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K-Book Trends

offers Korea's highly informative publishing content
to those in the global publishing industry.

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Korean Publishing Market Trends in 2025 and Outlook for 2026

Written by Ryu Young-Ho
(General Manager of eBusiness Division, Kyobo Book Centre)

Trends in 2025: A Year of Digital Transformation and Practical, Stability-Oriented Content

In 2025, Korea's publishing market underwent noticeable shifts in the ways readers discovered, selected, and consumed books, as digital transformation accelerated and social and economic uncertainty deepened. On the surface, the overall market size appeared relatively stable. Beneath that stability, however, structural changes became increasingly clear: the number of new titles grew significantly, while the average print run per title declined. As supply expanded, the actual market reach secured by individual titles continued to narrow. These changes were further shaped by the expansion of generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) and intensified competition from OTT (Over-the-Top) platforms.



Digital Transformation



AI Literacy



Text-hip

Together, they altered patterns of text consumption more broadly. As summarization, recommendation, and search functions shifted toward algorithm-driven systems, the entry points into reading changed as well, reinforcing a tendency to identify core information within shorter time spans.

Readers' choices did not move in a single direction. Demand rose sharply for knowledge-driven content focused on practical problem-solving—such as economics, investment, career development, and AI—while literature and humanities titles that offered emotional stability or explored questions of humanity and society continued to be read steadily in an environment marked by accumulated anxiety and fatigue. In effect, different purposes and modes of reading expanded simultaneously.

The key forces that shaped the market in 2025 can be summarized as the notable resurgence of Korean literature; the expansion of practical knowledge centered on AI utilization; the rise of “text-hip” culture formed largely among readers in their twenties; and

the growth of digital, and IP (Intellectual Property)-based content. Annual sales trend analyses released by Kyobo Book Centre and YES24 demonstrate that these shifts were evident across multiple areas of the market. Looking ahead, the outlook for 2026 focuses on how these currents will continue to unfold and take shape within the industry.

1. Key Trends in Korea's Publishing Industry in 2025

① The Symbolic Triumph of Korean Literature and the Polarization of the Fiction Market

The year 2025 carried significant symbolic weight in that Korean literature once again captured readers' sentiment and the social imagination. *Human Acts* by Nobel Prize-winning author Han Kang (Changbi Publishers) ranked first on the overall bestseller lists of both Kyobo Book Centre and YES24 for the second consecutive year. This indicates that the novel functioned not merely as a topical success, but as a "shared text" mediating social wounds and collective memory—reaffirming literature's role as a genre that confronts the scars of its time and offers language through which they can be endured.

The interesting thing is that the momentum behind Korean fiction did not stem solely from new releases. One example is *Contradictions* by Yang Gui-Ja (Write Publishing), originally published in 1998, which climbed to the upper ranks of bestseller lists 27 years later, reaching second place overall at Kyobo Book

Centre. This case demonstrates that texts regarded as modern classics can still resonate with the realities of a new generation. Alongside this resurgence, works by younger writers—such as *Honmono* by Sung Hae-Na (Changbi Publishers)—have further contributed to a multi-layered landscape in which Korean literature spans generations and emotional registers. Despite these impressive developments, structural polarization within the fiction market has intensified. According to data from Kyobo Book Centre, total sales volume in the fiction category rose slightly by 1.4 percent year on year, while sales of Korean novels recorded negative growth of 5.8 percent. In other words, reader attention and purchasing power are increasingly concentrated on a small number of bestsellers, narrowing the survival space for mid-list and later-arriving works. The increase in the number of novels ranked within the annual top 100—from 27 titles in 2024 to 30 in 2025—may suggest greater diversity on the surface, but in reality reflects a structure in which individual titles enjoy shorter shelf



Human Acts; Contradictions; Honmono

lives and face intensifying competition.

In international literature, the so-called Krasznahorkai László effect—following his receipt of the 2025 Nobel Prize in Literature—led to a 25.1 percent increase in sales within the “Other European Fiction” category at Kyobo Book Centre. Sales of British and American fiction also rose by 12.4 percent year on year, signaling a broad-based expansion of interest in literature as a whole. What merits particular attention here is that literary awards are functioning not merely as promotional tools, but as indicators of trust in “texts worth reading.” Faced with an overwhelming abundance of content, readers increasingly rely on prestigious prizes, authoritative recommendations, and media attention as mechanisms of quality assurance. Publishers, in turn, have entered a phase in which planning and marketing strategies must be recalibrated with this structure firmly in mind.

② The Explosion of Knowledge for Survival in the Age of AI and the Practical Turn in Content

The year 2025 marked a turning point in which AI came to be recognized not as a future possibility, but as a capability directly tied to present-day survival. According to data from Kyobo Book Centre, sales of AI-related books grew by 68.5 percent year on year. The focus of interest moved decisively away from theory and underlying principles toward practical application—questions such as, “What should I change right now in my work and daily

life, and how?” The upper ranks of bestseller lists were dominated by titles offering immediately applicable guidance, including prompt engineering, strategies for human–AI collaboration, and AI-driven creation, analysis, and workflow automation—books designed to be put to use on the ground without delay. AI-related content is no longer confined to IT or engineering sections. Titles about AI are now pouring into categories such as economics and business, the humanities, education, self-development, and even practical and lifestyle genres. As a result, AI literacy is no longer positioned as specialized knowledge tied to specific industries, but is increasingly approaching the status of a form of “foundational cultural competence—something every professional and learner is expected to possess.”

A turning point was also evident in the composition of readers. According to data from Kyobo Book Centre, women in their 20s to 40s accounted for a higher share of AI book purchases than men in the same age group. This suggests that the use of AI is no longer an issue limited to specific professions or specialists, but is being embraced by a broad audience as an essential capability for managing careers, productivity, and everyday life in an integrated way. The fact that the number of newly published AI-related titles nearly doubled compared to 2024 further indicates that, on the supply side, the market has already shifted its center of gravity from “theory” to “application.” Ultimately, reading AI in 2025 was less about learning technology itself and more about designing



Kyobo Book Centre's bestselling titles on "practical use of AI":
Park Tae-Woong's Lecture on AI 2025 (Hanbit Biz);
Easy AI Knowledge for Even Non-Majors (Business Books);
AGI: Is It an Angel or a Devil? (EAST ASIA Publishing);
AI Literacy: From Essential Knowledge to Perfect Use (Freelec);
AI Agent Ecosystem (Road Book); *AI 2025 Trends & Usage Guide* (Smart Books)

survival strategies for an era defined by uncertainty. The core shift of the year lay in the focus on literacy, moving away from understanding AI toward using AI to better control the variables shaping one's life.

③ Monthly Cross-currents Between Politics and Economics—and the Psychology of Practical Financial Investment and Management

In 2025, readers turned to books as a means of diagnosing present realities while preparing for the future at the same time. In the first half of the year, political and social issues were directly reflected in bookstore sales. According to Kyobo Book Centre, sales in the politics and society category rose by 19.1 percent year on year, with an extraordinary growth rate of 93.2 percent recorded in May, when political tensions peaked. YES24 likewise reported an 11.1 percent increase in sales of social and political titles. As books on constitutional issues and major political developments gained attention, readers sought to reread institutions, values, and power structures amid a turbulent political landscape. Political books are no longer confined to a “niche audience of specialists” - they are increasingly consumed as tools through which individuals examine their political identities and modes of participation.

In the second half of the year, the center of gravity shifted toward economics and personal finance. Data from Kyobo Book Centre show that stock-related books posted a striking growth rate of 99.3 percent in November alone. Bestsellers during this period focused not on abstract economic theory, but on topics directly tied to real-world investing—ETFs, US stocks, Bitcoin, and the relationship between elections and financial markets. Facing a convergence of risks, including high inflation, interest-rate volatility, and exchange-rate instability, readers are seeking practical manuals

that go beyond passively defending assets to actively managing and growing them. A glance at recurring keywords—stocks, AI, ETFs, the US, Bitcoin, and Trump—reveals their simultaneous presence. This reflects a reading behavior shaped by the recognition that global political and economic variables must be read alongside domestic issues. The month-by-month cross-currents between political and social books on the one hand, and



Kyobo Book Centre’s bestselling “financial management” titles:
Retire With Just 3 US ETFs (Leader Books);
The Flow of Money Repeats Itself (Porche Publishing);
Park Gom-Hee’s Lesson on Getting Rich on Annuities (Influential);
Everything About ETF Investment (Maeil Business Newspaper);
The Best ETFs That Can Change Your Life (Giant’s Garden);
Core Stock Investment Techniques for New Investors (Ire Media Books)

economic and financial titles on the other, signal that readers are navigating present-day uncertainty and future risk through different genres, reading them in complementary ways.

④ Text-Hip Culture Led by Readers in Their Twenties and the Rise of Digital and IP-Based Markets

It is difficult to discuss the publishing market in 2025 without addressing readers in their twenties. According to data from Kyobo Book Centre, this age group accounted for as much as 21.6 percent of purchases among the overall top ten bestsellers. For these readers, books are consumed less as information media than as lifestyle items that express personal taste and identity—a phenomenon often described as “text-hip” culture. At Kyobo Book Centre, sales of reading accessories such as book covers and bookmarks rose by 30 percent, reflecting a tendency to frame the act of reading itself as a form of style. A similar pattern is evident at YES24, where analog formats that involve writing and drawing by hand—such as transcription books, comics, and coloring books—have gained popularity. The more thoroughly consumption shifts to digital environments, the more pronounced becomes a paradoxical counter-trend: the growing collectible value of “go-to books” and “limited editions of re-covered titles.”

