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Translating K-Books for the World



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K-Book Trends

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In Translation, Context Is Where the Difficulties Converge

Written by

Oh, YoungJin

Oh, YoungJin | General director

Since 2015, he has created the courses “Software and Humanities Criticism” and “Machine Criticism” at Hanyang University ERICA. His research focuses on the aesthetics and politics of digital culture as represented by computer games, webtoons, and social networks. He is a co-developer of “Under the Sunlight”, a web-responsive interactive story about Syrian refugees. He also works as a producer and writer, having directed “Erangel: Dark Tour”, a dark tourism piece that lets users experience sites of tragedy in a virtual world, along with “The Voyage Without End”, a metaverse project tied to the academic conference “SF and Geopolitical Aesthetics,” as well as “AI Horror Radio Show”, “ChatGPT WAR Part 1”, and “Creative Boundaries: AI Sentence Miner”. He is the author of *The Artificial Intelligence Art Business* and serves as general director of the Art Korea Lab 2026 AI Open Prompt Community.

When we call something untranslatable, we usually don't mean a word that can't be rendered at all, but one that keeps demanding to be translated again. I'm not persuaded by explanations that locate the difficulty of translating Korean literature in the mystique of culturally loaded words like *jeong* or *bap*. What a translator has to carry across isn't some ultimate emotion sealed inside a word, but the connections that word forms within the work itself.



My Mouth Waters Kim Ae-ran, Moonji Publishing, 2007

The narrator of Kim Ae-ran's short story "Ascending Scales" (Moonji Publishing, 2007) is the daughter of a dumpling shop owner. Her mother sends her to piano lessons, believing her child should get the same education as everyone else's. Then the family collapses after the father cosigns a loan that goes bad. The narrator moves the piano into her older sister's semi-basement room in Seoul. She types up manuscripts on a computer to save for tuition while her sister works and studies English. The piano, which once seemed like it would raise the family's standing in life, sits silent, shut inside the lowest place a person can live. One day, during a downpour, water starts

seeping into the semi-basement. As it rises, the father calls. All he asks is whether she's eaten ("Bap-eun meogeonnya"). But packed into that question is the shabbiness and exhaustion of their lives, and family ties she cannot escape.

Translator Jamie Chang renders the father's question as "Have you eaten?" and the follow-up as "What'd you have?" The specific time of day, dinner, opens out into a meal in general, but the image of food doesn't disappear. The second question survives intact as well. Here, a translation doesn't have to compress every layer of meaning into a single line, because the surrounding narrative context carries much of the weight. The reader has already passed through the dumpling shop and the piano, the tuition and the semi-basement room, the water rising.

How well does generative AI pick up on context and the connections between words? While preparing this piece, I ran "Bap-eun meokgo daninya?" through a generative AI model, varying the conditions one at a time. Given the line with no context at all, it came back with "Have you been eating properly?" When I supplied a situation where a mother is asking an adult child she hasn't seen in a long time, it shifted to "Have you been eating okay?" In a context where a suspect in a criminal case is being questioned but it isn't clear whether he's the culprit, it gave me "How can you even eat after what you've done?" When I instructed it to preserve the ambiguity of the original, it offered "Do you still manage to eat?", and when I told it the image of food had to remain, "Do you still eat?"

As the context shifted, the outputs moved consistently along with it—toward care, accusation, or checking on someone's survival. The problem with AI is that its response to context is far too decisive from a literary

perspective. When a human translator leaves the strangeness of a literal rendering intact, that isn't a failure of translation. It's a choice to preserve room for the reader to inhabit the context. That's a choice machines simply aren't equipped to make. Feed a machine context, and it digs a channel through which only that particular context can flow. When several channels converge at once into a bottleneck, the machine still struggles to recognize that moment and make a choice. What it lacks is the capacity for poetic compression. A machine's literal rendering and a human's may look alike on the surface, but they operate on entirely different levels.



Source: Pixabay, AI Generated

If we collaborate with AI in translation, we should have it untangle the various layers of context embedded within a sentence, whether a factual query, an act of care, an ingrained family habit, an accusation, uncertainty, or the materiality of food. From there, it can generate candidate translations that bring each specific layer to the fore, detailing what gets sacrificed with every choice. As a researcher and curator, AI proves genuinely useful. It becomes a dramaturg of translation, bringing unchosen

possibilities onto the stage.

Yet the final choice still belongs to the human translator. This is not because a human always understands Korean better than an AI, but because someone must decide which layer of meaning to preserve across the work as a whole and take full accountability for what is lost in that choice. In literary translation, context is not a clue that hands us an answer. It is a force field that makes a single sentence even more complex. The true authority of a human translator lies in briefly putting the brakes on that rapid comprehension, recalling the meanings displaced while the machine locks onto a single option. In the age of AI, the translator's most vital virtue is not the speed of finding the right answer, but the capacity to defer resolution.

Books That Critics from Each Generation Would Want to Translate Themselves

Written by

Sollim Lee, Junhyuk Maeng, Mihyang Kim, Dongseok Jang

Sollim Lee | Publishing Editor

As an editor, she looks for books that will last. As a critic, she watches for new releases that demand to be read right now. And as a reader, she dreams of setting work aside to read purely for pleasure, secretly hoping to get locked inside a library one day.

Junhyuk Maeng | Book Editor

Rather than writing polished reviews or introducing books well, what he hopes for is that the sensibility he loves, and that others out there love too, comes across exactly as it is. As a Korean reader in his thirties who loves literature, he wants to speak, carefully, for some small part of that sensibility.

Mihyang Kim | Book Critic·Essayist, IT Service Planner

She worked as a publishing editor for thirteen years, three of them on books and ten on planning and editing a publishing magazine. She is the author of the essay collection *My Mother Said She Wasn't Happy* and a co-author of *Keywords in Korean Publishing 2010-2019*, *What Is Cinema?*, and *A Warning on Merch*. After a stint as creative director at an IT company, she now works as a service planner and storyteller, designing, interpreting, and documenting worlds.

Dongseok Jang | Book Critic

He reads books and writes. Captivated by the vast, deep world of books, he reads against the clock and works out how what he reads connects to our society. He is currently throwing himself into turning books, an endless source of content, into cultural content of every kind. His books include *The Living Library*, *The Rebirth of Forbidden Books*, *The Birth of Different Thoughts*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms: A Story Renewed After a Thousand Years*, and *Meeting World Classics for the First Time: A Guide for Teens*.

If you have ever loved a book that remains unpublished abroad, you have likely wondered why such a remarkable work was never translated. In keeping with this issue's focus on the art of translation, <Special Project> asks critics which book they would personally choose to translate if given the chance. Critics from each generation offered recommendations through their own lens, choosing books that introduce Korea or lay bare the realities of our society.

The 20s Perspective

Lee Sollim, Cultural Critic



A Camera That Makes You Look Especially Ugly

Can the small, odd details of one person's life survive a border crossing? *A Camera That Makes You Look Especially Ugly* is the poet Shin I-in's second essay collection. If I were translating it, I would introduce it as 'essays by an alien.'

Shin I-in is someone who doesn't blend easily into the world. She calls her thirteen-square-meter apartment a "rice chest" and keeps two lizards in it

named Destruction of Humanity and Reconstruction of Humanity. (She also raises a few silkworms, originally meant as lizard food.) Having to find somewhere in this world to plant her feet and live, she writes, feels like “jamming a key into a lock it doesn’t fit at all.”

Shin I-in, who goes so far as to call herself an alien, writes essays that are odd and refreshing. As the title suggests, this is a book written in the spirit of lowering the hand covering one’s face and simply standing in front of a camera that will make you look ugly. And yet she says the subject of this book is love. She states calmly that she intends to fulfill her duty as an alien who loves the world and worries over it. The crooked apple sitting large on the cover is crumpled and barely holding its shape, and the book is much the same. There’s something endearing about it. Life sometimes feels so enormous and unmanageable that it crushes us, but Shin I-in turns it around and packs life down tight to sell it. As if to say that life or a book only needs to be entertaining, she writes, “Sometimes I wanted to compress life down into something small enough to sell.”

Where can these essays by an alien go? Near the end of the book, Shin I-in gives directions to a sweating foreigner. The older man fumbling his way through the subway turns out to be a professor who teaches literature in the United States. That brief moment of guidance leads to a brief email exchange between Shin I-in and the professor, Robert, and one meal together. The poet gives him a book of her poems in Korean, and the professor thanks her and goes on his way.

If this book were translated into English and landed in America, Robert could read it too. He might read his own bewilderment and sweat, back when he was a foreigner or an alien on unfamiliar Seoul ground, in Shin I-in’s

sentences, and laugh the way he did then. It's him I think of when I want to translate this book and send it to America. For that one reader who is already inside the book.

The 30s Perspective

Maeng Junhyuk, Publishing Editor



The Radical Twenties

Kim Nae-hoon's *The Radical Twenties* digs deep into the political divergence between young men and women in their twenties, centering on the phenomena known as *idaenam* and *idaenyeo*, the politically charged labels for men and women in their twenties that surfaced around the 2022 presidential election. Even now in 2026, with a change of government behind us, the book's insights still hold. It's hard to find a better text for understanding where the extreme political distrust comes from, in a generation stretching from those born in the nineties to those born in the two-thousands. Above all, the fact that the author, born in 1992, writes his assessment from within his own generation sets it clearly apart from other

books that look at young people from the outside, through the eyes of an older generation.

According to the book, what people born in the nineties mean by fairness is a kind of “sense of being treated fairly,” which amounts to trust in the national system and a belief in the predictability and stability of one’s life. But the myth that effort brings reward broke down long ago. What remains for those driven into anxiety is retribution against anyone seen as having put in less effort. The author diagnoses that the fairness this generation wants has never actually been agreed upon socially, and that the claim “this isn’t fair” is itself an empty signifier. Today the word fairness has been reduced to a weapon that shuts down healthy debate and deliberation and treats “our” struggle alone as sacred.

