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K-BOOK TRENDS

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Notable Literary Works Selected by Critics
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Not just comfort and empathy, but anxiety and fear: Pay Attention to K-Horror

Written by

Cha Mu Jin

Cha Mu Jin | Novelist

Mujin Cha is a prominent Korean genre writer known for balancing commercial success with literary merit. He specializes in paradoxical narratives: malice within sorrow, humor in twists, and lyrical horror. After debuting with *Is That Kim Yu-shin's Head?*, he authored *In the Bag*, *The Season of the Fox*, the collection *Apollon Savings Bank*, and the craft book *The Villain's Guide for Storytellers*.

Healing and Zombies



In the Bag

For the past few years, the mainstream of Korean genre literature has undeniably been “healing.” Healing fantasy, set in familiar spaces such as convenience stores, bookstores, and antique shops, offered solace to Korean readers weary of individualism. Messages like “You are not alone in your struggles” and “We are looking toward the light together” were sweet and comforting. However, where there is bright light, there are also deep shadows. No matter how much we comfort one another, we remain beings who must ultimately compete alone in a cold, harsh reality. To make matters worse, the pandemic that struck like a tidal wave transformed reality itself into a horror narrative. Paradoxically, the public began to harbor a desire to stare reality in the face through the lens of unrealistic horror. Around that time, zombies emerged at the forefront, establishing themselves as a major pillar of Korean genre content. The zombie was a timely metaphor for pandemic-era fears: uncontrollable infection and systemic collapse. Starting with the film “Train to Busan” and continuing

through the Netflix series “Kingdom” and “All of Us Are Dead”, the “K-Zombie” craze has taken the world by storm.

Cha Mu-jin’s novel *In the Bag* sets itself apart by featuring mutated infectees who possess intelligence and language, rather than mindless zombies. At the time of its release, the work drew significant attention from the Korean literary community for its harrowing depiction of a post-apocalyptic world, where the absurdities of Korean society are transposed onto the ecology of the infected. In a state of total anarchy where neither God nor the state offers salvation, the image of a father heading south with his son tucked away in a giant backpack serves as a dry satire of the cold, “every man for himself” reality of modern society. Notably, the author moves beyond the one-dimensional horror of “eat or be eaten.” Through antagonists who speak, think, and in some ways appear no different from “normal” people, Cha projects the chronic ideological conflicts and deep-seated hatred embedded in Korean society. This approach does not merely depict the darkness of the era through surface-level monsters; rather, it is a literary implementation of the *Baechae* (reverse coloring) technique—subtly illuminating the underlying historical layers behind the visible horror.

Shamanism: Illuminating the Individual Life

If the zombie apocalypse represents a “disaster where everyone perishes equally,” what haunts the public in the endemic era is the “reality of being the only one left behind.” This is precisely where shamanism steps in. When zombies attack, there is little one can do but flee; however, in the world of shamanism, one can take action. One can pay for a *gut* (shamanic ritual) or use a *bujeok* (talisman) in an attempt to alter their own destiny. Few countries

witness such a bizarre coexistence of cutting-edge technology and pre-modern shamanic beliefs as South Korea. Recently, dating shows featuring shamans and survival auditions for practitioners have topped OTT platform charts, signaling that shamanism has emerged from the shadows to become a mainstream form of entertainment. Perhaps no other people encounter ghosts as casually at a fortune-teller's shop as Koreans do. Visiting a shaman is not merely an act of superstition; it is a form of supernatural consulting sought to resolve deeply private and secular concerns—ranging from romance and employment to college admissions, stock investments, and business expansion. K-Horror does not miss this “lifestyle-integrated” shamanism. Rituals are no longer confined to abandoned houses in deep mountains; they take place in luxury officetels in Gangnam or the living rooms of new suburban apartments. “Get my child into a prestigious university,” “Help me get promoted by eliminating my rival,” or “Make that person fall in love with me.” When the twisted desires of modern individuals attempt to break through systemic limitations using the unrealistic power of shamanism, the price paid is total catastrophe. The premise that “shamanism begins where science gives up” delivers the most realistic terror to modern individuals living in a capitalist society.

The title story of Bora Chung's short story collection, *Cursed Bunny*, is narrated by the grandson of a family that has crafted ritualistic curse objects for generations. After his grandfather's business is ruined by a friend's betrayal, the grandfather creates a “cursed bunny” lamp as an act of vengeance. This seemingly adorable bunny lamp finds its way into the home of the rival company's owner, gradually leading the family toward total ruin. Critically, what this bunny gnaws away at is not merely their lives, but their success itself. This marks the moment where a uniquely

Korean motif expands into a universal horror. The specificity of “Selectively eliminate my rival” feels far more chilling and seductive than the blind murderous intent of “Kill them all” (as seen in zombie narratives). In this work, the malevolent spirit is embedded within a commodity. In a capitalist society, a product is a symbol of desire; the premise that a seemingly harmless and cute commodity is, in fact, a monster devouring a family’s economic prosperity sophisticatedly demonstrates how a shamanic sal (a deadly curse or malevolent energy) infiltrates the lives of modern individuals.



Cursed Bunny

The Peak of Cruelty and Pathos

K-Horror possesses a fundamentally different texture from the traditional J-Horror or Western occult genres. Japanese horror, long the hallmark of Asian horror, obsesses over grudges and specific locations. Take *The Grudge* or *Ringu*, for example. Even if the protagonist has committed no moral wrong, disaster strikes simply because they entered a cursed house.

In these narratives, spirits are absolute evils with whom communication is impossible, and humans are portrayed as utterly helpless victims. In contrast, K-Horror is dynamic. Every instance of terror has a clear, underlying reason. However, authors do not resolve this causality in a straightforward manner; they twist it unrealistically and, at times, subvert it through far more powerful and brutal methods. While Korean occultism is often perceived as being driven by han (unresolved resentment) from an unjust death or the breaking of a taboo for personal gain, contemporary works transcend this cliché. They are significantly more intense and visceral than such traditional perceptions suggest.

Cho Ye-eun's short story collection, *Cocktails, Love, and Zombies*, captivated readers upon its release, with critics noting that it "blends horror, romance, and thriller like a cocktail to be downed in a single gulp." Yet, contrary to its sweet title, the collection reeks of the metallic scent of blood and the visceral sensation of tearing flesh. In the story "The Invitation," psychological violence—specifically gaslighting—is visualized as a thorn stuck in the throat. The protagonist, who has long endured subtle abuse from a lover, finally realizes the true nature of the foreign object in her throat. The scene where she vomits it out is more chilling than any ghost. These brutal depictions throughout the work are not random; each carries its own thematic weight. The masterpiece of the collection is "Overlap Knife, Knife." The premise—a mother and son repeating a time loop to kill a violent father—is both cruel and heartbreaking. Here, horror is not an unavoidable fate; instead, it transforms into a form of active salvation, where characters willingly stain their hands with blood to protect what is precious. While the core motivation for the terror is rooted in "distorted human relationships and will," following the grammar

of a thriller, the method of visualizing and implementing this fear borrows heavily from the conventions of horror.



Cocktails, Love, and Zombies

The Flip Side of Space

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of these terms. While a thriller deals with realistic terror born from human madness and malice, horror explores the unrealistic dread inflicted by supernatural entities—such as ghosts, evil spirits, and curses—that lie beyond human control. In a work of horror, the protagonist’s ultimate goal is to restore their world to the state it was in before encountering the malevolent entity. As mere mortals, the protagonists can never physically defeat these god-like beings. Thus, the final objective is either to undo the encounter or to successfully escape from their reach.

In Korean horror narratives, space is not merely a physical backdrop where ghosts appear. Rather, the space itself is often already contaminated by specific forms of violence or inherent contradictions. The suffering and

energy generated within these spaces are then visualized, manifesting in non-human forms.



Gosiwon Ghost Stories

The film “Whispering Corridors” elevated the school—the most familiar yet oppressive space for Koreans—into a stage for teen horror. The terror in this work does not stem from the iconic image of a ghost rapidly approaching in the hallway; rather, it lies in the duality inherent in the school itself. The maladies of the Korean education system, such as grade-obsessed meritocracy and physical or sexual abuse by teachers, signal that the very safety net meant to protect students has become corrupt. Here, the ghost is not an external intruder or an evil spirit; it is a pre-existing entity, a manifestation of the structural violence accumulated within the space. This spatial terror extends into forms of housing. Jeon Gun-woo’s novel, *Gosiwon Ghost Stories*, uses the gosiwon, a uniquely distorted Korean housing model, to test the limits of human dignity. The question this novel poses is profound: how do individuals who occupy the same space, yet remain complete strangers to one another, become the source of

horror? Ultimately, the gosiwon encapsulates the insularity of modern society in its densest form, and the eerie events occurring within are the inevitable byproducts of a twisted living environment. Like other works mentioned, this book is not pure horror but a hybrid genre blending mystery and detective fiction. It is a unique grammar of K-Horror to pull the sharp edges of reality into its narrative in a way that the horror of other cultures rarely touches.

Non-fiction on Emotions Selected by Critics Across Generations

Written by

Sollim Lee, Junhyuk Maeng, Mihyang Kim, Dongseok Jang

Lee Sollim | Publishing Editor

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.

Junhyuk Maeng | Book Editor

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.

Mihyang Kim | Book Critic·Essayist, IT Service Planner

She worked as a publishing editor for thirteen years, spending three years on books and ten years planning and editing magazines. She is the author of the essay *Mother Said She Was Not Happy*, and co-authored *Key Words of the Korean Publishing Industry 2010-2019*, *What is Film?*, and *Goods Caution*. Having served as a Creative Director at a tech company, she is currently designing, interpreting, and recording the world as a service planner and storyteller.

