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K-BOOK TRENDS

Opening a New Era of K-Content : The Culinary Class Wars Recipe Books

Written by

Hwang Yerin

Hwang Yerin | Publishing Critic, Marketer at Chungrim Publishing Co

A publishing critic and a publishing marketer. As a young voice in the Criticism Alliance, she hustles to spread the word that reading is the absolute hippest lifestyle.

Netflix’s hit variety program <Culinary Class Wars: Cooking Class War>, which returned for Season 2 after 15 months, is continuing a level of success that rivals Season 1. It’s the unshakeable top show on Netflix Korea. Every Tuesday when new episodes drop, <Culinary Class Wars> takes over social media feeds. This intense fever for <Culinary Class Wars> has directly hit the publishing market. Following the release of <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2, recipe books previously published by the appearing chefs are “reverse-running” back onto the bestseller lists.



<Culinary Class Wars> Season 2 Poster
(Source: Netflix)

The restaurants run by the show’s chefs are seeing explosive popularity, making it nearly impossible to snag a reservation. Naturally, fans are turning to the recipe books as the next best thing. It’s their way to experience the magic of the chefs’ dishes — even indirectly — right from their own kitchens. Korea’s major online bookstores such as Kyobo, Yes24, and Aladin are not missing a beat. Responding to the hype, they’ve launched special curated showcases celebrating Season 2, featuring coobooks by chefs from both the new season and the first.

The bibliography of these chefs is endless. This includes: *Choi Kang rok’s Cooking Note* and *The Meaning of Cooking* by Choi Kang rok, who appeared in both Season 1 and 2; Black Spoon brewing master Yoon Jumo’s *Yunjudang’s Four Seasons Makgeolli Recipes*; White Spoon chef Sam Kim’s *Once a Month, Fine Dining for Myself*; Raymon Kim’s *Raymon Kim’s Simple*

Cooking series; Chef Jun Lee's *Migam*; Chef Chun Sanghyeon's *The President's Chef*, etc.

From this extensive lineup, we've curated the absolute must-reads from the chefs who are generating the most buzz right now.



Kyobo, Yes24, Aladin 'Culinary Class Wars' Season 2 Curated Collections
(Source: Kyobo, Yes24, Aladin)

The subtle twist that elevates familiar flavors to the extreme

Among the books by Chef Lim Sung-geun, who appeared as a White Spoon chef in <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2, *Lim Sung-geun's Slightly Different Home Cooking* (Pen & Pen, Published in November 2018) is at the center of the “reverse-run” trend. Chef Lim became the show's biggest viral sensation. He captivated viewers by pairing a cheeky and relaxed charm with the serious, deep-rooted mastery of a true Korean cuisine virtuoso. The book captures 40 years of the master's secrets, helping readers whip up delicious daily meals and side dishes with ease. Following the airing of <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2, the book sales have jumped 42 times. Because he proved he could turn everyday comfort food into gourmet experiences, his performance resonated deeply. This is exactly why fans are flocking to his book – they want to master the distinct techniques that make such a difference.



Lim Sung-geun's Slightly Different Home Cooking



Venerable Sunjae's Temple Food Tossed with Stories

Beyond Asceticism: Temple Cuisine as a Deliciously Restorative Meal

The culinary essay *Temple Food Tossed with Stories* by Venerable Sunjae, Korea's first Official Master of Temple Food and a White Sppon chef on the show, has settled into the top 20 of the culinary category in all major online bookstores. Yes24, in particular, released a bookstore-exclusive recover edition, achieving 5th place in sales in the health and hobby sales charts. This book invites readers into the culinary world of Venerable Sunjae, who satisfied both judges Sung Anh and Paik Jong-won in <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2 with dishes that cared for health while bringing out the natural flavors of ingredients without meat. Venerable Sunjae weaves together recipes with touching real-life stories, from healing

illnesses to transforming the lives of troubled youth through food. She demystifies this often-unfamiliar cuisine, opening the door for anyone to easily recreate these healthy dishes at home.

Tasting the touch of Seoul Mother in perfect flavor balance

The new cookbook by Black Spoon chef Woo Jungwook, who appeared under the nickname ‘Seoul Mother,’ has achieved remarkable success, released to coincide with the airing of <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2. Her book, *Superpan Woo Jungwook Recipes* (December 2025), unveils the hit recipes celebrating the 10th anniversary of her restaurant ‘Superpan’ for the first time. It topped the cooking bestseller lists at Kyobo and Aladin. This book guides readers through fusion Korean recipes that will create a special meal with Woo Jungwook’s unique touch, such as Dried Radish Greens Risotto, Black Bean Mascarpone, and Seaweed Pesto Octopus Salad, as well as Seoul-style side dishes, soups, and kimchi. As she showed how to make plain dishes extraordinary with precise seasoning, her book detailing these foundational secrets, specifically pre-seasoning and prep work, was bound to be a hit.



Superpan Woo Jungwook Recipes



Napoli Matfia Secret Recipe

The dignity of the Season 1 winner rising again

With the good performance of Season 2, the sales of books by Season 1 participants are also rising together. Season 1 champion Chef Kwon Sung-jun, Napoli Matfia, also published a culinary essay. *Napoli Matfia Secret Recipe* saw its sales increase by 14.6% compared to the previous week in the second week of <Culinary Class Wars> Season 2 airing. In his book, along with his life story from going through Michelin restaurants to becoming the No. 1 chef in <Culinary Class Wars>, he introduced 31 secret recipes. His unique pasta recipe tip, and the fandom's interest in Chef Kwon, thanks to his active engagement across broadcast media and YouTube, translated directly into book sales.

The Leap in K-Recipe Books Started by <Culinary Class Wars>

The fever of the Netflix's <Culinary Class Wars> has created a trend where video consumers are transformed into readers eager to cook. This provides that boom in video content can serve as a new breakthrough for the domestic publishing market.

The leap in recipe books sparked by the <Culinary Class Wars> craze is just the beginning. After its release in December 2025, <Culinary Class Wars>

Season 2 ranked No. 1 in the Netflix Global Top 10 Non-English TV Shows for two consecutive weeks. Riding this wave, it is projected that in 2026, recipe books will emerge as one of the key pillars of K-content trends.

While <Culinary Class Wars> made the world ‘watch’ Korean culinary culture, recipe books invite people to ‘experience’ it firsthand. Recipe books serve as a gateway to ‘read, cook, and taste’ the culture, delivering an immersive experience of the sensibilities and values accumulated in Korean cuisine. In other words, the recipe books of the chefs who appeared in <Culinary Class Wars> provide an opportunity to experience the essence of Korean culture through the motif of ‘food’. As the global fascination with K-culture — ignited by K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Movies — expands into the realm of lifestyle, recipe books will stand at the forefront of publishing content, offering the trendiest way to experience this way of life.

Notable Literary Works Selected by Critics Across Generations - Differences and Shared Sympathy in Generational Book Preferences -

Written by

Sollim Lee, Maeng Junhyuk, Mihyang Kim

Sollim Lee | Publishing Editor, Cultural Critic

As an editor, she contemplates books that will stand the test of time, while as a critic, she keeps a keen eye on new releases that demand to be read in the here and now. She is also a reader who dreams of a day where she can step aside from professional concerns to simply read to her heart's content, secretly hoping to one day find herself accidentally locked inside a library.

Maeng Junhyuk | Publishing Editor, Reader

Rather than aiming to craft a polished review or a perfect introduction, my true hope is to accurately convey the 'code' shared by myself and the 'us' out there somewhere. As a South Korean reader in my thirties who loves literature, I seek to carefully give voice to a part of that sensibility.

This Special Project introduces eight literary works highlighted by critics across generations. Issues such as unknown worlds, individuals gazing into anxiety, the disintegration of the ideal subject, the reconstruction of care and family models, and the social sensibilities of 21st-century youth stand out. Should we stay in this problematic reality, run away, become immersed, or solve it? There is no right answer. The authors are messengers, conveying these situations and processes through the minute temperature of language.

The 20s Perspective - Sollim Lee, Cultural Critic



In That Case, We Go to Pohang / Even if God Leaves

Ironically, in conversations among people in their 20s welcoming the New Year, fortune-telling and shamanic divination appear as often as New Year's resolutions. Perhaps it stems for a subtle undercurrent of pessimism — the feeling that even with hope and hard work, the future remains unguaranteed. They have no faith, yet their footsteps are busy seeking out gods. The way comments like “I heard my luck this is....” naturally slip into discussions about goals reveals a stark reality. It illustrates just how deeply the realization has set in that life is governed by variables beyond individual control, and that these unseen forces hold significant sway over one's destiny.

Yoon Ina, widely recognized for her prose, captures a world where that very ‘unknowability’ has become the norm in her first full-length novel, *Even if God Leaves*. In this novel, which illuminates the life of a shaman whose deity abandoned her mid-ritual and those around her, the god is notably absent from beginning to end. After the standards that explained and guaranteed the world vanish, the characters seem to wander for a while but they soon support each other’s lives in their own clumsy ways. Among those who share old superstitions—that the number 4 is ominous, that one shouldn’t trim nails at night, or that stepping on a threshold lets luck escape—what remains in the place where god left is not silence, but the voices of humans who have inextricably become intertwined with one another. *Even if God Leaves* follows to the very end how humans share the heavy burden of aimless faith in an era where the object of belief is gone. The characters, who grumble that they can’t see an inch ahead, or even then minutes into the future, yet manage to navigate adversity well, feel strangely endearing by the end. Yoon Ina not transform human fragility into a possibility for overcoming, nor wraps it in the language of hope. She simply leads us to that point and seems to offer a gentle smile, as if saying. “What do we really know? Us humans, we don’t know much, do we?”

