

# A Study of Russia's First 19th Century Textbook of Korean Texts in Linguistic and Cultural Perspective

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## Abstract

Traditionally instruction of speech, grammar and reading in Korean has been carried out in separate educational units. Recently learning the Korean language has shifted from merely mastering grammar to focusing on spoken language and the communication skills. This article sheds the light on the need for integrated language learning activities in the Korean language and culture instruction using the 19th textbook *Chunhyangjeon* by Kim Byeong-ok. This research examines the Korean Texts of *Chunhyangjeon* – the first textbook introduced in Russia for reading in the medieval Korean language. The main purpose of this study is to better understand how the reading, grammar, and culture aspects of the Korean language were taught in Russia in the 19th century. The analysis revealed the need for integrating the medieval Korean texts into the Korean reading classes. The importance of combining the integrated Korean language instruction with the direct teaching method is also discussed. The author argues for the need to use both the traditional reading learning method and the mixed approach, which includes reading and understanding the writer, the reader, and the cultural context. Finally, this article is trying to provide a rationale for integrating reading and grammar education for higher learning outcomes in developing linguistic abilities and language comprehension.

**Keywords:** learning to read, Korean texts, Kim Byeong-ok, medieval Korean, Korean textbook, first Korean textbook, integrated approach, *Chunhyangjeong*

## 1. Introduction

Since the signing of the Joseon-Russian Treaty of Friendship and Trade, the first Korean language course in Europe was opened at St. Petersburg University in 1897. At that time Korean language textbooks, rewritten and compiled in the *Onmun* language (諺文), were used as textbooks for universities. In Kim Byeong-ok's textbook, the content of the creation of **Hun-Min-Jeong-Eum** by King Sejong was presented for the first time in Korean textbooks in Russia.

During this period, relations between Russia and Joseon were at their peak. When a delegation led by Min Yong Hwan attended the coronation of Nicholas II, Nicholas II demanded that a Korean language teacher be sent, and Kim Byeong-ok, then an interpreter at the Korean Consulate mission, taught Korean at St. Petersburg University. This was the beginning of teaching the Korean language in Europe. At that time, St. Petersburg University was an educational institution for training diplomats.

Kim Byeong-ok, who served as an interpreter for Min Yong-hwan's delegation, taught Korean at the university and compiled two publications: *Korean Texts* and *Study Guide to the Korean Language*. The *Study Guide to the Korean Language* is a method of teaching grammar with translation, which provides explanations of grammar in Russian and examples in Korean. This is the first textbook to introduce Korea to Russia and compare Korean pronunciation and the structure of Russian grammar. The *Korean Text* is a textbook written in Korean using the Eastern compilation method. This is the only textbook that focuses on teaching reading and uses the direct teaching method (Kim Hye Ran, 2022: 3).

At the dawn of teaching the Korean language in 19th-century Russia, Kim Byeong-ok reconstructed and utilized the original untranslated *Chunhyangjeon* text to help Russian students understand the Korean language. This textbook consists of 8 vertical lines including 6 to 10 words per line, which is characteristic of the Oriental-style textbook composition, and is characterized by conveniently arranged words and spaces for each word.

The collection in the Korean language *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon*, compiled by Kim Byeong-ok in the nineteenth century, is a textbook using an integrated approach to teaching reading, grammar, and speaking. In Joseon (Korea), *Chunhyangjeon* was not only a classic novel for the **yangban** (the governing class in the Goryeo-Joseon period) but also a classical text read by common people.

In *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon (Korean Classical Novel)*, one can find the grammar explained by Kim Byung-ok in the *Study Guide to the Korean Language*. The manuscript *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon* was published on March 2, 1898, and the *Study Guide to the Korean Language* was published in a book form on April 28, 1899, i.e. a year later.

Complicated Chinese characters and songs were adapted to be easily understood by foreign learners, and the parts that were not necessary for learning in terms of the content were excluded.

This can be regarded as the beginning of the contemporary **Hallyu (Korean Wave)**; Korean culture is gaining popularity abroad) with the fast narration of Korean dramas or pieces of fiction in the form of dialog, including action and characters.

