

*Comparative Study of Minjung Theology and Kierkegaardian Philosophy:
Toward Emotion of Han and Hope*

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Abstract

South Korea has had the stigma of having the highest suicide rate among OECD countries for 20 years. The suicide problem in South Korea is very complex, involving social and personal reasons. This paper aims to analyze the concept of *han* (恨), or suffering experienced by South Koreans, from a theological and philosophical perspective. The emotion of suffering that South Koreans uniquely experience, *han*, was addressed in great depth from a social perspective in the minjung theology of the 1970s. Although minjung theology is old, *han* is like DNA for Koreans, so we expect minjung theology to resonate with contemporary South Koreans. When I analyze *han*, I cannot overlook the existential aspect. The Kierkegaardian philosophy will be employed to examine the personal and existential distress experienced by contemporary South Koreans. Contemplating the emotion of suffering *han*, the paper will reflect in depth on how minjung theology can address *han*, the emotion of suffering Koreans in social aspects. Furthermore, the paper will address *anxiety and despair* on the existential level by analyzing Kierkegaardian philosophy. In conclusion, this paper will discuss the hope that can be found in the suffering of the Korean people through minjung theology and Kierkegaardian philosophy.

Keywords: Han, Minjung Theology, Liberation Theology, Kierkegaard, Anxiety, Despair, Suicide

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Introduction

In recent decades, South Korea has faced a troubling reality, maintaining the highest suicide rate among OECD countries for twenty consecutive years.¹ This alarming statistic reflects South Korean society's deep and complex issues, where personal and social factors intertwine to create an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness. Central to understanding this crisis is the concept of *han* (恨), a uniquely Korean form of suffering that encapsulates the collective and individual anguish experienced by the Korean people. Emerging from a history marked by colonization, political repression, and social stratification, *han* is more than just an emotion; it is a cultural phenomenon deeply embedded in the Korean psyche. This paper explores *han* through the dual lenses of Minjung theology and Kierkegaardian philosophy. Although Minjung theology is historically situated, its relevance persists, as *han* continues to resonate with contemporary South Koreans, reflecting their ongoing struggles and emotional wounds.

I will apply Kierkegaardian philosophy as a methodology to closely analyze the theology of *han* as addressed in Minjung theology. I have chosen Kierkegaardian philosophy because the concept of *han* is difficult for other cultures to comprehend fully. Among the various emotions that constitute *han*, Kierkegaard has deeply and existentially engaged with *anxiety* and *despair*. His analysis of these emotions is accessible across different cultural contexts, making it a valuable tool for analyzing *han* and facilitating its understanding in other cultures. Additionally, I believe there are numerous areas of overlap between the various aspects addressed in the theology of *han* and Kierkegaardian philosophy.

First, I intend to explore the concept of *han*, which is unfamiliar to those in other cultural contexts. Second, I will analyze *han*, focusing on Kierkegaardian philosophy's critical concepts of anxiety and despair as lenses for this analysis. Third, I will examine the role of the philosophy of *dan* as discussed in the theology of *han* in addressing and resolving the emotion of *han*. Additionally, I will analyze the role of Kierkegaard's concept of love in resolving *han*. Fourth, I will explore how *han*, resignation, or despair can lead individuals toward faith and how faith, in turn, establishes new hope in individuals. In conclusion, based on the preceding analysis, I will reflect on my thoughts regarding the unresolved emotions *han* is still experiencing in contemporary South Korea and discuss the prospects for future research.

Toward the Emotion of *Han* (恨)

The *han* is probably very unfamiliar to people in other countries. Suh Nam Dong states, "*Han* is an underlying feeling of Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness" (Kim, 1981, p. 54). As such, *han* is a complex emotion. Kim Chi-ha notes, "*Han* is the minjung's angry and sad sentiment turned inward, hardened and stuck to their hearts. *Han* is caused as one's outgoingness is blocked and pressed for an extended period by external oppression and exploitation" (Moon, 1982, unpublished). In other words, the emotion of *han* can be understood as a profound despair and anguish deeply ingrained within the human psyche, which results from oppression and exploitation by those in power. The theology that addresses *han* is Minjung theology (민중신학).