Young people cultivate hatred beneath this empty signifier. The book doesn’t dismiss that hatred as mere ignorance or moral failing. For them, hatred is the product of a kind of storytelling that locates the causes of depression and anxiety in a personified group. Peel back the thick outer layer of gender conflict and what appears underneath is young men and women in their twenties denouncing the unfairness of Korean society in one voice. What they find unfair is the very structure that shifts social responsibility onto individual young people rather than onto the older generations and elite groups who created this world in the first place.

In the end, the political identity of today’s twenty-somethings isn’t formed through affirmation of any particular ideology or value. The generations that follow, born from the two-thousands onward, seem unlikely to cohere around a clear alternative either. Their solidarity forms only in opposition, as an “anti-network,” and it will go on forming that way. Chronic anxiety about

the future and anger toward institutional politics become the adhesive that binds them together. Deeply distrustful of two-party politics yet unable to imagine anything beyond it, young people simply switch the party they support again and again to block one faction from returning to power, absorbed in passing judgment on the hypocrisy of the established order.

In conclusion, the book argues persuasively that the essence of this twenty-something phenomenon is not simple within-generation selfishness or a battle between the sexes, but the desperate struggle of young people crushed under structural contradictions. Behind the dazzling economic growth and the global success of Korean cultural content, a deep anger is boiling among young people who stand on ruins where the only rule left is every man for himself, warning of the system's hypocrisy. If this book were introduced abroad, it would serve as a meaningful text, offering a fuller view of the anxiety, the extreme political distrust, and the populist structures of antagonism that young generations everywhere are experiencing, seen through a cross-section of one dynamic society.

The 40s Perspective

Kim Mihyang, Publishing Critic



Outside the Parentheses, Farewell

Into what language do we translate the memory of the dead? After reading Lee Ju-hye's story collection *Outside the Parentheses, Farewell*, translation no longer means only the craft of turning one language into another. It becomes the work of carrying into present-day language the memories the dead leave with the living, the violence inscribed on the body, events history never properly spoke of, and even the lives of others that resist understanding in the end.

Lee Ju-hye is both a novelist and a translator. She has brought a great deal of English-language literature into Korean, and the narrator of the title story, "Outside the Parentheses, Farewell," is a translator as well. So it's no accident that translation surfaces as a preoccupation so often in this book. What's interesting, though, is how translation goes beyond a profession here. Lee Ju-hye's characters are constantly coming into contact with others, moving to other places, calling times already past into the present. In that process, just

as discrepancies and omissions arise between an original and its translation, life produces its own discrepancies, omissions, and unexplained remainders. This collection doesn't throw that remainder away.

It's also striking how often the characters head for Japan, from the opening story "The Mood of Fog" through "Are You a Summer Guest?" to the title story. Japan isn't simply a travel destination. The moment a body moves into a space that is familiar and strange at once, memories stitched shut back in Korea return wearing a different face. "The Mood of Fog" holds a father's death and the shadow of an era, while "Are You a Summer Guest?" brings in a family history in which an uncle was implicated in the case of the alleged spy ring among Korean students in Japan, imprisoned, and died in prison. Behind private mourning, the violence of modern Korean history shows itself. And yet this heavy reality isn't rendered through the grammar of realism alone. Ghostly presences appear, fog and water erase boundaries, and errors in translation reveal unexpected truths. Lee Ju-hye's use of the fantastic isn't a device for fleeing reality. It's a method for bringing back memories that the language of reality never managed to put into words. Social engagement and fantasy don't collide here. They sharpen each other.

That's why I would choose Japanese as the first language this book is translated into. For Japanese readers, Hokkaido and hot springs, hotels and bathhouses won't be the scenery of a foreign country. But the moment those places pass through the memories of Korean women, they hold a different history and a different set of feelings. When historical memory like that spy ring case overlaps with Japan as an actual place, translation does more than "explain" a Korean story in Japanese. It makes Japanese readers look again at places familiar to them, now through someone else's memory. In effect, it sends a Japan written in Korean back into Japanese.

The recurrence of water and bathing grounds this sense of translation in the physical body. In Lee Ju-hye's fiction, translation touches on transformation, on changing bodies. "The Mood of Fog," "Are You a Summer Guest?", and "Outside the Parentheses, Farewell" return again and again to hot springs, bathhouses, and bodies submerged in water. In the water, the boundaries of a body blur, and memories that resisted explanation resurface as sensation. Notably, both Korea and Japan are societies where bathing culture runs deep in daily life. With Korean sauna and jjimjilbang culture drawing fresh attention from younger generations and readers abroad, this familiar part of everyday life could serve as an excellent point of entry into Lee Ju-hye's distinctly strange world.

Of the eight stories in this collection, the one I would most want to translate is "Fledging in Progress." A translator, a novelist, and a poet drive toward the far end of the land. In the trunk sits something large, wrapped round and round in a beige blanket. It might be soft, it might be solid, and it looks warm and yet feels cold. No one even knows how long it has been there. The story never reveals what the load is.

They are driving to the end of the land to meet a philosopher who seems to have settled there in order not to fall, and then in order to live again. Read in that light, the load in the trunk feels less like an object than like the possibility of death that each of us carries without knowing it. It could be the weight of a life, or pain that has never been explained. And yet the title isn't "Dying in Progress." It's "Fledging in Progress." Just as a young bird leaves the nest, people keep moving too. Even with death riding alongside them.

This scene distills the whole of *Outside the Parentheses, Farewell*. Death visits often in this collection. But the dead don't disappear. They come back

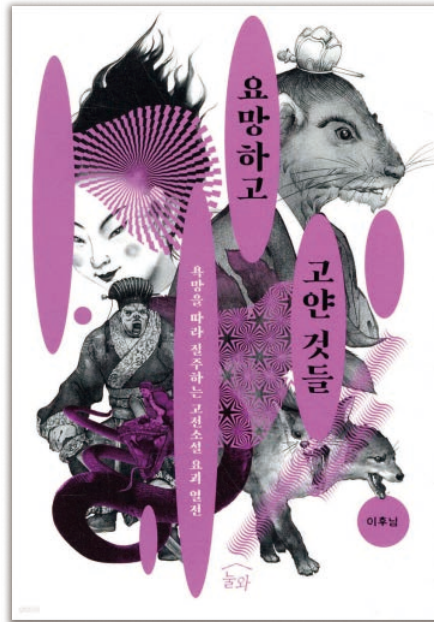
as memory, as ghosts, as sentences. The living don't stay fixed in a single identity either. They travel, they enter water, they encounter other languages, and at times they slip outside the self they thought they knew. Translation may be that kind of movement. To leave your original place, arrive in another language, and become something both the same as before and different.

For this reason, *Outside the Parentheses, Farewell* is not a book I want to translate simply because it easily introduces Korea to readers abroad. I want to translate it precisely because it refuses to explain Korea completely. It holds the specific wounds of modern Korean history, women's bodies, and family memory, yet it never stitches everything shut with neat commentary. What cannot be understood is left just as it is.

Good translation is not merely the work of conveying every meaning inside the parentheses. It is the work of gathering what has spilled outside them, what a sentence failed to catch, what remains ultimately unknowable in another person's life, and setting all of it before readers in another language. If the translation of memory she performed in Korean were rendered once more into Japanese, what remainder would be left behind? I want to translate that remainder too. *Outside the Parentheses, Farewell* is not a book that makes you fear failing at translation. It's a book that sends you across into someone else's world even though you know you will fail.

The 50s Perspective

Jang Dongseok, Literary Critic



Wicked and Insolent Creatures

The “K” wave is sweeping across the globe. It’s now a common sight to see people everywhere singing along to Korean music, and Korean dramas hold the attention of viewers of every age around the world. Countless foreigners visit Korea just to taste the food. The saying that what is most Korean is most global describes the power of Korean content perfectly. At a moment when Korean content is taking over the world, the work we should be doing alongside it is tracing where that content came from, what its roots are. Only then can we create a wider range of content, and only then can its influence last longer.

Wicked and Insolent Creatures, by classical fiction scholar Lee Hu-nam, is a book of serious research into where Korean storytelling begins. The monsters that appear in classical Korean fiction are beings that “transform into an enormous variety of shapes.” Their misdeeds vary widely, and each comes to its own strange end. What’s interesting is that these monsters

aren't merely destructive. They are beings with "desires like those of humans." To put it in the language of the content industry, having such desires amounts to being a compelling character.

Samgang Myeonghaengnok is a classical novel of unknown authorship from the late Joseon period, set against the ideals of loyalty and filial piety. Unusually, the figure who drives the story is a monster called Olchulbichae, who lures travelers, kills them, and cooks their flesh. Olchulbichae takes the form of a human woman, but with a red face, a waist as thick as a pillar, and tremendous strength. Monsters in other classical novels, when they transform into human women, take on the appearance of "a maiden from a noble household or a married woman." Naturally, they live by imitating "human women whose lives are dictated by men." Olchulbichae, though, plays the role of an "all-powerful female head of household" who even knocks her husband to the ground. Having thrown off the constraints of being human, Olchulbichae may be the character best suited to our own times.

One of the monsters most faithful to its desires is Daemang, or "enormous serpent," from *Wonhoerok*, a work believed to date from the late Joseon period. A blue serpent that has lived thousands of years on Mount Hyeongak, Daemang is the very byword for corrupting the affairs of state. Disguising itself as a Taoist adept with mysterious powers, it enters the human world, violates a royal concubine, installs the child born of that act as emperor, and soon holds the entire country in the palm of its hand. According to the author, a story in which a monster becomes the ruler of a country outright, or seats its own child on the throne to manipulate the government, appears nowhere else. Under a meticulous plan, Daemang monopolizes the country's power, but it goes too far. The whole scheme is exposed to the world, Daemang meets a gruesome end, "beaten to death with wooden clubs."