Dongseok Jang | Literary Critic, Secretary General of the Pajubookcity Center

He is a dedicated reader and writer. Captivated by the vast and profound world of literature, he spends every spare moment reading and contemplating how books resonate with our society. He is currently striving to transform books, the infinite source of all content, into diverse cultural formats. His published works include *The Living Library*, *The Rebirth of Forbidden Books*, *The Birth of Different Thoughts*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms: A Story Renewed After a Thousand Years*, and *Meeting World Classics for the First Time: A Guide for Teens*.

For the March issue Special Project, we feature a total of four non-fiction books on emotions, with one title selected by a critic representing each of the four generations. The theme of this issue focuses on emotional exploration, introducing a curated selection of books that delve into seclusion and isolation, the journey toward self-identity, the process of reaching adulthood, and various narratives regarding the human body.

The 20s Perspective

Lee Sollim, Cultural Critic

“Faint, Yet Not Gone: Existential Presence”



Faint Existences

Emotions harden when left untended. Left unexplained and neglected for too long, they gradually lose their warmth and eventually become walls that imprison the self. In this hardened space, terms like “seclusion” and “isolation” emerge. Within Korean society, this phenomenon is categorized

under the label “isolated and reclusive youth.” The time spent by these young people who neither work nor engage in social activities is quickly translated into the language of national economics and summoned as a problem that must be urgently solved. However, within such naming, the delicate textures of emotion are rarely revealed.

In her book *Faint Existences*, Kim Go-eun interprets seclusion and isolation as a shared sensation widely permeated among the younger generation. It is an internal current of life that statistics such as turnover or suicide rates fail to capture. Having studied Eastern philosophy outside of institutional academia throughout her twenties, she introduces the term “Soul Blindness” with the sensibility of a Confucian scholar. It describes a state of having lost one’s soul, being unable to face the souls of others, and ultimately failing to reach one’s own self. Her statement that this is not a state near death but rather “already dead” lingers long after closing the book. If one is alive but cannot feel that life, where can a new beginning be found?

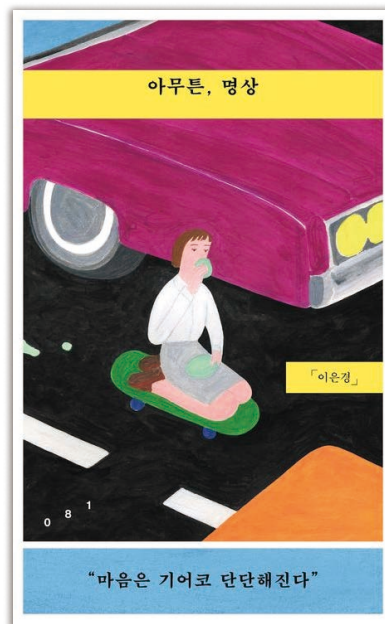
The book draws a line by placing another point next to the “dead point” of seclusion and isolation. This connected line then expands into a plane as it encounters reality. For the author, the process of writing this book was an act of learning rather than mere research. Instead of analyzing from a distance, she chose to stand closely beside her subjects. She repeatedly peered into these dead emotions without certainty of what she might find. At the end, the author closes the book while longing for her partner “Gaeguri”, who turned his back on the world. It is staggering to think of those who can no longer be reached even when their names are called, those quietly hiding or disappearing somewhere. Being faint does not mean being gone. Perhaps we can still reach them if we keep watching just a little

longer and never look away.

The 30s Perspective

Junhyuk Maeng, Publishing Editor

“I Am Sometimes Mediocre, Often Okay, and Occasionally Great”



Anyway, Meditation

What Does It Even Mean to Be Myself?

“I always felt a sense of suffocation whenever I heard the words ‘be yourself.’ What does being myself even mean? What if I am just a mediocre person? These questions surged within me.” (p. 127)

Seeing how the question “What does it mean to be myself?” remains unresolved even in adulthood, I sometimes think that we ask all of life’s essential questions in middle school and simply leave them there. While the world of content is flooded with the phrase “be yourself,” what does that actually look like? I am often cowardly, easily shaken, and prone to

comparing myself with others out of jealousy. At the same time, I loathe cowardice, long for integrity, and desire to maintain firm personal standards.

In these ambivalent feelings, we often try to identify the “real me.” Some decide that the “mediocre version” is the authentic self and try to find comfort by forcing a positive spin on those ugly emotions. However, the insight meditation provides in this book is much clearer. It is not about determining which version of “me” is real, but rather realizing that there is no fixed “self” to begin with.

Within the Flow of the Moment

The author also lived her life deeply concerned with the gaze of others, suffering from a sense of shame whenever she faced her inner depression and anger. Emotions were like waves that constantly crashed over her, and she struggled to avoid being swept away, often trying to endure by pretending to be a “decent person.” Through meditation, she reached this conclusion:

“Now I know. Being myself simply meant existing as the ‘me’ of each moment within the changing flow.”

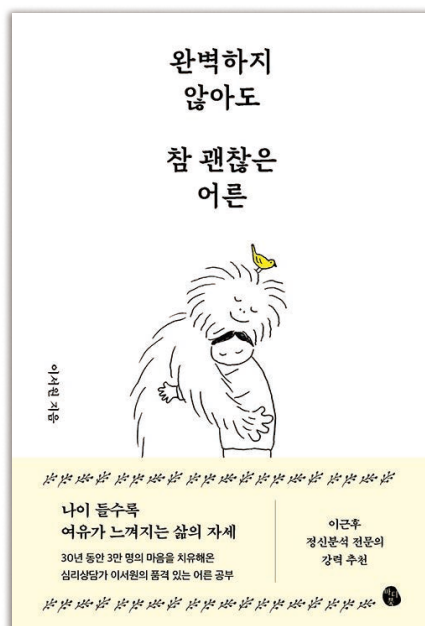
This sentence offered a strange sense of liberation. The realization that my existence is not fixed, but is instead like constantly flowing water. The “me” who is angry is still me, and the “me” who is peaceful is also me. Instead of denying or struggling to overhaul the “pathetic me,” I simply acknowledge and let the emotions pass by saying, “Ah, I am angry right now,” or “I am feeling jealous right now.” That is the method of handling emotions taught by meditation and the true meaning of “being oneself.”

In the book, the author gains the perspective of an “observer” who views themselves objectively. Seen through this lens, life is no longer a battlefield of emotions. It is okay to be inconsistent. We simply live our lives carrying the “me” of each moment within the ever-changing flow. And sometimes, that version of “me” is actually quite alright.

Anyway, Meditation does not tell you to tear yourself apart to become a better person. Instead, it tells you that it is okay to breathe exactly as you are, even when emotions are fluctuating. The power of meditation gained from this book is the affirmation of the entire flow, recognizing that excellence, deficiency, and ugliness all come together to create who I am.

The 40s Perspective

Mihyang Kim, Publishing Critic



Adulthood, Imperfect but Fine

In the Korean publishing market, “adulthood” has recently emerged as a significant trend in non-fiction. According to the article titled *On the*

Road Toward the End of 2025 (December 1, 2025), published in <K-Book Trends> Vol. 91 (February 2026) by the Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea (KPIPA), “adult” has become the most prominent keyword in the essay category. This phenomenon serves as an indicator that the concept of an “adult” has moved beyond a simple age classification. Instead, it reflects how contemporary Korean society is redefining maturity and the roles individuals are expected to play.

Ultimately, the core question is this: what kind of emotional management defines a mature person? In the traditional sense, an adult was understood as someone who restrains their emotions, remains unshaken, and bears responsibility. In this context, emotions were regarded as objects to be controlled or suppressed. However, recent discourse on adulthood is moving in a different direction. There is a growing recognition that a mature adult is someone who understands, coordinates, and handles their emotions responsibly. Adulthood is no longer defined by the absence of emotion, but is instead being redefined by how one perceives and manages those feelings.

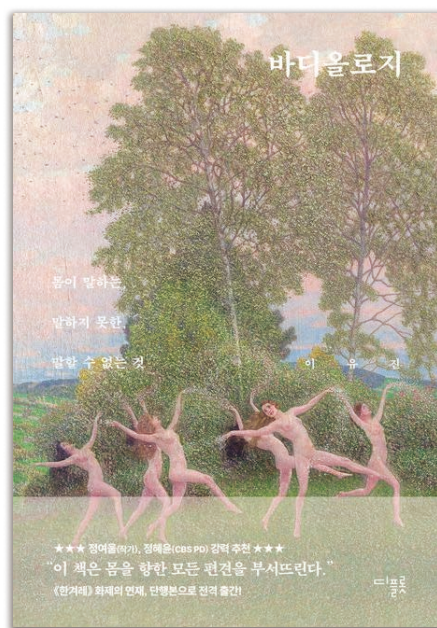
The book *Adulthood, Imperfect but Fine* is situated within this changing tide of discourse on maturity. It does not assume an adult to be a complete or finished being. Instead, it takes as its premise a state where emotions such as anxiety, jealousy, regret, and fatigue do not simply disappear. Under the recognition that all emotions are normal, the book suggests ways to understand and coordinate these feelings rather than suppressing them. In particular, the author emphasizes the ethics of relationships based on the premise of imperfection. While youth may be able to reorganize their social circles and the elderly may step back from certain responsibilities, middle-aged individuals occupy a position where they cannot easily sever

ties between the generation of their parents and that of their children. At this stage of life, performing duties while suppressing one's own emotions can easily lead to the exhaustion of these relationships. Conversely, an attitude that acknowledges one's own limitations while striving to sustain those ties makes long-term care and responsibility possible.

This book defines being an adult not as a stage of moral perfection, but as a way of handling emotions. By suggesting acceptance instead of perfection and coordination instead of suppression, this perspective reflects a generational shift in Korean society. At the same time, it poses a universal question to contemporary readers: What does it truly mean to be mature, and what emotional legacy will we leave for the next generation?