¹ <https://data.oecd.org/healthstat/suicide-rates.htm>

To understand the *han* in minjung theology, it is essential to understand the term mentioned above, *minjung*, and the historical context of Korea. First, analyzing the word and meaning of *minjung*, Jung Young Lee states, “The word minjung is the Korean pronunciation of two Chinese characters, ‘min’ and ‘jung.’ ‘Min’ literally means ‘the people’ and ‘jung’ ‘the mass.’ Combining these two words, we get the idea of ‘the mass people’ or simply ‘the people’” (Lee, 1988, p. 3). In other words, *minjung* means merely *people*. Second, examining the historical background in which minjung theology arose, Suh summarizes the history of *han* of minjung theology as follows:

1. Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding powerful nations so that the very existence of the Korean nation has come to be understood as *han*.
2. Koreans have continually suffered the tyranny of the rulers so that they think of their existence as *baeksung*, or *minjung*.
3. Also, under Confucianism’s strict imposition of laws and customs discriminating against women, the existence of women was *han* itself.
4. At a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population was registered as hereditary slaves, and were treated as property rather than as people of the nation. These thought of their lives as *han*. These four may be called the Fourfold *han* of Korean people. (Kim, 1981, p. 54)

In discussing the theology of *han*, Suh employed Kim Chi-ha²’s Christian perspective on *han*. Suh notes, “The person who has done most to develop *han* as a theme of Christian theology is Kim Chi-ha. The idea that consistently underlies Kim’s poetry is the theme of *han*.” (Kim, 1981, p. 59) Kim’s Christian perspective of *han* is presented in *Chang Il-dam*’s (poem) story.³ The story about Chang Il-dam is as follows:

Chang Il-dam is a butcher and the son of a butcher, which means that he is the symbol of killing the beast in human beings. Speaking of his lineage; three generations were killed during the Donghak upheaval, Japanese colonial era, and Korean War. Chang was their descendant. This is a symbol of *han* lineage. Chang escapes from prison, which is a contradiction of freedom. He depicts the path of his escape as that of a road traveled by a wayfarer who is going up to the top of heaven from the lowest bottom, fighting against the dark stream of life. In this journey, one goes through dramatic experiences, meets various kinds of people, gains insights into life, and gradually understands the truth of the Gospel more deeply. He then becomes the preacher of liberation, teaching disciples and training himself together with them, and he forms a community to realize koinonia. He proclaims *Hae Dong Kuk Rak* (Heaven on Earth), which is the coming of a new world. His blunt attitude changes into more flexible ideas; they are sublimated into the philosophy of *dan* and the road of a wayfarer. Later, his disciples are gathered because of his teaching. He teaches them the philosophy of *dan*, the *self-denial* that casts out the temptation of selfishness and comfort. It is the revolution of cutting the vicious circle of revenge by following the eternal stranger’s road, which leads to heaven. Finally, Chang and his disciples marched to Seoul to establish Hae Dong Kuk Rak as a vision of the future. Like Jesus Christ, Chang is

² Korean Catholic poet and political dissident, Kim Chi-Ha, most likely is an unfamiliar figure to students of thought, and global influence. At the height of Kim’s international fame, he was nominated for the Nobel Prizes in Peace and in Literature, was the recipient of the Lotus Prize, and was named an international “prisoner of conscience.” The source upon which I rely on Considine, 2016, p. 992.

³ The text of the poem itself, *Chang Il-Dam*, has been lost. It was confiscated by the S. Korea President. Park Chung Hee dictatorship when Kim was arrested in 1974. He never attempted to reproduce the poem but has published references and notes. The sources upon which I rely on Considine, 2016, p. 994.

arrested by a power group with the help of a disciple who betrays him. At last, Chang is sentenced to death, and then he is executed. However, a miracle happens, meaning Chang is resurrected three days after his death. (Kim, 1981, pp. 62-64)

Kim, through the story of Chang Il-dam, discusses the *han* embedded in the lives of the impoverished in South Korea. He portrays the *han* as deeply ingrained in Korean DNA, using the lives of Chang's family and his own life as historical examples. Additionally, he unfolds Chang's journey as he strives to break the vicious cycle of *han* that runs through his lineage. As a Catholic poet, Kim viewed Chang's process of breaking free from the bondage of *han* from a Christian perspective, drawing parallels between Chang's life and the life of Jesus. Lee notes, "minjung theology is the theology of *han*" (Lee, 1988, p. 9). Lee also states, "The Korean people are the people of *han*, for they are the victims of foreign invasions and controls. ... Christian ministry is the ministry of *han*, and Christ comes to relieve the minjung from their *han*" (p. 9). As Lee points out, Koreans are a people of *han*. The problem is that the emotion of *han* is still embedded in Korean DNA.

