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Spaces in K-Books

K-BOOK TRENDS



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The Place Where BTS Sang... K-Novels Portraying Gwanghwamun, “The Most Iconic Part of Seoul”

Written by

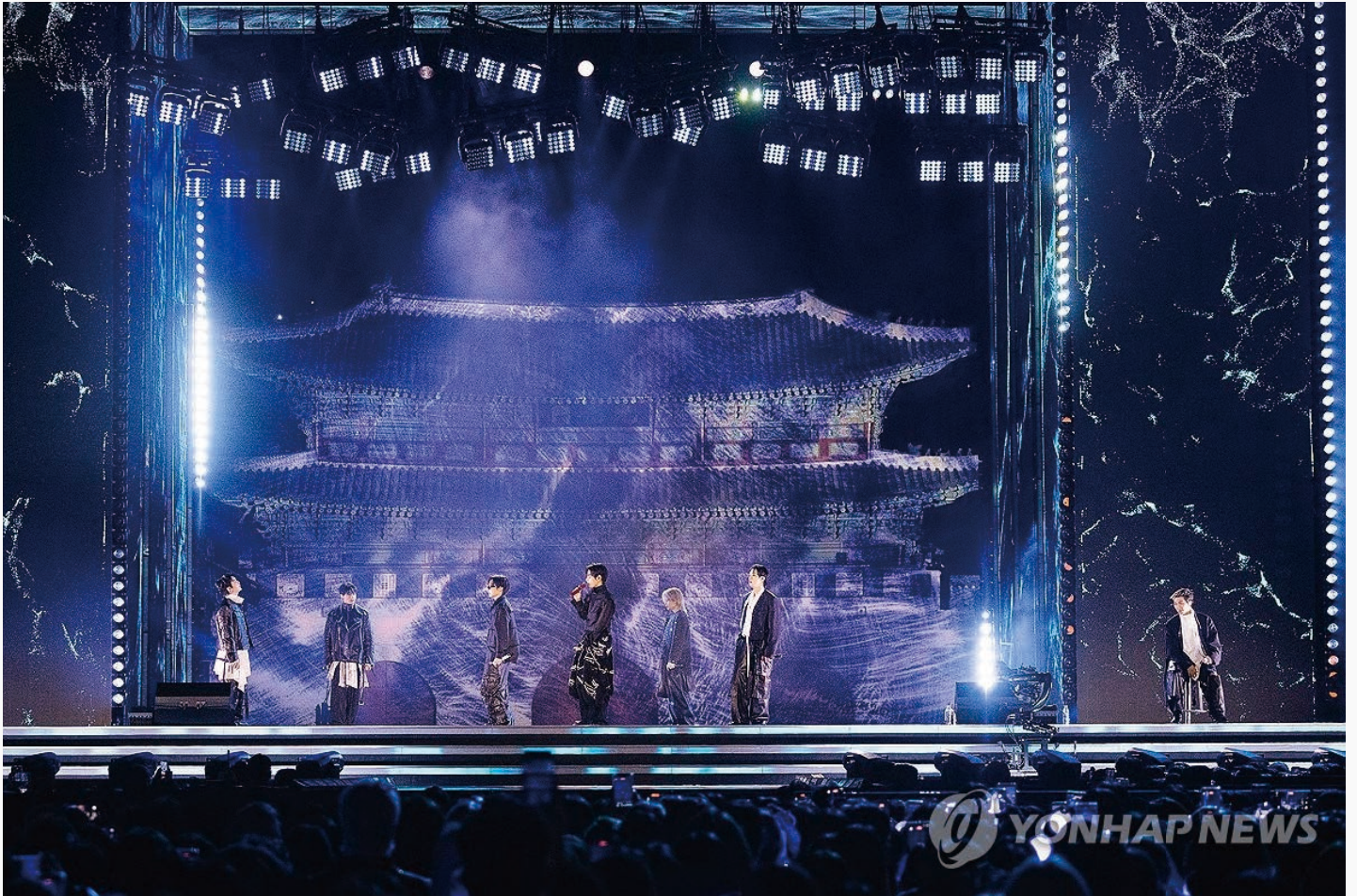
Eunseo Koo

Eunseo Koo | A Reporter at The Korea Economic Daily

As a reporter for The Korea Economic Daily, she has covered domestic and international publishing trends and major new releases. She is the author of *Classics with a Reason*, a book that explores the enduring charm and value of timeless literary classics.

The Hub of Corporate Life and a Witness to History

On March 27, 2026, the Gwanghwamun area in the heart of Seoul was undeniably a space of visual spectacle. BTS, the idol group with a global fandom, set up a stage here for their comeback performance, which was broadcast live worldwide by the global streaming platform Netflix.



BTS Gwanghwamun Concert (Source: Yonhap News)

Yet for a long time, Gwanghwamun has been a space of the written word for Koreans. Standing in the heart of Seoul, Gwanghwamun is the main gate of Gyeongbokgung Palace, the legal palace of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Its signboard—bearing the characters “光化門” written in the traditional reverse order from right to left—symbolically reflects the creation of Hangeul during the Joseon Dynasty, its necessity, and its historic turning points. Furthermore, the underground space connected to

Gwanghwamun Subway Station is home to the flagship store of South Korea's largest bookstore chain.