The 50s Perspective

Dongseok Jang, Literary Critic



Emotions are a product of the mind. However, they do not simply begin and end within the psyche; they inevitably manifest in the body in some form. It is a mistake to believe that the body and the mind exist as separate entities. In *Bodyology*, Lee Yu-jin, a journalist for the Hankyoreh who strives to be a “reporter by weekday and researcher by weekend,” tracks how emotions are expressed through the body, which has become a modern-day idol of sorts.

Just as the body changes with age, emotions also transform over time. Most immediately, when the body suffers from pain, the mind loses its sense of direction. Another crucial point to remember is that while every body belongs to an individual, it is also inherently social. This is a theme that *Bodyology* explores deeply. The body, though private, frequently captures the gaze of others. This gaze then shifts toward the person’s emotions and sometimes transforms the body into an object of desire. This has been true for the hips, for legs adorned under the name of “graceful curves,” and for the face as well. When people meet for the first time, they look at a face and guess what kind of person stands before them. Nowadays, people even compare faces to animals, using terms like “cat-like” or “dog-like.” Although there is no absolute standard for evaluating a face, people make arbitrary judgments of like and dislike based on their emotions. These preferences then expand on a social level. A representative example of this would be the faces and bodies of girl group members, which are infinitely consumed within Korean society.

Among the elements that make up the body, tears provide the most dramatic display of emotion. Until recently, tears were considered a yardstick of “humanity” that distinguished us from other animals. However, recent studies show that elephants weep in mourning and dogs may shed

tears of joy upon a reunion. Despite this, tears remain fundamentally human, as there are virtually no boundaries to the human teardrop when it comes to expressing the full spectrum of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. Yet, tears are sometimes mocked or trivialized. When celebrities or politicians shed tears of repentance after being caught in misconduct, the public often dismisses them as “crocodile tears.” Tears vividly demonstrate how emotions manifested through the body can be simultaneously private and social.

While the act of eating does not physically constitute the body itself, it is ultimately a part of both the body and the mind. Food often becomes an object upon which we project our desires. On the opposite end of the spectrum, fasting serves as a significant means of expressing resistance and protest—an embodiment of the dissenting mind. Although hunger strikes by politicians have now become subjects of sarcasm, the prison hunger strikes of independence activists or the fasting of early 20th-century British suffragettes to win the right to vote were noble expressions of the heart. As previously mentioned, the body vividly reflects the shifts within the mind. In other words, the movements of the mind are synonymous with the movements of the body. By traversing every corner of our physical form, Bodyology illustrates how each part of the body is intimately connected to our emotions. If you are curious about the movements of the mind or emotions, you should first observe the movements of the body.

Summary

Sollim Lee: The architecture of isolation in an era of disconnectedness; the sensory structure that statistics fail to capture

Junhyuk Maeng: The power of meditation to affirm every version of the self

Mihyang Kim: A book reminding us that a mature adult is one who understands their emotions, one who coordinates their emotions, and one who manages their emotions with responsibility

Dongseok Jang: The body as a result of the mind or emotions; a private yet social reality.

On the Japanese Publication of *Even a Corpse Is Fine - Just Stay by My Side: The Psychology of Evil and Loneliness*

Written by

Shô Deguchi

Shô Deguchi | Editor, Daiwashobo Publishing

Editor, Daiwashobo Publishing

My first encounter with this book happened during an exchange event with Korean publishers. When I reviewed the content, I immediately realized that it was a powerful work of nonfiction: a deep and unflinching examination of criminal psychology, written from the perspective of a professional profiler who had worked directly on real investigation scenes. This combination of universality and firsthand insight drew me in at once.

In Japan, each time a brutal crime makes headlines, public discourse quickly turns to the question: “Why did this happen?” Yet the psychological factors underlying such acts are rarely explored in depth. In that context, a book in which a field expert carefully unpacks the “psychology of evil” based on actual experience offers something genuinely meaningful to Japanese readers. That is why I strongly wished to take on the Japanese edition.



An introductory post for *I Want You to Stay by My Side, Even as a Corpse* posted on a Japanese X account.

The Japanese title, “*Even a Corpse Is Fine—Just Stay by My Side*,” comes from a statement made by one of the criminals featured in the book when speaking about his childhood. Although the expression is undeniably provocative, it reveals a profound loneliness and a distorted craving for affection. I felt it captured the essence of the entire work, and thus chose it as the title.

The response in Japan was remarkable. Even before the book’s release, an initial social media post announcing it received several thousand “likes.” After publication, a major Japanese online media outlet featured an excerpt, which reached the number-one position in its access rankings. Many readers commented that the book showed them “a world I had never known before.”

Indeed, the offenders’ words are selfish, unsettling, and filled with a level of isolation that refuses to let the reader remain in a psychological comfort zone. Yet I believe that very discomfort is the unique power of this book—and a testament to the strength of contemporary Korean nonfiction.

Perhaps Japan and Korea share certain underlying social anxieties or feelings of isolation. Whatever the case, I sincerely hope this book will continue to reach many readers as a work that connects audiences in both countries.

(Reference: Although posted from an account separate from Daiwashobo’s official one, a social-media announcement about the book received an especially strong reaction.)

Comfort Across Time: The Global Spotlight on K-Literature, Past, Present, and Future

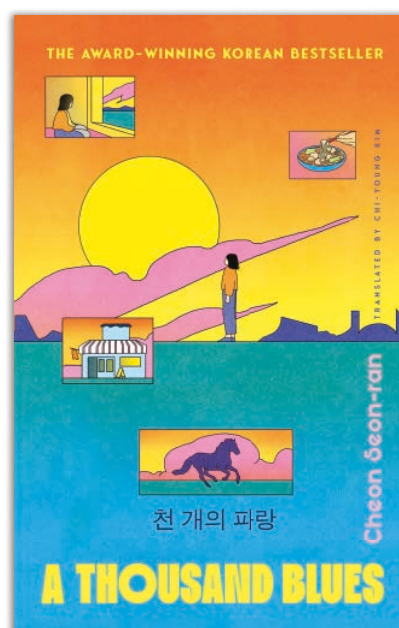
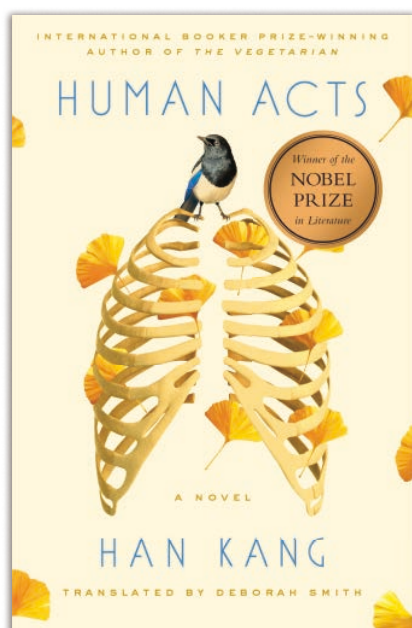
Written by

Bookyeosa

Bookyeosa | Book Content Creator

Bookyeosa is a prominent book influencer who shares the tenderness of literature with a community of 150,000 followers on Instagram. As an aspiring author preparing for her debut publication, she explores how the sentences on paper can beautifully transform daily life while delivering stories of healing and comfort.

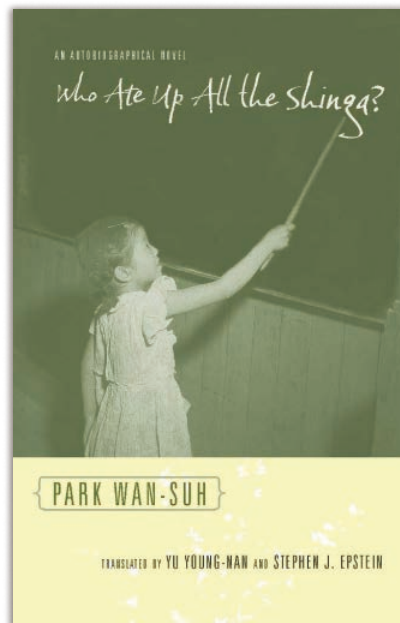
Korean culture is now transcending domestic production to become a core subject for major global studios, deeply embedding itself into the daily lives of people worldwide. This is evidenced by the global animation “K-Pop: Demon Hunters”, which dominated algorithms in 2025, and the film “Past Lives”, produced by the renowned Hollywood studio A24. The allure of K-Culture, which has captivated the global gaze, shines even more intensely within its literature. The 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature winner Han Kang’s *Human Acts* proved that the tragic scars of history are not exclusive to Koreans. Furthermore, Cheon Seon-Ran’s *A Thousand Blues*, which secured a film adaptation deal with Warner Bros. Pictures, demonstrated that kindness toward the marginalized resonates deeply with a global audience. However, the unique “emotion and healing” characteristic of Korean literature was not built overnight. There are masterpieces that have long walked alongside the lives of Koreans, quietly offering tenderness. Here, we introduce three beautiful works of Korean literature that provide unchanging solace regardless of the passage of time.