Chung Bora and Choi Uitaek’s novel, *In That Case, We Go to Pohang*, pushes this “unknowability” a step further. In this work, a collaboration between two authors active in the SF genre and bearing the title of ‘Korea’s first relay full-length novel,’ it is worth noting the story itself is constructed. The authors set up two characters who have lost their entire property in a borehole investment scam. With only the minimal plot outline that these two head toward Pohang while harboring suspicions each other, the authors take turns writing one chapter at a time. Since the narrative progresses without even the authors knowing how the next scene will unfold, this novel premises uncontrollability from the very beginning. The subject of a borehole business also meshes exquisitely with this novel’s format. This is because the structure of a drilling business—entrusting

current money and time while believing in resources that might exist somewhere underground—overlaps with a relay narrative, where one author’s choice is layered upon another’s. In *In That Case, We Go to Pohang*, uncertainty is not an obstacle to be overcome, but the operating mechanism of the story itself. As the author’s control loosens, the story paradoxically gains a more vivid momentum.

Faced with the same premise of ‘unknowability,’ these two novels take steps in distinct directions. *Even if God Leaves* chooses not to explain life after the defining standards of the world have vanished, it traces how the characters traverse that void through everyday language and relationships. On the other hand, *In That Case, We Go to Pohang* elevates ‘unknowability’ itself into a condition and format of the narrative, actively exploiting the inability to predict the next scene. In a sense, one proceeds by withholding explanation, while the other advances by actively designing uncertainty. This approach – keeping the story moving without attempting to resolve the ‘unknowability’ – is the persuasive narrative possibility that both novels present.

The 30s Perspective - Maeng Junhyuk, Publishing Editor



I am not fond of writing that makes a fuss. However, this notion of ‘fuss’ is a subtler area than one might think. What counts as a fuss and what doesn’t likely varies from person to person. To me, writing without such a fuss is writing that is honest and candid. I believe if an emotion is felt deeply, it should be expressed deeply; if felt lightly, then lightly. Of course, a reader can never truly know how much pain the author suffered or how deeply they felt. Therefore, what matters is sensing the integrity—the attitude that the author is speaking only as much as they genuinely felt. I often perceive a ‘fuss’ when the writing seems to say more than what was actually felt. Of course, there is always the possibility that the author felt nothing yet successfully deceived the reader. When I encounter such a skillful writer, I feel an urge, as a reader, to engage in a duel with them.

Judged by this standard, Kim Umji’s *Wiry* was a book that struck the exact chord of what I look for. The writings in this book generally do not speak loudly. They do not organize emotions for display, nor do they provide a easy conclusion for the reader to follow. However, precisely through this method, the book accurately articulates the emotion of ‘anxiety’. “The woman said she liked *japchae*. That she loved *japchae* so much she wanted to swim inside it.” “I really wanted to let her swim inside *japchae*.” “Do you want to die inside *japchae*? I asked her.” “Not die, but transform.” Faced with such dialogue that abruptly surfaces amidst an uneventful flow, the reader often pauses - but that is all. Reading these pieces, I felt not that I had ‘unverstood.’ but that I had briefly stood near the spot where the author was standing. Kim Umji does not try to explain anxiety or imbute it with meaning. However, that very aloofness reads as honesty. She spares her words even when it seems she could say more, and brings the sentence to a close right at the point where emotions might otherwise swell. As a reader, one clearly receives the attitude: “This is as much as I will say.”

Reading by this same standard, Kim Eunhan’s *I Think These Kinds of Things Are Also Fun* is a book that reaches the same point in a different way than *Wiry*. Rather than dealing with anxiety head-on, this book adopts an attitude

of carefully selecting viable options while fully acknowledging that anxiety. It steps back in situations where a fight is not strictly necessary, and instead of charging through life, it first explores angles that can reduce the burden. It is writing that leans more toward arranging ways to coexist with anxiety rather than eliminating it. This attitude is composed and candid. While it is stable, it simultaneously reveals a commensurate evasive tendency. Thus, there were moments when the author's method of discovering joy felt like a strategy chosen to suffer less damage from life. Yet, the reason I could not easily dismiss this book is that Kim Eun-han does not romanticize or actively defend his attitude. He simply suggests that there are people who view things this way, and people who make such choices—albeit with a touch of cowardice mixed in. I liked the fact that he wrote it down exactly as it is. So, to be honest, while reading, I found myself constantly searching for where the author's lie might be hiding.

When placed side by side, the difference between the two books is distinct. Kim Umji does not avoid anxiety but chooses not to speak of it unnecessarily, whereas Kim Eunhan acknowledges anxiety only to step aside at a feasible angle. One adopts an attitude of endurance, while the other is closer to an attitude of management. However, they are alike in that both focus less on how to eliminate anxiety and more on the attitude with which to handle it. At the same time, neither book wallows in its own anxiety. It is the choice to stop speaking even when there is more to say, and to write only as much as was truly felt. Whether enduring or sidestepping, what mattered was the resolve not to make a fuss using anxiety as fodder. It was this very attitude that made me trust these writings to the very end. What I confirmed in these two books was not a way to eliminate anxiety, but two distinct forms of honesty, each shouldering anxiety in its own way.

The 40s Perspective - Mihyang Kim, Publishing Critic



No People Zone / Charles Bukowski Typewriter

In the early to mid-2000s, novelist Jeong Yi-hyun clearly held an undisputed ‘place’ within the Korean literary scene. To me, having just started my college life around that time, the protagonists of her novels - epitomized by *My Sweet City* - were the ‘successful older sisters’ who had quickly mastered the rules of the city and navigated love and work with a ‘sophisticated pose.’ Jung Yi-hyun herself, a senior alumna and a professor at our university, was exactly the same. To this day, I cannot forget the sight of a friend who, with a flushed face after attending her lecture, would speak feverishly about her novels and her teaching style.

Throughout my reading of *No People Zone*, I was reminded of those ‘successful older sisters of 2006. I watched them—who once struck sophisticated poses in love and work according to the rules of the city—now standing on the game board again with middle-aged bodies. And I gazed at them as someone who, after twenty years, has also become middle-aged. It’s not just age that has changed for the narrators in the novel, the author, and myself. The difficulty level of life has also changed. For a “middle-aged” “woman” in 2026 South Korea, labor and caregiving, housing and relationships rush in all at once, and the life that tries to ‘manage

well despite all obstacles' loses its footing more frequently. The characters in *No People Zone* know how to save face, but they no longer remain mere "model subjects." They pretend to be calm in the face of cracks in relationships, then suddenly cross the line sharply.

That sharpness is not a grand declaration, but a small rebellion pushed up by accumulated fatigue and experience. Perhaps that is why the scenes in the novel feel exceptionally realistic, and while making the reader laugh one moment, only to abruptly evoke a deep sense of pathos the next. Jeong Yihyun's signature prose is sleek. Emotions are not exaggerated, and events are not over-explained. Instead, she accurately pinpoints the texture of the "rules" we encounter daily. The characters, living through lives transformed by institutional vessels like companies, families, and housing, do not declare this reality a tragedy. They simply learn the technique of selecting their expression for the next moment. Therefore, *No People Zone* is a Korean urban novel, yet simultaneously a record of a sensibility of daily life that crosses borders. Situations demanding courtesy, moments of swallowing grievances, and people moving once again for the sake of tomorrow. The image of that "us" found everywhere is vividly captured in this book. What today's readers need might not be grand salvation, but rather this kind of precise empathy. That empathy is the power that makes one turn the pages of books again that have lost their place to video media.

Park Ji young's novel *Charles Bukowski Typewriter* is set in a near future where "life transition" has solidified into an institution, showing head-on how easily an individual's old age is reduced to the language of administration and efficiency. An institution where, instead of growing old as a human, one can transition into another species or a different form of life. On the surface, it is promoted as an "opportunity to live out one's remaining days exactly as desired." In reality, however, this opportunity is merely a class-stratified choice, and essentially a politely packaged recommendation for the elderly to exit the stage, veiling its true intent. Calculations asserting that the cost of supporting a single elderly person

could sustain tens or hundreds of wild animals or rare protected species blatantly show a world where numbers takes precedence, even when discussing dignity. Faced with the invitation to ‘choose the life you want,’ the protagonist Seung-hye instead feels the inequality of options. Ultimately, she transitions into an inanimate “typewriter” and is placed in a memory depository. There, with a sentence by Charles Bukowski attached to her back, she becomes a body that receives and transcribes the confessions of others. For Seunghye, now a typewriter, the spoken words of others remain intact as a physical sensation of impact and pain. This work provides sensory proof that recording is at once healing and testimony, and often violence. For the act of leaving words behind is not merely a technique of recording, but an act of receiving, transcribing, and enduring the life of another. In this way, *Charles Bukowski Typewriter* directs the reader’s gaze not toward the ‘next life’, but back to the life they are living now. The physical changes that accompany aging, the distance in relationships that remains difficult to navigate even as one grows older, and the sentences that ultimately remained unspoken... Eventually, what Seung-hye reaches is not some grand answer, but the will to “write” and to “be written,” alongside a small period remaining at the end. Rare is the work that evokes so solidly and yet so strangely the universal anxiety transcending nationality and generation—the question of what we will leave behind before our existence vanishes. Even after the striking sound of the typewriter in the novel stops, let us fully take in the sentences that will continue to be typed within our hearts for a long time.

Summary

Sollim Lee : How to continue the story while embracing the unknown.

Maeng Junhyuk : Two types of honesty in handling anxiety.

Mihyang Kim : Two books depicting how the social demand to “live well,” rules, and institutions pressure and transform personal life and dignity.