The influx of readers in their twenties has also had a direct impact on genre-specific growth. According to data from Kyobo Book Centre, poetry saw year-on-year growth of 15.5 percent, while

comics grew by 15.0 percent. At YES24, IPs originating from web novels and webtoons have expanded across books, video content, and merchandise, firmly establishing an OSMU (One Source Multi Use) structure. In this process, publishing is no longer confined to the business of producing paper books; it is increasingly shifting toward designing and managing the entire IP life cycle. Looking at distribution channels, online sales (including mobile) at Kyobo Book Centre accounted for 63.0 percent of total sales,



Kyobo Book Centre bestselling “limited editions of re-covered titles”:
Hunger (EunHaengNaMu Publishing); *Why Do I Get Tired More Easily Than Others?* (Sustain);
You’re The One Who Gets Anything Done After All (Feelm);
The Shop That Sells Time (Jaeum & Moeum); *Beasts of a Little Land* (Dasan Books);
Midnight Timetable (Purple Rain)

significantly surpassing offline stores, which stood at 37.0 percent. Rapid growth is also evident in digital consumption formats such as e-books and audiobooks. Within e-book subscription services—such as Kyobo Book Centre’s “sam” and YES24’s “Crema Club,” patterns of “tailored deep reading” are becoming more pronounced, spanning a wide range of content from future-oriented titles on topics like GPT and exchange rates to comics, exam-preparation books, and children’s titles. Audiobooks, too, are establishing themselves as a distinct format rather than a supplementary one, as listening to books while driving, exercising, or commuting becomes part of everyday life.

2. Outlook for 2026: Publishing Trends in Korea

① Redefining Human Value in the Age of AI and the Advancement of Knowledge Content

The publishing market in 2026 is expected to enter a phase that returns to a fundamental question: after absorbing the AI shock of 2025, how should we design a balance between technology and humanity? If the market for AI-related books expanded explosively in 2025, 2026 is likely to see increasing segmentation around highly specific, immediately applicable “AI utilization” titles—books that address concrete challenges such as “how can AI transform my role, the organization, or performance?” across different industries, jobs, and contexts. At the same time, technology-centered narratives are revealing clear limitations.

As AI grows more advanced, the value of distinctly human capacities—ethics, reflection, empathy, and imagination—rises rather than diminishes. This helps explain the renewed attention given to philosophy, the humanities, literature, and the arts. The continued prominence of books that ask questions about coexistence with AI, the role of humans, and the direction of communities reflects the fact that books remain responsible not for technology itself, but for the human questions that arise within a technological world.

Another major axis of growth lies in content related to health and vitality. Titles addressing slow aging, brain health, sleep, resilience, and stress management—topics tied to the mental and physical sustainability of life—are increasing noticeably. Rather than focusing on techniques for simply living longer, practical books that help readers design lives that are mentally resilient and physically sustainable are likely to remain a key category in 2026. Ultimately, the three keywords—AI, the future, and health—converge on a single question: “how to live longer, better, and as human beings with dignity.”

② The Continuation of Korean Literature’s Golden Age, and Consumption Centered on Authors and Story Worlds

The literary market is likely to continue its steady growth, building on the boom in Korean literature in 2025. The consecutive year-long run of *Human Acts* at the top of bestseller lists represents

more than the success of a single title; it stands as a representative case demonstrating the strengthening fundamentals of Korean literature as a whole. As readers in their twenties and thirties have emerged as the core consumer base, the unit of consumption is shifting away from individual books toward “authors” and their “literary universe.”

By genre, Korean novels continue to expand their thematic range by addressing social fractures, generational conflict, and issues of region and class with increasing depth. Poetry, meanwhile, is merging with practices such as transcription, recitation, and short-form quotation content, becoming a mode of emotional expression for Generation Z. Genre fiction—including SF, thrillers, and fantasy—is enhancing its value as story IP through expansion into webtoons, television dramas, and films. At the platform level, a growing array of formats—audiobooks, performances read by actors and voice artists, live author events, and web-based serialization—will further diversify the ways literature is consumed. Publishers, accordingly, must move beyond one-off releases toward long-term design strategies, including author-led series, story-world labels, and thematic curation. As international demand for translations and rights to Korean literature continues to rise, the “global dissemination of Korean literature” is increasingly likely to move beyond mere declarations and into the realm of concrete execution strategies from 2026 onward.

③ The Parallel Expansion of Advanced Practical Knowledge and Demand for Emotional Well-being

Reading demand in 2026 is expected to unfold in increasingly diverse directions. On one side, practical knowledge is becoming more finely differentiated in response to a more complex social and economic environment; on the other, the desire for emotional stability and inner balance is growing more distinct. Books on economics and personal finance are evolving beyond basic financial literacy to address more sophisticated portfolio design, covering ETFs, overseas equities, pensions, taxation, and asset structuring. This reflects a growing readership that prioritizes long-term life planning over short-term price gains. A similar shift is underway in the self-help category. The center of gravity is moving away from abstract advice—such as the idea that “changing one’s mindset is enough”—toward books that offer concrete, actionable strategies grounded in scientific disciplines like neuroscience, behavioral economics, and cognitive psychology.

Yet practical knowledge alone cannot fully explain readers’ needs. In an era where anxiety and fatigue have become part of everyday life, readers increasingly seek texts that help them recover and restore themselves. Korean novels, poetry, and essays—as well as comics, transcription books, and coloring books—now function as more than simple hobbies, serving instead as “emotional safe zones.” As digital fatigue deepens, the value of experiences that involve slowly turning pages, transcribing, and concentrating

while coloring continues to grow.

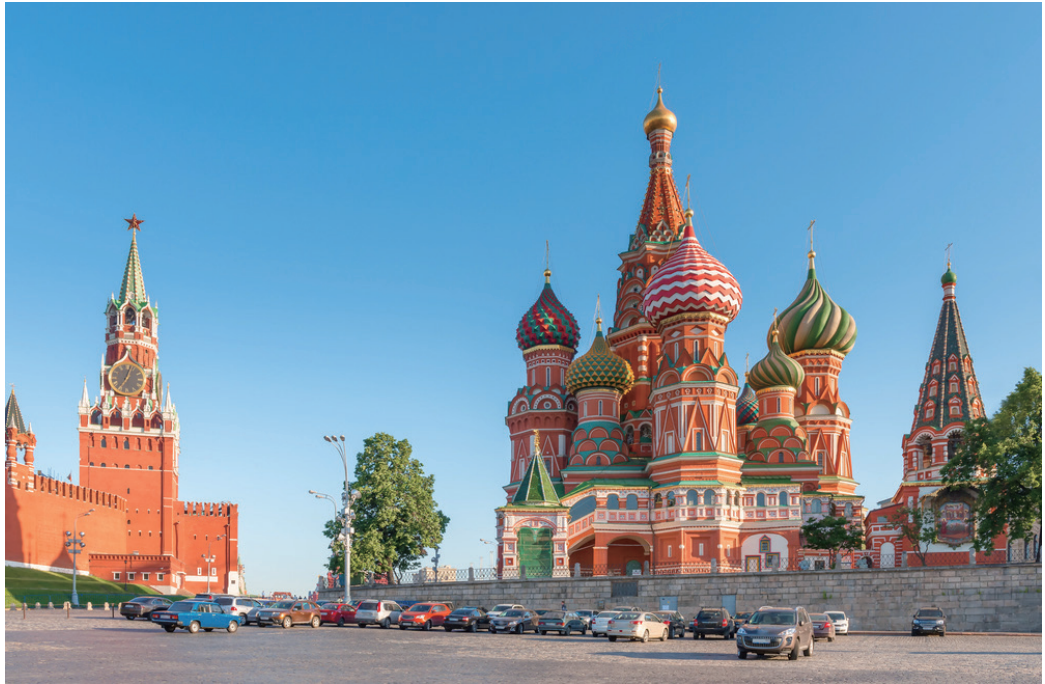
Ultimately, the publishing market in 2026 can be distilled into two main axes. One is advanced practical knowledge aimed at survival and growth; the other is emotional well-being content designed to help individuals avoid losing themselves. These two forces are not in opposition. Rather, they operate simultaneously as twin pillars within a single person's day and year. Against this dual structure, publishers must recalibrate their strategies—deciding how to differentiate content, which formats and channels to prioritize, and which readers to engage. The data from 2025 marks precisely the starting point that points the way forward.

SPECIAL PROJECT

[New Ways of Walking Through Cities ㉓]

**A City Cold Yet Warm at Heart:
Moscow**Written by Jeong Hwan-Jeong

Famous cities around the world tend to carry images of their own. Paris, the city of romance; New York, the center of popular culture; and Rome, often regarded as the very heart of ancient European culture—each city’s name becomes an icon and an object of aspiration. In this way, Moscow, the capital of Russia, the largest country in the world, has long been perceived as the center of the “Iron Curtain.” The term “Iron Curtain,” used during World War II by Nazi propaganda minister Paul Joseph Goebbels, referred to the closed nature of the Soviet Union and the communist states of Eastern Europe at the time. It portrayed the Soviet Union’s isolationist policies and police-state system as an “impenetrable barrier.” In 1946, British Prime Minister Winston



Churchill also expressed distrust in a speech toward the influence of the Soviet Union and the control Moscow exerted over certain Eastern European cities and their residents.

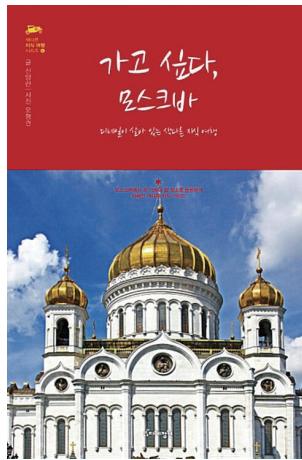
Moscow, too, has a history marked by hardship. In the 19th century, much of the city was burned and destroyed during Napoleon's invasion. In the 20th century, there was also the German-Soviet War, in which the city ultimately prevailed after nearly one million Soviet soldiers were killed during Germany's surprise attack in the German-Soviet War. Perhaps because of these historical experiences, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, Moscow has continued to retain the image of a cold and heavy city. Common preconceptions about Russians being sparing with their smiles also touch upon that image.