Human Acts, A Thousand Blues

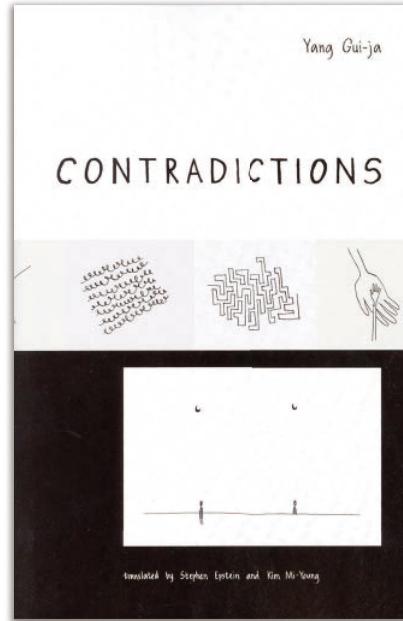
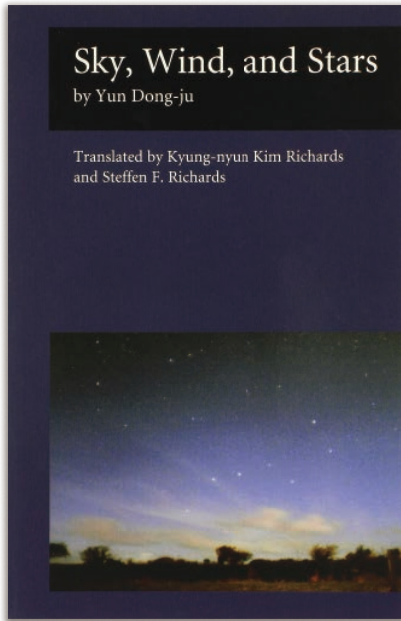
Sentences of Comfort That Transcend Generations

The first recommended book is *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* by Park Wan-suh. This work, which chronicles an individual's coming-of-age through the turbulent period of modern Korean history, is distinguished by the author's warm yet piercing gaze as she reflects on a wounded past. Its narrative, which embraces universal pain while transcending personal suffering, allows readers to experience a sense of healing that crosses national borders.



Who Ate Up All the Shinga?

The second recommendation is the posthumous poetry collection *Sky, Wind, and Stars* by Yun Dong-ju. The confessions of this young poet, who constantly reflected on himself to maintain purity even during a dark era of oppression, offer a clear and unwavering sense of comfort to modern readers navigating a complex world. His innocent heart, which understood the weight of shame, and his lyrical language, which counted the stars in the night sky, touch the deepest parts of the inner self across nationalities and generations.



Sky, Wind, and Stars / Contradictions

Lastly, I recommend *Contradictions* by Yang Gui-ja. This novel depicts a profound love for humanity, illustrating the spirit that compels us to keep living despite the inherent contradictions and absurdities of life. The process of intense contemplation and the subsequent choices made by the protagonist, An Jin-jin, serve as a deeply realistic and warm source of encouragement for our imperfect lives. It is a masterful guide to true growth, teaching us how to look our wounds in the eye and ultimately embrace them.

These three masterpieces, which already knocked on the doors of the international world through English translations in the early and mid-2000s, are more than worthy of being rediscovered amidst the wave of flashy, contemporary K-Content. The narratives of healing and solidarity passed down from the past are now being seamlessly inherited by the young authors of today. This is exemplified by Ysra's *The Age of Filiarch*, which is set for release in the English-speaking world following its success in Japan, Taiwan, and Italy, offering a delightful new take on

human solidarity. I hope these beautiful stories containing the most authentic Korean sentiments, along with the newly expanding narratives, will plant deep and resilient seeds of healing in the hearts of readers worldwide.



The Age of Filiarchy (left, Taiwan) 女大當家, (right, Japan) 家女長の時代

Book Funding: Getting Closer to Readers

Written by

Kim Hyo-sun

Kim Hyo-sun | Fiction and Poetry MD at Aladin

Author of *The Four Seasons of Oh Chun-sil*. She has been selling Korean fiction at online bookstores since 2010. During the day, she scouts for new titles to promote to readers, and at night, she immerses herself in the books she truly loves to read.

The landscape of the Korean book market has shifted significantly since the online bookstore Aladin launched its *Book Fund* in 2018. This crowdfunding style platform was designed specifically for the pre-promotion of new titles. By 2024, all three major online bookstores in Korea had integrated their own dedicated funding systems. This marketing strategy has now become so mainstream that it is considered a standard step for any Korean publisher preparing to release a new book.



Aladin Book Fund campaign example for *If We Can't Go at the Speed of Light*.

The funding systems of online bookstores offer a closer connection with readers than specialized crowdfunding platforms. Once the funding period ends and general sales begin, every reaction left by readers accumulates on the product page and serves as a catalyst for initial sales. Fans of specific genres, authors, or publishing houses eagerly participate in projects they

find appealing, such as long awaited translations, collector's editions, new releases, or re-covered editions. These fans often share news of the Book Fund through their social media channels and express their anticipation for the upcoming publication.

The image shows two examples of Aladin Book Fund campaign pages. The left page is for the book 'Four Daughters of Armian' (아르미안의 네 딸들) by Shin Il-sook. It features a red book set and text indicating it is a 20-volume set. The right page is for the book 'PASSION' (패션) by Yoo Ji, featuring a gold and red book set. Both pages display the current price, target price, and progress of the fund.

Left Page: 아르미안의 네 딸들 20권 세트

전설의 명작, 시대의 걸작
레트로판으로 복간!
<아르미안의 네 딸들 20권 세트>

123,800,800원, 849권 펀딩 / 목표 금액 3,000,000원

<아르미안의 네 딸들 레트로판 1~20 세트 - 전20권>으로 출간되었습니다. [책보기](#)

✓ 2020-12-01에 목표 금액을 달성했습니다.

* 본 북펀드는 출판사 요청에 따라 출판사 주관하에 진행됩니다.

스토리 구성 알라딘굿즈 유의사항 **응원댓글 83**

“그 시절 우리가 사랑했던 순정, 35년 세월을 거슬러 복원되다!”

Right Page: <패션> 완전판, 드디어 출간!

866,536,000원, 9,186권 펀딩 / 목표 금액 120,000,000원

<패션 완전판>으로 출간되었습니다. [책보기](#)

✓ 2021-12-29에 목표 금액을 달성했습니다.

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스토리 구성 알라딘굿즈 유의사항 **응원댓글 422**

첫 기획으로부터 2년이라는 긴 시간에 걸쳐 공동여 준비한 기획을 드디어 독자님들 앞에 선보이게 되어 기쁘게 생각합니다.
2006년 처음 세상에 나온 후로 많은 독자들과 사랑을 받아 온 유주지 작가의 <패션> 시리즈 전권을 한 권으로 묶은 완전판 도서입니다.

Aladin Book Fund campaign example for (Left) *Four Daughters of Armian* / (Right) *PASSION*.

Participants in a Book Fund support a publication by making an “investment” in the form of a purchase. Although several benefits are designed for customers, such as priority shipping, exclusive Book Fund merchandise, listing investor names in the first edition, and extra loyalty points for short reviews, the motivation for participating cannot be explained by rationality alone. In an era of early morning delivery that surpasses even same-day shipping, choosing to participate in a Book Fund and waiting a month for delivery would be difficult without a deep sense

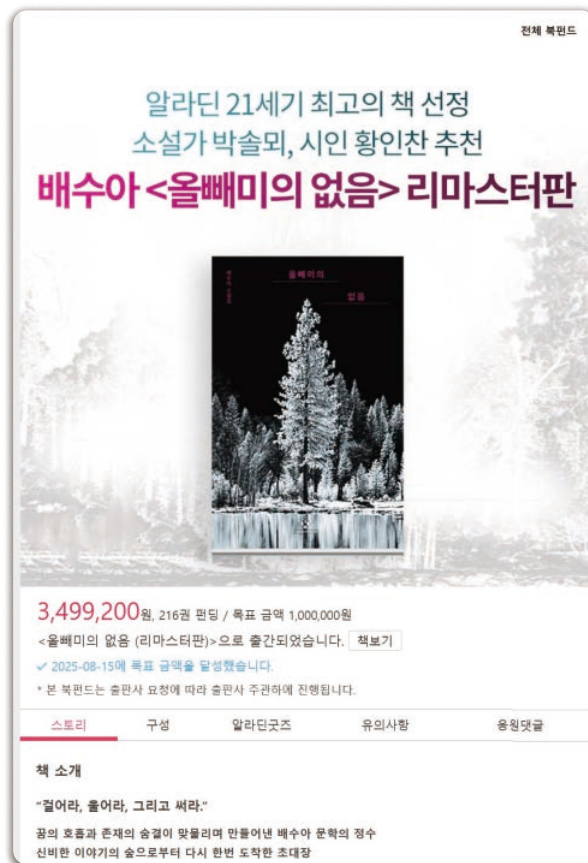
of devotion to the book.

The number of published copies, which had been declining every year since 2018, finally rebounded slightly (2.7%)* in 2024, thanks to author Han Kang winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. As the market narrows day by day, Korean publishing houses have been striving to bridge the gap with readers by operating social media and YouTube channels to overcome the situation. Even though the market faces challenges, the number of visitors to the 2025 Seoul International Book Fair reached 150,000, and local book fairs as well as independent publishing fairs are being operated successfully. Certain readers desire to get closer to books, and this intimacy is transformed into a heart of support.

In the Korean publishing industry, where the first printing of a new book typically consists of around 2,000 copies, starting with approximately 200 pre-orders through a Book Fund provides significant momentum. However, the even more powerful impact of a Book Fund is the tangible confirmation that readers are truly waiting for the book. The funding period usually lasts about a month and often overlaps with the final stages of publication. This allows publishers to feel the real-time reactions of expectant readers, giving them the drive to push forward toward the official release. The “support comment” section on the Book Fund page is specifically designed to foster this kind of virtuous cycle.

Running a Book Fund can also be a source of pressure because the support of each individual customer is measured daily through their purchase. If a publisher invests significant effort into preparing merchandise but receives an unexpectedly low number of orders, they may end up focusing all their energy on promoting the pre-marketing campaign itself rather

than the new book. For small organizations where small-batch production of various titles is common, this process can lead to the exhaustion of organizational resources. As the absolute number of books released through funding continues to grow, it has become difficult for first-time authors or publishers without an established fan base to capture attention through a sharp concept alone. For titles where a strong intimacy with readers has not yet been formed, proceeding directly to general sales may be a more effective choice.