Analysis of *Han* by Kierkegaardian *Anxiety and Despair*

The *han* emerges as a complex emotion shaped by the historical experiences of foreign invasions, oppression under the monarchical system, and the suppression of democracy during the military dictatorships of the 1960s and 70s. The *han* is rooted in the deep despair of Koreans' loss of freedom and hope. This vicious cycle of *han* continues to impact contemporary South Koreans. Sam Han provides a compelling explanation of how this emotion significantly influences modern Korean society: "The linguistic tendencies of popular culture in South Korea now reveal an engagement with the notion of *han* but with some complicated dynamics as it pertains to the violence of sentimentality. ... For instance, terms such as *kumsujo* (gold spoon), *hell Joseon* (hell Korea), and, more recently and crudely, *sipalpiyong* (fuck-it expense) are now commonplace in everyday conversation" (Han, 2021, p. 8). Furthermore, Han says, "This and other recent linguistic developments come in the wake of collective despair felt by a generation of South Koreans who feel a sense of injustice when looking at their life chances in the country. The statistics support these negative feelings" (p. 9).

Thus, it is evident that *han* continues to resonate deeply with contemporary South Koreans. However, while minjung theology has discussed the origins and roots of *han*, as previously mentioned, it has not thoroughly analyzed the emotion itself. *Han* is a complex emotion characterized by anxiety, resignation, and despair. Therefore, I intend to examine this multifaceted emotion by comparing it with Kierkegaard's concepts of *Anxiety and Despair*. Jon Stewart states, "Scholars argue about whether he was a philosopher, a theologian, an inspiration writer, a literary author, a psychologist, or something else" (Stewart, 2015, pp. 1-2). Also, he says, "His works have had an enormous influence on a number of different fields, for example, philosophy, theology, religious studies, literary theology, aesthetics, and psychology" (p. 2). As such, Kierkegaard's philosophy has had a great deal of influence on psychology and psychologists. Therefore, I will analyze *han* by focusing on the contents of "*The Concept of Anxiety (CA)*" and "*The Sickness unto Death (SUD)*," where Kierkegaard focuses on anxiety and despair.

Let's first examine the concept of anxiety as analyzed by Kierkegaard in *CA* (pseudonymous author Vigilius Haufniensis). He states that a human being is a synthesis between the psychical and the physical within the third, the *spirit*. The synthesis would be inconceivable

without unifying the psychical and physical within the spirit. This foundational idea sets the stage for understanding anxiety as a fundamental aspect of the human condition, rooted in the tension between these elements. Haufniensis maintains, “That anxiety makes its appearance is the pivot upon which everything turns. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit” (Kierkegaard [CA], 1980, p. 43).

Haufniensis notes, “Anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility. For this reason, anxiety is not found in the beast, precisely because by nature the beast is not qualified as spirit” (CA, p. 42). In other words, only humans are qualified to feel anxiety. According to Haufniensis, “Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.” Howard Pickett mentions that Man might be free. However, man is not free (at home) with that freedom. The confronting numberless possibilities posed his freedom, and Man felt dizzy, swaying between one possibility and another. Confronting innumerable limitations to his freedom, man feels dizzy still (Morgan & Sirvent, 2018, p. 415 [Kindle]). Through Haufniensis’s statement, it becomes evident that humans experience anxiety because they are not perfect like God. The reason humans feel the “dizziness of freedom” is due to the continuous oscillation between “finitude and infinitude (freedom),” “possibility and actuality,” and “the temporal and the eternal.” In other words, anxiety reveals the conflicting characteristics within the human psyche. This internal conflict, arising from the tension between these opposing elements, is what gives rise to a profound sense of anxiety.

In short, Haufniensis points out that anxiety is a human problem. It is because only humans possess a spirit that anxiety can become an issue. Ultimately, humans are beings of anxiety. Reason allows humans to think, which occurs within the framework of freedom. However, this very freedom functions as the cause of anxiety. Haufniensis says, “All of this is only for freedom” (Kierkegaard (CA), 1980, p. 61). Anxiety deepens and grows with the perception of freedom. If we recognize our freedom, we will inevitably have anxiety that is comparable to the magnitude of our freedom. Everyone wants to be free, so anxiety is a necessity for anyone who wants to be free.