However, anyone who has experienced Moscow even once would tell a different story. This is especially true for those with a strong interest in culture and the arts. Moscow is home to a wealth of world-class cultural heritage: the Kremlin, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the Bolshoi Ballet, renowned for its long history and tradition; and the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory Academic Music College, where Tchaikovsky served as a founding professor and left his name. For this reason, books about Moscow often feel similar to introductory guides to art, music, literature, and architecture. Perhaps the tendency to perceive Moscow as rigid and cold, despite its rich cultural and artistic beauty, stems from the notion of the “Iron Curtain,” which has prevented its true value from being fully recognized.

Between war and religion

Travelers who have grown accustomed to Europe often turn their attention to Russia. Those who have experienced the western edge of Europe—countries such as Spain and Portugal—shift their gaze eastward, extending their interest beyond the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine, and eventually to Russia itself. If one has traveled through Northern Europe, especially Finland, it is highly likely that the sight of a train bound for St. Petersburg pulling into Helsinki Central Station has, if only briefly, stirred the imagination of a journey to Russia.

For the author, who taught students as a Korean-language teacher



My Next Destination: Moscow

before retiring and becoming a travel writer, Russia must have been such a place as well. Having first experienced St. Petersburg, the author went on to publish *My Next Destination: Moscow* (written by Shin Yang-Ran, published by Book Blossom), and for her, Moscow was a city that had to be visited. Unfortunately, it was only upon arriving in Moscow that she learned that photographing the interiors of the city’s cathedrals—considered the very essence of Moscow—was strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, drawing on officially available photographic materials, the author gently and clearly explains the meaning that Orthodox Christianity and cathedrals hold for Russian people.

“Moscow was invaded by the Tatars in both 1451 and 1480, and the people of Moscow believe that they achieved victory each time under the protection of this icon. There is even a story that in 1941, at the height of World War II, when

Nazi Germany attacked, Stalin placed the ‘The Virgin of Vladimir’ aboard an airplane and had it flown over the skies of Moscow to pray for victory.”

- from *My Next Destination: Moscow*

Most communist states outwardly guarantee freedom of religion, yet in practice suppress religious activity among their people. The Soviet Union was no exception during World War II. This was especially true under Joseph Stalin, widely known as a ruthless dictator. That such a figure conveyed his resolve to protect Moscow to the public through an old icon displayed in the Dormition Cathedral—where the coronations of successive Russian emperors had been held—suggests an underlying intention to control the people through religion. Yet the cathedrals introduced in this book, along with the icons that visually embody Orthodox faith—an artistic form that symbolizes the identity of Russian art and belief—ultimately affirm the nobility of the human will and the passion for beauty.

The hidden face of Moscow behind expressionless looks

It is difficult to deny that Russia carries a rigid image. This is due to the combination of Russians’ tendency not to smile readily in front of strangers and a cultural perception that regards an expressionless face as a mark of seriousness and sincerity, and thus values it highly. It is why scenes of Russians smiling



Moscow Fantasy

together are hard to come by. There is a historical context behind this. Russia has endured prolonged periods of intense political upheaval and has been governed by a powerful, centralized political system. Revealing one’s moods and emotions openly could have been a dangerous act. Even so, to outsiders, the Russian reserve inevitably feels unfamiliar. The author, who worked as a marketer at a global advertising agency before coming to live in Moscow, “drawn by the pull of fate,” recalls her first visit to the city in *Moscow Fantasy* (written by Oh Se-Ah, published by Sigongsa Inc.), saying that she “felt like a prisoner being sent into exile in Siberia.” She is struck speechless by the elegance and beauty of Moscow’s subway stations, yet the thought that taking photographs freely is forbidden crosses her mind, leaving her unable to even take out her smartphone with ease. Still, such rigid apprehension did not last long.

“Once the underground air began to feel familiar, I found myself confidently taking out my camera lens in subway stations, busy photographing everything in sight. The police showed no interest in my taking pictures of the stations. Perhaps they, too, know perfectly well how magnificent their subway stations are, and so regard my behavior as only natural.”

- from *Moscow Fantasy*

The author, for whom even taking the subway had initially felt like a major adventure, soon comes to enjoy traveling farther and farther in order to “view” more subway stations. The subway stations were not the only destinations. Throughout Moscow are countless works and sites that Russia is proud of, and the world stands in awe; at times, one can also encounter moments of profound reflection on the essence of humanity. The author confesses that whenever life in Moscow left her feeling up against a wall, she found guidance and solace in the traces of great writers—Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gogol, and Gorky—who devoted themselves to an endless exploration of what it means to be human. Perhaps Russia is a place that offers a hospitality deeper than a smile.

Russia today, seen by a correspondent



Moscow Dispatch: A Reporter's Story

Even as the Cold War has ended and the global order has shifted toward a US–China bipolar system, Russia’s global influence remains impossible to ignore. To this day, Russia is regarded as a military power possessing vast conventional weaponry, and also as a great nation with the world’s largest territory and seemingly boundless natural resources. Climate change, too, plays a role in expanding Russia’s influence. As global warming melts Arctic ice and widens the Northern Sea Route—one of Russia’s key national transportation corridors—Russia will be able to exert significant influence over international trade. If Korea were able to use the Northern Sea Route, travel distances could be reduced by up to 40% compared to the existing Malacca Strait–Suez Canal route. This is not merely an economic issue but one that extends into political and diplomatic realms, as maintaining communication and relations with Russia would take on considerable importance.

For this reason, the account of the author who served as a Moscow correspondent in *Moscow Dispatch: A Reporter's Story* (written by Ha Joon-Su, published by Gureona) inevitably invites curiosity.

“When sociologists ask Russians when they believe the proudest moment in Russian history was, for more than twenty years the most common answer has been ‘victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945’—the term Russians use to refer to World War II. Victory in Europe Day over Nazi Germany, they explain, is one of the few nationwide celebrations capable of uniting people of widely differing perspectives into a single collective experience.”

- from *Moscow Dispatch: A Reporter's Story*

Historians acknowledge that Russia made a decisive contribution to the Allied victory over Nazi Germany. Russians take pride in the fact that, through the sacrifice of about 27 million soldiers and civilians, they halted Nazi Germany's eastward advance and helped preserve peace in the world. For this reason, Russia marks Victory in Europe Day each year on May 9 with a large-scale military parade. Present-day Russia spares no expense in showcasing its military might through these annual displays. If one is curious about why this is so, this book offers an answer. Through the sharp eyes of a foreign correspondent, it conveys both the human side of Russians who long for the era when they stood alongside the US as one of the world's two great powers, and the tension surrounding



events such as the sudden annexation of Crimea.

Most people who have experienced Moscow agree that it is “far more romantic than they had expected.” Many also say that behind its rigid expressions lies a shyly hidden warmth, more tender than that of many other places. This is especially true when it comes to culture and the arts. Those who have spent time studying there testify that Moscow is “a place where cultural pride is stronger and artists are treated with greater warmth than in any other



European country or city.” Yet there is still a sense of tension in the way the world looks toward Moscow. For Russia, war may be seen as a moment to reclaim the image of a once-great homeland, but the radiant Russia the world hopes to see undoubtedly lies not in military force, but in culture. I hope that someday people from all over the world will be able to stand shoulder to shoulder and savor peace amid the countless works of art found in Moscow.

EXPORT CASE

Export Case: Jeong Hae-Yeon's Success in Thailand

Written by Jackie Yang
(General Manager of the Export Team at Eric Yang Agency)

Introduction of Eric Yang Agency

Founded thirty years ago, Eric Yang Agency is now widely known as one of Korea's leading literary agencies for introducing international translated titles to the domestic market, including the *Harry Potter* series and *JUSTICE: What's the Right Thing To Do?* Less widely known, however, is that the agency has also achieved significant results in exporting Korean books to overseas markets for more than two decades. Over twenty years ago, Eric Yang Agency established a branch in China, and today it exports Korean titles across Asia through its offices in Taiwan and Thailand, as well as through local Eric Yang agents based in each market. Building on this stable Asian foundation, the agency

has recently expanded its efforts to export Korean books more broadly, including to English-language and European markets. In addition to handling global rights for authors such as Jang Kang-Myeong, Kim Cho-Yeop, and Cheon Seon-Ran, the agency drew international attention with Lee On-Hwa's novel *A Midnight Pastry Shop Called Hwawoldang* (Dive), which attracted strong overseas interest even before its official domestic publication and was sold into eleven countries prior to release. Kim Soo-Hyeon's *I Decided to Live as Myself* (Clay House) has likewise been exported to seventeen countries, including Thailand. These achievements demonstrate Eric Yang Agency's strong track record across genres, spanning fiction, non-fiction, and children's books.



Thai edition of *I Decided to Live as Myself*

The growth of the Thai publishing market

Thailand's publishing market has drawn attention as one of the most stable and steadily growing markets in Southeast Asia. This

growth has been driven by a significant influx of Millennial and Gen Z readers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has expanded the overall reading population. According to a report by the Thailand Publishing Promotion Agency, the Thai publishing market is projected to grow at an average annual rate of approximately 3.5% from 2025 to 2031. By genre, comics, thrillers, self-help, romance, and fantasy novels rank among the top categories, with fiction showing particularly strong growth, accounting for as much as 67% of the market. Within the fiction sector, BL (boys' love), mystery and detective fiction, as well as horror and suspense genres, are reported to be especially popular. This trend indicates that fiction has become a core category driving publishing consumption in Thailand, attracting new readers through print books as well as e-books and online platforms.

Korean books in the Thai market

In Thailand's publishing market, translated titles account for approximately 66% of all publications, and following books from the English-speaking world and Japan, demand for the translation and publication of Korean books has continued to rise. This is one of the key reasons Thailand has rapidly emerged in recent years as one of the most active overseas markets for Korean titles. Building on the cultural familiarity formed through K-pop and K-dramas, attention has now expanded to the literary sensibility and editorial

strength inherent in Korean books themselves. As Korean titles gain a stronger presence across a wide range of genres—including children’s literature, young adult fiction, general fiction, and practical books—Thai publishers are beginning to explore Korean content at earlier stages and to actively discuss new forms of collaboration. Recognizing the growth potential of the Thai publishing market, Eric Yang Agency further strengthened its local operations by recruiting a dedicated Thai-based agent in early 2025. As a result, the agency signed contracts with Thai publishers for more than thirty Korean titles in that single year alone.