Beyond these, the monsters come in every form imaginable, including nine-tailed foxes, wild boars, and tigers. What's striking is how these creatures, imagined long ago, consistently mirror human desire. Beyond physical appetite and lust, their yearning to be loved and recognized is, in truth, a reflection of our own desires. What is distinctly Korean becomes universal precisely because it lays bare the shared desires of humanity.

Summary

Lee Sollim: How an Alien Who Never Fit into the World Learns to Love It

Maeng Junhyuk: Anger Without an Alternative, Responsibility Adrift

Kim Mihyang: The Novels I Would Send Abroad First, Crossing Death and Memory, Body and History

Jang Dong Seok: Korean Desire Becomes the Desire of the World

Ripples of Connection: *The Cat Is the Answer*

Written by
Lee Young Eun

Lee Young Eun | Nabiclub Publisher

She spent many years as an editor across several publishing houses. In 2017, she founded Nabiclub, a press dedicated to mystery fiction, to showcase Korean works that harness the genre's unique power to construct compelling narratives.

Where the Connection Began

Nabiclub returned to the <K-Book Copyright Market> this year. Overseas publishing markets diverge from domestic ones, and it is precisely within those differences that new possibilities emerge. This discovery is the fundamental reason we participate. What works differs from country to country, press to press, buyer to buyer. That is only natural, since the vitality of publishing comes from diversity. The primary purpose of attending is to identify and cultivate those points of intersection, whether through a market, a theme, a publishing house, or an individual editor.

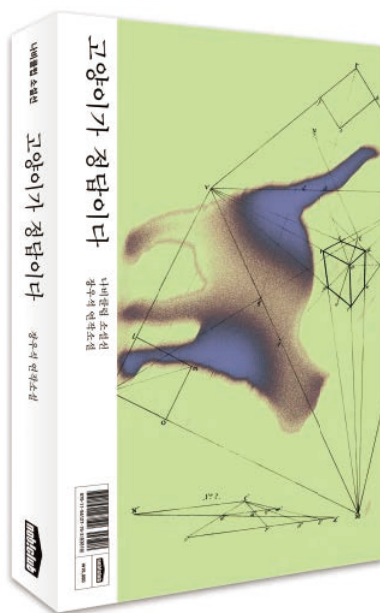
When Nabiclub first attended the Market in 2025 to establish its identity as a press specializing in Korean mystery fiction, we achieved a modest yet deeply meaningful milestone: securing a rights contract with Yilin, a venerable Chinese foreign literature magazine, to publish three works from the *2024 Golden Pen Award Anthology of Korean Mystery Fiction*. Among those selections was Jang Woo Seok's mystery short story, "The Struggles of Cat Detective Ju Gwan-sik," a narrative following a mathematician who becomes a cat detective. This international deal served as a catalyst, prompting us to reevaluate the potential of the narrative and, above all, its protagonist. I suggested to Jang that he develop the story further with the mathematician at its center. In the end, the initial thread that brought *The Cat Is the Answer* into the world this April came from a publisher in China.

A Six-Figure Preempt in English Within 48 Hours

As soon as *The Cat Is the Answer* was published, we were contacted by multiple agencies eager to represent the book abroad. The fact that agents, whose radar is always tuned to international markets, moved so quickly was

a clear sign of the manuscript's potential. Joy Lee at BC Agency, our strategic partner, recognized the novel's appeal immediately, brought in the right translator, prepared an English sample, and launched the pitch overseas. The momentum was immediate. Within 48 hours of submission, we received a six-figure preemptive offer for English-language rights from Random House, the largest publisher in the United States. We formally accepted the offer at 8:00 AM on June 22, just two hours before the <2026 K-Book Copyright Market> opened its doors.

Perhaps because our advance pitching for Nabiclub had left a strong impression, our schedule filled up far beyond expectations. Over two and a half days, we met with 27 buyers representing 15 countries. Pitching a book that had secured a six-figure English preempt within 48 hours of going out proved exceptionally powerful. Throughout the event, it was the book everyone at the market was talking about.



The Cat Is the Answer

Cats have long been a beloved presence in mystery fiction. Jiro Akagawa's *Calico Cat Holmes* grew into an enduring series spanning over

fifty volumes, while Akif Pirinçci's international bestseller *Felidae*, translated into seventeen languages, cast cats as both victims and sleuths. Indeed, felines suit the genre so naturally that they have carved out a dedicated "cat detective" subgenre. Yet Jang Woo Seok's *The Cat Is the Answer* takes a distinct turn. Echoing Keigo Higashino's *The Devotion of Suspect X*, the novel features a mathematician protagonist who carries the moral weight of his own gift. Through sharp social critique, it elevates the narrative far beyond the bounds of a conventional cat cozy mystery.

After a humiliating failure at his doctoral dissertation defense, the protagonist leaves academia to work as a high school math teacher. That quiet routine is broken when a student whose mathematical gift surpasses his own leaps from the school rooftop, an event that pulls him into the pain those around him have kept hidden. One after another, he confronts a dog abandoned to save it from a violent household, a family murder-suicide triggered by academic pressure, and guilt he has turned away from for decades, which resurfaces as he searches for his own missing cat. Featuring a mathematician turned cat detective with a complicated past, this singular novel reframes mathematics not as solving problems on a page, but as navigating the problems of life. Through the process of losing and finding again the many beings in his life, it traces the concept of zero, something we can only encounter through loss, and the ripples it sends through the human heart.

As of mid-August, following the English-language preempt, we closed a landmark deal with Rizzoli, an imprint of Italy's Mondadori Group, and are currently reviewing offers from publishers in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Russia. Meanwhile, evaluation requests have poured in from multiple territories including Spain, Brazil, and Germany, and Korean-language translators are

currently reviewing the full manuscript to support those detailed evaluations. It feels almost surreal that a novel by an author without established international recognition is drawing this much global attention. Selling foreign rights depends on a complex mix of variables and luck. There's demand built on precedents where similar content succeeded in that country, cultural and emotional resonance, the absence of material or themes that get in the way of localization, and above all, timing, which works like luck.

The Cat Is the Answer emerged as the breakout title of the event, drawing sustained interest in both foreign rights and screen adaptation. Three factors came together to make that happen. First, the platform provided by the <K-Book Copyright Market>. Second, a close collaboration with an agency that recognized the novel's potential and moved swiftly to highlight its core through targeted pitching and sample translation. And underlying all of it, the intrinsic charm of the author and the novel itself.

Lim Solah's *I Say I Am There*

Written by

Lia Iovenitti

Lia Iovenitti | Translator

Lia Iovenitti is an Italian translator of Korean literature whose work includes authors such as Han Kang, Pyun Hye-young, Bae Myung-hoon, Kim Hye-jin, Yun Ko-eun, Lee Mi-ye and Dolki Min. Her work has been recognized with the 2023 Korea Literature Translation Grand Prize and the 2024 La Lettura Award.

A Novel About What Remains

Published by Munhakdongne in 2023, the novel follows four women living on the margins of the art world who decide to organise an independent exhibition for artists excluded from institutional and commercial circuits. Hwayeong has lost the hearing in one ear and has spent years concealing her disability. Uju, a lesbian working in a bank, has learned to hide her ambitions in order to preserve the recognition of the woman she loves. Bora has built her life around the idea of fighting, only to discover that survival may require redefining what it means to fight. Jeongsu possesses an extraordinary capacity for empathy, so intense that she absorbs other people's emotions and expectations almost physically, yet this sensitivity makes it difficult for her to discover who she is when she is not responding to someone else.



I Say I Am There (Source: Kyobo bookstore.)

Their stories gradually intersect through fragments, memories and episodes from different periods of their lives. They do not heal their wounds through idealized solidarity or conventional ways. They do not find definitive answers or suddenly understand themselves. They simply endure.

The title comes from a memory belonging to Hwayeong. As a teenager, she remained on the beach while her friends went into the sea, holding their clothes so that the wind would not carry them away. Years later, she looks back on that moment and thinks: “I am still there.” The past remains in places, relationships and versions of ourselves that we thought we had abandoned.

Why do I recommend this novel?

Lim Solah’s restrained, unsentimental prose reframes familiar questions within a new context, while her poetic background underpins the rhythm and economy of her writing. Above all, this novel trusts literature to do something far more complex than provide answers. Rather than asking whether people pushed on the margins have managed to return to the centre, it invites us to consider where they are now, and what part of themselves is still there. It is contemporary without being tied to a literary trend: a striking example of the depth and diversity of current Korean literature, and a book I would very much like to see translated into Italian.

About the Author

Lim Solah (b. 1987, Daejeon) debuted as a writer in 2013, winning the JoongAng New Writer Award for poetry. She published her first novel, *The Best Life*, in 2015, which was later adapted into the 2021 film *Snowball*. She has received several major Korean literary awards.