The Global Domino Effect of Korean Publishing in 2025 - Korean Books Spreading Region by Region -

Written by

Kim Yunha

About Clayhouse

Clayhouse is a publishing house that will celebrate its 5th anniversary in 2026, and under the catchphrase “A world of practical warmth that works in everyday life,” it creates books that offer rest of weary minds. The phrase “Into the feel-good universe,” found on the front flap of every book, serves as the publisher’s guiding compass. It defines the identity of Clayhouse, which has garnered global love through bestsellers such as *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*, *Rainbow Market*, and *I Decided to Live as Me*. Three-quarters of its original titles have been sold internationally. In just four years, Clayhouse has secured over 120 foreign rights deals, with works currently being translated and published in more than 30 languages. While best known for their signature “healing novels,” Clayhouse is now expanding its horizons, transcending genres to present a diverse array of books that captivate readers worldwide.



Welcome to the Hyunam-Dong Bookshop / *I Decided to Live as Me*

The English-Speaking World: A Vast and Distant Ocean

To date, Clayhouse has successfully launched four titles into the English-speaking market. In 2022, *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop* was

sold to Bloomsbury in the UK. The following year, *I Decided to Live as Me* and *Rainbow Market* went to Penguin Random House. Finally, in 2025, rights for *The Hyehwa-dong Lunchbox Grandma* were sold to Hachette in the UK and Penguin Random House in the US. The primary benefits of entering the English-speaking market include high advances and increased international recognition. Having a full English manuscript significantly expands the pool of professionals who can review the book in its entirety. This eliminates the need to produce separate sample translations, as a growing number of international publishers can now read the English edition first to evaluate rights acquisitions. Of course, given that English is the world's most widely spoken language, competition is undeniably fierce; editors are inundated daily with more submissions than they can possibly review. However, buoyed by the global popularity of Korean content, there appears to be a rising trend of editors specifically seeking manuscripts that capture a distinct Korean sensibility.

The European Market: Moving Forward Hand in Hand

As Europe functions largely as a single, massive community, a rights deal in one country often leads to rapid awareness of the book in others. Perhaps due to geographical proximity and linguistic similarities—especially compared to East Asian languages—there is a distinct sense that the European market moves in unison. However, this connectivity presents a challenge. With high English proficiency already prevalent and growing among the younger generation, many readers consume the English edition before a local translation can be released. Consequently, local publishers often find it difficult to acquire translation rights, fearing that the market demand has already been met.

The Asian Publishing Market: A Closely-Knit Neighborhood

First, exports to China and Japan face formidable barriers. As Japan is a publishing powerhouse, it is not easy to enter the market by breaking through the competition caused by the overflowing production of local content and getting chosen. The Mainland Chinese market, which uses Simplified Chinese, tends to fluctuate frequently depending on the political situation. However, active communication is always maintained with Taiwan, Indonesia, and Thailand. While this is a global phenomenon nowadays, these countries have had a relatively high interest in Korean cultural content for a long time. There are many Korean language learners, and there are significant cultural similarities, such as in Buddhism and Confucianism. Since the languages are diverse and the number of users for each language is not very large, it is hard to expect the powerful scalability of the English-speaking world or Europe; however, geographical and cultural closeness certainly acts as a major advantage. Rather than focusing on major language groups in hopes of a jackpot, targeting several nearby countries first appears to be a good strategy.

For Books Read Halfway Around the World

Clayhouse sought to broaden its reach by participating in various international copyright events throughout 2025. This included the London Book Fair in March, the “Visiting Book Fair” (Prague and Warsaw) in May, the K-BOOK Market and Seoul International Book Fair in June, and the “Visiting Book Fair” (New York) in September. Meeting face-to-face with readers and buyers who were genuinely interested in our titles served as a great source of motivation. Furthermore, it was a valuable learning experience, offering insights into global market trends and hearing firsthand what kind of Korean books international industry professionals are currently seeking. The current landscape is markedly different from

the healing fiction craze that dominated until early 2024. It feels as though Korean publishing exports are entering to a new chapter. With events such as Han Kang winning the Nobel Prize in Literature and the global attention on works like <K-Pop Demon Hunters>, expectations for Korean content have expanded significantly. We are now seeing diversified opportunities that go far beyond mere variations of the existing spatial healing fiction genre. Rather than chasing immediate trends or solely targeting massive markets, perhaps the most important mission to develop books that resonate equally with us and with readers halfway around the world. Building on the trust established with our readers, Clayhouse aims to flexibly expand its literary universe, always listening intently to the voices of our audience.

A narrative is composed of events, characters, and a setting of time and space. That is what we are taught. In traditional storytelling, the events were paramount. However, at some point, character-driven narratives began to take center stage. In genres such as sitcoms or animations, events only materialize through the existence of the characters; the plot is merely the consequence of their action. Conversely, in storytelling for content like video games, “world-building” — the specific time and space that shapes a world — has become the priority. Worlds that are entirely alien to our reality, or those with overlapping or inverted rules, provide the necessary plausibility for their characters and events. Similarly in literature, genres such as fantasy and science fiction tend to place greater emphasis on this world-building.

SF was once translated as *Gong-sang-gwa-hak* (fantasy science). The term implied a genre that, while grounded in science, relied on imagination to construct new worldviews and cosmic perspective. Academically, the genre is often defined by the creation of a “Novum” through the “extrapolation” of scientific facts or hypotheses. throughout the 20th century, the genre expanded largely around the United States, and until the early 2000s, it was difficult for Korean SF to find its own footing. However, some twenty years later, SF now appears to be establishing itself as a mainstream pillar of the Korean literary scene. While this shift is partly due to a broader understanding of the genre through diverse media content, the most crucial reason is likely that the world we inhabit has itself become that “science-fictional” reality. Indeed, works by authors such as Kim Boyoung, Kim Choyeop, Chung Serang, Chun Seonran, and Cheongye display exceptional merit in utilizing the grammar of SF to rethink real-world issues or propose alternative orders. In this sense, contemporary Korean SF may well be valued as a genre of alternative realism.

Traversing Genres to Envision the World



Bae Myunghoon's
Short Story Collection
*Art and the Acceleration
of Gravity*

Bae Myunghoon's novels show a remarkable broad spectrum. At times, it appears as though stories from various genres are draped over the structural framework of science fiction. Yet, at their center lies a keen interest in the contemporary world and insight into its underlying structures. Above all, there is a distinct sense of catharsis in watching his characters traverse these diverse worlds—breaking through them rather than being overwhelmed by their weight. The short story collection *Art and the Acceleration of Gravity* features early works such as *Smart D*, alongside stories penned over the decade since his debut, each written with his own distinct direction and pace. The titular story, *Art and the Acceleration of Gravity*, particularly highlights the author's unique perspective on 'art' and 'gravity'. Bae has often lamented that despite the growth of Korean SF professional criticism has failed to keep pace. He points, for instance, to the lack of critical discourse that might thread his works together through keywords like "gravity."

In *Art and the Acceleration of Gravity*, the use of first-person narration — often intersecting — is particularly notable. Rather than relying on descriptions or dialogue, the writing is distinguished by its focus on the narration of the characters' internal (speculative) or external (experiential) actions. While classical novels often established their style

through descriptive technique, recent works tend to fill that descriptive void with explanations, argumentation, or pure narration. Bae Myunghoon's fiction possesses the power to bring out the true flavor of narrative using only minimal description.

Transcending the Boundaries of Content to Reinvent Literary Forms



2025 POSTECH SF Award Winners' Collection
The Diagonal Argument

The POSTECH SF Awards is the first literary competition in South Korea dedicated exclusively to undergraduate and graduate students in science and engineering. *The Diagonal Argument* contains the winning works from the 2025 POSTECH SF Awards: the Grand Prize winner *The Diagonal Argument* (Park Geonryul), the First Prize winner *Land of Emotion* (Lee Huyoung), and the Excellence Prize winner *The Testament of a Probabilistic Ghost* (Kim Jeongsu). What is interesting is the shadow of other media forms cast upon these stories. For example, the genre tropes and conventions frequently experienced in web novels, webtoons, and dramas are conspicuously present. From its very inception, the novel has evolved by assimilating various cultural and artistic forms; in this sense, its potential for development is often assessed as infinite.

A Workworks like *The Diagonal Argument* unfolds almost entirely through narration, with virtually no dialogue or description. This stylistic choice is inextricably linked to a reconstruction of the “novel” as an art form. While

narration, description, and dialogue are the core elements constructing a narrative, we can observe these components being colorfully reconfigured in recent fiction where genre mutations are taking place. Whether conscious or unconscious, it seems clear that the renewal of literary forms and the breakthrough of their boundaries are being achieved through the genre of SF.

Global Mourning for Baek Sehee, Author of *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki* - Social Media Condolence Messages Shared for International Readers -

Written by

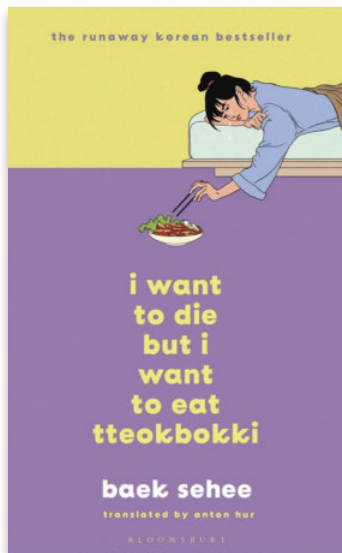
Joy Lee

Joy Lee | BC Agency

She is the Export Manager at BC Agency, dedicated to introducing Korean books and authors to the international publishing market. She has successfully introduced major titles, including *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki* and *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*, to readers in over 20 countries. She finds great fulfillment in discovering the value of literary works and connecting them with overseas publishers, ensuring that the unique voices of Korean authors transcend language and borders to reach a global audience.

As the year draws to a close, the most memorable events of the past twelve months flash through the mind. While there were moments of joy, surprise, and sorrow, one of the most heartbreaking events of 2025 was the news of the sudden passing of Baek Sehee, author of *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki*.