Aladin Book Fund campaign example for *The Owl's Absence*.

I recently read the remastered edition of *North Station* (2025) by Bae Suah, which was published through the Aladin Book Fund. This first edition is a printed signed copy featuring an exotic postcard design on the endpapers. It includes a postcard with the author's handwritten text from

the title story, “The Owl,” as well as another postcard printed with the names of the Book Fund supporters. This book is special to me. I hope that these literary adventures continue to create books that add another layer of special memories for readers and allow us to build the momentous event of a book’s publication together.

*publishing production statistics from the Korean Publishers Association (2024)

(2025.05.22)

Darambooks Publishing: Approaching Korean Literature with a Fresh Perspective CEO Park Hye-jin, a Former News Anchor Turned Publisher

Interview by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

What is the unique charm found within a book? A journalist who once led the main news for South Korea's public broadcaster has embarked on a new challenge through books. This is the story of CEO Park Hye-jin, a former MBC news anchor. Darambooks is a house that communicates deeply with readers about the events and social phenomena that Korean society must not forget. Through CEO Park Hye-jin, we explore how Darambooks engages with the world and views society through its diverse catalog—from social issues seen through a journalist's lens to works of science fiction.



Darambooks Publishing's book booth



CEO Park Hye-jin

Q. What is the meaning behind the name “Darambooks,” and how is it reflected in your publishing direction?

Long ago, I watched a documentary about squirrels. A squirrel, with its cheeks full of acorns, buries them in the ground and leaves to find more. It repeats this same action for a long time. Thanks to those forgotten acorns, oak trees eventually grow from the spots where they were buried. It was a scene created by a beautiful forgetfulness.

Darambooks takes its name from this image of a squirrel (daramjui in Korean). I wanted to create books with the hope of gathering good stories like a squirrel collecting acorns and planting them quietly in people’s hearts, so that one day those stories might take deep root like oak trees.

I believe those who have experienced books as a source of comfort, courage, or a way to expand their understanding of themselves and others during certain periods of life naturally choose a life with books. If a

book from Darambooks can become such an “acorn seed” for someone, I could ask for nothing more.

Q. What motivated you, as a former journalist, to start running a publishing house?

Since leaving the media over a decade ago, I have been living as a freelance broadcaster and a publisher. By nature, my heart is easily moved by the stories of people and the world, and I tend to hold onto a story for a long time once it reaches me. I am the type of person who prefers to keep stories close and look into them slowly, reflecting on them repeatedly in my mind rather than letting them flow away.

Because of this, I wanted to continue those stories in my own way. I began to dream of a format that does not disappear easily and can endure across time, rather than the speed and immediacy inherent in broadcasting. I imagined records that are read slowly like catching one’s breath and stay with the reader at a deliberate pace. It seems that this desire naturally led me to the work of sharing stories through the medium of print and books.

Q. When Darambooks decides on which titles to publish, what are the three main criteria you consider, and why do you choose to publish those specific books?

I consider three main criteria to be important when making a book.

First is whether the “human” is placed at the center of the story. Rather than grand discourses or sensational subjects, I seek to publish stories where a single person’s life, emotions, choices, and dignity are clearly revealed.

Second is whether the book poses questions worth thinking about together. It is important that the theme is not a story with a predetermined answer, but one that leaves room for readers to contemplate and reason together.

Third is whether the book possesses an unconventional approach and “fun planning.” I aim for books that have the power to lead the reader to the very end through new perspectives and formats.

Under these criteria, Darambooks has published the following four books.



When We Call Her Name

This is an essay that records the life of the late Kim Bok-dong, who was a victim of the Japanese military “comfort women” system, a human rights activist, and a peace activist. Many who have suffered physical and mental violence without reason amidst historical tragedies are often buried and forgotten within the nameless group of “victims.” However, Kim Bok-dong was also an individual who was someone’s daughter and sister, and who could have been a wife and a mother. An investigative journalist PD directly

observed, covered, and recorded the life of Kim Bok-dong, who worked until the last day of her life to inform the world of the reality of the Japanese military “comfort women” and to ensure that there would never be another female victim of war. This book is not a heroic narrative, but the story of a human being who wanted her name to be called.



Even on Days When Love Feels Like Nothing

This is an essay that explores the lives of young people living in the challenging environment of Korean society. Today’s youth are often referred to as the “N-po generation” (the generation that gives up on N number of things) or the “hopeless generation,” and they sometimes self-deprecatingly label Korean society as “Hell Joseon.” Although the word “youth” originally signifies a green and ripening season, young people in reality seem to have become beings standing in a fading period rather than looking forward to the future. This book tells the story of a young person who affirms their own life, discovers small joys, and creates their own standards and direction even without a special title, a stable job, or

significant wealth. It was planned to focus on the attitude of respecting one's own life beyond negativity and pessimism.



A Family of One

This is an essay that highlights the changing forms of family amidst shifts in lifestyles and culture. In today's Korean society, where the number of single-person households has reached 9 million and accounts for 36.1% of all households, the definition of "family" is no longer defined solely by marriage and childbirth. An increasing number of people are choosing to live alone due to economic reasons, voluntary choice, or unavoidable circumstances. Nevertheless, the social gaze toward living alone remains unfamiliar and distorted, and it is easily reduced to a personal flaw. This book talks about how single-person households are also neighbors living while caring for their "family of one," and it honestly captures the joy and sorrow, freedom and loneliness of living alone.



Entanglement Series

This is a special anthology series of Korean short stories designed to embody the scientific concept of “entanglement” from quantum mechanics within literature. Although individuals may appear to live like isolated islands on the surface, from a cosmic perspective, we are beings who are connected and influence one another in invisible ways. This series artistically explores that sense of “entanglement” through the characters and events within the stories. Through the portrayal of lives that are both individual and connected, it aims to show how we live while constantly influencing each other in various ways.

Q. You publish a wide range of books, including novels and essays. Is there a specific message that Darambooks wishes to convey to Korean society through its books?

The books of Darambooks begin with a re-examination of individual lives that Korean society has often overlooked or simplified. In a society where speed and efficiency have become virtues, many voices often pass

by without being fully heard. Darambooks stops to listen to those stories and aims to fully record the complexity and uniqueness of a single person's life. We also gently pose a question to our readers about what a society would look like if it prioritized human voices and dignity over speed and performance. This is because we believe that even if people living in their respective places cannot fully understand one another, they can still possess a perspective that observes another person's life without easily judging it. We hope that staying in someone else's life through a book can become a small seed for understanding yet another life.

Q. Among the books published by Darambooks, which one would you most recommend to international readers?

It is the essay *It's Okay to Hate My Mother* by author Kim Yun-dam.

This book captures the process of the author, who experienced emotional abuse from parents within the home during childhood, passing through a long period of darkness to stand again as a healthy mother and member of society. Late last year, the publishing rights for this book were exported to a major Polish publishing house, gaining recognition for its universal message and narrative power abroad.

Physical and emotional violence or abuse occurring within the home are often treated as strictly personal family matters and rarely surface outside of society. Especially in Korean society, where filial piety (hyo) is regarded as an important value, the act of resenting parents or raising issues is easily viewed as unethical. As a result, the responsibility for the wounds is often turned back onto the children. Many people live their entire lives carrying such pain and trauma.

The author of this book does not avoid the wounds that could be considered

weaknesses or shames, but looks into the deepest parts and confesses honestly. Then, as if to prove that the gaze of parents and society was wrong, she chooses to lead a more diligent and healthy life on her own. This book is not a mere record of accusation or anger, but a narrative of recovery of a human being who rescues herself from her wounds.

In a reality where parents are beings as vast as the universe yet at the same time can become a bond that is difficult to escape, I would like to recommend this book to everyone who wishes to rise resolutely from those bonds and live their own lives. I believe *It's Okay to Hate My Mother* is a book that goes beyond the story of a specific culture and can share universal questions about family, wounds, and recovery with readers around the world.



It's Okay to Hate My Mother

Q. In what way do you hope Darambooks will be positioned in the publishing industry in the future? If you could define the identity of Darambooks in a single word, what would it be?

I would like to say “Courage.” The books that Darambooks wants to create are those that offer the courage to live as oneself in one’s own place, rather than presenting grand success or definitive answers. I am talking about the courage to speak up against lies and injustice, the courage to face uncomfortable and painful history without looking away, and the courage to not recklessly compare one’s life with that of others.

Furthermore, I want to convey the courage to protect one’s own thoughts without being easily swayed even when holding a different opinion from the majority, the courage to allow oneself to be okay without “becoming” something specific, and the courage to believe that one can be sufficiently happy even within the small joys of life.

I would be happy if Darambooks is remembered as a publishing house that quietly but clearly encourages such forms of courage through its books.

Lee Kkock-nim: The Voice of Teenagers, Illuminating the Shadows of Adolescent Anxiety and Loneliness Through Fiction

Interview by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Lee Kkock-nim | Novelist

Lee Kkock-nim is a South Korean YA novelist known for page-turning stories loved by countless readers. She confronts social issues with clarity while delivering gripping plots. Her books are consistent bestsellers, with rights sold in more than ten countries.

There is a literary writer for the future of Korean literature who embraces the anxiety and loneliness of adolescents and the hearts of children. She won the Grand Prize at the Munhakdongne Young Adult Literature Award for *I Will Cross the World to Get to You*. We would like to hear the story of author Lee Kkock-nim, an icon of Korean young adult literature who wrote *The Girl You Want to Kill*, *The Girl You Want to Kill 2*, *A Bite of Summer*, *Of Course I Like You*, *Luck is Coming Your Way*, and *One night When I Wasn't There*.