The historic center of Seoul, encompassing Gwanghwamun, Gyeongbokgung Palace, and Changgyeonggung Palace, has long served as both a subject and a muse for numerous works of Korean literature. A notable recent example is Im Kyung-Sun's novel *Things Left Unsaid*. The protagonist is a highly capable woman who passed the Higher Civil Service Examination and works at the Central Government Complex, which stands looking out over Gwanghwamun. She falls in love after a chance encounter in Gwanghwamun Square with a pianist who has set up a practice studio in a nearby studio apartment.

While this novel is set against the backdrop of modern Gwanghwamun as a corporate hub, Jeong Myeong-seop's *The Gwanghwamun Trio* takes the old Gwanghwamun area as its setting. During the colonial era, Gwanghwamun was a space where the grim authority of imperialism and dreams of transformation intersected. Based on anecdotes of the real-life figure Baek Seok, one of Korea's representative novelists, and his friends, the novel portrays the "modern boys" who dreamed of literature during the colonial period.

In this sense, Kim Geum-Hee's *The Greenhouse Repair Report* can be described as a novel that bridges the past and present of Gwanghwamun. Through the process of repairing the Great Greenhouse inside Changgyeonggung Palace, another royal palace of the Joseon Dynasty, the story questions the meaning of preservation, recreation, history, and testimony. Built in 1909, the Changgyeonggung Great Greenhouse is Korea's first Western-style greenhouse, constructed by the Japanese colonial government

under the pretext of comforting the king after they had him confined within the palace. It remains open to visitors today.



Kim Guem-hee's *The Greenhouse Repair Report*

Gwanghwamun, the Home of K-Literature

The Gwanghwamun area is an indispensable destination for any literary tour of Seoul. As the historic heart of the city safeguarding ancient palaces, “the oldest part of Seoul” is deeply woven into major works of modern Korean literature. For instance, *The Naked Tree* by Park Wan-Suh, one of Korea’s most iconic novelists, tells the story of a protagonist who takes a job at a US military PX during the Korean War. Through her connection with a portrait painter, she contemplates life, war, despair, and hope. The main setting for this story is the Gyedong neighborhood in Seoul, an area directly adjacent to Gyeongbokgung Palace.

The Wings, a novel by the celebrated poet and writer Yi Sang (1910–1937), who was famously dubbed a “genius poet,” is also a staple of these literary journeys. The Mitsukoshi Department Store, which serves as the setting for

the final scene of this masterpiece, continues to operate today as the flagship store of one of Seoul's leading department store chains.

Park Tae-won's full-length novel *Scenery by the Stream* is set along the Cheonggyecheon Stream, a major historical and cultural space in Seoul alongside Gwanghwamun. This work, which depicts the daily lives of ordinary people living around the stream during the colonial era, is considered a masterpiece of Korean modernist literature. Notably, Park Tae-Won is also the maternal grandfather of the world-renowned film director Bong Joon-Ho. Another of his representative works, *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist*, follows the novelist Kubo over the course of a single day from the moment he leaves his house until he returns. The old downtown of Seoul, including the Cheonggyecheon Stream and Gyeongseong Station (now Seoul Station), beautifully pieces together his day—much like downtown Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Translators Strolling Through Gwanghwamun

Gwanghwamun is the quintessential Seoul. Ever since the Joseon Dynasty designated Seoul as the capital, this area has long functioned as the heart of the nation. As a result, various cultural facilities and events, including museums and art galleries, unfold around Gwanghwamun. For overseas translators visiting South Korea, whether for professional training or tourism, it is a place that is hard to miss.

For instance, the Seoul Metropolitan Library, a public library in the city, hosts an "Outdoor Library" event during the spring and autumn. Books are set out across Gwanghwamun Square, the Seoul Plaza in front of City Hall, and the Cheonggyecheon Stream area, allowing anyone to enjoy reading

out in the open. Starting this year, a tour program is also being held for foreign tourists, and tour participants will be provided with the English quarterly magazine from the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea).

Spaces within Books, as Seen 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

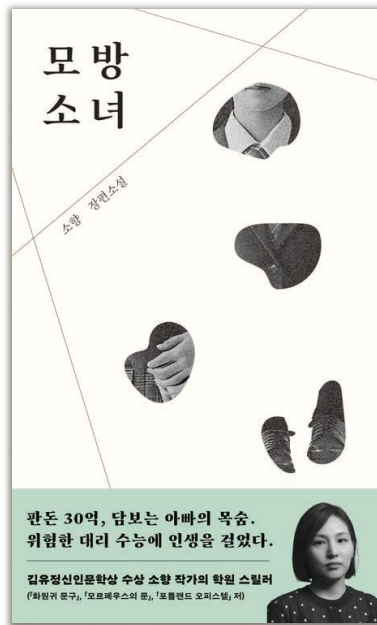
He is a dedicated reader and writer. Captivated by the vast and profound world of literature, he spends every spare moment reading and contemplating how books resonate with our society. He is currently striving to transform books, the infinite source of all content, into diverse cultural formats. His 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*.