I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki is a global bestseller, published in over 25 countries with more than 500,000 copies sold in Korea and another 500,000 internationally. However, beyond the sales figures, the book's true significance lies in how it transcended language and borders to unite readers worldwide who grapple with similar struggles. Witnessing the condolences from various editors and readers across the globe, we were able to reaffirm the universal power of literature. Amidst tears and sorrow, we wish to share this moment together, honoring the author's luminous spirit.



Covers of the English, Italian, and Polish translated editions

The news of Baek Sehee's passing reaches us last October, when the Frankfurt Book Fair was in full swing. Although my work involves reading thousands of words every day, I found myself reading those three syllables of her name over and over again, doubting my own eyes. I had meetings scheduled during the fair with editors from around the world who had

acquired the rights to her book. Inevitably, we could not help but begin each meeting with a shared sense of mourning.

The editor from Bloomsbury, responsible for the English edition that had already sold over 100,000 copies in its first year, had concluded our meeting before the news broke. Yet, immediately upon hearing the tragic news — even amidst the hectic schedule of the book fair — they sent an email expressing deep condolences and announced their intention to release an official statement in honor of the author.

Condolences poured in not only from the English publisher but also from international editors who had formed a bond through her work — including those at Pelckmans (Netherlands), Mondadori (Italy), Alice Publishing (Romania), İthaki Publishing (Turkey), and Učila International (Slovenia). These publishers honored her memory by posting official tributes on their social media channels, each expressing their grief in their own way.

“This is truly unbelievably sad news. Thank you for letting us know. We will keep Sehee in our thoughts and hearts. We find comfort in knowing that she has left a lasting legacy through her books and her noble act of organ donation — helping so many people now and into the future. Sending our warmest hugs to you, your colleagues, and everyone who loved her. Please take good care.” — Pelckmans Publishers, Netherlands

“We were deeply saddened to hear the news of Baek Sehee’s passing. On behalf of everyone at Alice Books, I would like to extend our sincere condolences. It was an honor to publish her work. Her writing touched the hearts of countless readers. We will forever cherish the privilege of bringing her work to readers in Romania. Having been able to deliver her work to Romanian readers. Please convey our heartfelt sympathies to her family and loved ones. We know this is an enormous loss for everyone who knew

and loved her. Please know that our thoughts are with you during this difficult time.”

— Alice Publishing, Romania

“She will always be remembered through her books, and that is our only comfort.” — Učila International, Slovenia



“My heart is shattered. I don’t even know what to say. I haven’t been able to stop crying since I heard the news. For the past year, I have lived with her words and her struggles. I felt as close to her as a sister. I will never forget the hand she reached out to thousands of people. My deepest condolences to you and everyone who knew and loved her. I hope Sehee’s beautiful soul has found peace. She will always be with me.”
— İthaki Publishing, Turkey



Memorial sentences from publishing houses
(© England Bloomsbury Publisher Instagram)

Major overseas media outlets, including the BBC, The New York Times, and The Bookseller, also published articles covering her passing. Truly, the entire world grieved and mourned her loss. Through her book, the author gifted people of different languages and cultures a profound experience: the ability to share deep-seated emotions, find comfort, and deeply connect with one another.

As Baek Sehee's agent, it has been my honor to serve as a bridge in these connections. The comfort, empathy, and courage she offered will remain with us, living on forever through her books.

Homilbooks Publishing Co. – The Pillar of Busan’s Humanities and the Unique Stories –

Interview by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Publishing from a region outside the capital is not simply a matter of one’s address. It is a matter of which voices to curate, which readers to envision, and the pace at which books are brought to the world. Based in Busan, Homilbooks Publishing Co. has steadfastly engaged with deep discourses across the humanities, sociology and the arts. From the philosophy behind the name “Homil” and the criteria for selecting titles, to the realities and opportunities facing regional publishing — Representative Jang Hyunjung shared his story with us.



Homilbooks Publishing Co.

Q. What is the meaning behind the name "Homilbooks," and how is it reflected in the publishing direction?

The name "Homilbooks" has two meanings. One refers to "a space where anyone can run and play freely," inspired by the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. We aim to be a sanctuary where diverse voices can breathe — whether they are the quiet whispers of the marginalized, voices of awakening that challenge absurd conventions, or deep philosophical insights honed in silence. The second meaning relates to "rye" (homil). Just as farmers plant tough, resilient crops like rye to transform barren land into fertile soil, the name reflects our aspiration to cultivate and enrich the cultural soil of our society through pioneering and experimental endeavors.

In accordance with this philosophy, Homilbooks is dedicated to discovering local narratives and non-mainstream discourses from Busan and beyond, supporting the debut of new writers, and introducing lesser-known international works, such as Turkish literature.

Q. What are the advantages/opportunities of operating a publishing house in Busan? Conversely, what is the biggest challenge?

Busan's location outside the capital serves as an optimal vantage point for

capturing the lived experiences of researchers, artists, and local residents who exist outside mainstream discourse. While planning and production were often dependent on the capital area in the past, we have now established a structure where everything from planning to distribution is completed within Busan. Homilbooks actively utilizes this opportunity to connect and expand the achievements of the city government, cultural foundations, research institutes, universities, and cultural city initiatives into new publishing businesses that did not exist before. Through this process, we have built Homilbooks' unique methodology called "Social Editing," which involves editing the city's entire cultural resources from a fresh perspective. Of course, there are significant challenges. Physical distance creates hurdles in distribution, promotion, meetings for new releases, and managing bookstore display. Additionally, the slow speed of information flow compared to the capital and the difficulty in recruiting skilled talent, such as capable editors and marketers, remain challenges we must continue to overcome.



Homilbooks' "Social Editing" Academy Program ©Homilbooks

Q. If you had to pick the top three criteria for selecting a manuscript, what would they be and why?

The most important factor is originality. I prioritize irreplaceable stories —

narratives that only that specific author can tell.

Second, I examine whether the work addresses critical issues closely related to life "here and now." I am not drawn to abstract grand narratives or stories that are excessively subjective. Instead of being pedantic or vague, the writing must embody the local context, daily life, on-site experiences, and physical sensations. Finally, I look for enduring value — content worth keeping and reading for a long time. A newspaper's information expires after a day; weeklies last a week; and monthlies a month. However, I believe a book should contain insights that remain resonant even when opened three, five, or even decades later.



Works by authors who released their first books with Homilbooks.

(From left) *I put work clothes on over my school uniform.* / *The Universe Within the Letters* / *Yabozzi (Duck Neck)* / *Far from fiction, farther still from daylight* / *The umbilical cord was cut long ago, yet / etc.* ©Homilbooks

Q. What do you value most in the collaboration between editor and author? Also, are there any non-negotiable principles you maintain regarding the book's physical design?

Some authors view editing as merely “the work of fixing,” but at Homilbooks, editing is “the process of completing thoughts together.” There is a strong culture here of treating authors not just as providers of manuscripts, but as colleagues who share a critical awareness of our times and the field. Regarding the physical design, we pursue a “modest

elegance” rather than excessive glamour. This is because we believe that classic forms — such as black-and-white interiors, Shinguk-pan (standard book size), and traditional fonts — best reveal the essence of a book. However, we do actively support and encourage the creative experiments of new editors and designers.

Q. What topics/agendas do you feel need to be read more in Korean society today?

There would be too many to list. But if I had to pick just one, I would say “Korean thought and culture.” Now that K-Culture is receiving global attention, I believe that, paradoxically it is Koreans themselves who need to pay deeper attention to their own thoughts and philosophy. Also, publishing in Busan makes me frequently reflect on the identity of the “local.” Broadly speaking, Korea itself has long been a “local” player in the global market of knowledge and culture. I believe this is a time when we need to focus more on the Korean worldview — our culture, arts, philosophy, and thought.

Q. Which of your books would you like to introduce to international or non-Korean readers?

Considering the global rise of far-right movements, I would like to introduce a recent release titled *October* – Illustrated Chronicle of the Busan-Masan Democratic Uprising. It uses illustrations to document the Bu-Ma Uprising, one of South Korea’s four major democratic uprisings. I also recommend *Yabozi (Duck Neck)* by the Korean-Chinese novelist Jeon Chunhwa. I had spent a long time searching for a Korean-Chinese author to publish, and after much effort, I found Jeon and produced her debut work with great care. It has been incredibly rewarding to see her emerge as a

significant figure in Korean literature, winning the Kim Man-jung Literary Award following this collection.

For those who want to fully enjoy the charm of our city, I recommend books like *101 Ways to Love Busan*, *101 Busan Dialect Phrases That Make You Smile*, *MaMaMa, Busan*, and *The food of Busan*. Finally, I would like to suggest *The Sentences of the Sea*, a slim but profound essay collection that captures the core identity of Busan and the ocean.



Busan-related books published by Homilbooks.
 (From left) *October* / *101 Ways to Love Busan* / *101 Busan Dialect Phrases That Make You Smile* / *The food of Busan* / *MaMaMa, Busan* / etc.
 ©Homilbooks

Q. What are your key planning directions or collaboration plans for the next year or two?

As mentioned earlier, I am planning books centered on Korean thought, culture, and the arts. I also intend to actively publish titles on contemporary art through collaborations with artists. Furthermore, I aim to expand our children’s and young adults lineup, a genre we had previously approached

more modestly with only two or three titles a year.

Above all, because Homilbooks has consistently prioritized the identity of Busan and the local, we will continue to steadfastly record the stories of life and community in Busan, along with the achievements of researchers. Meanwhile, with the growing international interest in Korea and Busan, we are also preparing projects specifically tailored for global readers. We are always open to brilliant ideas and collaboration proposals, so please feel free to reach out to us!

P.S. Homilbooks Representative Jang Hyunjung...