Author Lee Kkock-nim

Q. Your works are loved not only in Korea but also in various cultural spheres. What do you think is the power that allowed your novels to cross borders and move the hearts of readers?

I was invited to the Mantova Festivaletteratura(Book Festival) in Italy last year, and I heard that *I Will Cross the World to Get to You* is read there as a book for mothers and daughters together. I also heard many stories about

mothers and daughters with strained relationships reconciling after giving this book to each other as a gift. I realized that even if cultures are different, the emotions experienced during adolescence, such as anxiety, loneliness, family relationships, and friendships, are similar. In particular, because readers can each imagine characters a little differently in a novel, they seem to think of it more as “my story.” I think it is truly an amazing thing that literature becomes a new method of communication and a way to convey one’s heart. It was a boundless honor that the novels I wrote were part of the process of conveying hearts.



*Book Signing Event
at the Mantova Festivaletteratura, Italy*



One night When I Wasn't There

Q. Was there a particular reason you started writing young adult literature?

It was when I was a high school student that I began to dream of becoming a writer. At that time, I thought my life was unhappy in every aspect. If you were to ask if that was actually the case, of course, it was not. There was

only a tiny bit of misfortune like a speck of dust amidst tremendous luck. However, I was going through a foolish puberty, and therefore I took the luck I had for granted. It is an embarrassing thing. But at that time, I quite seriously confined myself within a fence of misfortune and hated myself. Since my heart was lonely, I went to the school library looking for a place with few people. No matter where I looked in the school, there was no place with fewer people than the library. At that time, high school students had night self-study until 10 PM, and everyone was busy only with studying, so they did not seem to come to the library to read books.

I did not like books very much, but it was awkward to just sit still in the library, so I started reading. That nurtured my dream. The reason I fell for novels and started nurturing the dream of becoming a writer was because of the countless lives within the books. There were truly so many lives. I could understand the inner thoughts of many people that cannot be known unless spoken, and there were painful lives that I had never even imagined. As I read books, countless hours of reflection and emotion, as well as hours of interest and excitement, passed by.

In my senior year of high school, I was a child somewhat distant from writing, to the extent that my teacher asked back what I was talking about when I said I wanted to be a writer. When the teacher asked back, I just scratched my head and replied that it was nothing, and that I just did not know well what I wanted to become. I think even I thought it was a bit out of the blue.

I somehow made it to the Department of Creative Writing, but I realized that I was just sitting there blankly among talented peers. I thought that going to the Department of Creative Writing would mean they would teach me how to write a novel just like they teach the multiplication tables,

but that was not the case. Since there are no right answers in writing, there were no miraculous ways of writing. There was nothing else but to sit steadily and wrestle with writing, and to write and write again even if you get exhausted.

To be honest, at that time, I only dreamed of becoming a “writer” and did not even think about what kind of pieces I should write. I just wanted to be a writer without even setting a direction. However, I simply did not know how on earth I was supposed to write a novel. The answer I heard most often was to read many books. So I think I practically lived in the school library every day. I borrowed books from the library and read them frantically. If you were to ask if I engaged in deep reading, I would answer “well,” but if you ask if I found something there, I can answer “yes.”

I discovered a book called *Wandeuki* there. Honestly, when I first saw *Wandeuki*, I wondered why a comic book was stuck on the shelf. I remember reading the entire book right where I stood while lightly flipping through it to change my mood. Wait, what is this? Why is it so fun and lovely? What is this? While standing there blankly and blinking my eyes, I realized that I was smiling. After finding out that it was the winner of the 1st Young Adult Literature Award started by Changbi, I searched the internet to find out what young adult literature was.

At that time, I did not even know that young adult literature existed. I only recognized that there were broadly novels, poetry, and children’s literature. That was partly because of my ignorance, but also because the proportion of young adult literature within the overall literature of our country was that low. When I said I wanted to do young adult literature, even the professors told me, half-jokingly and half-seriously, why I was trying to take

such a difficult path. I still remember it. They said things like, “Living as a novelist is a difficult thing. People do not read books much. But teenagers read even less. Are you still going to do young adult literature?” Since it is literature for teenagers, but the main readership does not read books, it was actually a path that was difficult beyond measure. Still, I wanted to do it. I thought that even if many people do not read what I write, if one teenager who is going through a lonely and difficult time like I did is comforted, realizes that there are more lives out there, and begins to dream of the future, that would be enough.

Life is truly mysterious. When I see that the emotions of those days, when I used to resentfully wonder why I was always so solitary and lonely while going through a difficult adolescence, have now become the greatest nourishment for writing novels.

Q. Please tell us what you think are the characteristics of young adult literature. What kind of influence can young adult literature have on readers?

I believe the most prominent characteristic of young adult literature is that its readership is not limited to teenagers. It attracts a wide range of readers, from 10-year-old children who love reading and seek stories beyond children’s literature, to adolescents, and even adults. Parents who wish to read and share conversations with their children, as well as teachers who read to use the books as classroom materials, also look for young adult literature.

In a sense, it encompasses a balanced audience of future teenagers, current teenagers, and those who were teenagers in the past. While a book read by

everyone from children to adults sounds wonderful in theory, but in reality, it is actually a challenging aspect for a writer. Since the way past, present, and future generations perceive adolescence differs slightly, and the generational gap ranges from a few years to several decades, it is difficult to persuade and connect with all these readers.

The influence that young adult literature has on readers is undoubtedly “understanding” and “communication.” I have met many adult readers who said they enjoyed communicating and sharing stories with their children who have reached adolescence while reading books together. To be honest, I felt a bit moved to tears. In the past, many parents were heartbroken because communication with their teenage children was cut off, but seeing so many parents today actively striving to understand adolescents really touched my heart.

Conversely, teenage readers have also begun to understand the circumstances of adults. They come to realize that they can somewhat understand the process of how adults change or the reasons why they had no choice but to act a certain way. As it becomes “my” story, “my family’s” story, and “my friend’s” story, and eventually “our school’s” story, it reaches the hearts of readers. Watching people try to understand each other more and share more stories, I could feel that young adult literature has moved closely into the lives of readers.

Q. Your novels are set to communicate with readers in new ways through other media, such as dramas, moving beyond the books themselves. Please share your thoughts on this.

I Will Cross the World to Get to You is being made into a drama, and *A Bite*

of Summer is coming out as a movie, a drama, and even a webtoon. Honestly, it still does not feel real. At first, I was so excited that I could not even sleep at the thought of my books being adapted into visual media. But now, I am waiting a bit more calmly and keeping my mind at ease. In fact, besides these books, other titles had their film and drama productions confirmed and even went through the contracting process, only to have the productions fall through a few years later. I have learned that I should accept everything calmly until the results are actually out.

Nevertheless, the fact that my stories appear attractive not only to teenage readers but also to those who create visual media is quite thrilling. I am also curious about how much the stories will change or stay the same as they are transformed into visual media. After all, novels and visual media are such different areas.

Q. Lastly, is there a message you would like to convey to your many readers, including the teenage readers who read your novels? Please share a few words for those who love you and your work.



Celebrating 1 Million Copies Sold

I do not see the world as only beautiful. On the other hand, I do not see only its ugly side either. I believe that while there are countless good and righteous people who sustain the world, there are also countless dark and twisted people who throw it into chaos. Because of this, the stories I write sometimes move between extremes. While some novels are full of individualists, others are filled with a sense of community. At times I view the world cynically and coldly, while at other times I view it with warmth and cherish it.

When I write a novel, I do not write to convey just one side to my readers. This is because I still do not know the “right answer” to living life, and I do not know what kind of life is the most proper one myself. I simply practice the act of “looking.” I look at a single scene, imagine the stories behind it, and write them down.

Some teenage readers look at an unhappy protagonist and ask why the characters in the book are so miserable, saying they do not have a single friend like that around them. On the other hand, there are readers who look at the same unhappy protagonist and tell me that it is a “fake misery,” claiming that far more terrible things happen countless times in their actual surroundings. Whenever I hear such stories, I think about how so many teenagers still believe that only the things happening around them are the truth. In fact, countless unbelievably warm things happen in the world, and conversely, countless events far more cruel than the terrible things in novels occur as well.

I want to be a writer who conveys the stories of countless people living many different lives. To every reader who picks up my books, I want to say that this is what life is—that there are infinite lives we do not know of and lives we cannot possibly understand. By looking at all those different lives,

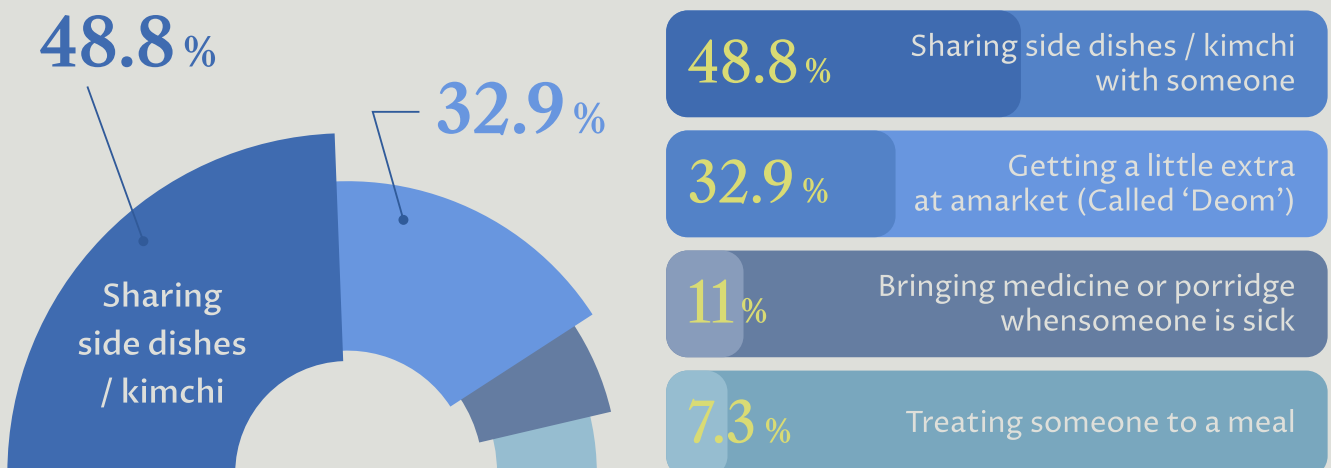
we eventually come to understand others. In that way, I want to support the lives of my teenage readers, who still have countless days ahead of them. So, I want to tell them that even if it is hard and even if you get exhausted, keep taking one step at a time, for wonderfully sunny days are waiting for you.