In the June issue’s Special Project, literary critics from different generations introduce spaces within books, as well as books themed around space. This feature presents works that explore the desires of children caught within the college entrance system, the foundations of daily life and neighborhoods, the spaces depicted by the master writer Park Wan-Suh, and the architecture of Gyeongseong, modern-day Seoul, during the Japanese colonial period.

The 20s Perspective

Lee Sollim, Cultural Critic

“Children Driven to the Edge”



The Mimic Girl

Schools are often spaces where the most intense narratives are born. In this context, the school environment is far from the romanticized image of youth that one might typically imagine. Students are perpetually anxious and rushed. Gathered together simply by virtue of being the same age, they

are subjected to relentless comparison and competition. At times, this competition drives individuals in completely unexpected directions. The novel *The Mimic Girl* coldly exposes the reality of the school environment within Korean society.

At the center of the story is the premise of a proxy college entrance exam. One day, Yeong-ri, a student living in poverty, receives a proposal from the chairman of a major corporation to attend school and take the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) on behalf of his daughter, Chorom. With her father in a coma following a sudden accident, Yeong-ri swallows her hesitation and ultimately accepts the offer.

To blend into Chorom's life, Yeong-ri begins to alter her own body piece by piece. She changes her hairstyle, undergoes laser eye surgery, and even implants a mole on her face in the exact same spot as Chorom's. To gain entry into a higher social stratum, she essentially erases herself to clone another person. However, a school is a space where glances and rumors travel faster than anywhere else. In an atmosphere where people fear another person's success just as much as their own failure, the proxy exam operation progresses precariously, narrowly dodging the tangled desires of students, parents, teachers, and private academy instructors.

The Mimic Girl does not merely rely on pushing a provocative premise. The novel relentlessly tracks how human circumstances and desires warp ethics. Alongside the school, the hospital emerges as an equally critical space in the work. Both institutions are places that drive human beings to extreme desperation. Faced with the terror of missing out on the life they wished for, people gradually abandon their morals. The landscape where the phrase "It is not a crime if you do not get caught" is casually tossed around feels

painfully familiar yet bitter.

The school in this work acts not merely as a background, but as a massive system that amplifies desire and anxiety. Although Yeong-ri possesses talent and Chorom possesses capital, both characters ultimately invade each other's lives out of a longing for what they lack. The author, Sohyang, who is actually an elementary school teacher, notes in the appendix that we frequently witness real-life news stories where the university entrance system tests individual ethics. Ultimately, *The Mimic Girl* is a novel that uses a chilling, fast-paced narrative to demonstrate how easily people in modern Korean society clone and alter themselves just to secure a coveted position.

The 30s Perspective

Junhyuk Maeng, Publishing Editor

“Our Foundation”



Sam-o Restaurant is a small eatery nestled in the absolute heart of Yeongdeungpo Market. To some, it is a fierce battleground of commerce and a mother's workplace; to others, it is an ordinary restaurant where they stop by to fill an empty stomach. Amid the nonchalant exchange of food and money, mixed with all kinds of rumors and coarse language, another day draws to a close. Usually, when asked to choose a book themed around "space," people tend to first think of beautiful and unfamiliar places like an old bookstore, a seaside village, or someone's cozy room. However, after reading Lee Myung-lang's novel *Sam-o Restaurant*, one arrives at the realization that a good space does not necessarily have to be pretty or romantic.

In this work, the market is not a mere backdrop or a stage where characters briefly pass through. Instead, it is a living space that shapes the temperaments and language of the people, ultimately grasping and swaying their very destinies. Centered around *Sam-o Restaurant*, a fruit shop, a fish market, a boiler room, a restroom, and a weathered wooden bench are densely interconnected. The visible space may be cramped, but the volume of life nestled within those crevices is by no means small. Someone's desperate livelihood rests upon it, while long-suppressed resentments, empty bluffs, and shabby desires hover around its perimeter.

Rather than being a purely warm place, *Sam-o Restaurant* is where desire and wounds intersect, and where love-hate relationships and sorrow entangle. Yet, that is precisely why it delivers a weightier resonance. The market people embrace one another only to easily inflict scratches, and they laugh heartily only to become harsh a moment later. However, that dizzying complexity is closer to the true, bare face of "daily living." We often try to package spaces into romantic memories, associating a market with

“human warmth,” an alleyway with “quaintness,” and a restaurant with “a warm bowl of rice.” Yet, *Sam-o Restaurant* sternly declares that such soft words cannot fully explain life. Even if it reeks of fish, noises abound, and the place is shabby, someone stubbornly endures their day right there.

Throughout reading this book, I thought about the difference between a “place” viewed from the outside and a “foundation” wrestled with from the within. A place can be appreciated with the eyes, but a foundation can only be understood by experiencing it with the entire body. In front of a foundation, there is very little room for choice. Even if you do not like it, you must tenaciously earn money, argue, eat, and fall asleep there. The characters who dwell in *Sam-o Restaurant* are precisely the people of such a foundation. Therefore, the market in this novel is not a romantic scenery, but the bone-aching pressure of survival itself.