Korean essays have traditionally been among the most frequently contracted genres in Thailand, thanks to their sustained popularity. Following the bestseller success of Hwang Bo-Reum’s *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop* (Clay House), a large number of healing novels have also been acquired and published.



Thai edition of *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*

In addition, within Thailand’s educational comics market, the *Cookie Run* (Seoul Media Group) series has consistently ranked as a bestseller. More recently, as demand for thrillers and mystery novels has grown rapidly in Thailand, publishers that once focused primarily on healing fiction and essays from Korea are now actively seeking out Korean genre fiction—particularly thrillers and mysteries—marking a noticeable shift in the market’s interests.

Writer Jeong Hae-Yeon in the Thai thriller market

Writer Jeong Hae-Yeon has established her name in Thailand as a leading figure in Korean thriller fiction, known for combining tightly constructed suspense with emotionally driven narratives. The fact that many of her titles have been contracted and published in Thailand attests to this recognition. In particular, *Double* (Happy Books To You), published in Thailand in 2015, was



Thai edition of *Double*

the work that first firmly introduced the name “Jeong Hae-Yeon” to Thai readers. Through this novel, readers experienced the “distinctive twists and tension” characteristic of Korean thrillers, responding enthusiastically to its genre appeal and describing it as a “page-turner” that was impossible to put down.

In 2022, Jeong Hae-Yeon’s readership in Thailand expanded further with the publication of *On My Way To My Death* (Goldenbough), released by Piccolo, an imprint of Amarin, Thailand’s largest publishing house. While the novel explores weighty themes such as death, life, and the value of existence, its immersive tone and fast-paced narrative left a lasting impression on Thai readers. Local reviews praised the work for its “unexpected twists” and its “vivid portrayal of human psychology within darkness.” Following this success, additional titles by Jeong Hae-Yeon were published by the same publisher and others in Thailand, including *The Bongmyeong Apartment Flower Boy Investigation Diary* (Goldenbough), *Suspects* (Wisdom House), and *The Flamingo’s*



Thai editions of *On My Way To My Death*;
The Bongmyeong Apartment Flower Boy Investigation Diary;
Suspects; *The Flamingo’s Place*

Place (Elixir). With multiple works released consecutively, she has firmly established herself in Thailand as one of Korea's leading genre fiction authors. Beyond individual translation and publication deals, the continued contracting and release of Jeong Hae-Yeon's works demonstrate the potential for Korean genre authors to develop into recognizable and sustainable brands in the Thai market.

ONE-LINER QUOTES

The Attitude of Looking Beneath the Surface

Graphic Designer's Pick

Written by Lee Ki-Joon (graphic designer)

Lee Ki-Joon is a graphic designer. He designed covers for books, including *Italy, Anyway* (Nanda Is Art), *You & I, Yellow* (Nanda Is Art), and *Study is Hard Work* (UU Press). He mainly makes books, catalogs, and records, and writes in between. He wrote the essay collections, *Excuse Me* (Minumsa Publishing) and *Sorry For Being a Regular* (Delta Time).

Everyone lives with a few hidden selves. It will be nearly impossible to know everything about who we are. The self we are at work is different from the self we are at home; different again with friends, with a lover, when eating together with others, and when eating alone. Some versions of ourselves appear only in certain situations or through certain people, while others never surface at all.



Gaeul in Glasses

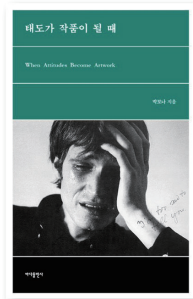
Written by Lee Yoon-Hee,
published by Changbi Publishers

Here, take these glasses,
Be me - without anyone noticing.



In *Gaeul in Glasses*, author Lee Yoon-Hee quietly unfolds the inner lives of animals living within human society. Once the humans leave the house, the family dog and a stray cat spend the afternoon baking bread and enjoying tea together. This stray cat, in turn, knows another side of the neighborhood's old man, infamous for his sour temperament. While his older brother is away from home, Gaeul puts on his brother's glasses and lives in his place, coming to learn secrets that had never been known. Through these scenes, the author seems to regard the hidden sides of beings we so easily overlook with quiet tenderness. It feels as though she is gently reminding us that if we pay just a little more attention, we might come to see the true selves of those who appear prickly on the surface but are kind at heart, or of those known as miserly who are, in fact, quietly feeding several stray cats. The illustrations—warm yet faintly lonely, shy yet quietly assured—deepen the pleasure of the story. Small, thoughtful touches are scattered throughout. The blue party hat resting on

Gaeul's head as he receives his brother's birthday meal overlaps with the blue fur hat his brother wore when he left, gently suggesting that Gaeul and his brother remain connected beings. Even while apart, the feelings of family seem to travel between them. These delicate details wait patiently across the pages, inviting the reader to slow down and look closely.



When Attitudes Become Artwork

Written by Park Bo-Na,
published by Bada Books

It makes us reconsider what we once accepted without question, distracted by grand, spectacle-driven works that seemed perfectly finished.



When Attitudes Become Artwork is an art essay that traces the works of contemporary artists and the attitudes through which they view art and the world. The author, Park Bo-Na, attempts “to read the world through the works of contemporary artists who share similar attitudes.” Here, “attitudes” refer to holding questions about the way the world appears to us. Take, for example, the American contemporary artist Byron Kim and his work *Synecdoche*, a series composed of monochrome panels that reproduce the skin tones of people around him. The work prompts us to begin questioning.

We commonly divide humanity into categories such as Yellow,

Black, or White, based on skin color, yet even within the same so-called race, skin tones are never identical. To be honest, I am not even certain whether Koreans can truly be described as “yellow.” There are a few people around me whose skin I would actually call that color. The category of “yellow” itself feels vague, and labels like “flesh-colored,” “sky-colored,” or even “dirt-colored” reveal a quiet violence embedded in naming. Gradually, the thought emerges that things we believed to be different are often not so different after all, while those that appeared similar may, in fact, be profoundly distinct. Following this line of thinking further, we come to realize how many things we pass over without truly seeing, how often we blur what lies before us, and how many judgments we make while pretending to know—armed with a fragile way of thinking woven from accumulated acts of overlooking.

Art may not offer solutions to the problems of the world. Yet, perhaps it allows us to discover questions. By learning to ask those questions anew in our own way, or by refining our attitude toward them, we may eventually encounter a version of ourselves that has quietly grown a little broader.

KNOWLEDGE

The Expansion of Korea's Picture Book Market

Written by Lee Rury
(writer, professor of the Department of Creative Writing
at Sejong Cyber University)

At some point, Korean picture books began making headlines. Korean authors are now frequent winners of Italy's Bologna Ragazzi Award, one of the most prestigious prizes in the field. They have also produced award recipients of the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (BIB) Award—one of the world's oldest international picture book festivals, launched in 1967—as well as Sweden's Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, often described as the Nobel Prize in children's literature; the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest honor bestowed upon authors and illustrators of children's literature; and France's most prestigious children's literature prize, the Prix Sorcières. Plus, countless Korean picture books have been exported to countries around the world, earning

the love of readers internationally. Most importantly, picture books have become central to Korea's reading culture, bringing the joy of books to every generation, from children to adults. How, then, did all of this become possible?

Picture book-reading adults become picture book authors

The Korean picture book market initially grew as parents read picture books to their children for educational purposes. Yet, the true beneficiaries were, in fact, adults. Through their children, adults began reading picture books themselves—and soon came to an important realization: picture books are an engaging and beautiful visual art, much like film or theater. Children, in their innocence, read through experience itself. Adults, by contrast, are moved, inspired, and led to moments of insight. Parents who gained such realizations through picture books went on to form picture book reading groups and establish small libraries. Notable examples include the Korean Children's Book Association and the Child and Small Library Association. In addition, the Book Culture Foundation's Book Start program and the Miracle Library (기적의 도서관) initiative also made significant contributions to the spread of picture book culture.



Logos of the Korean Children's Book Association, Book Culture Foundation

According to one study, the publication of original Korean picture books surged from just one title in 1988 to 445 titles in 2019. The starting point of this growth can be traced to the 1990s. Until the mid-1990s, the Korean picture book market was largely dominated by imported titles. Original domestic picture books were difficult to find, and well-known works from the English-speaking world and Japan prevailed in the market. Parents with a strong emphasis on their children's education were particularly enthusiastic about imported picture books. These books, in turn, helped restore a sense of expressive freedom and joy not only for children but also, quite naturally, for Korean parents themselves. At the same time, they planted the seeds of creative aspiration. Despite their brevity, picture books—visual art forms that combine images with narrative to deliver enjoyment, emotional resonance, and even moral insight—sparked new creative inspiration. Among the adults who read picture books in this way, some went on to become picture book activists or picture book creators, beginning to transform their own lives into picture books. From the late 1990s onward, this group grew explosively and emerged as the central driving force behind Korea's original picture book market.

The emergence of picture book-specialized publishers and bookstores

As more people became captivated by the appeal of picture books, they began establishing publishing houses dedicated exclusively

to the genre. Many of them had previously worked as editors, sales managers, or designers at large publishing companies, though some came from freelance writing backgrounds or entirely different fields. Picture book publishers such as BookGoodCome, Iyagikot, and Borim Press organized workshops, nurtured new creators, published picture books, and made their way to the Bologna Children's Book Fair. When I first attended the fair in 2011, only around 10 Korean picture book publishers participated in the Korean pavilion. By 2025, however, that number had grown to more than forty. At a time when the global publishing market has slowed, and international fairs have generally contracted in scale, Korea has seen a more than fourfold increase in participating publishers over the past 14 years.