The textbooks *Study Guide to the Korean Language and Korean Texts* compiled by Kim Byung-ok also have an interactive aspect. Foreign students not only were able to easily master and practice reading but also attempted to reflect expressions of social discourse that combined reading, speaking, and grammar by inserting spoken texts into communication.

## 2. Method and Principles of Research

Attention should be paid to the fact that Kim Byung-ok used the *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon* as a textbook applying a direct teaching method.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Kim Byung-ok combined teaching Korean grammar and Korean reading to develop principles of foreign language teaching based on natural assimilation as it occurs when learning the mother tongue.

This direct teaching method is used in Western countries and is similar to the method of translation agencies such as **Sayōgwōn** 사역원 established during the late Goryeo Dynasty.

To promote learning Chinese, the Bureau of Interpreters of the Ministry of Rites issued an instruction not to use the Korean language in everyday life. Arrangements were made to use only Chinese in all areas of life, from official duties to daily life.

Using only the target language can be regarded as a direct teaching method analogous to Western teaching methods.

Kim Byung-ok's direct teaching method used for teaching Korean to foreign students can be seen as both an Eastern and Western teaching method since this method had already been applied by **Sayōgwōn** in Goryeo.

According to Kim Young-ran (2009), the basic principle of the direct teaching method is that classroom teaching is conducted only in the target language, only vocabulary or phrases used in everyday life are taught, and the function of oral communication is used on a small scale. Besides, intensive language learning courses are conducted between teachers and students.

The direct teaching method is implemented according to a carefully thought-out procedure, using interdisciplinary questions and answers.

Besides, grammar is taught inductively, new teaching techniques are introduced. Specific words are taught by presenting objects and pictures, and abstract words are taught through associative concepts.

At the same time, it is proposed to simultaneously teach speaking and listening comprehension. Special attention is paid to correct pronunciation and grammar.

## 3. Results

According to Carter R. (2007), literature has long and frequently been used as a textbook for foreign language teaching; the reason is that decoding literary works in the target language was recognized as an intellectual educational goal in teaching a second foreign language.

Hall G. (2005) states that since the middle of the twentieth century, when the focus of language education became communication-oriented education, which is a functional element of language, the relevance of second language teaching materials has shifted to spoken language materials realized in real speech situations rather than in literary works.

However, since the late twentieth century, interest in the role of literature in mastering the communicative function of the target language has been revived. The reason is that literature not only is a factor that motivates students to learn but also contains many language elements that can be used as study materials.

Moreover, it is noted that literature is a good resource for understanding the culture of the target language and for communication because literary works reflect the feelings, values, and customs of the language society.

Heo Gyeong-jin and Lee Suk (2012) note that among the books in the collection of St. Petersburg Library, the following are indicated as textbooks for studying the Korean language: *Chunhyangjeon* (春香傳), *Cheonjamun* (千字文), *Cheon-un-ok-pyeong* (全韻玉篇), *Teo-seng-chon*, as well as historical books: *Sam-guk-ji* (三國志), *Goryeo-sa* (高麗史) and *Tong-guk-sa-rak* (東國史略).

Heo Gyeong-jin believes that classical literary works began to be used as teaching aids for studying the Korean language in Japan. Russia also followed Japan's example and used the above-mentioned classical novels for teaching the Korean language. However, the Imperial Library was established in Russia in 1809 under Empress Catherine II, a native of Germany, and many books from Europe were imported, translated, and published. Moreover, literary works were used for teaching foreign languages as part of the European school curriculum in the 18th century.

Taking into account that teaching foreign languages through literary works was introduced into the school curriculum in 18th-century Europe, one cannot state with certainty that Kim Byung-ok, who taught the Korean language at St. Petersburg University in the Russian capital, followed only Japan's example.

### 3.1 *Chunhyangjeon*

Kim Byung-ok taught reading in the Korean language by deciphering *Chunhyangjeon* (春香傳) written in **Onmun** (Korean script), adapting it to be easier understood by Russian students.

Previously, Chinese characters in *Chunhyangjeon* were written in simple words. The plot unravels very fast, as in *Madangguk* (a street theatrical performance unmasking the vices of society), which shows that it differs from many other *Chunhyangjeon* texts published in Joseon.