Today, we buy goods with a single click and push carts in smoothly polished mega-marts. This does not mean such changes are inherently bad. However, as convenient and sophisticated spaces multiply, someone’s roughly pulsating life recedes further from our view. *Sam-o Restaurant* summons those persistent lives, which have become invisible to our eyes, right back into the center of the novel. The true meaning of a space ultimately depends on who eats there, wipes away tears there, and rolls up the shutters again the next morning. Therefore, reading this novel is not merely about sightseeing a weathered “place” called Yeongdeungpo Market. It is an encounter with someone’s sweat-scented “foundation” hidden behind the smooth scenery, and a process of questioning what kind of lives we have been passing by all too quickly.

The 40s Perspective

Mihyang Kim, Publishing Critic



Grandma Judy

Space is not a mere backdrop. The kind of space one has lived in directly reveals how one has lived. In this regard, *Grandma Judy*, a collection of ten short stories meticulously selected by novelists of 2026 from among Park Wan-Suh's numerous works, is a volume that relentlessly exposes the theme of "space" from the most everyday perspectives.

Given that it brings together works published from the 1970s through the 1990s, this collection provides a condensed view of how spaces in Korean society have evolved. From post-war living spaces to the influx of urbanization and apartments, space undergoes continuous transformation.

In Park Wan-Suh's fiction, space is never fixed to a single locality. Living spaces such as houses, kitchens, alleys, apartments, and airports function as devices that unveil the characters' emotions and relationships, as well as the structural landscape of the era that was South Korea. The "home," in

particular, is presented not merely as a place to stay, but as a structure where life accumulates. For Park, space is not a simple background; it is the very way of life the characters have led. The “home” exposes the tension within family relationships, the “kitchen” visualizes women’s roles and labor, the “alley” carries the footprints of the era, and the “apartment” reveals social mobility and desire.

In *The Heaviest Dentures in the World*, the tension generated by national division and state power infiltrates the apartment where the everyday narrator lives and even the narrator’s own body, manifesting in a way that structurally oppresses individual life. The space remains, but the moment cracks appear in the relationships and emotions contained within it, that space can no longer serve as a peaceful foundation for life. In this manner, space in her stories transcends individual locations to function as a structure that constructs the narrative itself.

Another characteristic repeatedly shown in this collection is how space reveals relationships. In *You Think Babysitting Is Easy?*, urban residential spaces and the scars of redevelopment expose the characters’ socioeconomic class, while in *The Person I Met at the Airport*, the liminal space of the airport serves as a crossroads where post-war life and experiences in a foreign land intersect.

As such, Park Wan-Suh’s fiction relentlessly tracks how spaces acquire meaning and how they collapse. It is at this very point that this collection transcends being a record of the past and connects with today’s reading. Even though we live in much more diverse spaces half a century later, the structural reality of life contained within those spaces has not changed significantly. The class division and lack of understanding

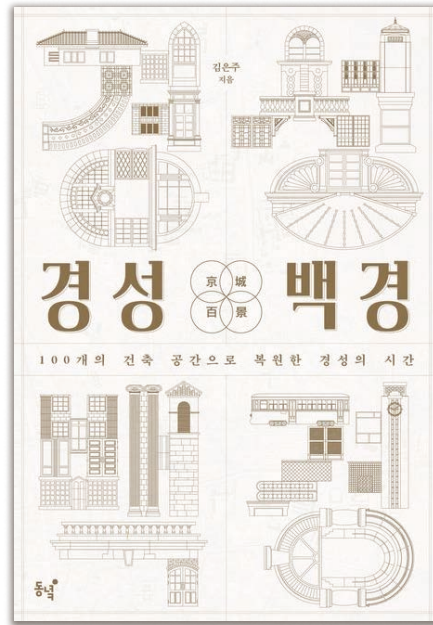
in *Stolen Poverty*, and the feelings of loss contained in *My Very Last Possession*, remain ongoing issues. The spaces of the past have vanished, but the structures of relationships and emotions created by those spaces continue to repeat within our lives today.

In this respect, reading Park Wan-Suh's fiction is not an act of reminiscing about the past. Rather, it is closer to reinterpreting the very spaces we inhabit today. In Korean society, space has functioned not merely as a physical location, but as the accumulated result of relationships, memories, social classes, and emotions. Park's works vividly expose this process of accumulation, compelling readers to read into these spaces once again.

For international readers, this collection serves as a gateway to a multi-dimensional understanding of South Korean society through everyday spaces like houses, kitchens, alleys, and apartments. At the same time, the experience of reading works from different eras side by side will prompt us to question what we have lost and what we have gained along the way.

The 50s Perspective

Dongseok Jang, Literary Critic



One Hundred Scenes of Gyeongseong

I was born and raised in Seoul, yet I do not know the city through and through. I am only slightly familiar with the neighborhood where I grew up, the streets of Jongno that we used to call “downtown,” and parts of Mapo-gu that I frequented for work. Still, some places remain as vivid memories. The royal tombs of the Joseon Dynasty, where I often went for school picnics as a child and strolled with my wife before we were married, are among them. So, it goes without saying that I know even less about the time when Seoul was called “Gyeongseong.” The reason my eyes were drawn to the newly published *One Hundred Scenes of Gyeongseong* is simple. The spaces of that era, which existed during Gyeongseong and still stand in today’s Seoul, are all around us in abundance. If we show just a little interest, we realize these places can transport us into the time and space of history. In the introduction, Kim Eun-ju, an architectural archivist and historian who introduces 100 structures in *One Hundred Scenes of*

Gyeongseong, states: “What they all have in common is that they are buildings that formed Gyeongseong during the historical period of Japanese colonial rule, strictly exist as records of our history, and are cultural heritages that must be preserved for the future.”