Programs Supporting Korean Books Abroad, with a Focus on Translation Support

Written by

Soi Kim, Chanwoo Park, Jang Gun-myung

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Global K-Book Team at Korea Publication Industry Promotion Agency

Chanwoo Park | Senior Manager

Translation & Publication Team at Literature Translation Institute of Korea

Jang Gun-myung | The Daesan Foundation

Connecting K-Books to the World Through Translation and Export Support

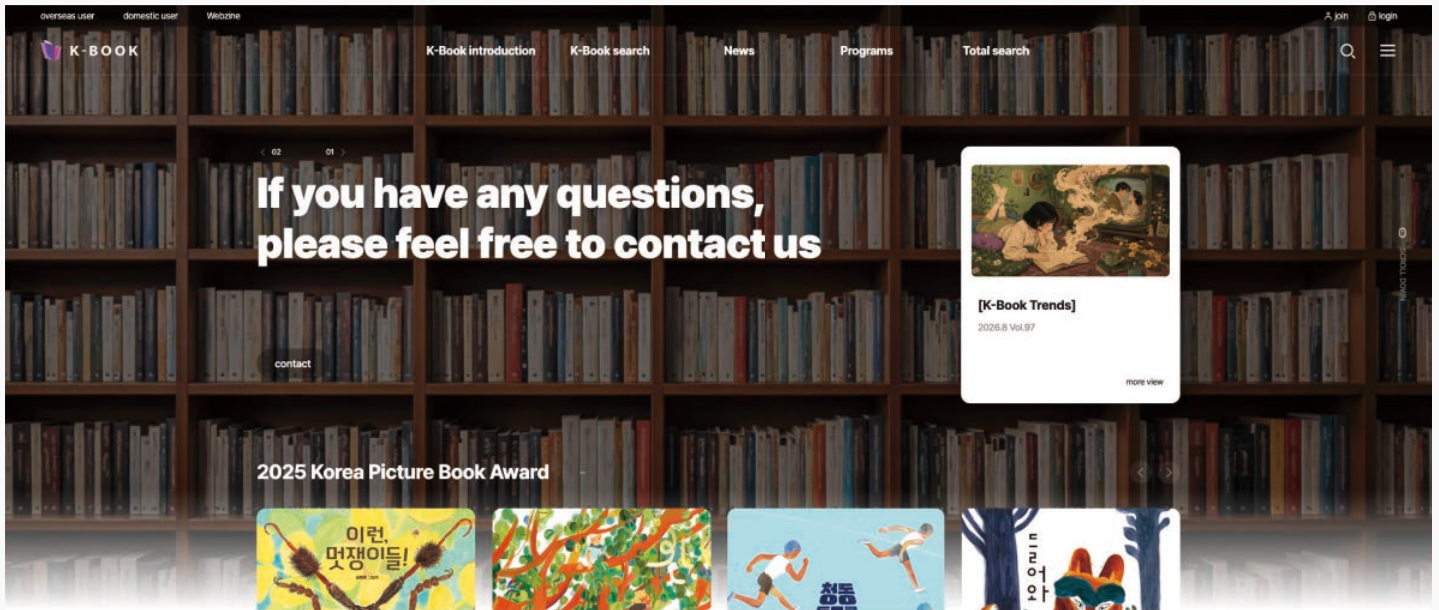
Kim Soi, Assistant Manager, Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea (KPIPA)

The Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea (KPIPA) supports the growth of the domestic publishing industry and helps build a reading ecosystem. Its mission is to build a publishing and reading ecosystem that grows together, and its vision is to be an institution that enriches people's lives through reading and leads the cultural industry through publishing. As K-culture spreads and overseas demand for Korean publishing content shows clear growth, the Agency has set "creating future growth engines for K-Books" as one of its four strategic goals, putting its resources and effort into securing global competitiveness for K-Books and stimulating exports. Behind this strategy lies the judgment that the ability to get content to market matters as much as the competitiveness of the content itself.

To bring Korean content directly to overseas markets, the Agency runs three programs. The first is the K-Book Copyright Market, held in Seoul each year, where B2B export consultations arrange one-on-one rights and IP matching between Korean and foreign publishers, with side events such as networking receptions and IR pitching sessions to improve how often deals actually close. The second is the Traveling Book Fair, which extends that market to overseas locations. This year it supports one-on-one business matching between Korean publishers and foreign buyers across four events, in Vietnam and Thailand, Taiwan, New York, and Milan. The third is participation in international book fairs, supporting publishers and books submitted for display at four fairs this year, the London Book Fair, the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the Frankfurt Book Fair, and the Shanghai

International Children's Book Fair. By operating export consultation booths at these fairs, the program promotes exports of Korean publishing content and builds the capacity of authors and publishers. Taken together, the Agency's various forms of support for overseas expansion function less as one-off events than as standing infrastructure.

Translation serves as the crucial link when Korean works are presented to foreign buyers and deals get made. For publishers, though, translation is a heavy expense. Recognizing exactly this need, the Agency runs two main translation support programs. The first, the Export Promotional Materials Support Program, covers translation costs for promotional materials, or samples, containing bibliographic information, introductions to the author and the work, and excerpts from the book. It is open to Korean publishers and agencies looking to enter overseas markets. Each selected company can receive support for up to fifteen items per year, with actual costs covered up to two million won per item, allowing for translation of up to 20,000 characters in the Korean original. The program runs six to eight times a year, and applications are accepted through the Agency's K-Book platform (k-book.or.kr). The second, the Web Novel Translation Cost Support Program, selects roughly forty companies each year from among Korean publishers and platform companies that hold web novel titles, providing up to fifteen million won per company toward translation costs. With web novel exports through overseas platforms growing rapidly, this program is a quick response to a growing market.



KPIPA, <K-Book Platform>

This year, the Agency has launched the K-Book Global 100 Project, which consolidates its existing support programs into one continuous process. Designed for the K-culture era, it offers one-stop support for taking publishing content abroad. Rights holders, whether for books or authors, and agencies respond to an open call, and after review, project proposals made up of two to five titles are selected regardless of genre. Support proceeds in three stages. The first is promotional support, covering the translation and production of materials such as samples, portfolios, and synopses. The second is export marketing support, which reimburses costs incurred in offline B2B activities such as participation in international book fairs and content markets. The third is publication and promotion support, which backs publication and promotional efforts by overseas publishers to accelerate local release and generate demand. In redesigning support that had been scattered across separate programs so that it now spans the entire process from translation to overseas publication, this project can be seen as taking the Agency's existing support system one step further.

If the K-Book Copyright Market, the Traveling Book Fair, and participation

in international book fairs work to increase the points of contact between Korean content and overseas markets, the translation support programs are the mechanism that turns those contacts into actual publication. The K-Book Global 100 Project, which brings both functions onto a single track, follows the same logic. The Nobel laureate José Saramago once said, “Writers make national literature, while translators make universal literature.” An author’s story is bound into a good book by a publisher, and sending that book out onto the world stage ultimately falls to translators and to the support systems that make good translation possible. The Agency will continue to serve as one pillar of that system.

How Korean Literature Reaches the World’s Shelves

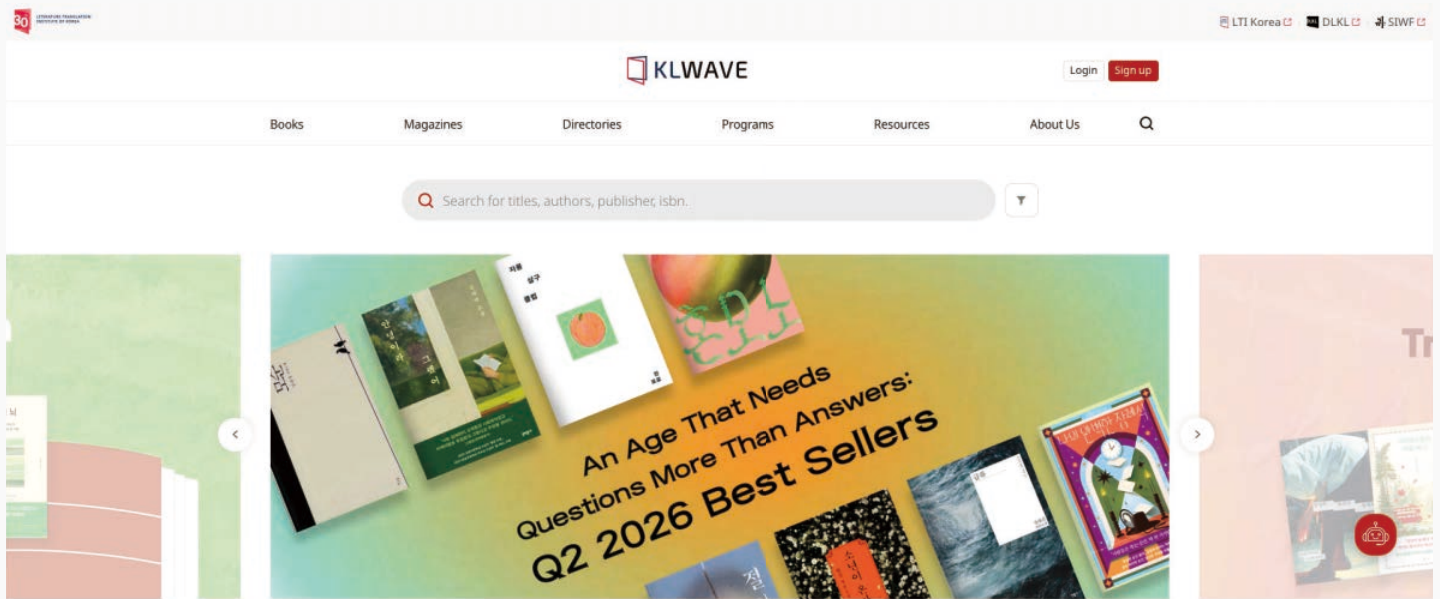
Park Chanwoo, Senior Manager, Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI)

Last month, the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea) released figures on overseas sales of Korean literary works that received translation and publication support over the past five years, from 2021 to 2025. Roughly a thousand supported titles published across more than forty language markets have sold about 3.58 million copies abroad in total, with annual sales alone reaching around 1.2 million copies for two consecutive years. LTI Korea attributes these results not to a few talked-about titles or a spike in sales after an award, but to readerships that have built up steadily across many language markets. The best-selling title last year was Hwang Bo-reum’s *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*, which sold 70,000 copies in the Turkish edition alone and roughly 230,000 copies across six countries over three years.

Yet an increase in readers seeking out Korean literature abroad doesn’t mean a Korean

a Korean book simply finds its way onto foreign shelves. From the moment an overseas publisher sees potential in a work to the point of actual publication, that work must pass through several stages, including rights negotiations, translation, editing, and production. Translation fees and publishing costs in particular become real barriers that give publishers pause before they commit. LTI Korea's Translation and Publication Grants for Overseas Publishers is the program that carries Korean literary works through this process to actual publication abroad.

