how you would check one of those claims.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Sijo:** Goryeo origin, Joseon flowering; three lines of 14 to 16 syllables; "twist" in line three; kinds: pyeong, ossijo, sasol, yeon, chang
- **Gasa:** longer, sung, parallel lines; split at the 1592 to 1597 invasion; the article names Jeong Cheol as perfecting it
- **Yun Seondo:** 1587 to 1671; *The Fisherman's Calendar* (1651), forty seasonal sijo
- **Hwang Jini:** about 1506 to 1567; gisaeng; "only a handful" of her sijo survive; many stories uncited
- **Jeong Cheol:** 1536 to 1594; three gasa titles; sijo exchange with Chinok
- **Check:** syllable patterns, surviving counts and every legend

Next chapter: Joseon Fiction and Performance.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Joseon Fiction and Performance

The best-known stories of Joseon exist in two forms at once: as novels on the page and as songs performed aloud. The sources say little about who wrote the first and a good deal, though hedged, about who sang and heard the second. This chapter looks at three famous tales, at pansori, and at how much of their history is known.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *The Tale of Hong Gildong* (lead, plot, debates, legacy and notes), *Chunhyangjeon* (the lead and what the article says of the story's themes and dating), *Pansori* (lead, name, description, history, repertoire and UNESCO sections) and *Kim Man-jung* (lead, life and work, infobox). I read no primary text and no translation. The *Chunhyangjeon* article carries a 2023 tag saying it may need rewriting, and the *Hong Gildong* article is flagged as needing expansion. Where the articles hedge or disagree, I say so. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

Hong Gildong

The article calls *Hong Gildong jeon*, often translated *The Biography of Hong Gildong*, "an iconic piece of Korean literature and culture". In outline, the hero is an illegitimate son of a nobleman with supernatural abilities, who steals from corrupt aristocrats. The article divides the plot in three parts:

1. Gildong grows up in the Hong family home, denied full status as a second-class son, and leaves after stopping an assassination attempt.
2. He leads an outlaw band, the Hwalbindang, robbing the wealthy until he is forced into exile.
3. He overthrows the king of Yul, becomes king himself and rules benevolently.

It is written in Hangul, though the article also mentions a Hanja text and a Middle Korean opening sentence. It says the critic Charles Montgomery called Gildong "the first truly 'Korean' main character", and that his name is used in Korea much as "John Doe" is in English.

Who wrote it, and when?

The traditional author is the Joseon statesman Heo Gyun (1569 to 1618), on the strength of writings by his former student Yi Sik. The article says recent scholarship has questioned this: Professor Lee Yoon-suk argues it cannot be Heo Gyun's because it mentions later figures and institutions, and proposes Hwang Il Ho; Minsoo Kang argues the attribution rests on flawed scholarship, suggests an anonymous writer of secondary or commoner status, and dates the extant version to about the mid-nineteenth century or not long before. The article describes the period as the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It says "The original author of *Hong Gildong* remains an open question" and "Scholars are uncertain which, if any, is the original manuscript". It also mentions a dispute over whether this was the first novel written only in Hangul, but that section is empty, so the article does not settle the claim.

Chunhyangjeon

The *Chunhyangjeon* article calls it "one of the best known love stories and folk tales of Korea". It is based on the pansori *Chunhyangga*, "the most famous of the five surviving pansori tales". The author is unknown and the present form "took shape between 1694 and 1834". The plot, per the article:

- Yi Mongryong, a magistrate's son, falls for Chunhyang, a gisaeng's daughter, and they marry.
- He leaves to follow his father to the capital. Chunhyang waits faithfully.
- The new magistrate, Byeon Hakdo, orders her to serve him as a gisaeng. She refuses and is imprisoned.
- Mongryong passes the state examination, becomes a secret royal inspector and returns in disguise. He exposes Byeon at a birthday banquet and the lovers are reunited.

The article names two themes: class, since the story crosses social barriers, with the suggestion that common readers may have enjoyed seeing a powerful official punished; and fidelity, Chunhyang keeping her integrity under pressure, which it links to traditional Korean moral values. It does not describe individual versions, and says its text from "Main characters" onward is translated from Korean Wikipedia.

The Cloud Dream of the Nine

The *Kim Man-jung* article gives him as a Korean novelist, politician and Neo-Confucian scholar (1637 to 1692), from the yangban class, who passed the state civil service exam and rose to academic counsellor and minister under King Sukjong. He was exiled twice because of political factionalism. It names two novels: *Record of Lady Sa's Southward Journey*, described as a satirical take on the politics of his day and a rebuke of the king, and *The Cloud Dream of the Nine*, "one of the most prominent novels of traditional Korea", with "a highly Buddhist overtone", centred on the "travails of the hero". "It is said that Kim wrote" it during his second exile, a hedge on the timing. The article gives no plot summary, no Korean titles for either work and nothing on the language of the original, so I make no claim on whether it was first written in Chinese or Korean.

Pansori

The *Pansori* article describes it as "musical storytelling performed by a singer and a drummer". The drummer is the *gosu*, who plays a *buk* drum and drives the emotional rhythm; the article calls the singer *changja*.

Point	What the article says
Repertoire	12 original *madang* (song cycles) established in the eighteenth century; five still performed: *Chunhyangga*, *Simcheongga*, *Heungbuga*, *Sugungga*, *Jeokbyeokga*
Length	A full madang can take up to ten hours, so performers often present highlights
Origin	"thought to have originated in the late 17th century"; "unclear where" on the peninsula, though the Honam region became the main site of its development
Performers	Earliest were most likely shamans and street performers
Audience	Lower-class people at first; the upper classes are believed to have begun attending from the mid-eighteenth century, and the elite embraced it in the nineteenth century, which the article calls its golden age
Heritage	National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 5 since 1964; registered by UNESCO on 7 November 2003

The article's text has no inline "citation needed" tags, but several sections are weakly sourced or hard to follow, including the shaman-songs theory, so I treat those as less certain. Chapter 1's article agreed on the count (five surviving texts from twelve madang).