The first building introduced is “Gyeongseong Station.” Named Seoul Station from 1947 after liberation, it is the very place now called “Culture Station Seoul 284.” Serving as the “central station for Japan’s expansion into the continent,” Gyeongseong Station was completed in September 1925. It was designed by Japanese architect Yasushi Tsukamoto, featuring a European-style exterior. The twelve massive pillars placed inside were a device to show off the “dignity and scale of modern architecture.” The author defines Gyeongseong Station as “a space where the times of diverse individuals, including independence activists and traitors, capitalists and laborers, those arriving in the capital and those returning home, are layered on top of one another.” While it fully reflects imperialist ambitions, it is undeniably a symbolic location in our history, as it also bears the footprints of the citizens’ daily lives and their strides toward independence.

The book also introduces “Bukchon Hanok Village,” which has recently been receiving much love from foreign tourists. During the Joseon Dynasty, Bukchon was predominantly inhabited by yangban nobles in power, while Namchon was home to disenfranchised nobles. Under Japanese colonial rule, this shifted so that Joseon people resided in Bukchon and Japanese people lived in Namchon. The large and spacious hanoks of Bukchon were gradually “reorganized into modern urban residential areas.” From the late 1920s, urban hanoks, which were modern improved hanoks, were built intensively. The person who dedicated himself to this work was Jeong Se-gwon. He developed the Bukchon hanok housing estates through his real

estate and housing management company, Geonyangsa. He was heartbroken by the reality that the people of Joseon were being pushed to the peripheries of Gyeongseong. Thus, he proposed the hanok as a new urban housing model, building and selling them directly in an effort to “go beyond mere housing supply and improve the residential environment for the Joseon people.” In that regard, Bukchon Hanok Village deserves to be called a “living museum of modern urban hanoks.” It is regrettable that due to constraints of space, I cannot introduce all 100 locations here. However, I hold a great expectation that there will surely be discerning readers who will take *One Hundred Scenes of Gyeongseong* in hand and visit all 100 sites.

Summary

Lee Sollim: A novel that meticulously depicts the school as a space where desire and ethics entangle under the provocative premise of a “proxy college entrance exam.”

Maeng Junhyuk: A foundation—a place one must experience with one’s entire body.

Kim Mihyang: A short story collection that allows readers to read the life, relationships, and eras of Korean society through space.

Jang Dong Seok: There will surely be discerning readers who will take *One Hundred Scenes of Gyeongseong* in hand and embark on a journey through time!

The Global Expansion of Healing Narratives in the Post-Pandemic Era

Over the past three years, Korean “space-based healing fiction” has firmly established itself as a distinct export genre in the international literary market. This movement aligns with shifting global reading trends in the wake of the pandemic. Following COVID-19, readers who experienced anxiety and isolation began actively seeking out “feel-good fiction” that offers emotional stability and a sense of restoration.

While rooted in familiar, everyday settings such as convenience stores, laundromats, and neighborhood bookstores, Korean space-based healing novels address universal themes of human relationships and the renewal of community, successfully forging a deep emotional connection with readers across diverse cultural spheres.

Global Scalability Evidenced by Real-World Export Success

These genres have experienced rapid expansion on the front lines of actual international trade. Titles such as *Marigold Mind Laundry*, *The Rainfall Market*, *Uncomfortable Convenience Store*, and *Yeonnam-Dong’s Smiley Laundromat* serve as prime examples that depict the restoration of relationships and the warmth of everyday life within a specific space. Many of these have secured international rights contracts in more than ten countries.

Furthermore, works like *A Midnight Pastry Shop Called Hwawoldang* captured the intense attention of overseas publishing professionals, becoming the first Korean novel to have its rights under contract in eleven countries even before its official publication in South Korea.



Uncomfortable Convenience Store, Marigold Mind Laundry, A Midnight Pastry Shop Called Hwawoldang

Innovative Healing Fiction

With a flurry of similar titles entering the market recently, the evaluation criteria for space-based healing fiction have become significantly more stringent and selective. Lately, international publishers have turned their attention toward works that intertwine traditional healing narratives with distinct genre elements.

Representatively, *The Late-Night Pharmacy Guarding the Dark*, a thriller-infused novel that drew significant notice at the Seoul International Book Fair, and *The Tarot Card Cafe*, a romance-blended story that generated substantial buzz at the Frankfurt Book Fair, have successfully secured export contracts across more than seven languages, including the Anglo-American market.

While overseas publishers have indeed grown more discerning in their review of space-based healing fiction, the strong global foundation established by this very genre has now expanded international interest into

diverse fields such as thrillers and romance. Ultimately, this shift is contributing to broadening the overall horizons of the export market for Korean literature. diverse fields such as thrillers and romance. Ultimately, this shift is contributing to broadening the overall horizons of the export market for Korean literature.