Founded in 1996, LTI Korea is a public institution that has spent the past thirty years supporting the entire process of bringing Korean literature abroad, through translation and publication grants, international exchange, and translator training. Among its programs, the Translation and Publication Grants for Overseas Publishers is significant because it supports the publication stage, where Korean literature actually becomes a book and reaches readers abroad. The grants are open to overseas publishers that have acquired rights to Korean literary or humanities and social science titles published as books in Korea and are preparing to translate and publish them. At the time of application, contracts must already be in place with the rights holder, whether the author or a Korean publisher, and with the translator. Applications are submitted through LTI Korea's digital platform, KLWAVE (klwave.or.kr), and are accepted four times a year, at the end of January, April, July, and October.



LTI Korea, <KLWAVE Platform>

The grants are divided into two parts, translation grants and publication grants. Translation grants are set at up to 19 million won depending on the genre and length of the original and the target language, while publication grants of up to 4 million won are awarded separately, varying by language market. Once a publisher submits the final translated manuscript and the cover, the translation grant is paid to the translator according to the agreement, and once the finished book is published and a copy is submitted, the publication grant is paid to the publisher.

Selection is handled by an external review committee made up of experts in literature and publishing. Evaluation is divided into three areas, the literary quality of the original work (30 points), the publication plan and its expected impact (40 points), which takes into account promotional strategy and the translator's ability, and strategic priority (30 points), which considers the overseas publisher's capacity, the institute's strategy, and contribution to diversity across countries and language markets. The framework goes beyond simply choosing a good work. It also asks how well that work, once it becomes a book abroad, can actually reach readers.

Results are announced on the KLWAVE platform along with the review committee's overall comments.

The significance of this program doesn't stop at subsidizing translation and publication costs for a single book. Publishers that receive grants note the support on the copyright page and continue working with LTI Korea after publication, sharing sales figures. Support doesn't end when the book comes out. It carries on as a shared effort to see how that book is reaching readers abroad. In her Nobel lecture, Han Kang described literature as "the power to penetrate beneath the surface, the power to encounter truth and to make it come alive, the power to connect us." For a story born in one language to reach readers in another, it needs translation and publication to carry it across the distance between the two languages. From the moment a work of Korean literature lands on a shelf in a bookstore somewhere in the world to the moment a reader there opens it for the first time, that distance may be exactly what the Translation and Publication Grants for Overseas Publishers sets out to help close.

So it goes

*A variation on a line from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Jang Gun-myung, Manager, The Daesan Foundation

Kyobo Book Centre is a major bookstore chain in Korea. Like The Daesan Foundation, it has Kyobo Life Insurance as its parent company. Right now, Kyobo's online store is promoting the release of a new essay collection by the novelist Kim Ae-ran. The title is *I Wrote That It Was So*. As it happens, Kim Ae-ran was the first recipient of the Daesan University Literary Award, which the foundation administers. In 2002, when she won as an undergraduate, the winning work drew a great deal of praise. Even so, few

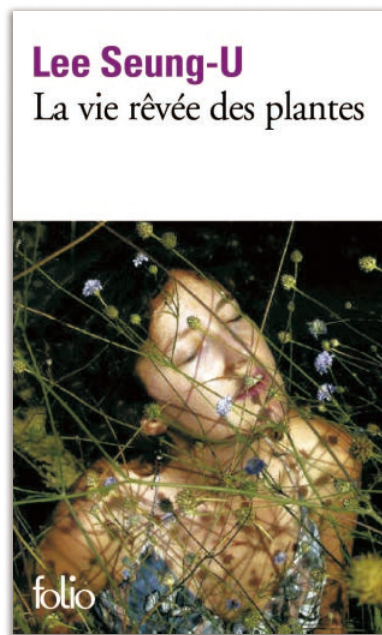
would have been sure at the time that she would become one of Korea's defining writers and move as many readers as she does today. And no one would have predicted that the award, conceived as a one-off event to mark the foundation's tenth anniversary, would continue to this day and produce so many student writers.



Kim Ae-ran's story collection *Run, Dad*, which includes "The House That Doesn't Knock," her prizewinning story from the award.

To introduce the 2026 Grants for the Translation, Research and Publication of Korean Literary Works, recently announced by The Daesan Foundation, sixteen works were selected this year. The foundation provides a set amount of funding to the selected translators and publishers. Among this year's recipients is support for an English translation of Lee Seung-u's *Songs of the Earth*. Lee Seung-u was the first recipient of the Daesan Literary Award, Korea's largest comprehensive literary prize, which the foundation runs. The winning work was *The Reverse Side of Life*. The year was 1993, when Michael Jordan announced his first retirement. It was also the year Michael Jackson gave his legendary Super Bowl halftime performance. Korea at the time was so caught up in cheering and absorbing

the flood of Western culture pouring in that even young children kept up with news about them. While so many people were dazzled by the dizzying onslaught of the Michaels, The Daesan Foundation named Lee Seung-u, a thirty-five-year-old novelist, as the first winner of the Daesan Literary Award, and the following year supported a French translation of *The Reverse Side of Life* through its translation grant program.



French translation of *The Reverse Side of Life*, published by Gallimard in its Folio pocket edition

The Daesan Foundation (daesan means “great mountain”) stays silent on the impact AI technology will have on the literary world. True to its name, it will go on doing what it has always done. It will keep introducing writers like Kim Ae-ran to the world, and keep carrying the work of writers like Lee Seung-u across borders. Whatever changes AI technology brings. Just as it has for the past thirty years. Like a great mountain.

Marmmo Press, Where the Value of Books Gets Published

Interview by
Woori Ko

Woori Ko | Publisher

She began her career as an editor in the summer of 2006. After working at several publishing houses, including Munhakdongne, Gimmyoung Publishers, and Hankyoreh Publishing, she took the leap and founded her own press in 2022. Ever since, she has focused on publishing literature and humanities titles, seeking singular stories best captured through the written word.

In 2026, there is one publisher quietly making waves in the Korean publishing world. Under the catchphrase “Parallel lines meet in the end,” Marmmo Press publishes literature, humanities, and general-interest titles. Its books, including *What Do You Have Besides Money*, *Our Love Is Everyone’s Business*, and *Those Who Want to Die, Those Who Want to Save*, are the kind readers find themselves glancing back at twice. We reached out to Marmmo Press about what they believe publishing is for, where books are headed, and their thoughts on the titles they’ve put out into the world.

Q. Please introduce Marmmo Press. In particular, we’re curious why the publisher is named after the shape of a rhombus.

A rhombus has two pairs of opposite sides that run parallel to each other. Through the books we publish, we wanted to create a point where the opposing camps that once ran along rigid, parallel lines can finally converge. At that point, I think each side’s thinking can widen and find balance, the way a rhombus stands in such delicate equilibrium. In that sense, I actually liked the sharp, pointed image of the rhombus. We want to publish books with sharp, well-defined editorial vision, ones that lay out a writer’s convictions with clarity and precision.



Marmmo Press Logo

Q. What do you consider a good book, and a good publisher? Please tell us what led you to found Marmmo, and what makes its values distinctive.

I worked as an editor for fifteen years before starting my own publishing house. There were many experiences and many reasons behind it, but above all, I felt it was time to move on to a “next chapter.” What I needed was a “sense of growth,” the capacity to stand entirely on my own as an editor and take in the whole of the publishing process, rather than being one member of an organization. The result is Marmmo, a one-person press.

This “sense of growth” runs along the same lines as the “widening of thought” I mentioned earlier, and it’s a value Marmmo aims for. More concretely, I want to build a press that grows together with its writers. Marmmo published its first book in 2022 and has released nineteen titles to date. For some writers we’ve published two books, for others as many as four. Counting the books still to come, that number will grow further.

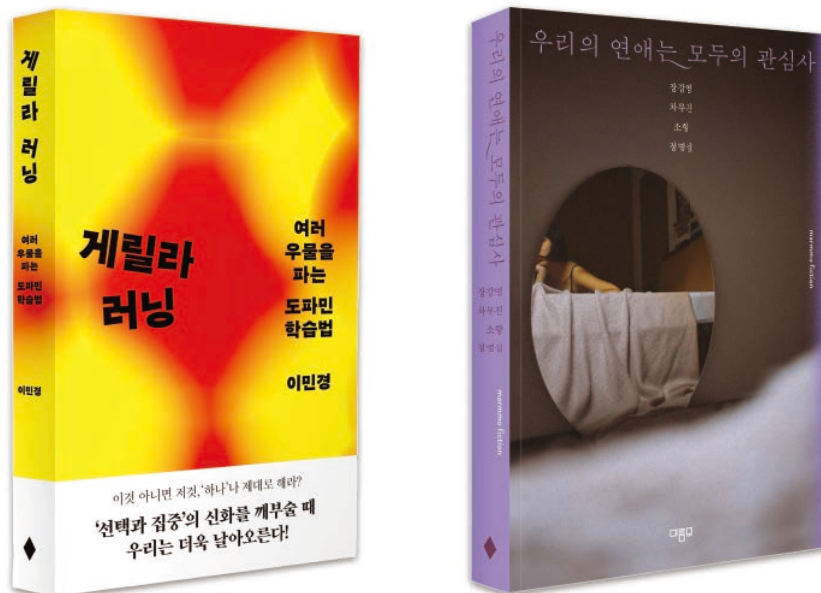
The goal isn't a one-off relationship with a writer to sell a single book, but understanding a writer's trajectory and context and growing alongside them. It's close to what Siegfried Unseld, the former head of Suhrkamp Verlag in Germany, describes in *The Author and His Publisher* (*Der Autor und sein Verleger*). Take Jeong Ji-woo, a writer who started out as a full-time author and cultural critic and later moved into copyright law. At Marmmo, I've worked steadily to develop and give voice to the many sides of his identity as a writer. That effort has often turned out to be a win for both the writer and the press. As Marmmo grows, I push to give my writers the best terms a solo operation can manage, both financial and otherwise. A book begins with its writer, and I believe that's what ultimately produces "good" readers and a "good" publishing ecosystem.