What this says about readers and listeners

Chapter 3 asked who used Hangul and left the question open. These articles give a partial answer for stories, not for the script: a Hangul novel such as *Hong Gildong* is credited, by its modern critics, with a commoner-adjacent or anonymous author (one scholar's suggestion), while pansori reached lower-class audiences first and the elite later. My reading, not a claim in the sources: written fiction and sung fiction overlapped (*Chunhyangga* is both a pansori and, as *Chunhyangjeon*, a tale), so one story can have several authors and several dates, which is why the sources cannot give one.

> **Gaps in what I read**
>
> I read no primary text and no translation, and I give no quotation from any of these works. The *Kim Man-jung* article does not cover the language of *The Cloud Dream of the Nine*, its plot or the Korean titles; I read nothing on *Kumo sinhwa* beyond the one line in Chapter 1, nor on *Simcheongga*, *Heungbuga*, *Sugungga* or *Jeokbyeokga* beyond their names, nor on the Joseon book trade, lending libraries or women readers. The *Chunhyangjeon* article names no specific film. The outline's list included *Gu-unmong*; the article I read uses *The Cloud Dream of the Nine* and I use that.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Summarise *Hong Gildong* in three parts, then give the traditional author and two arguments against that attribution. What does the article say about its date?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Tell the plot of *Chunhyangjeon* in four steps, name its two themes, and explain the link between the tale and the pansori *Chunhyangga*. What does the article say about its author and date?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe pansori: performers, instruments, repertoire, origin, audiences and heritage status. Name two points where the article hedges.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Hong Gildong:** illegitimate son turned outlaw then king; traditionally Heo Gyun (1569 to 1618); authorship and date open
- **Chunhyangjeon:** based on the pansori *Chunhyangga*; present form between 1694 and 1834; class and fidelity
- **Kim Manjung:** 1637 to 1692; *The Cloud Dream of the Nine* and *Record of Lady Sa's Southward Journey*
- **Pansori:** singer (changja) and drummer (gosu); 12 madang, five performed; late 17th-century origin ("thought to"); UNESCO 2003
- **Check:** authorship, dates and the language of each original

Next chapter: Enlightenment, Colonial Rule and Modern Poetry.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Enlightenment, Colonial Rule and Modern Poetry

From 1910 to 1945 Korea was under Japanese rule, and the writers who made modern Korean literature worked inside that fact. This chapter follows five of them, a novelist, a monk, a folk-song poet, an avant-garde architect and a student who died in a prison, and shows what the sources say about each, and what they leave doubtful.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Yi Kwangsu*, *Han Yong-un*, *Kim Sowol*, *Yi Sang* and *Yun Dong-ju*, plus the dates Chapter 1 took from the *Korean literature* article. The pages I first tried for Yi Sang and Yi Gwangsu under other spellings returned errors, so the articles I used are under the spellings shown. I read no poem or story and no translation, and I quote no poem text; the articles' poem excerpts may be in copyright. I read nothing on the colonial government's language policy or censorship rules, so I describe none. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

The Setting

Chapter 1's article gave a few dates for this period: the 1894 Gabo Reforms, the newspaper *Taehan Maeil Shinbo* (July 1904 to May 1909), the 1919 Samil Movement and the magazine *Changjo*, and Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945. It also tagged, as "citation needed", the claim that uncensored Korean publishing became impossible once the Government-General took over that newspaper. The five articles below add individual lives; none of them describes the censorship system itself.

Writer	Dates	Best-known work (per the article)	One fact the article stresses
Yi Gwangsu (Yi Kwangsu)	1892 to 1950	*Mujeong* (*The Heartless*, 1917)	"often described as the first modern Korean novel"
Han Yong-un (Manhae)	1879 to 1944	*Nim-ui Chimmuk* (1926)	Signed the 1919 Declaration of Independence

Writer	Dates	Best-known work (per the article)	One fact the article stresses
Kim Sowol	1902 to 1934	*The Azaleas* (1925)	Lines in the rhythm of Korean folk song
Yi Sang	1910 to 1937	*Crow's Eye View* (1934), *The Wings*	Little recognition in his lifetime
Yun Dong-ju	1917 to 1945	*Sky, Wind, Star and Poem* (published after his death)	Died in Fukuoka Prison aged 27

Yi Gwangsu: The First Modern Novel

The article calls him "a Korean writer, Korean independence activist, and later collaborator with Imperial Japan". His novel *Mujeong* (*The Heartless*, 1917) is "often described as the first modern Korean novel", and "reflected the complexities of Korea's modernization efforts". In the 1910s he was a reformist and a critic of Confucianism; his essay "On the Remaking of National Consciousness" (1920s to 1930s) "advocated a moral overhaul of Korea". He was the lead author of the February 8 Declaration of Independence (1919), which the article says helped catalyse the March First protests. After a 1937 imprisonment he "recanted his anti-Japanese stance and leaned more towards collaboration", and in 1939 became the first head of a pro-Japanese writers' association. The article cites the historian Michael Shin on nationalists' growing scepticism of him. It says he was captured by the North Korean army and died in Manpo on 25 October 1950, "most likely of tuberculosis".

The article hedges several things: the reasons for his 1921 arrest are "reportedly unknown", his Tolstoy influence is "reportedly" described, and a claim that he was a pioneer of queer literature is tagged "citation needed". My reading, not the article's: he is a good case for why this course reports a life with the hedges attached, and does not turn a writer into a hero or a villain.

Han Yong-un: Monk, Activist, Poet

The article describes Han Yong-un (1879 to 1944) as a Buddhist reformer, poet and independence activist, born Han Yu-cheon in Hongseong, who took the religious name Han Yong-un in 1905 (Manhae was his art name). In 1913 he published a work on restoring Korean

Buddhism that criticised its isolationist outlook. He signed the Korean Declaration of Independence in 1919 and took part in the March First Movement, for which he was imprisoned about three years and acquitted in 1922. *Nim-ui Chimmuk* (1926; the article glosses it "Lover's Silence") is "his most significant and enduring literary achievement", with poems that mix nationalism and romantic love. The article does not discuss the ambiguity of *nim* (a beloved); the nearest it comes is that "love for his country plainly appears under the guise of longing for the loved one", which is the article's reading, not a documented statement by the poet.