The Late-Night Pharmacy Guarding the Dark, The Tarot Card Cafe

What I Discovered in the Crevices of the City

Written by

Seol Myeong-Mun

Seol Myeong-Mun | Architect·Cultural Critic

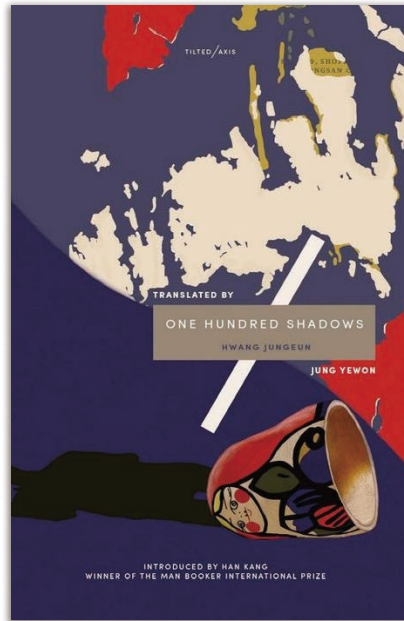
The author is a practicing architect and critic who designs extraordinary spaces rooted in a deep insight into nature, people, and history. Serving as a steering committee member of the Critics' Solidarity, a coalition of young critics, the author actively writes numerous book reviews and cultural critiques.

After moving to the capital, the Seoul that I so diligently explored became divided into roughly two categories for me: that which leaves a memory, and that which leaves an impression. Typically, things that were grand and splendid belonged to the former, while things that were small and tender remained as the latter. Memories held a sort of momentary intensity, as if capturing the “me” of that exact moment in a mirror. On the other hand, things that were small or ordinary left a faint trace of when or where they were found; yet, they were unmistakably discovered in the world outside of myself, leaving behind something entirely new that did not previously exist within me. In the form of a continuous and perpetual subconscious, these discoveries have always rendered my life fresh and abundant.

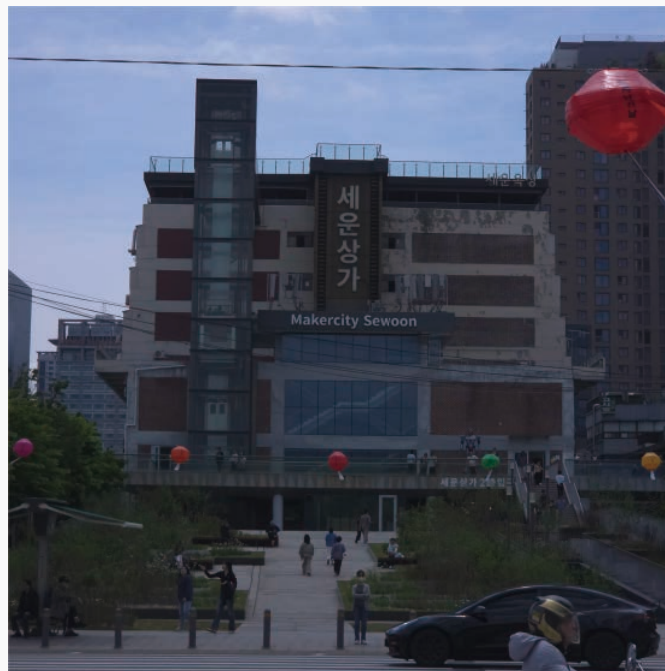
Life grows in the crevices, much like the greenery that takes root within the cracks of a rock. Life does not grow on the epidermis. Only when we actively strive to look can we discern the roots firmly anchored somewhere beneath. The more splendid the epidermis appears, the more difficult it becomes to make that effort; or perhaps, it could be quite the opposite. Nevertheless, we must incessantly discover others in order to understand ourselves. There is nothing to be gained from a mirror that reflects only the self.

Hwang Jungeun’s novel, *One Hundred Shadows*, is a story about those very crevices. An old electronics market in the heart of the city serves as the backdrop for the narrative, a massive structure often labeled a slum, or perhaps, a cluster of countless crevices. Within this cluster, the leisurely and beautiful movements of the owner of “Omusa,” an old light bulb shop, as well as the fresh, innocent romance between Eunkyo and Mujae, come vibrantly alive. In the empty space left behind after one of the five market buildings, once bustling with the warmth of human presence, was demolished,

a green space has been developed.