From the 2010s onward, the “independent bookstore boom” began to take shape. Independent bookstores refer to curated spaces built around the tastes and interests of their owners, often specializing in particular genres. While most existing bookstores across the country had traditionally focused on textbooks, bestselling titles, and stationery, the rise of independent bookstores paved the way for the emergence of picture book–specialized shops. Bookstores such as Yrurybooks, Noranusan, and Kamome Picture Book Store positioned picture books not merely as children's reading material, but as an art form, primarily targeting adult readers. In this way, picture books came to be recognized as art for everyone. Today, there are approximately 2,500 bookstores nationwide. Of these, around 1,000 are independent bookstores,

and roughly fifty specialize in picture books—a number that continues to grow. Importantly, picture books are already part of the offerings of most of these 2,500 bookstores, and a large proportion of independent bookstores place particular emphasis on picture books.

The growth of communities based on picture books

Another important group within the picture book market is educators. In its early stages, kindergarten teachers—who primarily worked with picture books for young children—stood at the center of this movement. From the 2000s onward, however, the use of picture books expanded across educational settings, including elementary, middle, and high schools, universities, and even humanities for adults. Video-based picture book training programs for teachers played a significant role in this shift. Courses such as “Picture Books: Touching the Heart of Our Classroom” offered by i-Scream Media and “Picture Book Class With Picture Book Authors” provided by Vivasam Remote Training Institute had a substantial impact on educators. As a result, picture books began to be actively adopted as classroom teaching materials. Teachers subsequently developed and disseminated training programs based on their own classroom practices, focusing on how picture books could be effectively integrated into education. In particular, picture book training programs led by the School Library Culture Network (학교도서관문화운동네트워크)

led to notable expansion in the use of picture books, and picture book authors increasingly began to be invited to schools.



Logos of the School Library Culture Network and Picture Book Sarangbang

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic—which fundamentally reshaped our everyday life—also connected picture books to the online world. The most significant change within the picture book sector has been the remarkable growth of online communities. Of course, there were already numerous commercially-oriented parenting cafés; however, COVID-19 gave rise to picture book communities that functioned not as commercial platforms, but as cultural movements. Online groups whose names alone convey a deep affection for picture books began to emerge, including the Picture Book Lovers’ Association (좋아서하는그림책연구회), the Picture Book Teachers’ Community, Newbooknow: Kkul Preview (Newbooknow 꿀시사회), and the Picture Book Sarangbang (그림책 사랑방). Through activities such as sharing picture book information, hosting Zoom previews of newly published titles, and organizing online lectures on picture books, these communities have cultivated a dedicated picture book fandom. To this day, they continue to play a leading role in the expansion of the picture book market.

2025: The Year of Picture Books

Since 1993, private organizations across the fields of publishing, libraries, bookstores, authorship, and reading have joined forces with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and the Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea (KPIPA) to form the “Year of Picture Books TF,” designating a different “Book of the Year” theme each year. While 2024 was celebrated as the “Year of Children’s Books,” 2025 has been designated the “Year of Picture Books.” The slogan “Picture Books for Everyone” underscores the idea that picture books are no longer confined to children’s literature alone. Throughout the year, a series of monthly forums explored picture books enjoyed by readers of all ages, alongside a relay-style program that selected and introduced 100 picture books under the theme “Memorable Scenes from Our Picture Books.”



Logo and poster of “2025 Year of Picture Books”

Most heartening of all is the emergence of a generation that dreams of becoming picture book creators. Today's young adults in their 20s grew up enjoying picture book culture, and the aspiration to become a picture book author feels entirely natural to them. As a result, illustration fairs now draw overwhelming crowds whenever they are held. The Korean picture book market has not yet reached its peak. In fact, this is where the real beginning lies.

KOREAN PUBLISHERS

SAMTOH Publishing Co., Ltd.

Stories That Find Meaning in Everyday Moments

We are living in an age of “dopamine addiction.” The quiet appreciation woven into everyday routines has gradually faded, replaced by a constant pursuit of stimulation. Yet, isn’t “true dopamine” found instead in the comfort and encouragement we receive at the end of a difficult day? Much like ordinary water, which becomes precious only when we are thirsty, a single sip of spring water can feel invaluable. Perhaps our relentless search for dopamine is not because daily life is too mundane, but because we have let gratitude slip past us as easily as water flowing away. Following is an interview with SAMTOH Publishing Co., Ltd. (“SAMTOH”), a wellspring for small but meaningful stories that find new life in book form.



Logo of SAMTOH Publishing Co., Ltd.

It's a pleasure to have you with us on *K-Book Trends*. Please introduce your company to our international readers along with the meaning of the company's name, "SAMTOH."

SAMTOH means "wellspring" in English. We strive to be a publishing house that offers stories like clear, clean spring water, stories anyone can drink in with peace of mind.

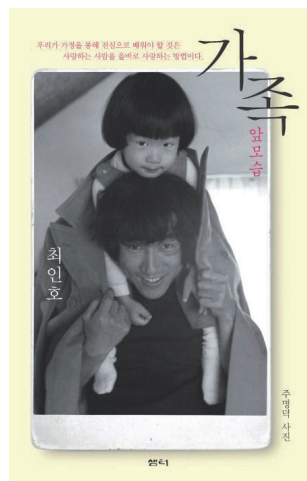
SAMTOH was founded on the philosophy articulated by its founder, Wooam (友巖) Kim Jae-Soon, former Speaker of the National Assembly: "to pursue happiness for ordinary people." How has this founding principle continued and taken shape over the years?

Since its founding in 1970, SAMTOH has gone out into the world in search of stories that encourage people to feel just how precious and worthy of gratitude the small moments of ordinary life truly are. And so, for 55 years, the company has steadily served as a messenger, sharing those stories through books, children's books, and magazines.

"We went out into the world in search of stories
that encourage people to realize how precious and gratitude-worthy
the small moments of ordinary life are."

SAMTOH has published works by many significant figures in Korean literature, including Pi Cheon-Deuk, Jeong Chae-Bong, Beopjeong Sunim (monk), and Sister Lee Hae-In, as well as Choi In-Ho, who serialized his novel, *Family*, for an extraordinary 35 years beginning with *Monthly Magazine SAMTOH*. What do you think has enabled SAMTOH to build such long-lasting relationships with these remarkable writers?

Just as stars cannot be seen in the daytime or beneath a sky filled with clouds, yet are undeniably there, the truths of the world exist even when they are not immediately visible. The writers of SAMTOH are like those stars. Without contributors who resonated with SAMTOH's philosophy, and without the writings that gave form to that shared belief, SAMTOH could not have continued to exist as it has until today.



Family

You have launched “SAMTOH Kids,” a brand for children and young people, as well as the humanities and liberal arts series, *AURUM*. What led you to establish these brands, and what messages did you hope to convey through them?

SAMTOH’s philosophy rests on two core principles. One is to pursue happiness for ordinary people, and the other is the belief that the world of childhood innocence is a spiritual home for all adults. In other words, we think that happiness and childlike innocence form the central axis of our lives. From this perspective, SAMTOH Kids represents our effort to return to that innocence, while *AURUM* is a series designed to support character education for adolescents. We believe that character is a form of competence, and that its foundation lies in *aegiaeta* (愛己愛他; loving oneself and loving others) and *yeokjisaji* (易地思之; the ability to place oneself in another’s position). Only by learning to love oneself can one truly love others, and only by looking beyond one’s own perspective to understand another’s can one live a happy life in the world. These series and brands were created to pass on to future generations the precious wisdom that experts from various fields have gained through a lifetime of dedication and study.

“We created this series for the happiness
and childlike innocence of ordinary people.”

We believe that SAMTOH's identity is rooted in the *Monthly Magazine SAMTOH*. Could you please introduce the editorial principles that have guided the magazine from its founding to the present? And, how have those principles evolved over time?

There is what we call the “3:3:3” principle. One-third consists of writing by professional authors; another third comes from people who may not be professional writers, but have led sincere and fulfilling lives; and the final third features stories of individuals who have led meaningful lives, but were unable to write themselves due to a lack of education. In the last cases, journalists visit them, listen carefully to their stories, and write them down on their behalf. This principle has been upheld consistently to this day.



Monthly Magazine SAMTOH
– Inaugural Issue (April 1970) and 50th Anniversary Issue (April 2020)

There are growing calls for change across print media such as books and magazines. In what direction does SAMTOH hope to evolve?

The role of books as “carriers of knowledge and information” is now largely being fulfilled by the internet and AI. What remains for books is their ability to “convey wisdom.” This is the moment for books to further exercise their strength as repositories of wisdom.

Since 2000, SAMTOH has engaged in social contribution activities through the “Wellspring Donation Account.” Could you please tell us more about these efforts?

The Wellspring Donation Account is SAMTOH’s social contribution campaign, created to support individuals and organizations who quietly share love with their neighbors, much like a hidden spring. Each year, 1% of our book royalties is set aside to form the Wellspring Donation Account fund, which is then distributed to those in need. Over the years, we have met many people who were facing hardship or working to overcome it, and we have offered them both financial support and encouragement. While the total amount of the fund - approximately 130 million won - is not large, we believe it has served as a genuine source of help, like a spring of water, to those who received it.

Could you please introduce a book that made SAMTOH what it is today, a book that most embodies the spirit of SAMTOH, and a title you would like to introduce to international readers?

We would like to highlight the works of the late Professor Chang Yeong-Hee: *The Miracles in My Past, the Miracles in My Future* and *Only Once in My Life*. Professor Chang, both a scholar and a translator, was often described as a “missionary of literature.” *The Miracles in My Past, the Miracles in My Future* offered courage and hope to readers even as she was battling cancer, and it became an immediate bestseller after its publication in 2009. To this day, it continues to be loved by readers, having gone through more than 100 printings. Meanwhile, *Only Once in My Life*, Professor Chang’s first essay collection, brings together writings originally serialized in the *Monthly Magazine SAMTOH*. Even amid hardship, the book conveys hope and love, and it continues to pour a spring of hope into the lives of its readers.