Kim Sowol: Folk-Song Rhythm

The article says Kim Sowol (1902 to 1934, born Kim Jeong-sik in Kwaksan) wrote early modern poetry in the style of traditional folk songs. His father became insane soon after his birth, which the article says shaped his early life. He studied under the poet Kim Eok, who mentored him for life, and managed a local branch of the *Dong-a Ilbo*. *The Azaleas* (1925), his only collection in his lifetime, was written mostly while he was a teenager. His teacher's essay says "the poet's true genius lay in composing lines in the rhythm of Korean folk song", and the article adds that this musical quality is hard to capture in English. He died at 32; the article gives a "reported suicide in 1934" and later years of heavy drinking.

> **Two ways to read one poem**
>
> The article describes the title poem as a woman speaking to a lover who may leave her. Commentators read it differently, it says: some as cultural resistance to Japanese rule, others as a coded anticipation of Japan's departure, and David McCann argues it should be read on its own terms, not through social history. The article does not choose, and nor do I. The same question appears for Han Yong-un's *nim*: the sources show readings, not a verdict.

Yi Sang: An Architect's Experiments

The article gives Kim Haegyeong (pen name Yi Sang, 1910 to 1937) as a Korean writer and architecture-trained avant-garde figure. He studied architecture at Gyeongseong Technical College and worked as a government building official until tuberculosis made him leave in 1933; he then ran a café and joined the Guinhoe literary group in 1934. *Crow's Eye View* (*Ogamdo*) was a 1934 newspaper series of 15 experimental poems that drew strong public hostility, and the

article says the series was cut short. *The Wings* (*Nalgae*) is his best-known story, using stream-of-consciousness to portray alienation. The article calls him a modernist shaped by Dada and Surrealism and links his training to diagrams, numbers and equations. Much of his early poetry was written in Japanese, and the article warns that early Korean translations were loose and inconsistent. He had little recognition in his lifetime; his work was reprinted from the 1950s, his reputation grew in the 1970s and the Yi Sang Literary Award was established in 1977. He died in Tokyo on 17 April 1937, aged 26, after being detained for questioning on ideological charges and then hospitalised as his tuberculosis worsened. The article gives differing interpretations of the circumstances of his death, and carries maintenance tags for translation quality and missing citations; some scholarly readings (quantum mechanics, relativity, Christianity) are not clearly attributed.

Yun Dong-ju: A Collection After Death

The article says Yun Dong-ju (1917 to 1945) was born on 30 December 1917 in Longjing, Jilin, in China, among Korean settlers. He graduated from Yonhi College (now Yonsei University) in Seoul in 1941, went to Japan in 1942 to study English literature at Rikkyo and then Doshisha, and was arrested by Japanese police in 1943 over alleged anti-Japanese activity. He died in Fukuoka Prison on 16 February 1945, aged 27. The article says the cause of death is uncertain, mentions accounts of saltwater injections and medical experiments, and carries a "citation needed" tag on that passage, so I treat it as unverified. *Sky, Wind, Star and Poem* was published after his death: a first selection of 31 poems in January 1948 with an introduction by the poet Chong Ji-yong, and an expanded 1976 edition of 116 poems. The poems are in Korean. The article describes childlike narrators, a lost hometown, shame at not living a conscientious life, introspection, anxiety about the darkness of the period, and a later resolve to overcome despair through hope and courage.

> **Gaps in what I read**
>
> I read no poem, story or translation. My first attempts at the Yi Sang and Yi Gwangsu pages under other spellings failed, so the spellings of names here follow each article and vary (Yi Gwangsu and Yi Kwangsu; Yun Dong-ju also appears as Yun Tongju and Yoon Dong-ju). I read nothing on the colonial government's censorship or language policy, so I make no claim on how they shaped these writers' choices, on the 1919 magazine *Changjo*, or on women writers of the period. I read the Yi Sang article up to the last 3,440

characters. Choe Nam-seon, Yeom Sang-seop, Kim Dong-in and others in the literature are not covered.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Say what the article claims for Yi Gwangsu's *Mujeong*, what he did in 1919 and after 1937, and which claims about him are hedged or tagged.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose Han Yong-un or Kim Sowol. Give the dates, the main work, what the article says about its style or themes, and the way it says the work can be read in more than one way.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare Yi Sang and Yun Dong-ju: dates, education, main works, how each died, and when and how each was published or recognised. State one thing the articles leave uncertain for each.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Yi Gwangsu:** 1892 to 1950; *Mujeong* (1917); Feb 8 Declaration (1919); collaboration after 1937
- **Han Yong-un:** 1879 to 1944; signed the 1919 Declaration; *Nim-ui Chimmuk* (1926)
- **Kim Sowol:** 1902 to 1934; *The Azaleas* (1925); folk-song rhythm

- **Yi Sang:** 1910 to 1937; *Crow's Eye View* (1934); early poems in Japanese
- **Yun Dong-ju:** 1917 to 1945; died in Fukuoka Prison; collection published 1948, expanded 1976
- **Check:** circumstances of deaths, readings of "nim", censorship and language policy

Next chapter: Division and War.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Division and War

After 1945 the peninsula was divided, and in 1950 a war began that is still unresolved. Writers in the South took both as subjects. This chapter looks at what the survey source says about post-war writing, at two named writers whose work the sources tie to the war and the division, and, briefly and factually, at what an open source says about literature in the North.

How this chapter was checked

The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Korean literature* (the national-division and post-war sections, re-read for this chapter), *Hwang Sun-won* (lead, life, work, translations and awards), *Choe Inhun* (the page that *The Square* redirects to, which covers the novel in a sentence or two) and *North Korean literature* (the article text; its first passage is the only part I summarise). I read no story, no novel and no translation, and I quote no text from any of them. The *Korean literature* article names almost no post-war writers in these sections, so most of this chapter's names come from the two author articles. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified. I fetched the North Korean literature article only from a source open outside Korea; no North Korean site was used.

What the Survey Article Says

The *Korean literature* article is short on the post-war period, and it names no post-war writers in its division and post-war sections. What it does say:

- "The Korean War led to the development of literature centered on the wounds and chaos of war and tragedy."
- Literature concerned with the national division (*bundan soseol*) "became more popular". No works or authors are named.
- Post-war South Korean literature much of the time addresses ordinary people's daily lives and their struggles with national pain.
- A traditionalist movement sought a return to traditional rhythms and folk sentiment, and an experimentalist movement among some poets aimed to bring new experiences to Korean poetry.