Books by Jeong Ji-woo, who has published four titles with Marmmo. From left: *What Do You Have Besides Money*, *The Person Who Stays*, *AI, Writing, and Copyright*, *Copyright Law: What You Need to Know*

Q. Marmmo publishes a wide range of books. Is there a particular genre or direction that matters most to you?

Marmmo publishes mainly in the humanities and literature. Books that widen how we think and stir the imagination, that's the direction I'm after. Beyond simply conveying knowledge, I want to publish books that raise questions, generate discourse, and let readers see familiar things in a new light. *Guerrilla Learning*, for instance, takes the “distractibility” associated with ADHD out of the realm of abnormality and shows how to turn it into a strength. *What Do You Have Besides Money* asks what's left of a person once you strip away their thoughts and goals about money, in a world obsessed with it. And *Our Love Is Everyone's Business*, a novel, touches taboos that Korean society keeps hidden and asks what “proper” love even means.



From left: Lee Min-kyung, *Guerrilla Learning*; Jang Kang-myung et al., *Our Love Is Everyone's Business*

Q. What do you see in Marmmo's future? And if you have a message for our subscribers abroad, we'd love to hear it.

I'd like to reach readers abroad with novels like *Ppaegnyeong*, which was named the most entertaining book in Korea at the "2026 Seoul International Book Fair." My hope is to give readers overseas the same fresh spark Marmmo is after, through books with a distinctly Korean sensibility. Generative AI has pushed deep into Korean publishing and left the industry unsettled, but tomorrow Marmmo will probably still be pursuing exactly what it wants to pursue, unbothered by all of it. And in this age of cutting-edge AI, it will be doing that in the form of a book, of all things.



Ryu Hyun-jae, *Ppaegnyeong*

Sung Haena, a Shining Icon of Korean Fiction

Interview by
Sung Haena

Sung Haena | Writer

She made her literary debut in 2019 through the Dong-a Ilbo New Year's Literary Contest. She has published the story collections *Light Underneath Light*, *Honmono*, and *Human, Not Human*, as well as the novella *The Summer Left Behind*.

Sung Haena is a rising star in Korean fiction today. Known for meticulous research and finely crafted structure, she has won the devotion of countless readers. Her body of work includes *Honmono*, along with *Human, Not Human*, *The Summer Left Behind*, *When We Are Born and Die Ten Times Over*, and *Light Underneath Light*. Celebrities have recommended her books, and readers have embraced her work in droves. We reached out to Sung Haena to hear her thoughts on writing and on the kind of storytelling our society has come to love.



Honmono / Human, Not Human

Q. Please introduce yourself as a writer and tell us what led you to writing.

Hello, I'm Sung Haena, and I write fiction. I think of a writer as someone who suffers through the growing pains of their era alongside everyone else, and I've been trying to write with that in mind, as steadily as I can.

If there's a single spark or catalyst behind my writing, I think it's society, and the people in it. While going through old notebooks from high school, I

once came across something I'd written back then, a line about wanting to write fiction where "society" and "those pushed to its margins" meet. It read, "I stop in my tracks when I see people who've been pushed aside. The media calls them pitiable, but they aren't simply people who cower and shrink. I want to make them into characters who are truly alive on the page."

I think that impulse traces back to figures like labor activist Jeon Tae-il, and to works like Cho Se-hui's *The Dwarf* and Yi Cheong-jun's *The Falconer*. For a long time, I've wanted to capture the problems of Korean society, and the people living through them, in a way that's sharp and unflinching. Through that, I also wanted to look squarely at, or sometimes upend, the things we tend to view with condescending sympathy, or simply take as given.

Q. Your fiction is known for its unique ideas and meticulous storytelling. I'm curious whether you have your own method for finding material for your novels.

I write with my physical presence. So when I need to, I go out and do fieldwork, conduct interviews. I actually prefer staying home, so going out takes a lot out of me, but once I've gone and explored the actual spaces in a story, the range of what I can write about widens. I end up embodying a life I never got to live myself.

Fieldwork matters, but so does indirect experience. I lean heavily on nonfiction books and academic papers too. When I was writing a short story called "Go," I read old medical texts like the *Compendium of Materia Medica* and the *Dongui Bogam (Principles and Practices of Eastern Medicine)*, since the main character is a doctor of Korean medicine. Reading

with a learner's attitude, with humility, that seems to become a kind of sturdy sinew running through the work.

Q. Several of your novels currently hold firm positions on the bestseller charts. What do you think it is about your fiction that readers love so much?

I suppose it might be because each of my characters has their own distinct texture. Some are rough, some delicate, some blunt, some sharp. But I think they're all alike in being imperfect human beings, and that's probably what lets them reach such a wide range of readers. I'm grateful that people have taken to them. I feel like I need to push myself further as a writer.

Q. Could you tell us about a topic you'd like to write about in the future, and share a message for our subscribers?



Sung Haena

There's so much I'm drawn to that it's hard to name just one, but I do have a strong desire to write a rural narrative. I lived in the countryside for a long

time, so I care a great deal about the life and culture there. I'm someone who lived in a rural area myself and felt firsthand the gap between ideals and reality. I think everyone, in their own way, has an instinct to return to where they came from. That's why so many people move back to their hometowns, and why so many settle there for good. I suppose that's why I want to write a rural narrative too. Most Korean novels are set in Seoul, and stories set in the countryside are rare. Because of that, I feel drawn to capturing more of the problems and the ideals that exist in rural life.

Lastly, just as some of you have followed my novels, I imagine there are readers following this piece as well. It may sound presumptuous, but I often think literature can save a person's life. Listening all the way through to someone's story, and not twisting their choices into something else, that alone can give someone the strength to keep living. I've lived that way myself, and I think we're all reading and writing in that spirit, pushing back against the world's easy assumptions, trying, however we can, to understand people who seem impossible to understand.

That's why readers always matter so much. A story can only fulfill its purpose when readers step into the gaps left by a writer's imagination, filling them in, putting flesh on the bones of the story, and coming to understand its characters down to the last detail. We live in an age that questions the very purpose of literature, but I remain hopeful that the very act of reading and understanding is literature's use, and its power. I believe our tomorrow lives inside that process, painful as it is, of willingly digging into the emotions and memories society has chosen to overlook.

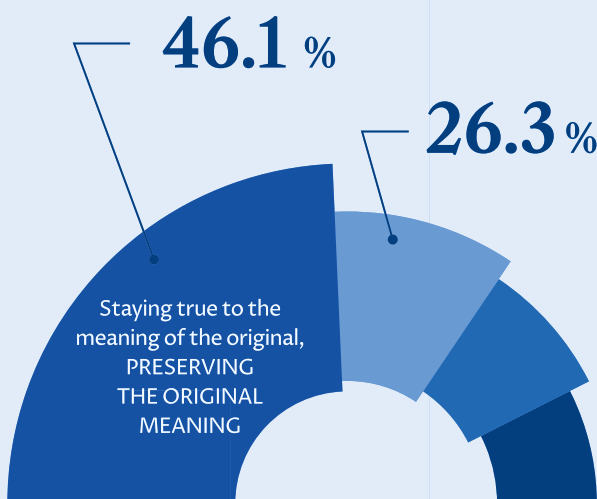
With deep gratitude and love for everyone who reads this...

From Rendering Words to Conveying Culture

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Q. From page to screen, which K-story stayed with you?



46.1 %

Staying true to the meaning of the original,
PRESERVING THE ORIGINAL MEANING

26.3 %

Understanding the culture behind the story,
CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

17.1 %

Carrying the story's emotions across
languages, EMOTION & ATMOSPHERE

10.5 %

Reading naturally, without feeling translated,
SMOOTH, NATURAL WRITING

“What do you think matters most when introducing Korean books to readers abroad?”

“What do you think matters most when introducing Korean books to readers abroad?” Survey results.

In this survey, the most common response was “translation that preserves the meaning of the original,” at 46.1 percent. “Understanding of Korean culture” came in second, at 26.3 percent.

What’s interesting is that these two answers aren’t as far apart as they might seem. Translating Korean literature into another language involves far more than simply converting Korean sentences into a foreign tongue. Only by understanding the relationships and emotions embedded in a single sentence, along with its mood and the era it springs from, can a translator fully convey the meaning held within the original.



Choi Eun-young, *Shoko's Smile*, Munhakdongne, 2016

In that sense, Choi Eun-young’s *Shoko’s Smile* is a work that makes us reconsider what translation really means. The work traces, with great delicacy, the relationships between characters who come from different languages and cultural backgrounds, and beneath its restrained, understated

prose, it holds emotions that resist easy articulation. For this reason, carrying *Shoko's Smile* into another language may take more than getting the meaning of each sentence right. The distance and hesitation between characters, and the feelings that accumulate within their relationships, need to come through as well, if the texture of the work is to be felt in full.

In the end, good translation may be more than rendering words from one language to another; it may be the work of carrying the life, the sensibility, and the culture behind those words to readers of another language.

As K-Books cross borders to meet more and more readers, the question of how to convey the full meaning of a book may matter just as much as what to translate.