Chopsticks That Move Before Words, Jeong (情)

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Q. Which scene best shows Korea's relationship culture, "Jeong"?



When we asked, “What scene comes to mind when you think of the Korean sentiment of Jeong?”, the most frequent answer was “sharing side dishes or kimchi” (48.8%). This result clearly shows that Korean Jeong is revealed not through grand words or declarations, but rather first through the consideration practiced quietly at the dining table. Warm words such as “Eat more” or “You like this, don’t you?” are certainly important, but there are moments when the heart is delivered even more vividly. Small movements, such as the act of gently pushing a side dish bowl closer so someone can easily reach it with their chopsticks, the act of silently serving another portion of kimchi so it does not run out, or the act of repositioning a soup bowl before it gets cold, make relationships warm. Because it is a culture where the hands express the heart before words, Korean Jeong often remains as “an emotion that is difficult to explain but is immediately understood once experienced.”

The book *Recipes for My Daughter* by author Gong Ji-young captures that very point in a very everyday manner. In this book, “recipes” do not just mean ways of cooking, but are a method of taking care of oneself when the heart collapses and a way of passing that care on to someone else. It is easy to say “The harder the day, the better you should eat,” but in reality, a meal is often the first thing to be given up in the face of an exhausted mind. However, this book approaches the moment just before that surrender and suggests dishes that are possible within a short time (10 to 15 minutes) rather than a grand banquet. While the food is being prepared, it tells stories of life in a quiet, steady voice, giving the feeling of saying, “It is okay, this is enough for now.” It is a book that offers comfort at the pace of daily life, sometimes with ingredients left in the refrigerator and other times with ingredients easily found at a grocery store.



Recipes for My Daughter

The reason this book feels even more special is that, as the title suggests, it is clearly directed to “my daughter,” yet the message contained within actually reaches every “someone.” We are all someone’s daughter or son, and at the same time, someone’s friend, colleague, or neighbor. Ultimately, the emotion of Jeong does not stay only within the family, but gradually spreads out through everyday relationships. The act of sharing side dishes at the dining table shows that spreading in the easiest way. This is because the heart that says “I am taking care of you” can be expressed through a small plate instead of grand words.

This book is very similar to your voting results of “Jeong equals sharing side dishes and kimchi.” Jeong is not a grand event, but a heart that prevents one from giving up on a meal even on a difficult day, and a heart that ensures that meal is not eaten alone. Sometimes, while preparing long and perfect words to comfort someone, we end up unable to do anything at all. However, the Korean dining table speaks in a different way. “Just sit down.” “Just eat.” And the true meaning of those words is usually close to “You are

not alone.” The scene of sharing side dishes and kimchi is the most everyday way of putting that message into practice.

Why not choose one favorite menu from this book, make at least one side dish, and share it with a friend? It does not have to be a grand dish to be enough. Just a single sentence like “I made a little more because I thought of you” or “I thought it would be nice to eat together,” along with a small bowl, can be a great example of explaining Korean Jeong. Perhaps the easiest way to explain Korean Jeong is not to look for a difficult definition, but to create the experience of sharing a spoonful together.

Lastly, in your culture, what action naturally comes to mind when expressing “care” or “affection” through food? It could be any form, such as serving food to someone else first, packing leftovers to take home, or handing someone a warm drink. I believe your answers will become another “language of Jeong.”

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

Memories of Cherry Blossoms and Spring for a Week

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

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“On the way home, under the long-stretching branches of a cherry blossom tree. There you were.”



Way Back Love

Spring, the season when winter passes and new life is born, and the months of March and April in Korea are full of excitement waiting for cherry blossoms. Writing that captures life and longing is perhaps the most practical form of writing. Is there anything more important than life and people? The time spent with family, partners, and friends under the cherry blossoms will live on for a long time in a corner of one's memory. In that sense, the first full-length novel by author Seo Eun-cha, *Way Back Love*, is a fantasy novel but could also be a type of practical guide to life.

Way Back Love is a novel that focuses on the story of Hui-wan's first love, Ram-u, who died a long time ago and returns as a grim reaper to visit her, making readers look back on the birth and preciousness of family and what love is, centering on Hui-wan, Ram-u, and their families. In the novel, Ram-u creates the will to live for Hui-wan, who has lost her motivation for life, with a bucket list such as a cherry blossom festival date.

It is a novel that quickly unfolds a time like a spring miracle experienced by the protagonist Hui-wan from the perspectives of various characters with a short breath resembling a web novel. Centering on the fulfillment of the spring bucket list by Hui-wan and Ram-u, each chapter focuses on the stories of individual characters. It is a good novel to read in spring, a season when there is much to do but also a time to strengthen one's will for the year with a new mind.

Did the author set the story against the backdrop of spring, when new leaves sprout and cherry blossoms bloom magnificently, for a new will to live? Like Hui-wan, who finds the will to live during a week when cherry blossoms are in full bloom even while facing death, someone might find a new meaning of life in spring and spend the year meaningfully. Among various memories of spring, what is the magical memory of a spring day that you have experienced?

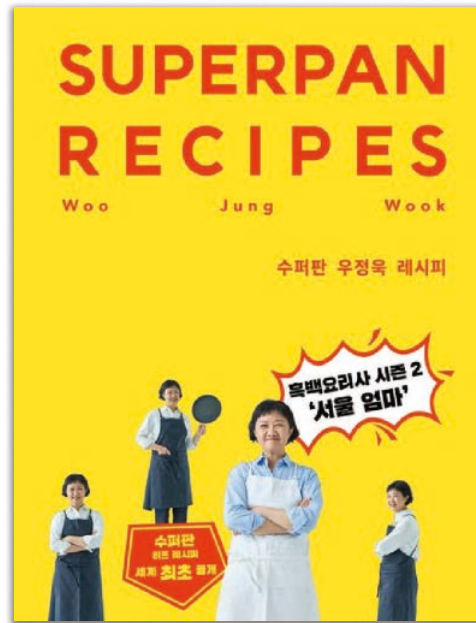
Netflix <Culinary Class Wars 2> “Seoul Mom” Cookbook

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.



SUPERPAN Recipes

Netflix <Culinary Class Wars 2> contestant Chef Woo Jung-wook, who appeared as the “Black Spoon” nicknamed “Seoul Mom” and presented Seoul-style home cooking, has released a recipe book containing her culinary life. Chef Woo left a profound impression on Culinary Class Wars by winning the Pohang monkfish battle against “White Spoon” Chef Jung Ho-young with her “Spicy Braised Monkfish.” The nickname “Seoul Mom” is a special name for her. After being unable to have children for about 15 years after marriage and spending those days in tears, the production team gave her the title “Seoul Mom.” She says that she feels deeply moved just by the fact that many people who watched the broadcast call her “Seoul Mom,” and she feels as though she has been compensated for her lonely years. Seoul is the hometown of Chef Woo and the foundation where her family has lived for four generations. Her cooking skills come from her maternal lineage. Her maternal great-great-aunt worked in the royal kitchen, and her mother, who inherited the culinary talent of her grandmother, made food for 700 people every week at a church for 10 years. Her father was a gourmet who was so sincere about food that he went on pilgrimages to

famous restaurants in Seoul with his family. To her, cooking is family, friends, and memories.

Chef Woo Jung-wook opened SUPERPAN, a Korean dining restaurant specializing in Seoul-style home cooking recipes, after gaining recognition as a cooking instructor in Daechi-dong and Ichon-dong, Seoul. *SUPERPAN Recipes* is filled with her culinary life and hit recipes. The book is full of memories about food and people, such as her mother's culinary touch, the dishes her father-in-law enjoyed, and the menus that moved her husband. The composition of *SUPERPAN Recipes* reflects her kindness and attentiveness well. It provides detailed guidance on ingredient preparation as well as her own secrets for creating the clean and deep flavors unique to Seoul-style home cooking.

In the book, a banquet of Chef Woo's style of cooking that brings out the flavors of Seoul unfolds, including the most popular menu at SUPERPAN, seorithae (black soybeans) mascarpone, as well as dried radish greens risotto, croaker bulgogi, royal court tteokbokki with dried vegetables, and mugwort terrine. Woo Jung-wook is not stubborn and enjoys applying new ingredients or cooking methods, and she constantly strives to create her own unique flavors within them. She completes wonderful recipes like royal court cuisine even with a single vegetable, and she tames tough ingredients to become soft so that the original taste of the ingredients can be felt. The table settings that convey temperature, flavor, and aroma are impressive, featuring steamed shredded squid, soft beef top blade jeon, autumn radish soup, and beef aralia elata jeon. For those who are curious about the heartfelt home-style recipes of "Seoul Mom" shown in <Culinary Class Wars 2>, *SUPERPAN Recipes* is highly recommended.