Active as a rock band vocalist starting in his late teens, he turned to sociology in his late twenties. He earned his master's degree with a thesis on indie culture and his Ph.D. through research on local publishing. He continues publishing, cultural planning, and research activities under the motto of "social editing," which expands the concept of "editing" into cultural arts and urban strategy. He served as the inaugural president of the Busan Publishing Culture Industry Association and has authored several books, including *The Boy's Philosophy*, *Rocking Society*, and *The Sentences of the Sea (Vol. 1 & 2)*. He also translated *The Case for a Four Day Week* and *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* into Korean.

Author Hwang Boreum - Comfort to Everyone's Own "Today" -

Interview by

Lee Hyun Ho

Lee Hyun Ho | Poet

Debuted in 2007 through *Korean Modern Poetry*. He published poetry collections *Let Me Borrow a Lighter*, *The Name of the Beautiful Person was Alone*, and *Bimuljil*, as well as prose collections *A Person with Only a Room*, *a Person outside the Room and After Points*, *Lines*, and *Planes is the Heart*.

“How should we live?” This is a question that transcends time and culture. One author has captivated the hearts of readers around the world by answering this universal query—one that every human faces—with a single novel. She is Hwang Boreum, the author of the international bestseller *Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop*. In a world dominated by competition and speed, she assures us that it is okay to walk at our own pace. We listen to the story of Hwang Boreum, who offers warm comfort to our weary lives.



Author Hwang Boreum

Q. Your work is loved across diverse cultures—from the English-speaking world and Europe to Asia—beyond just Korea. What do you think is the power that allowed a story set in the specific background of today’s Korea to move the hearts of readers around the world beyond borders?

I was genuinely surprised when I first read reviews from overseas readers. They were strikingly similar to those written by Korean readers. This made me realize that despite living in different cultures and speaking different languages, people share a need for common questions and shared narratives. Questions like, “How should I live? What choices should I make? and with what attitude should I live?” It seems that these questions,

contained in my novel, meaningfully reached readers in other language groups as well.

Q. The “Hyunam-dong Bookshop,” in your novel feels less like a commercial space and more like a sanctuary—a refuge or resting place where wounded souls can pause to catch their breath. When constructing this fictional space in your mind, what specific “air” or atmosphere did you want to create?

Before I started writing, the scene I wanted to see most was simply characters talking to one another. But not just idle chatter—I wanted deep conversations that are hard to have even with close friends in daily life. For instance, exchanging questions like, “Do you have a dream?”, “Do you believe life has meaning?”, or “What truly matters in your life?” For such conversations to happen, you need a listener who nods in understanding and offers affirmation, no matter what answer you give. I wanted to depict the “Hyunam-dong Bookshop” as a gathering place for such people. You could say I wanted to create an “air” of acceptance—an atmosphere that fully embraces people as they are.



Welcome to the Hyunam-Dong Bookshop

Q. The novel’s protagonist, “Yeongju,” boldly deviates from the track of

success defined by society to find her own direction and pace. I imagine many readers looked back on their own lives while watching her journey. I found myself pondering the difference between “beign well-off” and “living well.” I would like to hear your definition of “living well.”

Sometimes, while listening to someone’s story—whether in person or on a screen—I find myself exclaiming, “Wow, that’s cool.” To me, such people are those who know exactly who they are: what they like and dislike, and what kind of lifestyle they wish to pursue. I believe “living well” is a life constructed for oneself by someone who knows oneself.

While it is difficult to make “me” the standard for every single moment of life, it is a life where, nonetheless, you spend at least a part of your day with “yourself” as the compass.

Q. Your background as a software developer after majoring in computer science is interesting. You have crossed over from the world of coding, where logic and accuracy are important, to the world of literature, where emotion and ambiguity are allowed. Does your past experience influence or aid your writing process?

As you mentioned, coding and writing are definitely different. However, I think they share similarities. In coding, the most critical aspect is that every line of code must be logically and precisely connected. This means there should be no superfluous lines. If even a single line defies logic, you cannot achieve the desired result. I believe the time I spent scrutinizing such logical precision has helped my writing. All writing requires logic, and what every writer strives for is a text where not a single sentence is wasted.

Q. Even in an era dominated by digital media and short-form content, the characters in the novel gather at a bookstore to read physical books.

This gives the impression that you hold a firm belief in physical spaces over online ones, and in the materiality of books themselves. We would love to hear your thoughts on this.

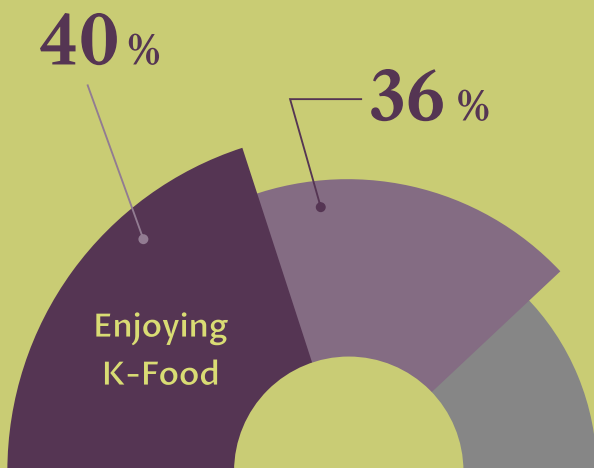
Since I live alone, I can easily go days without seeing anyone if I choose to. But after a few days of isolation, I feel a primal instinct stirring inside me. A desire to go somewhere, and to meet people there. I believe that more than anything, humans need time to meet, interact, and converse with others. That is why offline spaces will remain with us forever. The materiality of books will always hold meaning, as long as humans possess the sense of touch.

From Taste to Sentiment Bridging the Korean Food Experience with *Anyway, Tteokbokki*

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Q. What is one thing
you definitely want to do when you go to Korea?



40%

Enjoying K-Food

36%

Korean History & Traditional Experiences

24%

Dive into K-Culture



In this survey, “Eating Korean food (samgyeopsal, chimaek)” was selected as the No. 1 activity people want to do in Korea. It shows that the “pleasure of eating”—often the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of Korea—remains a powerful attraction. In particular, the communal dining culture of grilling *samgyeopsal* together, or enjoyment of fried chicken and beer known as *chimaek*, are experienced easily accessible during travel, which seems to have led to the high preference.

As such, an interest that starts with “taste” naturally expands into the atmosphere and sentiments unique to Korean food, and further into the relationships people share through dining.

In that sense, I recommend Yozoh’s *anyway, Tteokbokki*. This book centers on *tteokbokki*, a dish frequently mentioned as a “hot” menu item in the recent <K-Pop Demon Hunters>. For Koreans, *tteokbokki* represents a lifestyle culture that ranging from street stalls to modern franchises, serving as a dish that evokes distinct memories across generations. Rather than a recipe book or a restaurant guide, this essay collection captures memonets of life—childhood memories, chatter with friends, and the comfort needed to endure a long day—through the medium of *tteokbokki*, Korean’s representative “soul food.”

Through scenes of eating *tteokbokki*, the author transcends the simple

sensation of “deliciousness” to delicately captures the mood of a specific day, the atmosphere of a place, and the warmth of the person sitting next to them. As you read, you naturally come to understand that *tteokbokki* is not just a spicy dish. For some, it is a reward after exams; for others, a small ritual to soothe the heart on the way home from work; and at times, an excuse to reconnect with someone.

Above all, *anyway, Tteokbokki* conveys in warm language exactly that makes the “experience of eating in Korea” so special: the food in Korea often serves as a medium to bring people together, spark conversations, and share emotions. Much like the shared moments of grilling samgyeopsal to make ssam (lettuce wraps) or laughing over chimaek, *tteokbokki* is a food that brings people closer—whether standing side-by-side at a street stall or sitting face-to-face at a table.

This book is a perfect fit for readers who wish to remember Korea through its “tastes,” and for those who want to feel the texture of daily life hidden behind those flavors.

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

A Heartwarming Journey to Neighborhood Bathhouse

Written by

Shin Sunhang

Let's Try introduces various useful, books
published in Korea every month.

Also, don't miss gift events related to the introduced books!

[Click here to check the event](#)

Shin Sunhang | Copyright agent, Publishing planner, and Translator

As the Director at Arui SHIN Agency, she has dedicated years to introducing exceptional Korean books to international readers. A first-generation copyright agent, publishing planner, and translator who deeply believes in the power of books, she continues to walk this path with steady, unwavering steps.

Blossoming Years, Neighborhood Bathhouse

- Written by NeverlessHolida, Illustrated by Aleoji, Dot Book

“On days when you long for warmth, the neighborhood public bathhouse is always right by our side!”



Blossoming Years, Neighborhood Bathhouse

With steam rising, as you soak your body in the tub, the chill hiding in every joint slips away, and a sigh of “Ah, that’s good!” naturally escapes your lips – there is such a place, and it is the neighborhood bathhouse. It offers a deep refreshment incomparable to washing at home, leaving both your skin and your heart feeling lighter and softer. It brings back childhood memories of shyly turning away with a bashful grin when bumping into a neighbor, or the stinging yet affectionate sensation of a mother’s scrub amidst the thick steam. Driven by a mix of curiosity and a sense of duty to record these disappearing local bathhouse, a new book introduces them through warm, hand-drawn illustrations. This is ***Blossoming Years, Neighborhood Bathhouse***.

The days when word of mouth about ‘great water, top-notch facilities, and expert scrubbing’ caused long lines to stretch out the door are now mostly a thing of the past. However, warm bathhouses still remain in neighborhoods across the country, filled with the genuine affection of the local residents. Some bathhouses in renowned hot spring districts like

Onyang and Dongnae are cherished for their authentic water drawn straight from the source. Meanwhile, others have stood as local landmarks for over half a century—family-run establishments that have even gained fame as filming locations for movies and dramas.