The Pains and Pleasures of Translation

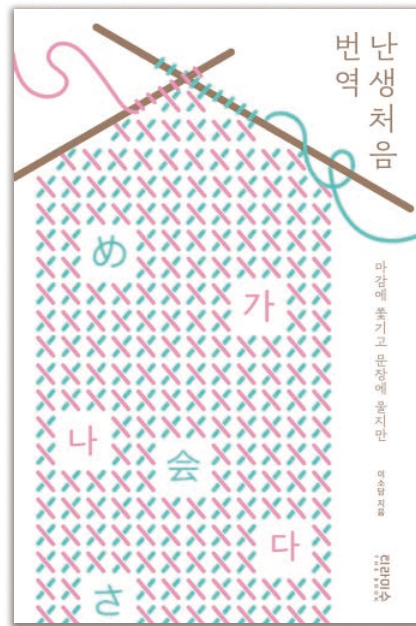
Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Welcome to *Book Grocery*, a monthly K-Book Trends feature that recommends books based on readers' real stories. If you would like to receive a book recommendation tailored to your concerns or situation, please submit your story through the form below.

[Submit your story](#)

The September issue of <Book Grocery> features a story sent by a subscriber residing in Morocco. Here is the heartwarming tale of how they discovered the book of a lifetime, beautifully conveyed through natural, expressive language that honors the spirit of the original work.



Lee So-dam, *First-Time Translator*, Tiramisu the Book, 2026.

A Story from Morocco

Back in my school days, I came across the original foreign-language edition of a novel by one of my favorite authors. Even with my limited foreign-language skills at the time, I was deeply moved by the story. I realized later that more than half of that emotional impact came directly from the translator's brilliant sentences. I was profoundly touched by how the translation captured the original work's lyrical atmosphere, delicate emotions, and unique cultural humor, bringing them to life using Korea's rich and beautiful vocabulary. Beyond merely converting words from one language to another, the translator acted as a flawless bridge between two cultures, allowing

me to encounter the book of a lifetime. I am always grateful to all global translators who break down language barriers and gift us stories from a wider world through their masterful work.

A Glimpse into a Translator's Struggles

It would be wonderful if every original work could always be rendered into flawless, beautiful prose, but even people who have never seriously studied a foreign language can sense the difficulty of translation, given how vocabulary differs from language to language and how sensibilities differ from culture to culture. Translators take on the demanding task of understanding these differences in culture and language use, adapting a work to fit the sensibilities of its new readers, and still delivering it whole, without doing damage to the original.

Even if we never become translators ourselves, there is a book that let us in on a translator's life: the struggles and the rewards, told firsthand. In *First-Time Translator*, translator Lee So-dam writes candidly about the hardships of the profession while also sharing the happiness and satisfaction she finds in her work. Her path into translation began with devotion to a fandom, but the book offers a glimpse, however indirect, into the heart of a translator who has come to love and cherish the craft of translation itself.

None of us may end up working as translators, but we hope this book gives you a chance to think about what it means to cherish your own work and to spend your days conveying the beauty of language to someone else.

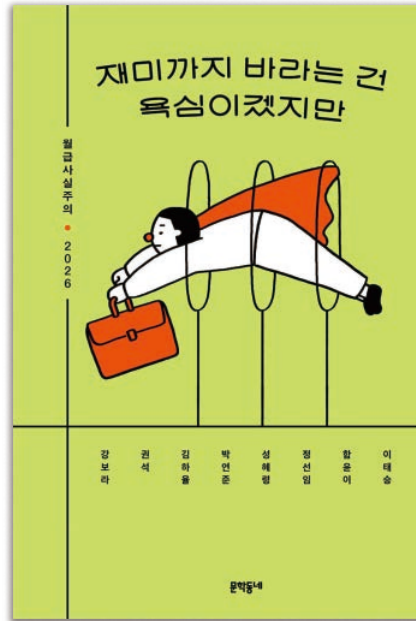
The Mood We Want for Tomorrow

Written by

Jung-Ah Shin

Jung-Ah Shin | Culture Critic, Adjunct Professor, Division of Performing Arts, Baekseok Arts University

TV documentary writer who has scripted over 400 episodes, the author is deeply interested in the intersection of cultural content and humanistic imagination. With a love for the stories of people and the world embedded in media, she believes in the power of good content to change the world. Major publications include *Elderly in Media*, *Elderly outside Media*, *Living with AI*, *New Media and Story-doing*, *Cultural Content and Transmedia*, and *Media Literacy Education for Digital Literacy*, etc.



Kang Bora, Kwon Seok, et al., *Even Wanting It to Be Fun Is Asking Too Much*, Munhakdongne, 2026.

Even Wanting It to Be Fun Is Asking Too Much is a short story anthology published by Munhakdongne since 2023. The anthology's theme is "labor." Its editor is novelist Jang Kang-myung, a writer who moves between reality and literature to capture a self-portrait of Korean society, sometimes sharply and sometimes with humor. In planning the labor fiction series, he set the rule that, driven by the belief that "more works capturing today's labor scene need to be written," the stories should record the "here and now" rather than decades past or a distant future, and should be written realistically, through legwork.

Jang Kang-myung, together with writers who shared this vision, formed a literary collective called "Wolgeup Realism" and began writing. The writers who took part in the 2026 story collection are Kang Bora, Kwon Seok, Kim Ha-yul, Park Yeon-jun, Sung Hye-ryung, Jung Seon-im, Ham Yun-i, and Lee Tae-seung. Looking at the book's table of contents, the labor sites each of the eight writers reported on are listed in the form of hashtags. The jobs held by the workers who appear in the stories include #MagazineReporter

#EntertainmentPD #WeddingHelper #ContractTeacher #BicycleCourier #CivilServant, among others. Each form of labor carries its own weight, its own shame, anxiety, and sense of helplessness, depending on the job.

Kang Bora's "Our Tour" tells the story of Da-jeong, who becomes unemployed overnight when the magazine company she works for shuts down due to a risk tied to its owner, and who must then fight for a year, alongside a labor attorney, to recover her unpaid wages and severance pay. While the colleagues who were laid off alongside her are all reinstated, she alone must go on fighting against the owner's family, and she feels the strain in her now-awkward relationships with her juniors. It troubles and angers her that the company was at fault, yet it is the worker who ends up carrying the guilt, an arrangement she finds strange and unjust. After a year, Da-jeong finally receives her overdue wages and severance, and by her side, fortunately, are the juniors and the labor attorney who helped her hold her ground. Together, they begin to plan for a new future. The fierce ratings war within a broadcasting company's entertainment program, as depicted by Kwon Seok, is heartbreaking as well.

"On-Air Accident Report" tells the story of Producer Yoon Tan, who books a band popular with the younger generation in an attempt to reclaim the coveted Friday evening slot, only for the members' unexpected behavior to cause an on-air disaster. In fact, it was Gung-hyun, a comedian and junior colleague he was close with, who had tipped him off about the band, a favorite among Gen Z and millennial viewers, while Yoon Tan was agonizing over ratings. In exchange, Gung-hyun had asked to appear on the show himself. But the deal fell through, and only the band ended up appearing.

Among the reasons the plan didn't work out was the host's objection, but in

truth, it had been the producer's own decision, made because he felt Gung-hyun's name recognition was too low and that he didn't fit the show's image. The twist comes to light when it turns out that Gung-hyun's wife was the show's devoted fan, the Silver Lining who had always posted heartfelt comments for the production team and made keyrings as tribute gifts for the host and crew. She had cancer, and Gung-hyun had wanted to appear on the popular show to make memories for her. Shamed and sorry for having betrayed Gung-hyun's loyalty, Producer Yoon Tan finally writes the incident report he had been putting off. And he offers Gung-hyun a spot on the show.

Park Yeon-jun's "Kyung-hee and What Isn't Kyung-hee" tells the story of Kyung-hee, the youngest employee at a PR firm that operates several tiers down the subcontracting chain from a major corporation. At a company with only four employees in total, Kyung-hee ends up handling everything from her superiors' odd jobs to washing dishes in the break room.

Her mother has worked twenty-five years on the sales floor of the meat section at a supermarket. She arrives two hours before her shift to get things ready, and once the store opens, she starts selling at the top of her lungs. Thanks to her, the meat section's sales once ranked second in the country, and the head of a livestock company even paid a visit to encourage her. But when the supermarket ran into trouble, her mother lost her job. Watching her mother live harder than she has to, with a mix of pity and exhaustion, Kyung-hee gets up at five every morning to enjoy some time to herself, listening to classical music while drawing birds. Starting the day with music and drawing isn't a bad way for her to live. Then one day, on the day of a meeting to land a contract with a public corporation, Manager Lim, without asking, dumps out the contents of Kyung-hee's canvas bag, stuffs them into her own Gucci tote, and rushes her out the door with it instead.

The empty canvas bag is left crumpled on the desk, and in that moment, Kyung-hee senses that something is wrong. As she thinks about the real and the fake, the designer bag and the canvas bag, she recognizes the greed and hypocrisy that surface between putting up appearances and being true to herself. The moment the self she wants to be and the self others expect her to be start to teeter out of balance, Kyung-hee hands in her resignation so she won't fall. Afterward, she shares a relaxed meal with her mother, something they haven't done in a while. Contrary to Kyung-hee's expectation that her mother would be disappointed, her mother is understanding. She seems to feel that, just as she is finally giving herself the rest she denied herself for twenty-five years, Kyung-hee needs rest too.

The reality of labor in Korean society, as portrayed by these eight writers, is anything but easy. And yet the book isn't a grim reportage steeped in tragedy and despair; small, modest threads of hope run through every line, giving off just enough light to keep us going. Reading it, you find your legs growing steadier without quite noticing, along with the urge to cook yourself a good meal. We have the right to shape our own mood for tomorrow.

August Bestsellers to Cool Off the Sweltering Summer

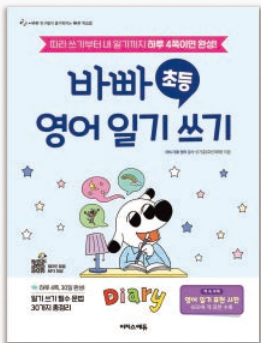
Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

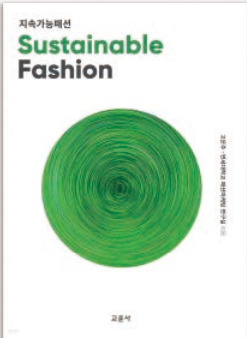
In this September issue, we examine the bestseller rankings from Jongno Books, South Korea's third-largest bookstore chain. While Jongno Books maintains various sub-charts, it does not offer a combined ranking for both online and offline sales. Therefore, unlike our previous reports, this month's analysis relies exclusively on online sales data.