According to Kim Dong-wook, *Chunhyangjeon* (春香傳) was recognized as a typical classical Joseon novel, and it was first translated into Japanese by Nakariya Dosui in 1882, then in 1889 by the American missionary Allen, in 1892 by the French writer Rosny, and in 1895 by the German Arnous. Each of them translated the work into his own language and published it.

*Chunhyangjeon* (春香傳) was translated into several languages at once, perhaps because foreigners found it to be the best text to read, reflecting the unique Joseon culture, history, and customs of that time.

Professor Kim Byung-ok also compiled *Chunhyangjeon* (春香傳) (1898) and the Study Guide to the Korean Language (1899). These were the first textbooks for learning Korean in Russia, recognized as textbooks of a decent level for teaching Korean culture and Hangul.

Korean Texts is a textbook comprising a total of 62 pages. Each page contains 8 lines and 23–28 characters (6–10 words per line). The book contains a total of 3,811 words (there are no pages in the original). Pages 1 through 5 contain information about *samgang oryun* (三綱五倫).



Figure 1. The Korean Texts (Kim Byeong-ok, 1898:1)

3.2 *Samgang oryun* (三綱五倫)

It is believed that the reason why **samgang oryun** (삼강오륜) – the three fundamental norms and five moral disciplines in human relationships explained in simple words – is included in the textbook before Chunhyangjeon is that this text conveys Joseon’s social values.

**Samgang (three basic types of human relationships) include:**

Gunwisingang 군위신강 (君爲臣綱) – the principle which the relationships between the king and his subjects should comply with;

Buwijagang 부위자강 (父爲子綱) – the principle which the relationships between a father and a son should comply with;

Buwibugang 부위부강 (夫爲婦綱) – the principle which the relationship between a husband and a wife should comply with.

**Oryun 오륜 (five ethical norms) include:**

Gunsinyuui 군신유의 (君臣有義) – the relationship between the king and his servants should be faithful;

Bujayuchin 부자유친 (父子有親) – the relationships between the father and son should be close;

Bubuyubyeol 부부유별 (夫婦有別) – the relationships between the husband and wife should be discerning;

Jang-yuyuseo 장유유서 (長幼有序) – there should be order (succession) between adults and children;

Bungwuyusin 봉우유신 (朋友有信) – there should be trust between friends.

It can be said that explaining the meaning of samgang oryun 삼강오륜 preceding the story of Chunhyangjeon was regarded as a process of education rather than just informing about Joseon culture or social customs.

The story of Chunhyangjeon begins with an explanation of samgang oryun (the three basic norms and five moral disciplines in human relationships), and Chunhyang is described not only as a woman of low status but also as an exemplary Joseon woman obeying the rules of samgang oryun.

Chunhyangjeon reveals the thematic characteristics of **gwonseonjing-ak** (권선징악, encouraging good and punishing evil), a story of love, the characters of different social statuses in the Joseon Dynasty, as well as class

discrimination, social values based on chastity, and the specifics of Korean culture. All of these are reflected in the textbook Korean Texts.

### 3.3 Korean Texts for Teaching Reading

The author suggests that this The Korean Texts was done for teaching reading before studying Korean grammar. Books related to Joseon kept in Russia were sent to St. Petersburg University, to the city where the emperor was at the time, by the Russian envoy Weber and other diplomats.

Since diplomatic relations had already been established between Russia and China, Chinese language departments were established at universities and there were students studying Chinese.

However, it would have been difficult for Kim Byung-ok to teach Russian students a book written in Chinese characters, which was read by Joseon intellectuals at that time, because Chinese characters are the “sound of meaning” (sense), not the “sound of sound” (pronunciation). Therefore, he attempted to teach students Hangeul, the phonetic script representing Joseon, which differs from Chinese character writing.

In Chinese hieroglyphic texts, there are almost no spaces, so to make it easier for students to read the textbook, Kim Byung-ok wrote it in Hangeul, where sentences are written with spaces, using regular characters, 8 lines per page, and 8 to 10 words per line.