The Miracles in My Past, the Miracles in My Future (special edition commemorating the 100th printing); *Only Once in My Life*

To us, Professor Chang Yeong-Hee was someone whose thoughts, words, and actions were perfectly aligned. Her writings, too, were unmistakably sincere. Encountering her through SAMTOH was a great fortune, and publishing her books there feels like an extraordinary blessing.

Are there any titles currently under discussion for overseas rights export? We would also love to hear about the efforts you are making for international publication.

Another Solid Day, which explores how self-care can help build a resilient everyday life, is a book we believe will resonate with readers abroad as well. Also, *Don't Be Fooled!* by fashion artist and painter Zion. J is an autobiographical picture book that reflects on the author's childhood experiences. As Zion. J is actively engaged in exhibitions and art fairs overseas. We believe the book has strong potential to attract international readers. Meanwhile, *Reading Other People's Minds* by cognitive psychologist Professor Kim Kyeong-Il offers clear and practical psychological insights for those struggling with human relationships. Because difficulties in relationships are a universal concern, we would very much like to introduce this book to readers around the world.

In particular, we would like to recommend *What I Wanted to Become When I Was a Kid* by Ko Jeong-Wook, who was shortlisted for the 2025 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA). In this essay collection, the author shares five values that helped him overcome discrimination and hardships because of childhood

polio, and find inner strength. We also hope to introduce international readers to the work of Ko Jeong-Wook, one of the leading figures in Korean children's literature, through titles such as *The Boy Who Carries My Bag* (Sakyejul Publishing) and *My Very Special Brother* (Daekyo Books Junior). In this way, SAMTOH continues its efforts to introduce a wide range of books - and the values it stands for - to readers beyond Korea.



Another Solid Day; Don't Be Fooled!; Reading Other People's Minds; What I Wanted to Become When I Was a Kid

We look forward to what lies ahead for SAMTOH as it continues to share sincere and warm-hearted stories. Could you please tell us about your vision for the future?

As mentioned earlier, SAMTOH will continue to do our best to discover and share diverse forms of content that allow people to recognize how precious - and how worthy of gratitude - the small moments of ordinary life truly are. We will not limit ourselves to paper books alone, but will keep seeking out such stories with the same sincerity, in every corner of the world. This is SAMTOH's vision - and the promise we make to our readers.

KOREAN AUTHORS

Writer Taesoo

Happiness, Found Despite It All

It is easy to find research results claiming that Social Media lowers people's happiness. When we compare ourselves to others, even what we already have can start to feel small. And yet, there is someone who says that through the very same Social Media, happiness can be surprisingly ordinary—and therefore easier to notice. Rather than chasing grand success, writer Taesoo lives by his own standards of satisfaction. Even when life is difficult, he speaks of a life that remains happy nonetheless. Following is an interview with writer Taesoo.

It's an honor to have you with us on *K-Book Trends*. Please say hello to our readers along with a brief introduction of yourself.

Hello. I'm Taesoo, a writer who writes about ordinary moments in life. Somehow along the way, I came to write *1cm Diving* (FIKA),



Home In Home (PIKA), and most recently, *Adult Happiness is Quiet* (Page 2 Books). Still, a life of writing feels less familiar to me than an ordinary office job, so being part of an interview like this is no small source of awkwardness. Even so, for readers who have read my work—and for those who may come to it in the future—I will do my best to answer each question sincerely.

You actively share various kinds of content on Social Media and communicate with your readers there, and your username is quite distinctive. What does “bad workers” mean?

When I was just starting out in my career, working late was still considered a virtue. People who created more work for themselves were seen as talented, and even if you had finished your tasks, leaving the office on time received judgmental looks—

as if you had nothing better to do. Regardless of actual ability, you were labeled a “bad worker.” There was a prevailing attitude that went something like, “Who would ever entrust important work to people who strictly protect their personal lives?”

At the same time, I felt both envy and admiration for people who managed to maintain a healthy work–life balance. Perhaps I had simply grown tired of a life spent sacrificing my body and time for the company. Gradually, the kind of worker who could protect their own life—even in the face of the company, that seemingly inviolable entity—became my ideal. In the end, I left my job after three years. Determined not to repeat the same mistake, I redefined for myself what kind of working life I wanted to lead: a wise worker who knows how to protect both work and life. Yes—that is what “bad workers” means to me. Hoping to become the kind of “bad worker” my seniors once warned against, and wishing that more people might become that kind of worker too, I created the Social Media account and began sharing my writing there.

You became a bestselling author after gaining widespread resonance on Social Media. We would like to know when and why you first started using it. What led you to begin posting the kind of writing you share today? And, why did you once delete all of your content?

I realized that there weren’t many people around me who enjoyed serious conversations. (Laughs) I was feeling quite low, and I wanted to open up and share my thoughts sincerely, but that felt

difficult to do in offline spaces. So, I began pouring those feelings out online instead. To my surprise, far more people than I had expected deeply resonated with my writing. That eventually led to publishing books, and thanks to that, I now feel I'm living a life far richer than I deserve.

I delete my content periodically. Whenever I reread past posts and find writing that no longer sits right with me, or when my values have shifted significantly, I remove older pieces. Perhaps it is because I believe writing is one of the most powerful forms of content when it comes to influencing people's hearts. I don't want to present versions of myself that I no longer agree with in the form of words to others. That is why I regularly delete posts that no longer feel true to who I am. I don't remember exactly when I deleted all of my content at once, but looking back, it was probably during a time when my values were undergoing a major change.

Writing pieces that resonate so deeply with readers seems to require both careful reflection and a wide range of experiences. Could you tell us about the process of how your writing takes shape? And when you turn your online writing into books, do you revise or edit the pieces in new ways?

When a particular experience leaves a strong impression on me, I make sure to write down the sentence that comes to mind in my notes app. That's how the title of this book, *Adult Happiness is Quiet*, came about as well. It was a sentence that occurred to me

on my way home from work, as I looked up at the sky before the sun had set. When such a sentence appears, sometimes I continue writing from there depending on how I feel, and other times I stop and leave it as it is. From experience, even if I leave a piece unfinished, encountering a similar moment later often causes the sentence to flash back into my mind. Perhaps recording emotions allows them to connect over time, even after a pause.

Once a piece comes together through this process, I post it on my personal Social Media. Then, as I read readers' responses, I revisit the text—reflecting on what felt lacking or on thoughts I hadn't been aware of at the time of writing—and revise it several times before including it in a book. In the end, the most important part of the process is imagining a single line that will linger in the reader's mind. That may be why, when such a line comes to me, I'll even wake up from sleep to open my notes app. Emotions that aren't written down, no matter how intense, are easily forgotten.



Adult Happiness is Quiet

Your author bio, “I just happened to write - I am not a writer,” certainly stands out. Why do you hesitate to call yourself a writer? Is there a title you would prefer to be known by?

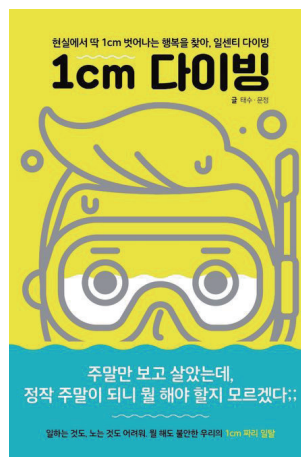
I think something like “a scribbler” suits me better. Thanks to writers I deeply admire, I have been able to view many aspects of life more positively, and because of that, I don’t want to claim the title of “writer” lightly. Perhaps it is because I don’t believe my writing has had such a powerful impact on others—at least not yet. That said, I don’t curse myself by thinking, “I will never become a writer.” I see myself simply as someone who is in the process of fulfilling a dream. I plan to keep writing consistently—pieces that might offer something meaningful to both my readers and myself. And, if I continue doing that, perhaps there will come a day when I’m introduced as a writer. Of course, even if that day never comes, I think that would be just fine too.

Your first book, *1cm Diving*, published in 2020 with writer Mun-Jeong, sold over 200 thousand copies and was exported to five countries, including Japan and Taiwan. How did readers at home and abroad respond? Is there any particular feedback that has stayed with you?

I can’t recall the exact wording due to my bad memory, but one comment has stayed with me very deeply: “This is the first book I have ever read all the way through.” When I was writing *1cm Diving*, my foremost goal was to create a book that people could read with enjoyment from beginning to end, so that response

made me feel especially proud.

We often link reading to its usefulness—saying things like, “Reading books improves literacy,” or “Books help expand vocabulary and sharpen thinking.” But, to me, more than anything else, books should be enjoyable. That is why, now and in the future, I want to continue writing books that readers can truly enjoy reading all the way to the last page.

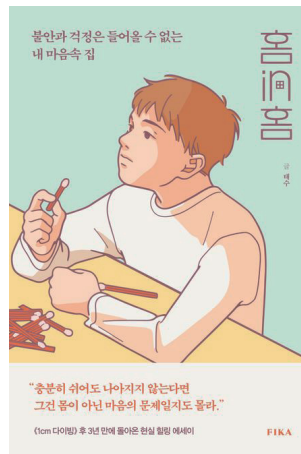


1cm Diving

Your book, *Home In Home*, explores the idea of building a true home where the heart can rest. What does the place where your own heart rests look like?

It seems to change from time to time. Most of the time, my family is my home of the heart. But, on days when my wife and I have a big argument, the bathroom or my car becomes that place instead. (Laughs) Ever since our child was born, I no longer have my own room. Even so, these days, my family is still my perfect home.

I believe a home of the heart should be a place where you can be wholly “yourself.” For me, that place is wherever I am with my family. With them, I can show my weak and imperfect sides, and honestly admit the things that frighten me. I used to pride myself on believing that I could rely on no one but myself, so it still feels a little strange to depend on others this much. But, these days, my heart truly rests in my family’s embrace.



Home In Home

Your third book, *Adult Happiness is Quiet*, has remained near the top of the bestseller lists since its publication in November 2024. Why do you think this book has resonated with so many readers?