With the improvement of private bathing facilities, fewer people visit public bathhouses today, leading to frequent, regrettable news of closures and demolitions. Yet, in busy downtown areas, some are finding a second life. By repurposing these spaces into cafes, galleries, concert halls, exhibition venues, or guesthouses—while retaining their original names—they are preserving both the nostalgic architecture and the history within.

*Prominent examples include Jungangtang in Jongno-gu, Seoul—the real-life setting for Baek Heena's picture book *The Bath Fairy* — and Hakcheontang in Cheongju, famous for its design by the celebrated architect Kim Swoo-geun. While they now serve different functions, they remain open, standing as enduring spaces of memory.*

Through careful interviews, the author documents the history and practical struggles of these neighborhood bathhouses. Yet, amid the difficulties, the unwavering dedication of the owners shines through. The reflections of one owner, who has run a bathhouse in a Jeju neighborhood for many years, seem to speak for the pride and persistence of them all: “Even when it gets hard, we tell ourselves, ‘Let’s keep it spotless for the neighbors who come to visit, for as long as we keep our doors open.’ We have lived a good life, and continue to do so, thanks to this community. Please make sure to tell them that I am always grateful.”

Even as generations shift and times pass, I hope the ‘style’ of time and space found in neighborhood public bathhouses and that Korean warmth known as ‘Jeong’ will live on for a long time. Shall we set off on a journey to the local bathhouse today?

A Journey through Seoul's Alleys with Tteokbokki

Written by

Jung-Ah Shin

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

A 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.

Seoul Tteokbokki Encyclopedia: The Great Adventure

- Written by Daemoheum Seoul Editorial Department, Published by Daemoheum Seoul



<Seoul Tteokbokki Encyclopedia: The Great Adventure>

Tteokbokki, made by simmering chewy rice cakes and fish cakes in a sweet and spicy gochujang sauce, is an iconic K-food representing Korea. A single plate of *tteokbokki*, enjoyed at snack bars in front of schools during one's school days, holds flavors and stories that remain unforgettable long into adulthood. *Seoul Tteokbokki Encyclopedia: The Great Adventure*, published by Daemoheum Seoul, is a collection of local stories documenting the tastes and histories of these nostalgic *tteokbokki* shops. It introduces the signature menus of 114 long-standing *tteokbokki* spots in Seoul, along with the romantic stories of their neighborhoods. If you think *tteokbokki* has only one flavor, think again! The 114 varieties featured in the book possess their own unique taste and origin stories, as well as hidden secret recipes. The structure of the book is also interesting. The first category introduced is the “school-front *tteokbokki*” shops. The spicy and sweet taste of *tteokbokki* that captivated students on their way home was, for some, the sole comfort that made them forget the boredom and weariness of school life.

Baekbaek Bunsik in Gocheok-dong, which opened in 1980, derived its name

from shortening the phrase “*tteokbokki* 100 (*beak*) won, dumplings 100 (*baek*) won”. A plate of *tteokbokki* featuring rich wheat cakes and plenty of bouncy glass noodles, paired with a side of fried dumplings as crispy as crackers to dip in the sauce, creates a fantastic combination. On days when one’s budget allows, adding a boiled egg and drenching it in the *tteokbokki* sauce is a small luxury to be enjoyed.

Fried food (*twigim*) is the perfect partner that balances out the spiciness of the *tteokbokki* while enhancing the savory flavor and richness. The most popular fried items include dumplings filled with glass noodles, seaweed rolls (*gimmari*), and plump squid, though some shops use their own unique ingredients. For instance, at **Wow Shin-nae-tteok** in Noryangjin, an area famous as a village for exam-takers, the “garlic fries” are a hit. These feature crispy on the outside and soft on the inside french fries generously topped with plenty of garlic and chili sauce.

At **Jeil Bunsik** in Mia-dong, which opened in 1977, the star attraction is the sweet potato fries—a worthy rival to the potato. As you enjoy *tteokbokki* and fried dishes, you might find yourself craving a refreshing broth to clear your throat. This is the perfect moment for fish cake (*eomuk*). While often used as an ingredient in *tteokbokki*, *eomuk* is also highly popular as a standalone menu item. A skewer of tender fish cake, simmered for hours, paired with a sip of the hot broth, offers a comforting heartiness that perfectly balances the lingering heat of the *tteokbokki*. For *tteokbokki* enthusiasts, another variation simply cannot be missed: *jeukseok tteokbokki* (Instant or on-the spot *tteokbokki*). Cooked directly at the table in a pot filled with rice cakes and ingredients, the flavor of the sauce becomes increasingly exquisite as it boils down. **Tabong House near Kyung Hee University**, boasting a 50-year history, offers an addictive flavor created by a blend of *gochujang* and *chunjang* (black bean paste), enriched by the subtle sweetness of cabbage and the sharp kick of black pepper. After fishing out rice cakes and ramen noodles from the bubbling pot, the

true highlight is the fried rice cooked in the remaining sauce. As *jeukseok tteokbokki* is a meal meant to be savored slowly, the atmosphere inside these shops is distinct. Walls densely covered in customer graffiti, tables bearing the marks of time, and the sight of an old-fashioned kitchen all feel like turning the pages of a memory book.

Opened in 1988 near Ujangan Station, **Mokdong Bunsik** features a second-floor attic space where customers take off their shoes to enter. This cozy spot has long served as a favorite hideout for students. As they sit huddled together, chatting about the weather and friends, the *tteokbokki* soon boils. Once the pot is empty in a flash, leaving only the broth, it is time to stir-fry rice. Topped with seaweed flakes and sesame oil, the finished fried rice fills the room with a rich, nutty aroma. **Meongtongguri Jeukseok Tteokbokki** in Gongneung-dong is famous for its harmonious blend of East and West, adding cheese, perilla oil, and kimchi to its fried rice.

The book also introduces a rich array of side dishes that complete *tteokbokki* as a full meal. All-time favorites include *gimbap* and *sundae* (Korean blood sausage). Filled with humble ingredients, *Gimbap* is excellent for satisfying any remaining hunger. *Sundae*, which offers various cuts to choose from, is the hero that adds a savory, meaty flavor to *tteokbokki*. **Seohung Hypermarket Tteokbokki** in Hwigyeong-dong is famous for its handmade *sundae*, generously packed with fresh ingredients like *cheongyang* chili peppers, onions, carrots, and chives. **Parasol Bunsik** near Nowon Station and Miso House in Gubanpo are known for serving deep-fried *sundae*. Other popular sides that have emerged with the changing times include corn dogs, *jjolmyeon* (spicy cold chewy noodles), and *so-tteok* (sausage and rice cake skewers). Finally, when you crave something sweet and cool after the spicy kick of *tteokbokki*, finishing the meal with *patbingsu* (shaved ice with red beans), soft serve, or slushies makes for the perfect combination.



What *Seoul Tteokbokki Encyclopedia: The Great Adventure* presents is more than just food and menus; it is a collage of stories and scenes accumulated in each shop. Diverse locations across Seoul—beside railroad tracks, inside bustling markets, at subway stations, in front of schools, and near amusement parks—invite readers with their own unique warmth and character. If you love to travel and are curious about the diverse flavors of tteokbokki, it is recommended to explore every corner of Seoul's alleys with *Seoul Tteokbokki Encyclopedia: The Great Adventure*. You will encounter a veritable feast of this soul food—from the chewy texture of spicy-sweet tteokbokki made with heart, to the warm Korean affection (*jeong*) that soothes the traveler's soul.

Which Foreign Books Did Korean Readers Choose in 2025?

Written by

Eunseo Koo

Eunseo Koo | Culture Department Reporter at The Korea Economic Daily


As a reporter for the Culture Department's Publishing Team, she covers domestic and international publishing trend and curate book recommendations for readers. She is the author of *Classics with Reason*, a book that explores the enduring appeal of literary works that have withstood the test of time.

“Interest in Korean fiction” is an indispensable phrase when explaining recent publishing trends in Korea. Thanks to the halo effect of Han Kang’s Nobel Prize in Literature win in 2024, Korean novels swept the top spots on the comprehensive bestseller lists last year. The slump in non-fiction books, driven by the commercialization of generative artificial intelligence (AI), also played a significant role. The prevailing view in the industry is that the surge in Korean fiction—and Korean literature at large—is a “butterfly effect” resulting from the contraction of the local non-fiction market, a sector traditionally dominated by renowned foreign authors rather than domestic ones. However, this situation may present a unique opportunity. With fewer foreign titles breaking through, it becomes relatively easier to trace the specific pathways through which they successfully reach Korean readers.

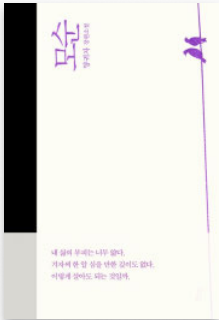


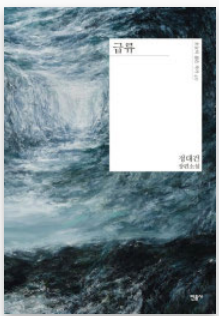
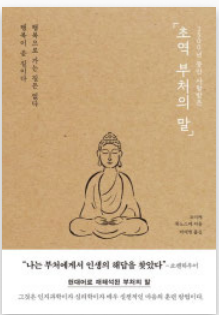
How, then, did the select few foreign titles chosen by Korean readers manage to captivate them? And which foreign books are poised to claim the bestseller spots this year?

Last Year’s Foreign Book Report Card

The only foreign book that managed to squeeze into the top 10 on the 2025 annual comprehensive bestseller list at Kyobo Book Centre, Korea’s No. 1 bookstore, was Ryunosuke Koike’s *Ultra-Translation: Words of the Buddha*.