Subsequently, let’s examine Kierkegaard’s analysis of despair in *SUD*. Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *SUD*, insists that despair is the sickness unto death (Kierkegaard (SUD), 1980, p. 13). Like Haufniensis, he said that human beings are the spirit. He also mentions, “A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity” (p. 13). Having thus established human existence; he goes on to discuss the nature of human despair. Anti-Climacus notes, “There is a greater consciousness here of what despair is because despair is indeed the loss of the eternal and oneself” (p. 62). In other words, humans cannot be themselves when they have lost the eternal. If human beings lose eternity, they cannot be self. The reason is that, according to Anti-Climacus, human beings can only become self by synthesizing, and if eternity is lost, synthesis is impossible.

Kierkegaard posits that human existence is fundamentally characterized by anxiety, arising from our intrinsic longing for freedom and eternity. These elements are essential for achieving a complete synthesis of the self. However, the more we desire freedom and eternity, the more we are plagued by anxiety and despair as the eternal and the temporal, the infinity and the finite, perpetually conflict within us. This internal conflict results in a sense of disorientation, deepening our experience of anxiety and despair. Consequently, as anxiety and despair intensify, so too does the yearning for freedom and eternity. This dynamic can

also be applied to the Korean emotion of *han*. As previously discussed, *han* is an integral part of the Korean experience. The more profound and expansive *han* becomes, the stronger the Korean people's desire for freedom and eternity. However, this longing has been consistently suppressed by the privileged classes, leading to an irreparable depth of *han*. I contend that the complexity of anxiety and despair within *han*, as explored in minjung theology, may surpass even Kierkegaard's analysis. The reason is that *han* is not merely an individual experience, as illustrated by the protagonist Chang Il-dam in Kim's poem but is deeply rooted in social and historical contexts. Like Chang, who endured the suppression of freedom across three generations, Koreans bound by *han* continue to live in a state of anxiety and despair, akin to an incomplete self.

Resolution of *Han*: Philosophy of *Dan* and Love

Suh notes, "*Dan* is to overcome *han*. Personally, it is self-denial. Collectively, it is to cut the vicious circle of revenge." (Kim, 1981, p. 61) According to Kim, *dan* has two dimensions: self-denial at a personal level and curtailing the vicious circle of revenge at a social level. (p. 65) The intense, unresolved *han* is continuously confronted by *dan*. On one side, *han* carries a deep-seated fear, capable of leading to destruction, revenge, and endless hatred. *Dan* repeatedly intervenes to prevent this explosive force from erupting, aiming to break the vicious cycle. Through this process, *han* can be transformed into a higher spiritual power. This dialectical interaction between *han* and *dan* ultimately opens the full potential of the minjung, uniting these complex emotions into a cohesive whole (Kim, 1981, p. 61).

The philosophy of *dan* has to do with the story of Chang Il-dam. We have already seen the story of Chang Il-dam. After Chang becomes a preacher of liberation, he teaches the philosophy of *dan* to his disciples. The philosophy of *dan* that he taught is "self-denial," which casts out "the temptation of selfishness" and comfort and cuts "the vicious circle of revenge" (Kim, 1981, p. 63). Through Chang's story, Considine maintains that Chang Il-dam presents that the philosophy of *Dan* encompasses both a dedication to nonviolent resistance and an acknowledgment of the potential for resorting to an 'agonized violence of love' (Considine, 2016, p. 995). Kim also notes, "The revolution I support will be a synthesis of true non-violence and an agonized violence of love." (Kim, 1971, p. 10) Thus, we can see that the philosophy of *dan* is built on the foundation of authentic love. So, where does authentic love come from? Kim says that Jesus did the work of cleansing the temple of God, which became the marketplace. However, this action of Jesus Christ was done out of a "violence of love." It was a power filled with love. Jesus wanted the suffering people and the rulers who oppressed them to be reborn as true children of God. (p. 10) The core of the *dan* that Chang imparted to his disciples is centered on the "agonized violence of love" exemplified by Jesus Christ. In other words, it is only through the authentic violence of Christ's love that those who suffer and struggle under the weight of *han* can find salvation and overcome their anguish.