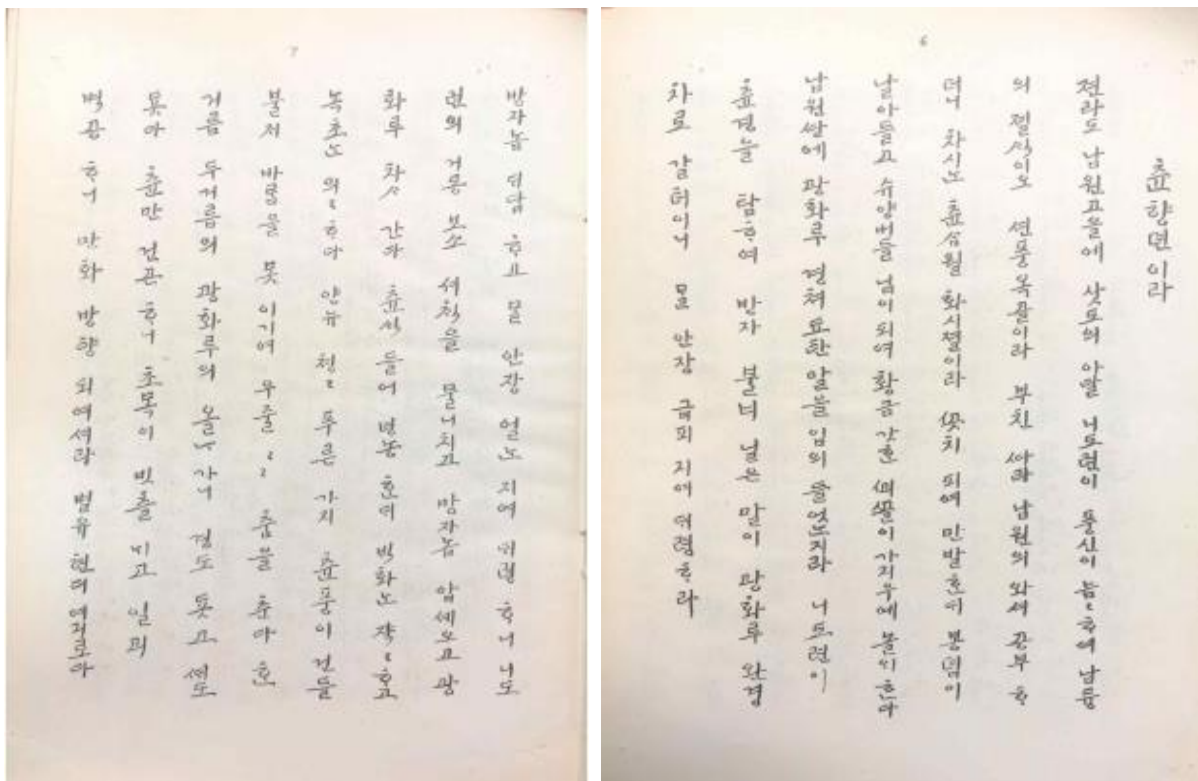


Figure 2. The Korean Texts (Kim Byung-ok, 1898:6-7)

### 3.4 Popularity

Classic Chunhyangjeon (春香傳) in Russia was first published as a textbook for Korean reading and gained great popularity; later, it was used not only as educational reading material. In 1960, Chunhyangjeon was translated into Russian as The Story of Chun Hyang’s Loyalty in a collection of classic Korean novels of the 17th–19th centuries by Adelaida Trotsevich, a professor of Korean literature at St. Petersburg University in Russia.

Such popularity of the book can be explained by the fact that it contains a love story that overcomes differences in social status, and similar stories of class discrimination existed in the Russian imperial family.

Grand Duke Alexei IV, son of Alexander II, who was Tsesarevich of Russia, had a son born to the daughter of the poet Vasily Zhukovsky in 1871 while he was serving as a naval officer. His father, Alexander II, refused his grandchildren and opposed their marriage. The reasons for the opposition were both the difference in age

(Zhukovskaya was 8 years older than Grand Duke Alexei) and the difference in social status (she was the Empress's maid of honor). The laws of the Russian Empire prohibited marriage without the Tsar's consent. The Russian Orthodox Church annulled the marriage, and Archduke Alexei made efforts to have his wife and son accepted as members of the Russian royal family, but did not succeed.