In the second week of August, the young adult science fiction novel *Big Home* claimed the top spot on the official Jongno Books Naver Store. Notably, *Big Home* did not appear on the August bestseller lists of any other major bookstore. Furthermore, it stood as the sole work of fiction to rank within Jongno Books' top 10. The bookstore's August rankings were predominantly driven by self-improvement titles and children's books. Children's literature, including *Bappa Elementary English Diary Writing, Hello, Pororo's Friends!*, and *Eyes, Nose, and Mouth*, performed strongly alongside practical guides and humanities works such as *Practical Investment Lectures* and *The Analects for People in Their 60s*.

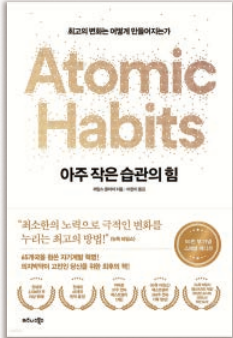
Please refer to the table below for the detailed bestseller rankings.

Jongno Books Bestseller List: Second Week of August 2026			
Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre	
1		<i>Big Home</i>	
		Ginger	
		Miraein	
		Fiction	
2		<i>Bappa Elementary English Diary Writing</i>	
		Seong Ki-hong	
		EasyysEdu	
		Children / Education	

Jongno Books Bestseller List: Second Week of August 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
3		<i>Practical Investment Lectures</i>
		André Kostolany (author) / Choi Byung-yeon (translator)
		Miraebook
		Economics / Management
4		<i>The Analects for People in Their 60s</i>
		Takashi Saito (author) / Kim Yun-kyung (translator)
		Thoughts of Others
		Asian Philosophy
5		<i>Hello, Pororo's Friends!</i>
		Kids Icon Editorial Team
		Kids Icon
		Children / Education
6		<i>Sustainable Fashion</i>
		Ko Eun-joo, Yonsei University Fashion Marketing Lab
		Gyomoon Publisher
		Arts & Culture
7		<i>How to Live a Healthy, Long, and Happy Life</i>
		Lee Seung-won
		Baeksan Publishing
		Health / Wellness

Jongno Books Bestseller List: Second Week of August 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
8		<i>Consolations: On Comfort Received and Given</i>
		Christophe André (author) / Ahn Hae-rin (translator)
		Bulkwang Publishing
		Psychology / Counseling
9		<i>Atomic Habits</i>
		James Clear (author) / Lee Han-ee (translator)
		Business Books
		Self-Improvement
10		<i>Eyes, Nose, and Mouth</i>
		Baek Joo-hee (author, illustrator)
		Borim Press
		Children / Education

Buckwheat Blossom Season: Lee Hyoseok Memorial Hall in Bongpyeong

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

September in Bongpyeong and the Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall

In September, literature comes to life as a vivid landscape in Bongpyeong. Located in Pyeongchang, Gangwon-do, Bongpyeong is the setting for Lee Hyo-seok's short story *When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom* and preserves one of the most lyrical scenes in modern Korean literature. The buckwheat fields, moonlit paths, Bongpyeong Traditional Market, and water mill from the story still leave a deep impression on many readers. Especially in September, when the buckwheat flowers bloom, Bongpyeong enters a season that feels just like watching a novel unfold right before your eyes.



Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall (Source, <https://korean.visitkorea.or.kr/>)

The Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall is a space where visitors can explore the author's life and literary world. Inside the exhibition hall, you can trace his works, literary legacy, and the historical background behind the creation of *When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*. What makes the memorial hall truly special is that it extends beyond the display space, blending naturally into the surrounding village landscape. Stepping outside, the paths, fields, streams, and marketplace of Bongpyeong unfold just like the settings in his story. Here, the experience of reading literature expands into the experience of walking through the landscape itself.

Located near the memorial hall, Hyoseok Moonlight Hill is a space where visitors can experience Lee Hyo-seok's literary world in greater depth. The site features a restored replica of the author's birthplace, an interactive space dedicated to modern literature, and walking trails offering views of the Bongpyeong landscape. The name "Moonlight" naturally connects to the lyrical quality of *When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*. As you stroll through this space, the story's night paths, buckwheat fields, and the tender emotions shared between people come alive with even greater presence.



Hyoseok Moonlight Hill (Source, <https://korean.visitkorea.or.kr/>)

What makes September in Bongpyeong even more special is the Pyeongchang Hyoseok Cultural Festival. Held every year when the buckwheat is in bloom, this premier festival honors both Lee Hyo-seok's literary heritage and the distinct character of Bongpyeong. Throughout the festival, the entire region comes alive with buckwheat fields, literary programs, live performances, hands-on activities, and local cuisine. The seamless connection between the Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall, Hyoseok Moonlight Hill, the buckwheat fields, and Bongpyeong Traditional Market transforms all of Bongpyeong into a single literary stage.

The Bongpyeong Traditional Market and its buckwheat dishes are also key elements that evoke the true spirit of Bongpyeong. The market's vibrant atmosphere, reminiscent of the itinerant vendors in *When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom*, along with local specialties like buckwheat noodles (memil-

guksu), buckwheat crepes (memil-jeonbyeong), and buckwheat pancakes (memil-buchim), creates a natural bridge between the novel's backdrop and present-day Bongpyeong. Here, literature does not remain confined to the pages of a book; it comes alive once more within the town's landscape, the daily lives of its people, its local flavors, and the mood of the season.



Bongpyeong Traditional Market (Source, <https://korean.visitkorea.or.kr/>)

September in Bongpyeong is far more than just a place with beautiful buckwheat blossoms. It is a place where Lee Hyo-seok's literature has become the collective memory of the town, and his iconic story defines an entire region's seasonal landscape. Visiting the Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall, wandering through Hyoseok Moonlight Hill and the buckwheat fields, and passing by the bustling Bongpyeong Traditional Market, the lines of *When Buckwheat Flowers Bloom* naturally linger in mind once again.

When the buckwheat is in bloom, Bongpyeong becomes a space where literature comes alive in its most beautiful form.

Address

2026 Hyoseok Cultural Festival: 2026-09-04 ~ 2026-09-13, 157, Ihyoseok-gil, Bongpyeong-myeon, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do, Admission: Free

Bongpyeong Traditional Market: 14-1, Dongijangteo-gil, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do, Market Days: Every 2nd, 7th, 12th, 17th, 22nd & 27th

Lee Hyo-seok Memorial Hall: 73-25, Hyoseongmunhak-gil, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do

Hyoseok Moonlight Hill: 54, Hyoseongmunhak-gil, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do

Heungjeonggyegok Valley: 62 Heungjeonggyegok-gil, Bongpyeong-myeon, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do

Herbnara Farm: 225 Heungjeonggyegok-gil, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do

2026 Frankfurt Book Fair

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

K-Books are heading to Frankfurt to connect with the global publishing market.

At the fair, 15 Korean publishers and 103 consignment titles from 44 publishers will meet overseas publishers, agencies, IP companies, and other buyers for one-to-one export consultations.

A networking reception will also bring together publishing professionals from Korea and abroad to share market insights and publishing trends, while building new connections for the global expansion of K-Books.

DATE: October 7–11, 2026 | PLACE: Messengelände, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Follow K-Book Trends for more news on Korean publishing and its connections around the world.

INFO

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EHRENGAST TSCHEDIEN**

**A GOOD
STORY
CHANGES
EVERY-
THING.**

2026 Frankfurt Book Fair

2026년 프랑크푸르트도서전, K-북이 글로벌 출판시장과 연결됩니다.
K-Books Connect with the Global Publishing Market!

K-Book Trends

**DAS
NÄCHSTE
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WARTET
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**A GOOD
STORY
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**7.-11.
OKTOBER
26**

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K-BOOKS MEET GLOBAL PARTNERS

Korean Companies

15
*

Consignment Publishers

44
*

Consignment Titles

103
*

At the fair, 15 Korean publishers and 103 consignment titles from 44 publishers will meet overseas buyers, including publishers, agencies, and IP companies, for one-to-one export consultations.

Business matching will create opportunities for Korean publishing content to connect with new partners in the global market.

국내 출판사 15개사와 44개사의 위탁도서 103종이 해외 출판사, 에이전시, IP업체 등 다양한 바이어와 만나 1:1 수출상담을 진행합니다.

비즈니스 매칭을 통해 한국 출판콘텐츠와 새로운 글로벌 파트너의 접점을 만들어갑니다.

BEYOND BUSINESS MEETINGS

Building Connections Beyond the Fair



Market Insights



Publishing Trends



Global Networking

A networking reception will bring together publishing professionals from Korea and abroad to share insights into the global publishing market and its trends.

Through new connections and exchanges, the program aims to build a stronger foundation for the global expansion of K-Books.

국내외 출판관계자가 함께하는 교류 행사도 마련됩니다.
세계 출판시장 정보와 트렌드를 공유하고 서로의 네트워크를 넓히며 K-북의 글로벌 확산을 위한 기반을 만들어갑니다.

EVENT INFO

2026 Frankfurt Book Fair

Dates

October 7-11, 2026

Venue

Messegelände, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

독일 프랑크푸르트 암 마인 메세게레네

Participants

15 Korean publishers,
103 consignment titles from 44 publishers,
Export specialists

국내 출판사 15개사, 44개사의 위탁도서 103종 및 수출전문가

✿ See you in Frankfurt! ✿

Read the full story on our webzine.

K-Book Trends

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