I think it is because people are seeking peace of mind. In the past, happiness was often associated with victory or achievement. But, as you know, victory never really ends. In what we call the age of centenarians, a life spent having to win for a full hundred years can feel quietly exhausting. In other words, people seem to have

come to want a life where it is okay not to win.

When I think back, just a few years ago, the words that were most closely associated with happiness were things like excitement, grandeur, and brilliance. These days, however, words such as calm, stability, and comfort come to mind more often. Perhaps that is because people are beginning to feel that a peaceful day—one without any particular problems—is just as valuable as a day spent solving issues or achieving something tangible.

You speak about “happiness” across your three books. From your perspective, what does happiness look like in people’s lives?

I think the people who live the happiest lives are those whose standards of satisfaction are deeply personal. Someone who finds unexpected joy in a plate of *chungmu gimbap* (a type of gimbap made with only rice as the filler, served with tangy, spicy radish kimchi and seasoned spicy squid) bought from a street stall, or someone who carries the warmth of a weekend game of catch with their child through the entire week. These standards may not be universal, but for each individual, they are firm and clear. People like that seem to have a higher sense of happiness—because their happiness does not require validation from others.

There was a time when I looked at such lives cynically, thinking, “They just haven’t been through enough yet.” It is embarrassing to admit. How absurd it is to say that happiness is the goal of life, and then scoff at people who already seem happy. I have come

to realize that only those with inner strength can hold on to their own standards of satisfaction. The life I consider truly happy is precisely the kind of life those people are living.

“Someone with a firm, personal standard of satisfaction seems to have a higher sense of happiness.”

Are you currently working on a new book, or do you have any upcoming publications planned for international release? If so, could you please briefly introduce them to us?

Unfortunately, I feel as though I have already written everything I wanted to say. So, for now, I’m focused on replenishing my input. I read books, watch films, spend a lot of time talking with my family, travel, and work. I’m living an everyday life that’s somewhat removed from writing. And, I think that, as has always been the case, if I live like this for a while, stories I want to tell will naturally return.

Your remark that “happiness is a state in which unhappiness is absent” is particularly impressive. Could you share your plans for living a happy life, and your ultimate goals in life?

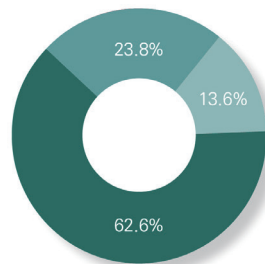
I want to live “a life of satisfaction, despite it all.” Even if I miss the subway on my way to work, trip over a stone while walking down the street, or fail to reach a goal I longed for, I still want to live a life where, nevertheless, I can come home to a good dinner, watch a

movie with my favorite flavor of popcorn, buy a gift for someone I love—however embarrassing that may feel—and sing birthday songs to one another. I want to keep living that kind of life, again and again, for as long as I can.

IMAGE OF K-BOOK

Hallasan: A Peak Shaped by Nature and History

Q. What is the representative mountain in Korea?



No. 1
Hallasan
62.6%



No. 2
Jirisan
23.8%



No. 3
Seoraksan
13.6%

About 70 percent of Korea's land area is mountainous. One of the most prominent ranges is the *Taebaek Mountain Range* (태백산맥; 太白山脈), which stretches from the northeast to the southeast and includes many famous peaks such as *Geumgangsan*, *Seoraksan*, *Odaesan*, and *Taebaeksan*. However, the highest mountain in Korea is located on Jeju Island at the southernmost tip of the country: *Hallasan*, which topped this month's *K-Book Trends* poll as "Korea's representative mountain." Rising 1,947 meters above sea level, *Hallasan* is an active volcano formed by repeated eruptions of basaltic lava. It was designated a Natural Monument of Korea in 1966, and in 2007, it was recognized as a UNESCO



Korea's representative mountain, *Hallasan*

World Natural Heritage site, gaining recognition as a natural treasure of global significance. At its summit lies *Baengnokdam* (백록담; 白鹿潭), which means “the crater pond where a white deer drinks,” though it is not easy to catch the spectacular sight of the crater filled with water. Despite its height, *Hallasan* is considered relatively easy to climb, and visitors can enjoy a total of seven official hiking trails.

Even as *Hallasan* is widely known for its distinctive location, geology, ecology, and natural heritage, it is also a place that bears painful historical scars. This is because the Jeju uprising, which took place on Jeju Island between 1947 and 1954, is closely tied to this mountain. The uprising was ignited by a complex entanglement of factors: excessive police suppression and

violence by far-right groups directed at civilians suffering from post-liberation famine and food shortages, as well as conflicts surrounding elections. Its name comes from the large-scale uprising that began on April 3, 1948. The officially confirmed number of victims is around 14,000, but actual casualties are estimated to exceed 25,000. *Hallasan* was the place where Jeju residents fled to and where they were surrounded during that period. *Hallasan* also appears as an important setting in *We Do Not Part* (Munhakdongne Publishing), a novel by Han Kang that deals with the Jeju uprising. There are other works of fiction that address the incident as well - one of them is *Aunt Suni* (Changbi Publishers) by Hyun Ki-Young, which is featured in this issue.



Aunt Suni

Aunt Suni is a work that, after forty years of silence, brings to light the tragedy of the Jeju uprising. The narrator, “I,” returns to the hometown of Jeju upon hearing the obituary of “Aunt Suni,” whom he had known since childhood. Through the testimonies of those

around him, he gradually comes to understand the past wounds that Aunt Suni suffered. After losing her family and surviving by fleeing to *Hallasan*, Aunt Suni became mute from fear of death and the aftereffects of violence; even within Jeju society, she was forced into silence. At the time, simply mentioning the incident itself was taboo. In the end, the narrator realizes that Aunt Suni's life and death are not just an individual tragedy, but a scar that belongs to Jeju society as a whole. He feels a sense of responsibility to record this forgotten history. He believes that the wounds left by society and the state must be remembered and written down so that such events will not be repeated. The title *Aunt Suni* is like a name that calls out to everyone still living within the pain of history, telling them all, "Do not remain silent."

»» [Go to the voting event for the next issue](#)

LET'S TRY

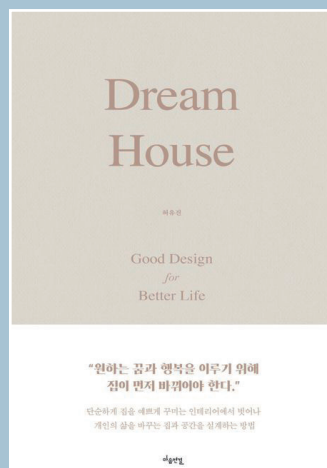
How Space Shapes the Way We Live

Event

Let's Try introduces various helpful books published in Korea every month. Also, don't miss gift events related to the books introduced! Simply click on the link below to enter the event! Let's Try!

Dream House: Good Design for a Better Life

– Written by Heo Yoo-Jin, published by Nous and Mind



Design a home of your own:
a space that reflects your life, and a space that can reshape it

They say you can tell a lot about a person's taste, philosophy, and lifestyle just by looking at the space they live in. A wall filled with paintings reveals one's aesthetic sense, while a neat desk suggests a minimalist mindset. In that sense, the place that reflects a person most intimately would be their "home." It's both a haven of rest and a canvas that expresses one's personality. And, in turn, the way we shape our home often shapes how we live: replacing the TV in your living room with a bookshelf full of books might just lead you to read more.

이제는 곧 물이 단단한 공간을 넘어서, 우리의 가치관과 삶의 철학을 반영하는 상징적인 장소임을 과언이 아니다.

Dream House, Room 1



15

우리는 매일, 매 순간 공간 속에서 생활한다

공간 속에서 깊은 삶에 기반적이고 필수적인 특별한 공간이다. 공간은 단순한 벽장이 아니라, 우리의 삶을 담아내는 기본적인 위대다. 공간이 없는 삶은 상상할 수 없다. 우리 삶의 모든 활동은 공간 위에서 이루어지며, 그 공간이 사람과 상호작용할 때 비로소 의미를 가진다. 결국 공간 관계는 늘 사람이 있다.

사람과 삶의 관계를 가장 본질적으로 살펴보면 최초의 상자로 돌아갈 수 있다. 사람에게 최초의 공간은 동굴이었다. 자연의 위험에서 벗어날 수 있는 안전한 장소였고, 그곳에서 사람은 생존했다. 최초의 공간인 동굴은 시간이 흐르며 지금의 집이 되었다. 동굴과 집이라는 공간은 인간의 삶을 위한 가장 기본적으로 필수적인 시작점이다.

동시에 사람들은 단선적 동굴에서 벗어나는 것을 넘어, 그 안에 자신을 담기 시작했다. 그들은 동굴 밖에 추수하던 그릇을 그려서 삶의 풍요를 기원했다. 공간에 단선적 기능적 의미만을 가진 것이 아니라, 마음을 담아 이해의 풍요를 기원하는 장소가 되었다. 지금 우리가 집을 바라보는 시각도 이와 크게 다르지 않다. 깊은 단선적 생활 공간을 넘어서, 삶의 의미와 미래의 꿈을 담아내는 장소가 되어야 한다.

16

우리 삶은 집과 함께 성장한다

누군가를 집을 이야기할 때, 집을 빼지 않고 이야기 주는데, 단순한 수면이 아니다. 깊은 우리의 삶과 같이 함께 숨 쉬는 공간이기 때문이다. 마치 닭 행이 자신의 깃대기를 함께 지켜주듯, 삶이 발전하고, 집이 깊어질수록 우리의 집도 그에 맞춰 성장한다.

깊은 단선적 벽장은 것이 아닌, 삶의 기반이자 삶의 결실을 위한 공간이다. 우리가 꿈꾸는 모든 순간에 깊이 자리 잡고 있다는 것은, 그 공간이 우리에게 얼마나 중요한지를 다시금 깨닫게 한다. 우리 공간은 단순한 형태를 넘어, 그 안에서 삶의 방향을 제시하고, 우리가 나아갈 길을 만들어가는 곳이 되는 것이다.