3.4 The Best Classical Work

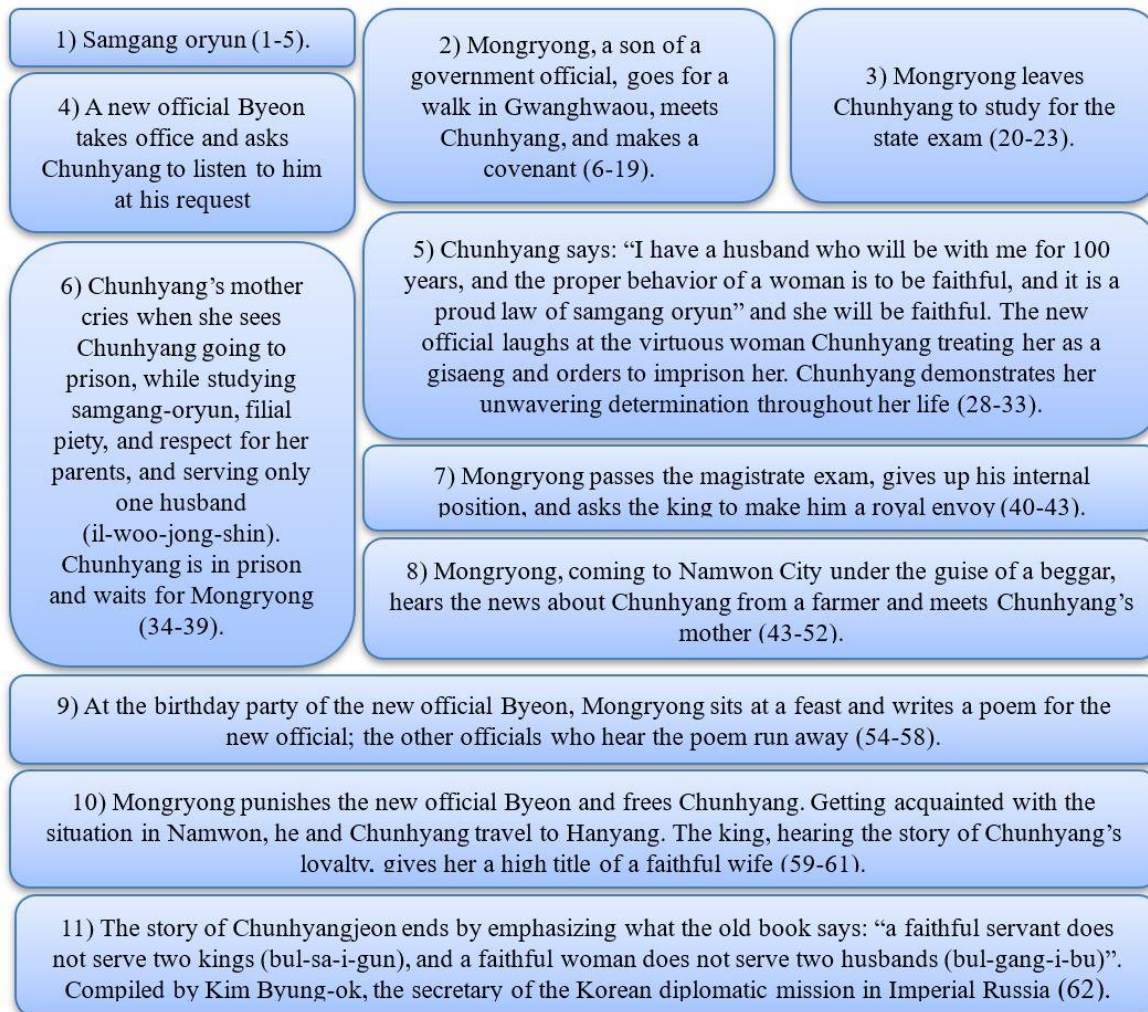
Chunhyangjeon (春香傳) is undoubtedly the best classical work of the Korean people. Since ancient times, it has been published many times in different versions in different regions of Joseon and was read by people.

The complete edition of Chunhyangjeon (春香傳), containing many Chinese characters, is written in such a way that it is hard to understand its meaning and content. The text of Chunhyangjeon in the Korean Texts by Kim Byung-ok is written in Korean without an admixture of Chinese characters, so it is easy to understand even for those who begin studying the Korean language.