One Hundred Shadows

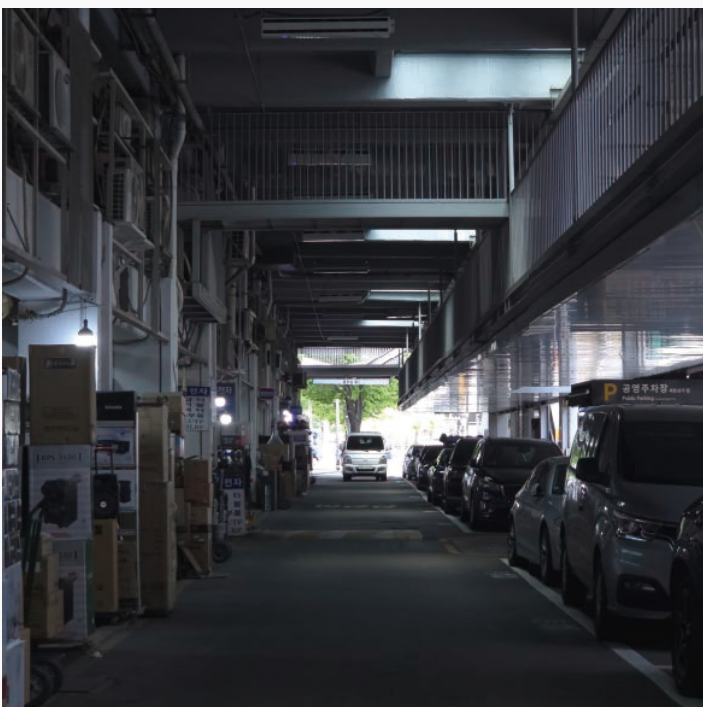


Sewoon Sangga and the site of the former Hyundaesangga, which has now been transformed into a green space

The old electronics market is a metaphor for the actual Sewoon Sangga located in Seoul. In the novel, the brief word “slum,” used by outsiders to define the market, is juxtaposed with the rather complex and plausible official title, the “Sewoon Redevelopment Promotion Zone.” While society

and its institutions measured them as a single, homogenous mass, the cluster of countless crevices within rarely surfaced to the world above. In 2009, Hyundaesangga, one of the eight buildings comprising the Sewoon complex, was demolished, and a green space was established in its place. This green space, which altered its appearance multiple times due to varying utilities and political controversies, proved to be far smaller than the light, shadows, metallic sounds, and smell of oil that it originally contained.

I hope that you will discover the smaller things within Seoul. I hope you will step into the world outside of yourself and take away things that did not previously exist within you. I hope that these perpetual impressions will become a gift, enriching your life and surroundings within your subconscious. I hope you will discover the crevices. For there is nothing to be gained from a mirror that reflects only the self.



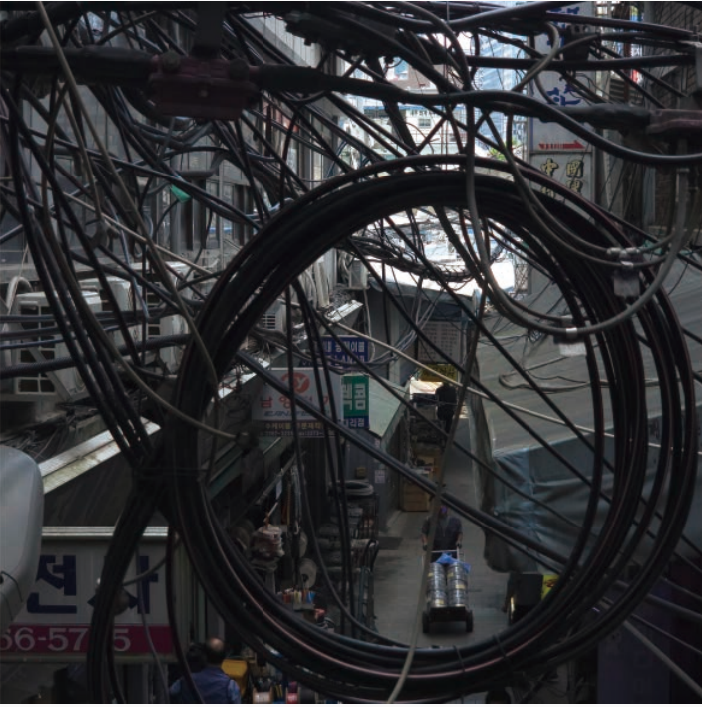


Photo by Seol Myeong-Mun

A “Popup-Addicted” Reporter’s Notebook: Covering Publisher Pop-up Stores

Written by

Hyeri Choi

Hyeri Choi | Culture Reporter

The author majored in Media & Communication and Film and Video Studies at Sungkyunkwan University, and currently covers books and visual media as a culture reporter for the JoongAng Ilbo. Driven by a keen interest in where people direct their attention today, the author deeply cherishes the moments of uncovering what lies just beyond those focal points. There remains a steadfast belief that short, precise daily records have the power to guide people toward a better place.

Why buy a book at an offline bookstore when you can simply order it online? This was the question that emerged within the Korean publishing industry about twenty years ago, when online bookstores first made their debut. Recently, this question has shifted in an entirely different direction: “Why come all the way to a ‘pop-up store’ to buy a book that can be purchased anywhere?”

As a reader who has frequently sought out publisher pop-ups and book fairs, I have chewed over this very question. Why do I personally go all the way to a pop-up to buy a book? While some analysts suggest it is because “text” has simply become “hip,” the young readers I encounter on-site are demonstrating a different shift. To answer this question, I will trace the subtle evolution of publisher pop-ups that I have observed over the past three years.



The scene at Munhakhdongne’s “Murakami Haruki Station,” widely recognized as the first pop-up store in the Korean publishing industry following the onset of the pop-up craze. (Source: Munhakhdongne)

It was in September 2023 that publishing houses began entering the pop-up market in earnest. To celebrate the publication of novelist Haruki Murakami's *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*, the publisher Munhakdongne launched a pop-up store showcasing the author's literary world. Taking inspiration from the boundary between reality and unreality that features prominently in the novel, Munhakdongne constructed a train station named "Murakami Haruki Station," allowing visitors to explore the author's entire catalog of published books.