- "In the 1960s many South Korean writers started to reject post-war literature as sentimental escapism."
- In the 1970s, anti-establishment literature addressed rapid industrialisation, including neglect of farmers. Chapter 8 returns to this.

The article's division sections carry no citation tags, but the article as a whole is tagged "needs more citations" (March 2024). It names a few writers elsewhere: Ri Ki-yong (1895 to 1984), author of *Kohyang* (1932), "later a North Korean author", and the poet Cho Ki-chon, who "eventually moved to North Korea" with no year.

Two Writers and the War

Hwang Sun-won (1915 to 2000)

The *Hwang Sun-won* article calls him a South Korean writer of short stories, novels and poems, born under Japanese rule in what is now North Korea, who debuted as a middle-school student in 1931, studied English at Waseda University and later taught at Kyunghee University. It says his fiction followed ordinary Koreans through colonialism, ideological conflict, the Korean War, industrialisation and military rule, and that he sought to show the resilience of the Korean spirit rather than only adversity; children often appear as symbols of purity. It notes, especially early in his career, his refusal to write in Japanese, a stance it links to Yeom Sang-seop, and says that stance is described as a feature of his early years.

Work	What the article says
"Cranes" (*Hak*, 1953)	Two childhood friends on opposite sides of the ideological divide rediscover their affection for each other
Trees on a Slope (1960)	A novel depicting three soldiers during the Korean War
"The Shower" (*Sonagi*)	The pathos and beauty of love between two children
The Descendants of Cain (1954)	Listed among his novels; the article gives no description

The article lists awards (the Asia Freedom Literature Prize in 1955, the Academy of Arts Award in 1961, the Samil Prize in 1966, the Korean Literature Award in 1983 and the Inchon Award in 1987) and English translations, among them *The Stars and Other Korean Short Stories* (1980),

Trees on the Cliff (1980), *Trees on a Slope* (2005) and *The Moving Fortress* (2016). Its claims about his significance are attributed to the Korea Literature Translation Institute and to a reference work, *Who's Who in Korean Literature*. The article also notes that short fiction was the leading literary genre in Korea for much of the twentieth century.

Choe Inhun and *The Square* (1960)

The page I could reach is about the author, not the novel. It describes *The Square* (1960) in one sentence as following a Korean prisoner of war whose life is troubled and who dies by suicide amid an intensified ideological rift in the post-war era. It says the novel "immediately became successful", that it was published right after the April 1960 Student Revolution, and that this was "the starting point for a new era in Korea's modern literature". It lists an English translation by Kevin O'Rourke (Spindlewood, September 1985). It does not name the protagonist, the setting or the choices he makes, and says nothing on revisions across editions. I give no further plot.

> **What the sources do and do not say**
>
> The two writers here are the ones the articles tie most directly to the war: one through a story about friends on opposite sides, the other through a novel about a prisoner of war. My reading, not the sources': both put the division inside a private life, a friendship or one man's choices, and not on a battlefield. The survey article's phrase "wounds and chaos of war and tragedy" is the only general statement I have, and it names no work. I did not read anything on women writers of the war, refugee writing, or poets of the period, so this chapter shows two examples, not the field.

A Short Factual Note: Literature in the North

This course follows South Korea after 1945, so this is a short note from one open source, the Wikipedia article *North Korean literature*, with its caveats. The article says output is shaped and controlled by the state: only members of the Korean Writers' Alliance may publish, works go through several levels of censorship and must praise the Workers' Party, and writers self-censor. It says the literature is "almost always characterized as socialist realism" (the critic B. R. Myers argues the mode has "failed" there, a minority view in Western scholarship), that after the mid-1950s Kim Il Sung denounced "foreign" elements, and that after a 1967 purge people were made to burn or donate foreign books. It names Han Sorya's *Jackals* (1951) and Hong Seok-jung's *Hwangjini*, which won South Korea's 2004 Manhae Literary Prize, the first time a North

Korean writer received it. It is tagged as containing statements that may be dated (from 2020), much of its material comes from individual sources such as a defector, and some of its references are weak. That is all I say about the North in this course.

Gaps in what I read

I read no primary text or translation and quote none. The page I reached for *The Square* is an author article with a one-sentence plot, so I give no more. The *Korean literature* article's division and post-war sections name no writers, so I cannot name the main writers of the 1950s and 1960s from it. I read nothing on Kim Su-yeong, Kim Sung-ok, Park Wan-suh's war memoir, Yi Mun-yol, poets of the period, refugee and exile writing or the 2005 joint literary congress beyond one sentence in the survey article. I used one article on North Korean literature and have not checked its claims elsewhere.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Using the survey article, describe post-war South Korean literature in four points. Say what it names and what it leaves out.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Give Hwang Sun-won's dates, birthplace, and three works with one line each. Name one thing the article says about his language choice, and say how it hedges it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Say what the sources give for *The Square* and what they leave out. Then, in three sentences from the open source, state how North Korean literature is described, and name two reasons to treat that description with care.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Survey article:** war literature of "wounds and chaos"; *bundan soseol* "more popular"; 1960s rejection of "sentimental escapism"; 1970s anti-establishment writing
- **Hwang Sun-won:** 1915 to 2000; "Cranes" (1953); *Trees on a Slope* (1960)
- ***The Square*:** 1960; published right after the April 1960 Student Revolution; translated by Kevin O'Rourke (1985)
- **North:** state-controlled; socialist realism; tagged as possibly dated; one open source only
- **Check:** the plot of *The Square*, the names the survey leaves out

Next chapter: Industrialisation, Dissent and Memory.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Industrialisation, Dissent and Memory

From the 1960s to the 1980s South Korea was under military-led governments and was industrialising fast. The survey source says writers in this period wrote against the establishment and about the cost of rapid change. This chapter looks at four writers the articles tie to those years, and at how one event, the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, became a subject of later books.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Kim Chi-ha*, *The Dwarf* (Cho Se-hui's novel; the page on the author was not read), *Park Wan-suh*, *Hwang Sok-yong* and *Gwangju Uprising* (read to about 100,000 of 154,000 characters), plus what Chapter 7 took from the *Korean literature* article. I read no poem, story or novel, and I quote no text from any of them. The *Dwarf* plot comes from a secondary summary on the page, which says it may not capture the novel's full nuance. Two of the pages disagree with each other or with my notes on points of fact, and I say where. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

The Setting

Chapter 7's survey article said that in the 1970s anti-establishment literature addressed rapid industrialisation, "including neglect of farmers". The *Kim Chi-ha* article describes the regime of Park Chung Hee, who took power in a 1961 coup. The *Gwangju Uprising* article describes martial law under Chun Doo-hwan in 1980. None of the five pages describes the censorship system or the economy in detail, so I describe neither.