Moreover, it should be noted that the plot in Chunhyangjeon unravels in an exciting and fast manner, as in a drama or madang (마당극) play.

The full text of Chunhyangjeon (春香傳) contains about 20,000 words, while Kim Byung-ok's textbook contains 3,811 words (excluding the original page 1), so it can be called an excerpt of a larger text. The content structure of Chunhyangjeon (春香傳) is summarized in the table below. Besides, this table is presented as a dialog box where the text is divided into sentences made up of spoken discourse.

4. Chunhyangjeon Content Development (p. 62).



5. Discussion

When teaching reading, it is essential to provide background knowledge related to the topic of the text before the learner engages in the reading process. It is believed that explaining the ethical values of samgang oryun can help

students understand the culture of the Joseon Dynasty by accumulating and activating background knowledge when reading the text.

Unlike with the bottom-up method, when students are learning to read primarily fiction texts, that starts with small units and moves on to larger units, this *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon* textbook applies the top-down principle, when larger units (content) are studied first and then students move on to understanding smaller language elements.

The textbook *Korean Texts* presents the Confucian culture of samgang oryun as background knowledge, and it is believed that teaching reading proceeds through studying the *Chunhyangjeon* story. As mentioned above, many situational conversations can be referred to as teaching material accompanying not only the teaching of reading but also the practice of speaking, which has a conversational and communicative function.

Lee Mi-hye states that speech-related grammar should be extended beyond phonology, vocabulary, and sentence units, which are the objects of traditional grammar, into the domain of discourse and should contribute to the development of language use skills including functional knowledge.

This means that teaching grammar should be implemented at the discourse level. The 19th-century textbook *Korean Texts* based on *Chunhyangjeon*, which is the focus of the present research, can be called a textbook that contains traditional grammatical and functional language expressions applicable as materials for learning and practicing spoken language and as reading materials at the discourse level.

The integrated teaching method used in teaching the Korean language based on *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon* enables students to improve speaking skills, study the situations in which speech takes place, the purpose of speech, the elements of speech such as indirect speech, greetings, writing, etc.

Thus, this textbook for teaching the Korean language based on a literary text is designed on the basis of social values and functional language forms, combining translation grammar teaching methods and methods for teaching reading.

The *Study Guide to the Korean Language* (1899) compiled by Kim Byung-ok can be used as supplementary material to improve reading comprehension. The examples of verb conjugation, plural forms, postpositions, words, and examples of grammatical explanations in this study guide are taken from the textbook *Korean Texts*.

The main grammatical elements present in the *Chunhyangjeon* text are: narrative; connective; interrogative; imperative; prepositional; adverbial participles; adverbs “-ha-myeon-하명”; connection type “ha-de-하 · 되”; palatalization “n-ㄴ” (not used); palatalization “d-ㄷ, t-ㅌ” (not used).

It should also be noted that there are no Western punctuation marks in the textbook. They are replaced by Korean morphological forms such as narrative, interrogative, imperative, connective, and participial forms. However, the symbol “~” for repeated sounds is used to omit the number of repetitions of the sound, which indicates a reduction in the use of repeated letters.

Examples include “nym ~ ha-yo 늠~하여”, “jak ~ ha-go 작~하고”, “jap-y-si-o ~,~,~ 자 · 버으시오~ ~ ~ ~”, “won-su-ro-da ~~~~ 원슈로다~~~~”.

The most often used grammatical endings among the endings of narrative sentences are the following:

Table 1. Most used grammatical endings in narrative sentences

(오)느니라	(되)는지라	(절식)이오	(못하)더라	(여기)로다	한다(-하다/-외다/-도다/-는다/-업다/-하옵니다)
24	14	19	13	31	103

Table 2. Verb most often used as an ending of the grammatical link in linking sentences – “ 다”

(공부)하여/(사랑)하고	(현신)하니/(공부)하더니	덜하옵고/슈절하오며/시행 아니하면/황공하오느/싱각하와/반축하다가서/사랑도 할여니/설화하옵다가/감동하시면/살피지 안하옵고
133	43	35

The author concludes that from an educational perspective when studying the text read need read the linguistic and cultural context, one could use the direct teaching method based on the original text rather than the translated version. The *Chunhyangjeon* text was read in parallel with the explanation and study of grammar in the textbook *Study Guide to the Korean Language*. Grammatical explanations of postpositions, conjugation, and verb tenses found in the reading texts can be found in the above-mentioned study guide.