공간, 삶을 담은 그곳
내가 처음 가족과 떨어져 독립된 공간에서 살아보기 시작한 것은 학교 근처의 작은 원룸이었다. 문을 열고 들어서면 비로 보이는 작은 화장실 겸 세탁실이 있었다. 문 하나 낼 수 있는 사이즈의 침대와 비로 보이는 작은 주방, 작은 수납장이 전부였다.

그곳은 단순한 공간을 거쳐 나의 공간을 넘어 나의 꿈을 키워나가는 작은 작

20

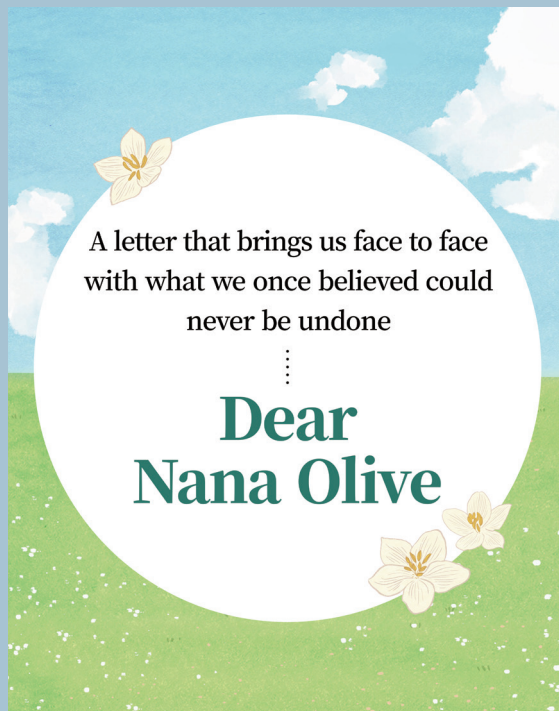


This month's featured book, *Dream House: Good Design for a Better Life*, goes beyond simple interior styling tips. It offers guidance on how we can perceive our homes and fill them with meaning. The author describes home as "a blueprint of one's dreams." Having designed the interiors of people who have achieved their dreams, she believes that "a space is a mirror that reflects a person's state of mind. A well-organized home shows that its owner is also a good organizer in their work and life. It's not just about tidiness - it's about one's mindset and readiness for the future." The way we treat our living space reflects how we face life, and that space, in turn, influences how we live it. In today's busy world, when time spent at home feels increasingly short, it can be hard to even tidy up, let alone decorate. But, why not start small - with a plant by the door, a lamp by the bed, or a cozy corner that welcomes you back each day? Begin turning the space you live in now into your own "dream house."

NEW BOOKS

A letter that brings us face to face
with what we once believed could never be undone

Dear Nana Olive



**“People called it
the Olive Tree House.
A large olive tree stood there,
and a spotted dog
was always lying beneath it.”**

- from the book



**A house that once willingly offered
shelter to those who needed hope.
But thirty years on, when we faced it again,
there was a collapsed wall,**

⋮

**there was a collapsed wall,
an olive tree bowed and broken,
and a spotted dog.**

**“Everything is destined
to disappear.
But what holds us
is always what remains,
isn’t that so?”**



- from the book

In the house, now little more than a ruin,
an old notebook is found.
Inside is a letter, written by someone who
once called the boy a “runny-nosed kid”
and still does, even now that
he is middle-aged.

**A letter addressed
to Nana Olive,
the house’s former owner.**

Having lost her way,
and needing to find something
to hold on to,
the author began to write.

⋮

In the end, she shaped a story
about a place where life can be endured,
and about someone
who keeps others living.

A story that holds you up
when life is falling apart.



Dear Nana Olive
Written by Ruri,
published by Munhakdongne Publishing

BEST SELLERS

**Heading into 2026:
Comparing the Combined**

**Bestseller Lists of Korea's Three Major Online Bookstores for
the 2nd week of December, 2025**

There is a saying that time does not simply pass—it accumulates. Even when daily routines feel repetitive or unremarkable, the experiences we encounter continue to pile up, quietly shaping our lives. For those who look back on 2025 with a hint of regret, it offers comfort; for those who have been running without pause, it feels like encouragement. Throughout 2025, the publishing world moved forward through the quiet, persistent labor of those who worked to create each book, building their efforts piece by piece. Looking ahead to 2026 with the hope that this dedication will yield even greater rewards, let's take a look at the bestseller list for the last month of 2025.

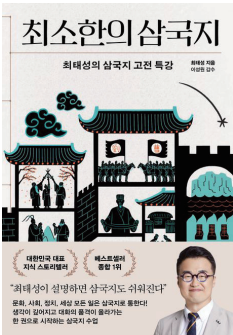

Topping the bestsellers in the final month of 2025 was *Minimal Korean History*, an introductory and condensed guide to the enduring East Asian classic, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The book is the latest release by Choi Tae-Sung, widely known

as Korea's most influential history instructor. For readers who may have hesitated to approach the original work due to its sheer volume and vast cast of characters, this book distills the essential events and figures into a single, accessible volume. In many ways, it reflects a broader era defined by compression and simplification. While *Honmono* and *Cutting Wound* continue to hold steady positions on the literary bestseller list, two essay titles that rose to prominence last month—*Adult Happiness Is Quiet* and *Dignity of Adults*—have expanded their reach by entering the overall bestseller rankings. At No. 10 was *Independent Newsroom: Independent, Together*, published by the Korea Independent Newsroom Network (KINN), a collaborative alliance formed by independent media outlets. The book documents the real experiences of these organizations, tracing the trial-and-error process of launching independent newsrooms and exploring the strengths of solidarity-based collaboration in independent journalism.

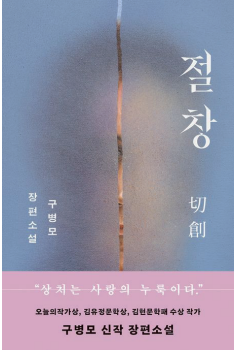

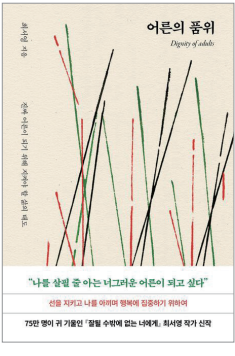
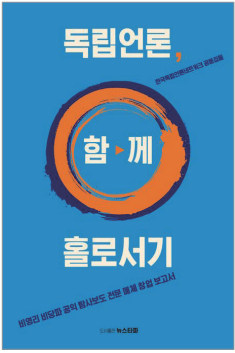
Seasonal shifts were clearly reflected in the healthcare and hobbies category. Titles such as *Hyeon-Jin's Handwriting Guide*, *Soobni's Knitting: Hand-Knit Clothes for Dogs*, and *Nordic Motif Knitting (Complete Edition)* ranked first, second, and fifth, respectively—suggesting a growing preference for indoor activities like practicing handwriting or creating warm knitted pieces during the colder months. Meanwhile, the third and fourth spots were claimed by photobooks celebrating the LG Twins and

the Hanwha Eagles, the champion and runner-up of the 2025 Korean Series. After years of struggle, the Hanwha Eagles' return to the finals—backed by their passionate fan base—made the 2025 baseball season feel especially intense and memorable. As a result, fans following the heated offseason market may be hoping more than anyone that the winter of 2026 passes quickly, ushering in a new season of play.

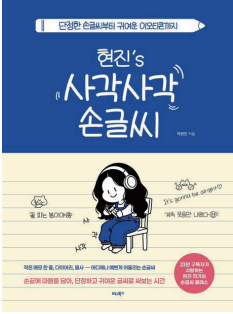



* The rank of bestsellers below was organized after integrating domestic bestsellers in the second week of December from the three biggest online bookstores in Korea – Kyobo Book Centre, Aladin, and Yes 24.

Top 10 bestsellers for the 2nd week of December		
1		<p><i><u>Minimal Korean History</u></i></p> <p>Author Choi Tae-Sung Publisher Front Page Genre Humanities</p>
2		<p><i><u>Trend Korea 2026</u></i></p> <p>Author Kim Nan-Do and 11 others Publisher Mirae Books Genre Business</p>

Top 10 bestsellers for the 2nd week of December

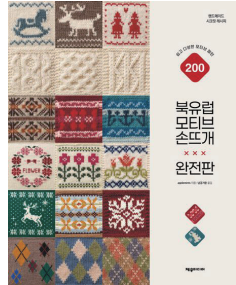
<p>7</p>		<p><u>Cutting Wound</u></p> <p>Author Koo Byung-Mo Publisher Munhakdongne Publishing Genre Fiction</p>
<p>7</p>		<p><u>Against Interpretation</u></p> <p>Author Susan Sontag Publisher Willbook Genre Humanities</p>
<p>9</p>		<p><u>Dignity of Adults</u></p> <p>Author Choi Seo-Young Publisher Book Romance Genre Non-fiction</p>
<p>10</p>		<p><u>Independent Newsroom: Independent, Together</u></p> <p>Author Korea Independent Newsroom Network (KINN) Publisher NewsTapa Genre Politics & Society</p>

Top 5 Books on Healthcare and Hobbies for the 2nd week of December

<p>1</p>		<p><u>Hyeon-Jin's Handwriting Guide</u></p> <p>Author Park Hyeon-Jin Publisher Vita Books</p>
<p>2</p>		<p><u>Soobni's Knitting's Hand-Knit Clothes for Dogs</u></p> <p>Author Soobni's Knitting Publisher Jeu Media</p>
<p>3</p>		<p><u>Invincible LG: Special Photobook Celebrating V4</u></p> <p>Author The Sports Seoul Editors, Milal Book Editors Publisher Milal Books</p>
<p>4</p>		<p><u>Hanwha Eagles: Magnificent Support! Soaring to New Heights!</u></p> <p>Author The Sports Seoul Editors, Milal Book Editors Publisher Milal Books</p>

Top 5 Books on Healthcare and Hobbies for the 2nd week of December

5



Nordic Motif Knitting (Complete Edition)

Author | applemints
Publisher | Jeu Media