Kim Chi-ha: The Poet Who Went Underground

The article gives Kim Chi-ha (born Kim Yeongil, 1941 to 2022) as a South Korean poet and playwright and a dissident under Park's government. He used the pen name Jiha, which the article says is the Korean word for "underground". His 1970 poem *Five Bandits* led to his arrest under the Anti-Communist Law; the article notes the poem "says nothing about either

communism or North Korea", is read as a satire of Park, and the magazine that printed it was pulled from circulation. A ballad, *Groundless Rumors*, uses pansori rhythm, as *Five Bandits* does, to satirise corruption among those in power. He was tried and sentenced to death in 1974, after a public outcry the sentence was commuted to life, and he was later released; he was jailed again after accusing the government of torture in the People's Revolutionary Party case. My reading, not the article's: the use of pansori rhythm (Chapter 5) shows an old form being used for a new purpose. The article says nothing about any international campaign or later controversy, so I say nothing either.

Cho Se-hui: The Cost of Redevelopment

The article on *The Dwarf* describes Cho Se-hui's 1978 Korean novel (the Korean title, as the article gives it, means roughly "a little ball launched by a dwarf"; the English edition shortened it) as set in 1970s Seoul, around the forced redevelopment of a district and its human costs. A dwarf and his family are evicted when their district is redeveloped; the dwarf dies by suicide in a factory smokestack, one son becomes a murderer, and the daughter turns to semi-prostitution to try to win back the family's home, and her attempt fails. The book is a *yeonjak soseol*, a linked novel: loosely connected stories first published in Korean magazines between 1975 and 1978, in non-chronological order. The article describes a blend of realism with a fantastic structure and a flat, direct tone, and reads it as social criticism of measurement, standardisation and commodification. Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton translated it (University of Hawaii Press, 2006). It was a bestseller in Korea and was adapted as the 1980 film *A Small Ball Shot by a Midget*. The article hedges: a claim about the title spelling is sourced to an unclear source, and a critic's claim that the novel is paternalistic towards labourers is tagged "citation needed". It quotes Cho's 2009 remark: "I can't believe that novel has been read until the present."

Park Wan-suh: War, Memory and Women's Lives

The article gives Park Wan-suh (20 October 1931 to 22 January 2011) as a South Korean novelist and essayist. She published "The Naked Tree" in 1970, at 40. Her early fiction is grouped under "the tragic events of Korean War and its aftermath", and the Life section says the war separated her from her mother and elder brother and ended her studies at Seoul National University early. From the 1980s she turned toward "problems afflicting women in patriarchal society", and *The Dreaming Incubator* is cited as a critique of male-centred family expectations. The article says *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* sold about 1.5 million copies in Korean. It lists the Yi Sang Literary

Award (1981), the Dong-in Literary Award (1994), the Ho-Am Prize in the Arts (2006) and the Order of Cultural Merit (2011), and English translations including *The Naked Tree*, *The Red Room* and *Sketch of the Fading Sun*. It describes her work as "revered" in Korea and, for *The Naked Tree*, a reading of the mother as "an empty shell" that it attributes to its sources.

Hwang Sok-yong: Vietnam, Gwangju and Prison

The article gives Hwang Sok-yong (born 4 January 1943) as a South Korean novelist, born in Xinjing (now Changchun) in Manchukuo, who studied philosophy at Dongguk University. He served in the Republic of Korea Marine Corps from 1966 to 1969, including clearing up evidence of civilian massacres, and the experience inspired his story "The Pagoda" (1970). His first novel was *Mr. Han's Chronicle* (1970), and *Jang Gilsan*, a satirical saga of a bandit serialised from 1974 to 1984, is estimated to have sold a million copies. *The Shadow of Arms* (1985) is based on his Vietnam service, and *The Guest* (2002) is about a massacre in North Korea; *Mater 2-10* was longlisted for the 2024 International Booker Prize. He took part in the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, and in 1985 was jailed after agreeing to be credited as author of a Gwangju memoir to help market it. He travelled to Pyongyang illegally in 1989, lived in exile in New York and Germany, returned to Seoul in 1993, was sentenced to seven years under the National Security Law and was pardoned in 1998 after about five years; the article says he staged 18 hunger strikes in prison. He described Korea's reality as a "nation-wide state of homelessness".

Gwangju in Literature

The *Gwangju Uprising* article gives the dates as 18 to 27 May 1980. Students protested martial law under Chun Doo-hwan, troops suppressed the demonstrations violently from 18 May, armed citizens took control of much of the city, and the army retook it on 27 May. It says Chun cut off communication to and from Gwangju and used disinformation portraying the protests as communist-instigated.

Source of figures	Deaths
Government (as the article gives it)	144 civilians, 22 soldiers and 4 police; 165 in total
May 18 Family Association	At least 165, with 76 missing and presumed dead

Source of figures	Deaths
Scholarly estimates	600 to 2,300 (lead); "anywhere between 1,000 and 2,000" elsewhere in the same article

The article says there is "no universally accepted death toll". It also says disputing official figures could once lead to arrest for "spreading false rumors", and that denial of the massacre is "commonly espoused" by conservative and far-right groups, which is its characterisation. It dates memorialisation: a National Assembly hearing and renaming in 1988, an official memorial day in 1997, a national cemetery in 2002, a UNESCO Memory of the World listing for the uprising's documents in 2011 and a Truth Commission in 2020. Among books and films it lists: *Human Acts* (Han Kang, 2016), *The Old Garden* (Hwang Sok-yong), *There a Petal Silently Falls* (Choe Yun, 2008), adapted as *A Petal* (1996), *Peppermint Candy* (1999), *May 18* (2007), *A Taxi Driver* (2017) and *1987: When the Day Comes* (2017).