Kierkegaard asserts, "Despair is to lack the eternal." (Kierkegaard (WL), 1995, p. 40) Kierkegaard argues that despair and love are closely related. To illustrate the connection between despair and love, Kierkegaard draws on an anecdote. As with "the anecdote from *SUD*," (Kierkegaard (SUD), 1980, pp. 19-20) losing a loved one does not cause despair; rather, it exposes that the love was inherently despairing. Despairing over any misfortune, like losing a beloved, reveals that one is already in a state of despair, indicating a deeper misrelation within one's inner self. For Anti-Climacus, loving in a despairing manner is predicated on a misrelation within the self (p. 20). The girl in the anecdote from *SUD*

expected her relationship with her beloved to be everlasting, even if her beloved was not eternal. Therefore, the girl's love was not eternal, which means that her love was the same as despair.

The girl's love took the form of despair because she fixated on a finite and ever-changing love. She was under the illusion that she could sustain a lifelong, unchanging love with the person she loved. As such, Christina Danko insists, "Instead of treating the beloved as one's God—focusing on the beloved to fault—one must turn to God" (Danko, 2016, p. 12). Danko mentions that lovers must first establish their right relationship with God. Danko notes, "The Lovers must independently relate to God as well as allow God to mediate the relationship, which is hinted at in the expression 'God is the middle term'" (p. 12). In other words, for true love between lovers, God must mediate between them. Kierkegaard asserts, "To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love is to be loved" (Kierkegaard (WL), 1995, p. 107). Kierkegaard insists that through true love with God, lovers can be safe and free from despair. Kierkegaard says that when love is a duty, it is *secured against every change*, made free in blessed independence, and *secured against despair* (p. 29). Kierkegaard warns against this girl's relationship with her beloved: "A person dare not belong to another as if that other person were everything to him; a person dare not allow another to belong to him as if he were everything to that other" (p. 108). Kierkegaard points out that this love for a girl is tantamount to idolatry.

The girl's distorted love for her beloved caused her to despair, which can be seen as a vicious circle of *han*. However, we have already discussed the despair caused by distorted love and how to break the *han* through God's eternal love. To overcome the vicious circle of *han*, Kim suggests that we need the philosophy of *dan*, the essence of which, as we have seen, is the *agonized violent love of Jesus*. Similarly, Kierkegaard argued that God's love must be involved in maintaining an authentic love relationship. Through this, we can see that the girl's despair stems from her distorted love, and the way to overcome *han* is through God's love.

***Han* Leads to Faith: Hope**

Han, Despair, and Anxiety may lead us to faith. In the story of Chang Il-dam, as we have seen above, Chang's life is *han* itself. However, *han* made Chang realize the philosophy of *dan*. If he had not experienced the deep *han* in his life, would he have been able to think of a methodology to overcome *han* called the philosophy of *dan*? Chang research not only the philosophy of *dan*, but also "the theory of *In-Nae-Chun*" (Kim, 1981, p. 63). Through the theory of *In-Nae-Chun*, Chang maintains "the unification of God and revolution"; "the unification of acts and prayers"; and "the unification of earthly food and heavenly food" (p. 63). Chang develops a conceptual framework that integrates individual spiritual transformation with the pursuit of social justice (Kim admits he learned this synthesis from the Catholic faith.) (p. 63). Kim explains unification or synthesis:

The first stage in this process is Shi Chun Ju (worshipping God in mind), the second stage is Yang Chun Ju (nurturing the body of God), the third stage is Haeng Chun Ju (practicing the struggle), and the fourth stage is Sang Chun Ju (transcending death and living as a single, bright resurrected fighter for the people). (p. 63)

Suh's explanation above is not easy to understand. Lee explains each stage in detail:

The first stage is to realize God in our hearts. The second stage is to allow the divine consciousness to grow in us. The third stage is to practice what we believe in God. This stage marks our struggle to overcome the injustice of the world through God. The final stage is to overcome injustice through transforming the world. In this stage resurrection takes place from death and the coming of the Kingdom of God is realized on earth. (Lee, 1984, p. 11)

So, Lee states that *dan* (*self-denial*) works in these four stages to resolve *han*, which is the process of salvation in minjung theology (p. 11). Chang did not merely live with the *han* passed down through three generations; instead, his *han* led him to reflect on his life and make the decisive resolution to break the vicious chain. Chang's determination led to the development of the philosophy of *dan*, which is grounded in God's love. *Dan* culminates believing that a union between God and humanity is possible. Through the philosophy of *dan*, this belief not only enables overcoming *han* but also instills a "hope" for establishing Kingdom of God on earth.