New Spring, Books Worth Your Attention


Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

As we approach the spring of 2026, the bestseller charts for the second week of February once again demonstrated the enduring power of fiction, with novels claiming six of the top ten spots. For our 2026 feature, we move beyond the digital sphere to focus on brick-and-mortar bookstores, where readers can personally browse the shelves, feel the texture of the printed type, and choose their books through a physical encounter.

In South Korea, major franchises occupy the majority of the physical bookstore market. Currently, four main franchises—Kyobo Book Centre, Youngpoong Bookstore, Jongno Books, and Arc N Book—are in competition. We intend to examine the top ten books across these locations, starting with Kyobo Book Centre, which holds the largest number of branches, followed by Youngpoong, Jongno, and Arc N Book. To begin, we analyzed the Kyobo Book Centre bestseller list for the second week of February 2026.





In February 2026, the memoir of the late Lee Hae-chan, Executive Vice-Chair of the Peaceful Unification Advisory Council who passed away last January, recorded the highest sales. Fiction also showed remarkable strength, with novels such as the Japanese work *Goethe Said Everything*, singer-songwriter Hanroro’s *Grapefruit Apricot Club*, and Yang Gui-ja’s *Contradictions* entering the bestseller charts. Additionally, two books in the business and economics sector climbed the list, reflecting the current investment fever in South Korea.

| Kyobo Book Centre Bestseller List: Second Week of February 2026 | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Rank | Cover | Title / Author / Publisher / Genre |
| 1 |  | <i>The Memoir of Lee Hae-chan</i> |
| | | Lee Hae-chan |
| | | Dolbegae |
| | | Politics/Society |

Kyobo Book Centre Bestseller List: Second Week of February 2026

| Rank | Cover | Title / Author / Publisher / Genre |
|------|---|---|
| 2 |  | <p><i>The Art of Spending Money</i></p> <p>Morgan Housel</p> <p>Seosamdok</p> <p>Business/Economics</p> |
| 3 |  | <p><i>Goethe Said Everything</i></p> <p>Yui Suzuki</p> <p>Leaf</p> <p>Fiction</p> |
| 4 |  | <p><i>Grapefruit Apricot Club</i></p> <p>Hanroro</p> <p>Authentic</p> <p>Fiction</p> |
| 5 |  | <p><i>Minimum Economic Study to Survive the Era of Capitalism</i></p> <p>Baek-eok-nam (Kim Uk-hyeon)</p> <p>Highest</p> <p>Business/Economics</p> |
| 6 |  | <p><i>Contradictions</i></p> <p>Yang Gui-ja</p> <p>Ssuda</p> <p>Fiction</p> |

Kyobo Book Centre Bestseller List: Second Week of February 2026

| Rank | Cover | Title / Author / Publisher / Genre |
|------|---|------------------------------------|
| 7 |  | <i>The Use of History</i> |
| | | Choi Tae-seong |
| | | Frontpage History/Culture |
| 8 |  | <i>I Said Goodbye</i> |
| | | Kim Ae-ran |
| | | Munhakdongne Fiction |
| 9 |  | <i>My Perfect Funeral</i> |
| | | Jo Hyeon-seon |
| | | Book Romance Fiction |
| 10 |  | <i>Honmono</i> |
| | | Seong Hae-na |
| | | Changbi Fiction |

Pohang: The Landmarks That Inspired the Life and Literature of Bora Chung

Written by

Kang Buwon

Kang Buwon | Author, Professor at Sungkyunkwan University

Kang Bu-won is a researcher and critic specializing in the intersections of literature, history, technology, and culture. As a member of the Humanities Cooperative, he remains active across various spheres, including academia, public squares, cities, and local communities. He also contributes regular columns and essays to diverse writing platforms such as <9oc>, <alookso>, and <To Be Continued>.

Pohang, the City Beloved by a Master of Sci-Fi

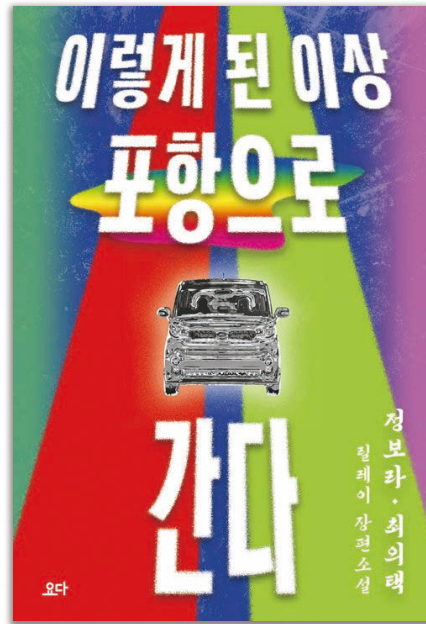
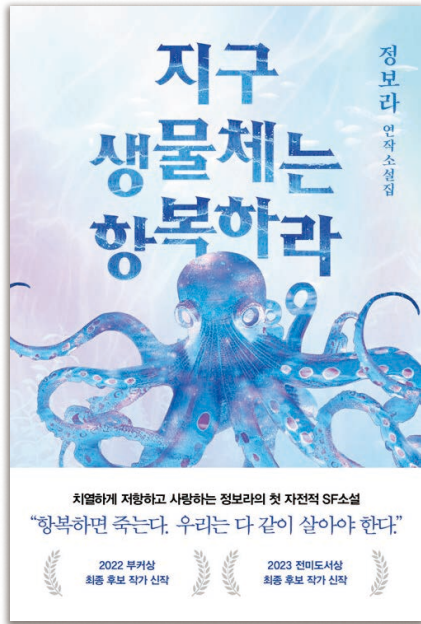
Bora Chung is one of Korea's most prominent science fiction writers. Her short story collection, *Cursed Bunny*, was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2022, and her work *Your Utopia* reached the finals of the Philip K. Dick Award in 2025. Pohang is the city dearest to Chung's heart. It provides her with abundant sci-fi imagination and a vibrant energy for life. Originally a lifelong resident of Seoul, the author moved to Pohang five years ago following her marriage. Now, Pohang has become her new sanctuary, a space of both life and art where she continues to craft her brilliant science fiction works.



<What happens when Pohang and science fiction meet? Author Bora Chung lives in Pohang>
©Pohang MBC

Bora Chung expresses her ambition to “transform Pohang into a city of science fiction.” After experiencing the diverse natural landscapes and sites that define Pohang's unique character, she has been actively incorporating these feelings of awe into her sci-fi works. Representative examples include *Surrender*, *Earthlings* and *In That Case, We Go to Pohang*,.

Pohang is a city where nature, humanity, and technology are harmoniously intertwined. It is a singular space where industrialized artifacts coexist with the deep blue sea and mountains bathed in lush greenery. Chung shares that the distinct senses and scenery of Pohang have allowed her to see the world through a different lens.



Surrender, Earthlings / In That Case, We Go to Pohang

The Unique Nature and Spaces of Pohang

① Songdo Beach

The name Songdo means “Pine Tree Island.” It is a mystical place where the forest and the sea converge within the city. In her 2022 work *Shark*, Songdo Beach is described as follows: “It is a place where the sea lies right beside a pine forest. Upon stepping out of the lush green woods, a pure white sandy beach unfolds, beneath which a brilliant blue sky opens up. The azure sea, merging with the sky, rolls endlessly, offering a fresh sense of wonder as if one has been transported to another dimension in an instant.”



Panoramic view of Songdo Beach ©Pohang City Hall



Sunrise at Homigot seen beside the “Hands of Harmony” ©Pohang City Hall

② Homigot

Homigot is the sharpest eastern point on the map of the Korean Peninsula. It is the place where the sun rises earliest in Korea. It is especially famous for

the giant paired sculptures named “Hands of Harmony,” which stand in the center of the plaza and the middle of the sea. Upon seeing the dynamic octopus sculpture at Homigot Sunrise Plaza, the author was inspired to conceive a science fiction work warning of an ecological crisis beneath the ocean.

③ Guryongpo

Guryongpo is a port village steeped in the legend of nine dragons ascending to heaven. It serves as an emotional anchor for the people of Pohang and is highly accessible, even by city bus. During the early 20th century, Guryongpo was a major residential area for Japanese settlers, and today, the “Japanese House Street” has been preserved as a modern cultural heritage site. The author affectionately refers to the Haetae statue on the hills of Guryongpo as the “Guryongpo Kitty.” The view of the Pohang sea from the top of the Guryongpo hill is both beautiful and breathtakingly vast.



The Nine Dragons Sculpture at Guryongpo Sculpture Park ©Gyeongnam Maeil News

④ Jukdo Market

Jukdo Market is the perfect place to experience the daily life and culture of the people of Pohang. It is always brimming with vitality and the bustling noise of tourists and locals alike. Within the market, there are many foreign workers and an abundance of seafood brought in from distant waters, such as the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean. In this sense, Jukdo Market is one of the most international spaces in Pohang. The author even included a scene in her work where crabs, octopuses, and fish in restaurant fish tank converse with one another in Russian, worrying about the impending crises facing the Earth and the sea.



Panoramic view of Jukdo Market ©Gyeongbuk Ilbo

⑤ POSCO (Pohang Steelworks)

POSCO is the heart of Pohang and the engine that symbolizes Korea's industrialization. Thanks to POSCO, Pohang has become the world's leading steel production hub. It stands as a testament to how much a single enterprise can transform a city's history and culture. These massive

industrial facilities, whose scale exceeds the bounds of human imagination, provide immense inspiration to those seeking harmony between technology, humanity, and nature. Through the night view of POSCO, one can experience the grandest sense of mystery that man-made structures can possibly create.



The night view of POSCO ©Pohang Ilbo



Pohang Landmark Map ©The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.