Where the sources disagree

The *Hwang Sok-yong* article dates *The Old Garden* to 2000; the *Gwangju Uprising* article gives it as a 2009 novel with a 2006 film. The film date contradicts a 2009 novel, which suggests different dates (original and English edition) were used, but neither article says so. The *Hwang Sok-yong* article also gives the English edition of *The Guest* as 2005 in its text and 2006 in its translations list. The *Gwangju* article's own death estimates differ (600 to 2,300 against 1,000 to 2,000). And a date I had in my notes for Kim Chi-ha's death sentence (1975) is not the article's: it says 1974. I follow each article and do not choose between them.

Gaps in what I read

I read no primary text or translation. I did not read the article on Cho Se-hui himself, nor on Ko Un, Shin Kyung-sook, Yi Mun-yol or Kim Seung-ok, so this chapter shows four writers and one event, not the field. I read the *Gwangju Uprising* article only to 100,000 of 154,000 characters. The articles do not describe censorship in these years. The *Hwang Sok-yong* and *Gwangju* articles mention a North Korea visit and a massacre in the North only as facts about his life and a novel's subject; I add nothing about the North.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe Kim Chi-ha's pen name, his 1970 poem, why its arrest was notable, and what happened to him in 1974 and after, using only what the article says.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Summarise *The Dwarf*: setting, plot in four sentences, structure, translators and adaptation. Name one claim in the article that is hedged or tagged.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare Park Wan-suh and Hwang Sok-yong: dates, how each connects to a war or its aftermath, and one work each. Then give the Gwangju death figures from three sources and explain why no single figure is given.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Kim Chi-ha:** 1941 to 2022; pen name "Jiha"; *Five Bandits* (1970); death sentence 1974, commuted
- ***The Dwarf*:** Cho Se-hui, 1978; linked stories 1975 to 1978; Fulton translation (Hawaii, 2006)
- **Park Wan-suh:** 1931 to 2011; "The Naked Tree" (1970); turned to women's lives in the 1980s
- **Hwang Sok-yong:** born 1943; Marines 1966 to 1969; *The Shadow of Arms* (1985); *The Guest* (2002); pardoned 1998

- **Gwangju:** 18 to 27 May 1980; no universally accepted death toll; *Human Acts* (2016)
- **Check:** dates of English editions, and the death toll

Next chapter: Contemporary Writers and the Translation Boom.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Contemporary Writers and the Translation Boom

Chapter 1 opened with the 2024 Nobel Prize. This chapter looks at the writers around it: the novelists and story-writers whose books reached English readers in the last twenty years, what the sources say about their prizes and translators, and how often those sources contradict each other on small facts.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on *Shin Kyung-sook*, *Kim Young-ha*, *Bora Chung*, *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* and *Han Kang* (as read for Chapter 1), plus the *Literature Translation Institute of Korea* article. I read no novel or story and no translation, and I quote no text from any of them. Wikipedia is a dated snapshot, and several of these pages give figures from 2018 or earlier. The sentences marked as my reading are mine and unverified.

Five Writers at a Glance

Writer	Born	Work the article stresses	English-reader marker
Shin Kyung-sook	12 January 1963	*Please Look After Mom* (2009)	Man Asian Literary Prize; English edition 2011
Kim Young-ha	11 November 1968	*I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (1996); *Your Republic Is Calling You* (2006)	Translated into many languages
Han Kang	27 November 1970	*The Vegetarian*, *Human Acts*	International Booker 2016; Nobel Prize 2024
Bora Chung	1976	*Cursed Bunny*	Shortlisted for the 2022 International Booker Prize
Cho Nam-joo	not given in the part I read	*Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* (2016)	Longlisted for the US National Book Award for Translated

Writer	Born	Work the article stresses	English-reader marker
			Literature, 2020

Shin Kyung-sook

The article says she debuted in 1985 with the novella *Winter's Fable*, and that *Please Look After Mom* (2009) is her best-known book, a million-copy bestseller. She won the Man Asian Literary Prize for it, and the article calls her the first woman and the first South Korean to win. **The year conflicts within the page**: the lead and awards list say 2012, the career section says 2011. Chi-Young Kim translated the book into English (2011). The article also lists *I'll Be Right There* (2010) and gives *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness* as the English title of a different book, *A Lone Room*. It reports that in 2015 the *Huffington Post Korea* alleged she had plagiarised a passage from a short story by Yukio Mishima in her book *Legend*; the article says she apologised and her publisher withdrew a collection of her short stories. That is a press report as the article gives it, and I add no detail.

Kim Young-ha

The article calls him "one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Korean literature", with recurring themes of urban alienation, identity and modern capitalism. His debut novel was *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (1996). *Your Republic Is Calling You* (2006) is described as a crime-fiction-style novel about a North Korean spy and his family in Seoul, and won the Manhae Literary Award (2007). *Black Flower* (2003), a historical novel about Korean migrant workers in Mexico, won the Dong-in Literary Award (2004). The English *Diary of a Murderer* is a 2019 collection; the Korean original of the title story is the novel *A Murderer's Guide to Memorization* (2013), adapted as the 2017 film *Memoir of a Murderer*. The article names Krys Lee as translator of the collection and names no translator for most other English editions. Its awards list includes the Yi Sang Literary Award (2012) and several earlier prizes.

The article is inconsistent on small points: its translations section says *Brother Has Returned* won the Yi Sang Award in 2004, while its awards list gives that year's prize as the Lee San Award; the film adaptation of *Your Republic* is tagged "in progress" with a "when?" marker; and one awards entry is unclear.

Han Kang

Chapter 1 gave her dates, the 2016 International Booker (*The Vegetarian*, translated by Deborah Smith; the first Korean-language novel to win; the prize was shared by author and translator) and the 2024 Nobel Prize for "intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life". Chapter 8's *Gwangju Uprising* article lists *Human Acts* (2016) among books about May 1980. The *Han Kang* article names Deborah Smith for *The Vegetarian*, *Human Acts* and *The White Book*, Deborah Smith and Emily Yae Won for *Greek Lessons*, and Emily Yae Won and Paige Aniyah Morris for *We Do Not Part*. I read no new material on her for this chapter.