If you want to explore the relationship between resignation and faith, one way to do so is to analyze Kierkegaard's "*Fear and Trembling*" (*FT*). Kierkegaard was writing under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio when he wrote *FT*. In *FT*, Johannes mentions "double-movement" (Kierkegaard (*FT*), 1983, p. 36). One type of double-movement is "infinite resignation" (p. 37). Johannes maintains, "Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my external validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith" (p. 46). The other movement is "the knight of faith" Johannes states, "The knight of faith can be saved only by the absurd, and this he grasps by faith" (p. 47).

Johannes insists that *infinite resignation* is the precursor to faith, and he illustrates this with the story of Abraham offering Isaac to God. Johannes states, "This is the peak on which Abraham stands. The last stage to pass from his view is the stage of infinite resignation. He actually goes further and comes to faith" (p. 37). When Abraham offers Isaac to God, he undergoes infinite resignation. Johannes states that the movement of resignation does not require faith because this movement is purely physical (p. 48). However, Abraham does not remain in his act of infinite resignation; instead, he moves to the stage of the *movement of faith*. Transitioning to this stage of faith would not have been easy for Abraham, as Johannes suggests that faith movement induces a sense of dizziness, reflecting the immense challenge and uncertainty involved in this leap (p. 48). The reason is that the exercise of faith is a "*dialectical of faith*." The movement of faith allows Abraham to leap into infinity (p. 36).

Johannes says, "The story of Abraham contains just such a teleological suspension of the ethical" (p. 57). In other words, Abraham's infinite resignation and leaps of faith were possible because he practiced "teleological suspension" (p. 54). Johannes maintains Abraham's act of offering Isaac to God and evaluates it as follows:

He acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is precisely the absurd that he as the single individual is higher than the universal (ethical). This paradox cannot be mediated, for as soon as Abraham begins to do so, he has to confess that he was in spiritual trial, and if that is the case, he will never sacrifice Isaac, or if he did sacrifice Isaac, then in

repentance he must come back to the universal. He gets Isaac back again by virtue of the absurd. Therefore, Abraham is at no time a tragic hero but is something entirely different, either a murderer or a man of faith. (pp. 56-57)

In this way, Abraham, as a man of faith, ceases to be ethical. In other words, he cuts off all things ethical and universal. By cutting them off, he gains Isaac through an infinite leap of faith.

Chang's *han* and Abraham's infinite resignation lead human beings to faith. However, neither Chang nor Abraham remained ensnared by *han* or infinite resignation. Through the philosophy of *dan* and the suspension of the teleological, they break or suspend the vicious circle of *han* and the universal and ethical. Ultimately, this leads both Chang and Abraham to faith. Chang experiences union with God through this faith, and Abraham regains his beloved son, Isaac. For both, faith in God becomes a source of hope.

Conclusion

South Korea has held the highest suicide and depression rate among OECD countries for the past 20 years. Youth Koreans often refer to South Korea as “*Hell Korea*” and “*Gold Spoon*,” reflecting a profoundly negative view of the realities of Korean society. Also, most South Koreans are judged based on wealth and social status. For example, “money” is the number one priority for South Koreans in making life meaningful.⁴ However, money is finite. If South Koreans rely excessively on money—the finite—Kierkegaard suggests this inevitably leads to anxiety. In this context, the emotions of *han*, like anxiety and despair, continue to grow and deepen. Yet, *han* also serves as a means for Koreans to gain awareness of their reality, helping them understand the root causes of their depression. However, the theology of *han* and Kierkegaard emphasizes the necessity of breaking the vicious circle of *han* for Koreans. This cycle cannot be broken by human effort alone; it can only be overcome through God's love, which is accessed through faith. *Han* serves to draw individuals towards faith in God, as it leads to the realization that *han* cannot be resolved by one's strength. This faith then becomes a source of hope for Koreans. I hope that my argument contributes to addressing the pervasive *han* in the lives of Koreans. Furthermore, I hope that this article encourages further research into the correlation between *han*-induced depression and suicide rates among Koreans, as well as the development of effective solutions.

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/11/18/what-makes-life-meaningful-views-from-17-advanced-economies/>

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