Kyobo Book Centre 2025 Annual Comprehensive Bestseller List		
Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
1		<i>Human Acts</i>
		Han Kang
		Changbi

Kyobo Book Centre 2025 Annual Comprehensive Bestseller List

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
2		<i>Contradictions</i>
		Yang Guija
		Ssuda
3		<i>In the End, the People Do It</i>
		Lee Jaemyung
		OhmyBook
4		<i>Honmono</i>
		Seong Haena
		Changbi
5		<i>Rapids</i>
		Jeong Daegeon
		Minumsa
6		<i>Ultra-Translation: Words of the Buddha</i>
		Ryunosuke Koike
		Forest Books

Kyobo Book Centre 2025 Annual Comprehensive Bestseller List

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
7		<i>Reading of Youth</i>
		Rhyu Si-min
		Woongjin Knowledge House
8		<i>An Adult's Happiness is Quiet</i>
		Taesu
		Page2Books
9		<i>The Vegetarian</i>
		Han Kang
		Changbi
10		<i>Only One Life</i>
		Kim Youngha
		Bokbok Books

The dominance of Korean fiction is evident throughout the list. Half of the top 10 entries—five titles—were Korean novels. For the second consecutive year, Han Kang’s novel *Human Acts* claimed the number one spot on the comprehensive bestseller list. Rounding out the list were the autobiography of President Lee Jae-myung, who was elected following last

year’s impeachment proceedings and early presidential election, along with essay collections by Korean novelists.

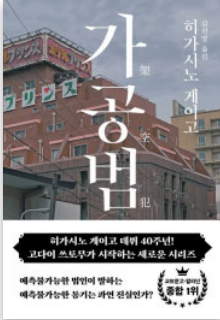
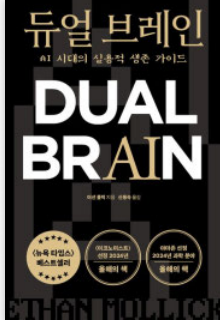

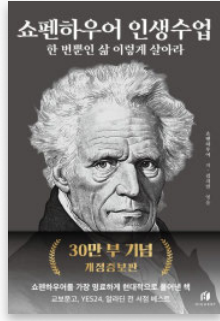
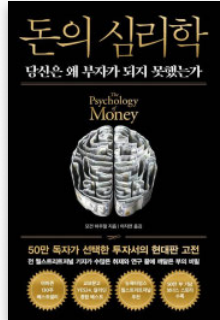
Redefining the Bestseller Rankings

So, which foreign books managed to secure a spot in the upper ranks of sales, achieving a feat akin to threading a rope through a needle’s eye?

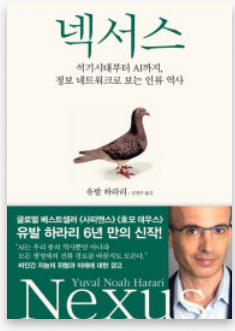
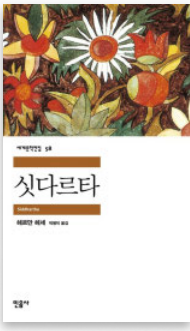
The following table shows a recompiled ranking, derived by extracting only foreign books from the comprehensive bestseller list provided by Kyobo Book Centre.

Top-Selling Foreign Books at Kyobo Book Centre in 2025 (Excluding workbooks)		
Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
1		<i>Ultra-Translation: Words of the Buddha</i>
		Ryunosuke Koike
		Forest Books
2		<i>Stoner</i>
		John Williams
		RHK Korea
3		<i>Übermensch</i>
		Friedrich Nietzsche
		Rise

Top-Selling Foreign Books at Kyobo Book Centre in 2025 (Excluding workbooks)

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
4		<p><i>Masquerade Game</i></p> <p>Higashino Keigo</p> <p>Book-da</p>
5		<p><i>Dual Brain</i></p> <p>Ethan Mollick</p> <p>Sangsang Square</p>
6		<p><i>If You Don't Act, Life Won't Change</i></p> <p>Brian Tracy</p> <p>Hyundai Jisung</p>
7		<p><i>Schopenhauer's Life Lessons: Live Your One and Only Life Like This</i></p> <p>Arthur Schopenhauer</p> <p>Highest</p>
8		<p><i>The Psychology of Money</i></p> <p>Morgan Housel</p> <p>Influential</p>

Top-Selling Foreign Books at Kyobo Book Centre in 2025 (Excluding workbooks)

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher
9		Nexus
		Yuval Noah Harari
		Gimm-Young Publishers
10		Siddhartha
		Hermann Hesse
		Minumsa

Finding a common thread among these titles is no easy task. From *Ultra-Translation: Words of the Buddha*, a collection of Buddha’s famous quotes reinterpreted for modern times, to John Williams’ novel *Stoner*, and *Dual Brain*, a guide to survival in the AI era—it is difficult to find any consistency in terms of genre or publication date. For instance, *Stoner*, which ranked second, was originally published in the U.S. in 1965. The edition that climbed the charts this time is the Korean translation released in 2015. On the other hand, *Ultra-Translation: Words of the Buddha* and *Dual Brain* were released in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Meanwhile, the original source material for *Übermensch* (published in 2025) is *Nietzsche’s Human, All Too Human*, a book dating back to 1787. Then again, Buddha predate them all.

Fandoms Create Bestsellers

The “invisible hand” organizing this seemingly disparate list of foreign bestsellers is none other than “fandoms”. *Ultra-Translation: Words of the*

Buddha went straight to the bestseller list after Jang Won-young, a member of the K-pop girl group IVE, mentioned it as the book she was currently reading during her appearance on the YouTube show “Dex’s Fridge Interview” in January 2025. According to Yes24, a leading online bookstore in Korea, sales of the book surged approximately 29-fold between January 15 and 29 compared to the previous month, following her mention. It was a prime case demonstrating the sheer “firepower” of IVE’s fandom.



K-pop idol girl group IVE.
© StarShip Entertainment

For *Stoner*, recommendations from comedian Hong Jinkyung and film critic Lee Dong-jin served as a powerful boost. Lee Dong-jin, in particular, commands a loyal fandom through his podcast and YouTube activities. Consequently, it has become the norm for his monthly recommendations to shake up the bestseller lists. Indeed, the No. 1 bestseller on Yes24 for January 1st of this year was Suzuki Yui’s novel *Goethe Said Everything*, a book he recently recommended.

Ranking third, *Übermensch* was released by a publisher where “Author Son Him-chan,” who boasts 420,000 Instagram followers, served as an executive. It appears that followers, mobilized by aggressive social media marketing, purchased the book first, pushing it up the charts. This, in turn,

seems to have piqued the curiosity of general readers, leading to further sales.

Higashino Keigo's *Masquerade Game* also drove sales through a combination of the author's existing fandom and features on various "BookTube" channels. The same goes for *Dual Brain*. One online reader review for this book begins with: "Every YouTube channel I visited seemed to be talking about how his book was coming out in March..." In an era of uncertainty, the growing demand for philosophy and the deep thirst to understand AI, combined with the rise of "BookTube" and short-form content, have effectively extended the lifespan of this fandom-driven purchasing trend.

Will Foreign Fiction Leap Forward This Year?

Everyone knows that the industry cannot rely solely on fandoms to produce and sell books. A book is, ultimately, a book. The destiny of this product—which must prove its value through its content—has led to a parade of "Big Shot" foreign novels being published this year. This is a direct response to Korean readers' hearts turning toward literature last year.

Korean bookstores are gearing up for major releases this year, including *The Things That Leave Do Not Return*, a novel declared to be "my last book" by Julian Barnes, a master who has swept the world's most prestigious literary awards. Also scheduled is the publication of works by Krasznahorkai László, last year's Nobel laureate, which will be translated directly from the original language for the first time in Korea (previous editions were re-translations from English or German). The strong performance of *Goethe Said Everything* early in the year is a promising sign. The foreign book market faces two key questions this year: Can foreign fiction captivate Korean readers? And how will non-fiction survive in the era of AI?

4 Must-Visit Publisher Book Cafes in Seogyo-dong for Editors

Written by

Nam Ban Jang

Nam Ban Jang | Web service planner

Since 2015, he has operated “Dongneseojeom”, a nationwide recommendation search service for independent bookshops worth visiting. He graduated with a Master of Journalism in Digital Media from Sogang University’s Graduate School of Journalism. Since launching the internet radio station “Indiscriminate Broadcasting Station” in 1998, he has worked as a web service planner for companies in the media and entertainment sector.



Moonji Salon

Here are four publisher-run book cafes tucked away in the alleys of Seogyo-dong, brimming with intellectual inspiration, that serve as must-visit destinations for avid readers and editors alike.

Overview

There are certain places that are absolute must-visits for avid readers and editors alike. These are the publisher-run book cafes tucked away in the alleys of Seogyo-dong, Mapo-gu—the district with the highest concentration of publishing houses in Korea—a neighborhood brimming with intellectual inspiration.

Here, we introduce four recommended book cafes operated by publishers located near Hapjeong Station and Mangwon Station in Seogyo-dong, Mapo-gu, Seoul: Cafe Changbi (Changbi), Moonji Salon (Moonji Publishing), M Book Cafe (Miraebooks), and Mind B (Hakjisa).

Definition of Book Cafe

A “Book Cafe” refers to a cultural complex that combines the concepts of books and café. Going beyond a simple venue for drinking beverages, it offers a space where visitors can read, purchase books, and enjoy various book-related cultural activities.

Difference from Independent Bookshop with Coffee & Tea

Generally, a “Book cafe” is primarily a café that incorporates the functions of a bookstore, allowing customers to freely enjoy drinks and engage in conversation. In contrast, an “Independent Bookshop with Coffee & Tea” is a bookstore that adds beverage service. The key difference is that these shops generally encourage customers to refrain from loud conversations to avoid disturbing readers. Also, to prevent damage to the books, customers are often asked to enjoy their drinks only in designated areas.