Bora Chung

The article says Chung Bora is a South Korean writer and translator born in 1976, who studied at Yale, took a doctorate in Slavic literature at Indiana University Bloomington and has taught at Yonsei University. Her short-story collection *Cursed Bunny* was "shortlisted for the 2022 International Booker Prize", translated by Anton Hur (Algonquin, 2022), who has also translated her other works. The article says the stories "borrow from different genres, including magical realism, horror and science fiction" and does not call her a purely horror writer. Its bibliography is marked "incomplete".

Cho Nam-joo: Kim Ji-young, Born 1982

The article says the novel follows a young woman who begins impersonating other women she knows and is taken for psychiatric help; it then traces her life through son preference in her family, workplace discrimination, marriage, pressure to have a child and stay-at-home motherhood, ending with depression, with a psychiatrist's narration closing the story. The article's own plot section is flagged as containing excessive detail, so this is simplified. It says the book "has sold more than 1 million copies as of 27 November 2018", the first Korean novel to do so since *Please Look After Mom* in 2009. A 2018 gift of the book to President Moon Jae-in boosted sales. In 2020 it was longlisted for the US National Book Award for Translated Literature and the French Emile Guimet Prize for Asian Literature. The author said she meant it to "make this into a public debate", and the article says it became part of feminist movements in South Korea. It records online backlash against a member of a K-pop group who mentioned reading it. A 2019 film starred Jung Yu-mi and Gong Yoo. The article names no translator, so I name none.

What the sources do and do not say about the translation boom

The articles show a pattern of prizes aimed at translated books: the Man Asian Literary Prize (Shin), the International Booker (Han Kang, Bora Chung) and the National Book Award for Translated Literature (Cho). Chapter 1's *Literature Translation Institute of Korea* article described state-funded translation grants and said that, since 2014, a sample translation is funded first and the rest follows once the translator and author sign with an international publisher. My reading, not stated in the sources: because translations pass through prizes, grants and a small number of English-language publishers, the books that reach readers abroad are a small and partly shaped selection. None of these articles gives a count of Korean books translated or sold abroad, so I give none. I also read nothing here on webtoons or web novels; they have their own course plan.

Gaps in what I read

I read no novel, story or translation, and quote none. The pages conflict on small facts (the Shin prize year, one Kim Young-ha award, the date of *The Old Garden* in Chapter 8), and I did not resolve them. The *Kim Ji-young* article gives sales only to 2018. I did not read about Kim Hye-soon, Kim Hyesoon, Hwang Jungeun, Sohn Won-pyung, Cheon Myeong-kwan, Kim Soom, Park Min-gyu or genre fiction, and the article on Cho Nam-joo herself was not read. I read nothing on translators' working methods or on the reception of the Nobel win beyond Chapter 1's single sentence.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

For Shin Kyung-sook, give the debut, the best-known book, the prize, the translator and the date of the English edition, and name the inconsistency in the article's account of the prize.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose two of Kim Young-ha, Bora Chung and Cho Nam-joo. For each give the work, the year, one prize or shortlist, and one thing the article hedges or leaves out.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

List the translators the sources name for Han Kang, Bora Chung and Kim Young-ha. Then, in three sentences, say what the prizes and the grant system suggest about how books reach readers abroad, and mark which sentence is your own reading.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Shin Kyung-sook:** born 1963; *Please Look After Mom* (2009); Man Asian Literary Prize (2011 or 2012: the article gives both)
- **Kim Young-ha:** born 1968; *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (1996); *Your Republic Is Calling You* (2006)
- **Han Kang:** born 1970; International Booker 2016; Nobel Prize 2024
- **Bora Chung:** born 1976; *Cursed Bunny*, translated by Anton Hur; 2022 International Booker shortlist
- **Cho Nam-joo:** *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* (2016); over 1 million copies by November 2018
- **Check:** prize years, translators and current sales

Next chapter: Capstone: Reading Korean Literature as a Conversation.

Korean Literature

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Reading Korean Literature as a Conversation

Nine chapters, from songs in a borrowed script to a Nobel Prize. This chapter adds no new facts. It follows five questions that kept coming back in different forms and shows how the chapters answer them. The title is a suggestion for a way of reading and not a claim from any source: the periods can be read as answering one another.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> Every fact below was drawn from the earlier chapters of this course, which took them from the Wikipedia articles named there. I read no new sources for this chapter. The grouping into five threads, and the sentences marked as my reading, are mine and unverified. Where an earlier chapter noted that its source hedged, was tagged or contradicted another, that caution comes with the fact.

The Threads, Chapter by Chapter

Chapter	Script and language	Control and dissent	Division and war	Class and gender	Who is heard
Korean Literature 2	*Hyangchal*; Classical Chinese for the histories	Myth used later to date states	Dangun dated differently in South and North	Samguk yusa: commoners about 8% of protagonists	25 hyangga survive
Korean Literature 3	Idu; Hunminjeongeum (1446); *Yongbi eocheonga* (1447)	An official first work in Hangul		Preface: ordinary people could not write what they wished	Who learned the script left open
Korean Literature 4	Sijo and gasa, sung		Gasa divided at the 1592 to	Gisaeng poets; yangban and	"Only a handful" of Hwang Jini's sijo

Chapter	Script and language	Control and dissent	Division and war	Class and gender	Who is heard
			1597 invasion	commoner gasa	
Korean Literature 5	Hong Gildong in Hangul; pansori sung	Authorship contested		Illegitimate son hero; a gisaeng's daughter	Pansori: lower-class audiences, then elite
Korean Literature 6	Early poems in Japanese (Yi Sang)	Collaboration (Yi Gwangsu); Yun Dong-ju's death in prison			Yi Sang reprinted from the 1950s
Korean Literature 7	Hwang Sun-won's refusal to write in Japanese	North Korean literature as state-controlled	"Cranes"; *The Square*		The survey names no post-war writers
Korean Literature 8		Kim Chi-ha's death sentence (1974); Hwang Sok-yong's prison term	Gwangju; Vietnam	*The Dwarf*; Park Wan-suh on women	Disputed Gwangju death toll
Korean Literature 9	English via translators			*Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*	Prizes for translated books; LTI Korea grants

Thread One: Which Language, Which Script?