Moreover, *Chunhyangjeon* begins with eight lines in the textbook formulating a functional study plan: A description of a person's appearance, a description of a natural landscape, a greeting, an invitation, a request, and an order.

The textbook includes many dialog phrases having the a similar to a phrasebook, as well as grammar for using final endings according to the social ranks of the characters. Thus, the textbook can be used in developing communicative skills through function-oriented grammar teaching.

To teach discourse grammar, functional and discourse expressions are used that include different functions such as speech. Besides, the textbook contains cultural aspects such as the Koreans' wishes (조선인들의 기원) that could be fulfilled, i.e. ja-seong-man-dang - many children and grandchildren (자손만당, 子孫滿堂) and jang-su-jang-nak – longevity and long enjoyment (장수장낙 長壽長樂).

Although the *Korean Texts – Chunhyangjeon* compiled by Kim Byung-ok are an adapted excerpt of the original text, they retain religious themes. Most likely, Koreans who migrated to the Far East embraced Orthodoxy to settle in Russia, went to Orthodox schools, and studied the Korean and Russian languages.

For example, on page 16, Chunhyang sings the song “Kwon Juga” and Mongryong drinks to “get excited”. He hugs Chunhyang and says that “heaven” brought him and today they met, and asks Chunhyang to spend 100 years together.

In the original, according to the Joseon custom, Chunhyang wanted to meet a benevolent husband, seeing the “sun and moon” and “begged” heaven for this. Here, by contrast to the original text, it is said that Chunhyang prayed to “God in heaven” 하늘님께 day and night to meet a benevolent husband.

Moreover, in the farewell to Mongryong on page 22, there is the phrase: “after the heaven and the earth were created, the sun and the moon appeared. God, having created people, why else did He create separation? Of all things, separation is the saddest”. Inserting a Biblical verse, the author describes the process of creating the world and humans and talks about the sadness of parting from a loved one.

The textbook *Korean Texts - Chunhyangjeon* consists mainly of colloquial speech. The textbook aims at teaching to understand the meaning of the text, pragmatics, discourse, relevance of forms and phrases and their use in real communication processes, rather than “bottom-up” methods generating grammatically correct forms and phrases. The examples that attention is mostly paid to “top-down” skills.

From the modern perspective, first, this textbook is a medieval-era textbook, and it can be used to learn medieval Korean using the textbook itself as it is. Second, this textbook can be used as a textbook in conversational reading such as a modern drama script written in a conversational style, and it can be reorganized to improve the language skills of foreign students.

It can be supposed that such a conversational reading textbook modified in a modern way can be creative educational material that students can use to create plays or short video content of their own criticizing and ridiculing the contemporary society, where ethical values are collapsing, based on the Korean philosophy of **samgang oryun**.

## 6. Conclusion

The book *Korean Texts - Chunhyangjeon* is of utmost importance because it is the first textbook in Russia aimed at direct teaching of the original Korean literary text based on the understanding of language and culture and the development of diplomatic relations between Russia and Joseon.

The material of the textbook is written in the Onmun (諺文) script of Joseon using the Oriental editing method. It can also be noted that this textbook focuses on teaching reading, which is supported by the fact of using spaces.

An analysis of the grammatical corpus shows that grammars of similar sentence patterns were used repeatedly, and punctuation marks were replaced with endings.

Besides, the textbook was repeatedly adapted, that is, from an educational perspective, it is assumed that grammatical knowledge from other textbooks focusing on the grammar of the *Korean Texts - Chunhyangjeon* was



taught by integrating speech and reading, including sentence units and grammatical rules into the discourse structure and pragmatic expressions.

Besides, the relevance of the textbook is due to the fact that it was originally designed to teach the values, customs, and culture of the Joseon people through sociolinguistic knowledge and through the Joseon classic text *Chunhyangjeon*.

This textbook is not a study guide where speaking, reading, and grammar are separated, but an integrated textbook, and as such, it can be a good model for creating reading textbooks from a modern perspective.

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