The number of these independent bookshops serving coffee and tea began to surge around 2015 as a survival strategy within the domestic market. Bookstores started to evolve by either specializing in specific genres or diversifying by selling coffee and miscellaneous goods. To survive, they had to pursue the efficient use of idle space and time through hybrid business models, such as running a publishing or design business alongside the shop. (Excerpt from the author’s previous contribution)

4 Publishers’ Book Cafes in Seogyo-dong Sorted by opening date (oldest first)

Name	Address	Publisher	Instagram ID	Publishing Field
Cafe Changbi	1F & B1, Changbi Seogyo Building, 7 World Cup-ro 12-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul	Changbi	@cafe_changbi	Literature, Humanities, Children’s, Social Sciences
M Book Cafe	1F, Miraebooks, 62-1 Jandari-ro, Mapo-gu, Seoul	Miraebooks	@mbookcafe	Economics & Management, Trends, Self-improvement
Mind B	1F, Mind Building, 20 Yanghwa-ro 15-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul	Hakjisa	@mindb.cafe	Psychology, Education, Counseling, Social Welfare
Moonji Salon	B1, Moonji Building, 18 Jandari-ro 7-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul	Moonji Publishing	@moonji_salon	Poetry, Novels, Humanities, Criticism

1. Cafe Changbi (Changbi)

This is a warm space where visitors can discover Changbi's latest releases and steady sellers. It serves as an open cultural community hub designed to foster interaction between readers and authors. The cafe offers 10% discount on book purchases and various membership benefits, along with comfortable seating perfect for reading and regular author book talks.



Cafe Changbi

Address	1F & B1, Changbi Seogyo Building, 7 World Cup-ro 12-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul (Seogyo-dong)
Instagram	@cafe_changbi
Publishing Fields	Literature, Humanities, Children's, Social Sciences

2. M Book Cafe (Miraebooks)

Operated by Miraebooks Publishing, this cozy cafe is an ideal spot for quiet concentration and gaining inspiration on business and management trend. It is optimized for work or study, featuring a curated selection of the latest business books—including the famous Trend Korea series—and a seating layout designed for focus.



M Book Cafe

Address	1F, Miraebooks, 62-1 Jandari-ro, Mapo-gu, Seoul (Seogyo-dong)
Instagram	@mbookcafe
Publishing Fields	Economics & Management, Trends, Self-improvement

3. Mind B (Hakjisa)

Operated by Hakjisa, a publisher specializing in psychology, this cafe offers true rest and healing, living up to its name which implies “Vitamin for the Mind.” Visitors can freely browse specialized psychology books and enjoy an intellectual recharge regarding mental health in a calm and neat atmosphere.

Address	1F, Mind Building, 20 Yanghwa-ro 15-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul (Seogyo-dong)
Instagram	@mindb.cafe
Publishing Fields	Psychology, Education, Counseling, Social Welfare

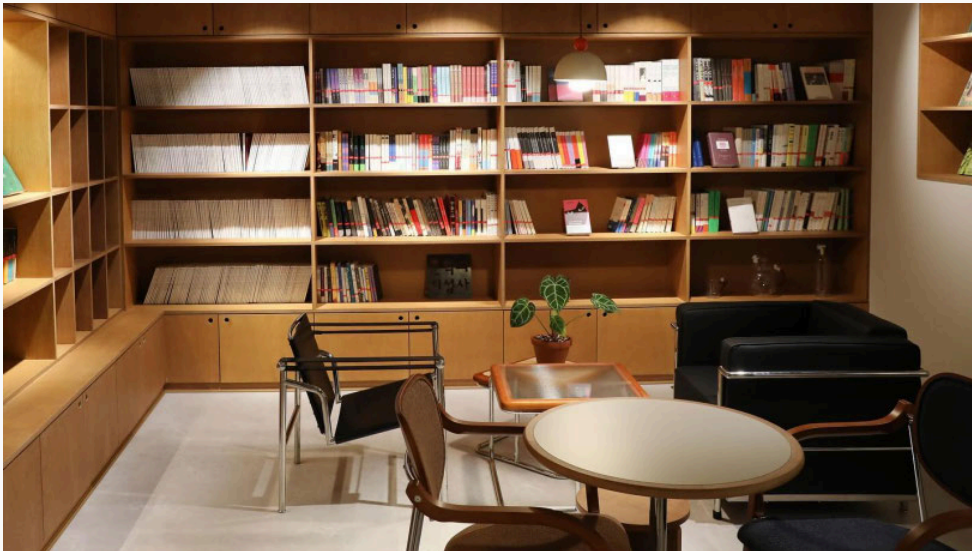


Mind B

4. Moonji Salon (Moonji Publishing)

An intellectual sanctuary operated by Moonji Publishing, it is a sensuous salon where visitors can savor the deep resonance of poetry and fiction over coffee or tea. It houses an unrivaled literary library, including the renowned Moonji Poets Series, and hosts cultural events infused with artistic sensibility, such as exhibitions and readings.

Address	B1, Moonji Building, 18 Jandari-ro 7-gil, Mapo-gu, Seoul (Seogyo-dong)
Instagram	@moonji_salon
Publishing Fields	Poetry, Novels, Humanities, Criticism



Moonji Salon

3 Tips to Enjoy Publisher-Run Book Cafes

Benefits

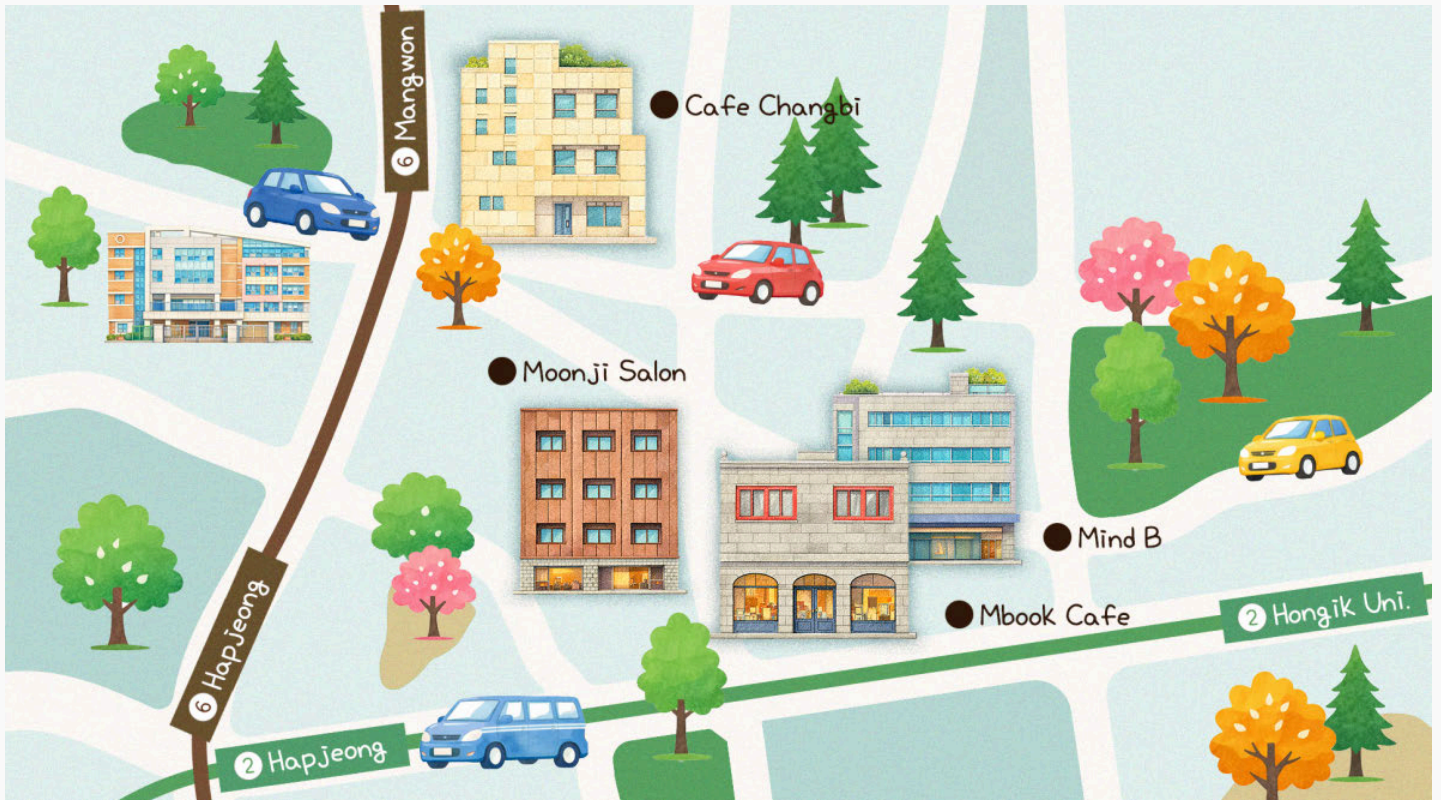
Most book cafes offer a 10% discount when purchasing books published by the house and actively host related cultural events.

Atmosphere

- Cafe Changbi** With its spacious layout and lively community vibe, it is suitable for gatherings and meetups.
- Moonji Salon** Relatively quieter with a literary sensibility, making it perfect for quiet contemplation.
- M Book Cafe** Offers practical business inspiration, making it ideal for individual work or study.
- Mind B** Great for solo visits, allowing for deep reading or quiet work in a calm setting.

Operating hours

Business hours are subject to change due to publisher events or venue rentals. It is highly recommended to check their official Instagram accounts before visiting.



Notice

1. The information mentioned in this article is current as of January 12, 2026, and AI tools were utilized to assist with some data collection and content editing.
2. Please note that some details regarding the venues mentioned may have changed or could be inaccurate by the time you read this.
3. We highly recommend verifying the latest details via each venue's official website or Instagram account before visiting.