Korean Literature 1 gave the article's line that "For much of Korea's 1,500 years of literary history, it was written in Hanja". Korean Literature 2 and 3 followed the adaptations: *hyangchal* and *idu* used Chinese characters to spell Korean, and the 1446 *Hunminjeongeum* introduced the alphabet whose first major work, *Yongbi eocheonga* (1447), was a court poem. The question comes back in the twentieth century in a different form: Korean Literature 6 noted that much of

Yi Sang's early poetry was in Japanese, and Korean Literature 7 that Hwang Sun-won was noted for refusing to write in Japanese, particularly early in his career. In Korean Literature 9 it is the English that matters, and a translator's voice. My reading, not stated in the sources: in every period, the question "in what script, in what language?" decided who could write and who could be read.

Thread Two: Control and Dissent

The sources record control and the response to it more often than they describe it. Korean Literature 6 gave Yi Gwangsu's collaboration after 1937 and Yun Dong-ju's death in Fukuoka Prison; Korean Literature 7 gave a short, factual note on North Korean literature as state-controlled; Korean Literature 8 gave Kim Chi-ha's 1974 death sentence for a poem the article says "says nothing about either communism or North Korea", and Hwang Sok-yong's prison term and pardon in 1998. The sources do not describe the censorship systems themselves, and the course did not read about them.

Thread Three: Division and War

The division is a subject from Korean Literature 7 on: Hwang Sun-won's "Cranes", about friends on opposite sides, and *The Square*, whose source gave only a sentence. The survey article's phrase "wounds and chaos of war and tragedy" is the only general statement the course has. Korean Literature 8 added Park Wan-suh's war-separated family and Hwang Sok-yong's Vietnam service and *The Guest*, and Korean Literature 8's Gwangju figures, which no source settles. The Dangun dating in Korean Literature 2 (2333 BCE in South Korea's old Dangi era, an early thirtieth century BCE in North Korea) shows the division reaching back to the myths.

Thread Four: Class and Gender

Class and gender are in the stories from the start. Korean Literature 4 named gisaeng poets and the shift in gasa from yangban to commoner writers; Korean Literature 5 gave Hong Gildong, an illegitimate son denied full status, and Chunhyang, a gisaeng's daughter; Korean Literature 8 gave *The Dwarf* and Park Wan-suh's turn, from the 1980s, to "problems afflicting women in patriarchal society"; Korean Literature 9 ended with *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* and its reception.

My reading: the same two questions, who is allowed full status and who is believed, run from *Hong Gildong* to a 2016 novel, but the sources do not say so.

Thread Five: Who Gets Heard?

Only 25 hyangga survive (Korean Literature 2), only a handful of Hwang Jini's sijo (Korean Literature 4), and early Korean translations of Yi Sang were "loose and inconsistent" (Korean Literature 6). In the present, translated books pass through prizes and a state-funded institute (Korean Literature 1 and 9). The pattern is that what survives or is translated is a selection, and the sources do not say what was left out.

Open Questions

- **Who learned Hangul, and when?** Korean Literature 3 asked this and no article read answered it.
- **Who wrote *Hong Gildong*?** The article says the question is open (Korean Literature 5).
- **How should a writer's later choices be judged?** The sources report Yi Gwangsu's collaboration and Kim Sowol's or Han Yong-un's readings without a verdict (Korean Literature 6).
- **How many died at Gwangju?** "No universally accepted death toll" (Korean Literature 8).
- **What of Korean literature is not in English?** No article gives a count (Korean Literature 9).
- **Were the dates right?** The articles disagreed on the *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa*, on a prize year and on *The Old Garden*.

A Reading Path (Mine, Unchecked)

These are works the course named together with an English translation one of its articles lists. I did not check availability or editions.

- Choe Inhun, *The Square* (translated by Kevin O'Rourke, 1985).
- Cho Se-hui, *The Dwarf* (translated by Bruce and Ju-Chan Fulton, University of Hawaii Press, 2006).
- Shin Kyung-sook, *Please Look After Mom* (translated by Chi-Young Kim, 2011).
- Han Kang, *The Vegetarian* and *Human Acts* (translated by Deborah Smith).

- Bora Chung, *Cursed Bunny* (translated by Anton Hur, 2022).
- Hwang Sun-won, *Trees on a Slope* (English edition listed as 2005).

What This Course Left Out

It left out most poetry after 1945, drama, children's literature, essays, literary magazines, women writers of the colonial period, the censorship systems, Korean writing abroad, genre fiction and webtoons and web novels (which have their own course plan), and all primary texts: I read no poem or story, and quote none. North Korean literature appears only as one short note. Many writers named in the articles but not read here (Kim Hyesoon, Ko Un, Yi Mun-yol, Hwang Jungeun and others) are good starts for a second course.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Trace the question "Which script, which language?" through four moments in the course, with dates and names, and say which of your four sentences are from the sources and which are your own reading.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose class or gender and name three works from different chapters that deal with it. For each say what the chapter reported and what is my reading, not a claim from a source.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Give four examples from the course of a source being lost, disputed, contradicted or hedged, and say what habit from Korean Literature 1 each one calls for.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Script:** hyangchal, idu, Hanja, Hangul (1446), Japanese for some colonial-era writing
- **Control:** Yi Gwangsu, Yun Dong-ju, Kim Chi-ha (1974), Hwang Sok-yong; the sources do not describe censorship itself
- **Division and war:** "Cranes", *The Square*, *The Guest*, Gwangju (no agreed toll)
- **Class and gender:** Hong Gildong, Chunhyangjeon, *The Dwarf*, Park Wan-suh, *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*
- **Who is heard:** 25 hyangga; a handful of sijo; prizes and grants for translated books
- **Method:** separate surviving from described; treat "first" as a claim; show disagreements; mark your own reading

Where next: this completes *Korean Literature*. The planned Korea courses on history, K-pop, webtoons, taekwondo and festivals can follow the same method, and a second literature course could take the writers and forms listed above.