Following the massive success of "Murakami Haruki Station," which was so densely packed that it triggered intense "open runs" where eager crowds lined up long before opening hours, other publishing houses quickly followed suit with their own pop-ups. In April 2024, the publisher Changbi hosted "Poet-nic," a pop-up store celebrating the publication of the 500th volume of the Changbi Poetry Series, at a complex cultural space near the Changbi Seogyo Building in Mapo-gu, Seoul. During the exact same month, Moonji Publishing also launched its own pop-up, titled "A Place for Poetry and You," to commemorate the 600th volume of its poetry series, featuring interactive events such as a "Relay Poetry Reading with Poets."

There are also cases where multiple publishing houses and related brands gather in one location to host a collaborative pop-up. A prime example is the "Reading Party" held in November last year at The Hyundai Seoul in Yeouido. Around 400 titles from publishers such as Wisdom House, Safehouse, and Dasan Books were exhibited and sold at their respective booths. In addition, dedicated booths were set up to showcase unique collaborations, including eyewear created by the publisher Minumsa in partnership with the eyewear brand Yun Seoul, as well as a perfume crafted by the publisher Green Ray together with the fragrance brand Selvatico.

During the two weekend days when the venue was most heavily crowded, approximately 5,000 readers purchased books at this event alone.



The publisher Safehouse hosting its “Genre Banquet” pop-up store at a “Reading Party.” (Photo by Choi Hyeri)

The primary objective behind publishers opening pop-up stores lies in branding. A marketer from a publishing house noted, “Rather than being a significant driver for expanding book sales, pop-ups are more frequently launched as a strategic way to reach out to younger readers.” Marketers generally perceive that pop-ups yield a much greater branding effect than traditional book fairs. This is particularly true for comprehensive publishing houses; since they must arrange their book fair displays to reflect the diverse needs of various genres, it is difficult to project an image that highlights any single genre. This explains why they prefer pop-up stores, which allow them to narrow their focus down to a specific category like literature, or even further, to a single sub-genre or a single author.



Moonji Publishing's "Book Fair Encore Pop-up" (July 2025), featuring a repurposed booth from that year's Seoul International Book Fair. (Photo by Choi Hyeri)

Another defining characteristic is that the boundary between book fairs and pop-up stores is becoming increasingly blurred. The "Reading Party" earned the nickname "a mini book fair" because it featured booths from publishing houses that had bypassed the official book fairs that year. Similarly, events like "This is Text," organized by 16 small-scale non-fiction publishers last January, and "Dear My Reader," which brought together 39 indie publishing teams at The Hyundai Seoul last April, carry the distinct atmosphere of a traditional book fair by branding themselves as "book fairs." However, they also possess strong characteristics of a pop-up store, given that they present highly curated, themed booths for a very limited duration.

Regardless of the format, there are two distinct categories of readers that publishers are targeting: "highly involved readers," who possess a deep

understanding of publishing houses and actively follow their events, and “lowly involved readers,” who may not know much about books but visit pop-ups out of sheer curiosity. Ultimately, the objective of these pop-up stores is to raise book awareness among all visitors, no matter what brought them to the booth, and seamlessly guide them toward making a purchase.



The Wific booth at the “Reading Party,” featuring special re-covered editions of books by authors including Jo Ye-eun and Gu Byeong-mo. (Photo by Wific)

Intriguingly, the primary item that readers seek out at these pop-ups is shifting from merchandise back to the books themselves. While early publisher pop-ups relied heavily on merchandise and events to draw foot traffic, books are now taking center stage over peripheral goods at recent pop-up stores. An official from Wisdom House, which participated in the “Reading Party,” shared, “We prepared the merchandise with just as much care as the book designs, but the books, including our re-covered editions,

sold significantly better.” Furthermore, “This is Text,” an event that completely eliminated merchandise to fill its booths solely with books and editors, experienced an estimated purchase rate of over 80%.

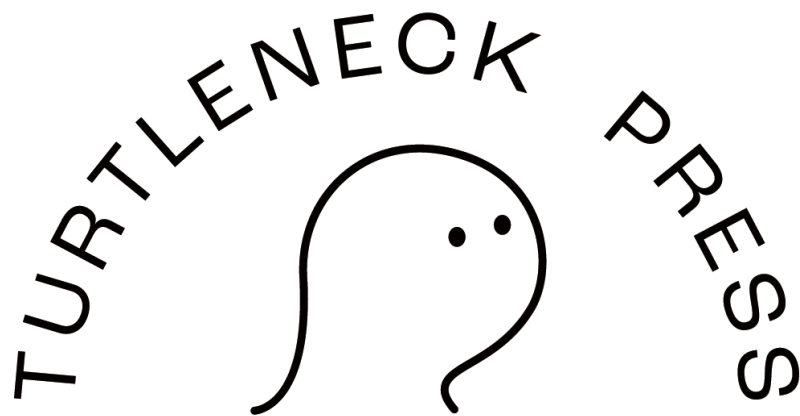
When asking readers visiting these book fairs and pop-ups, seven out of ten turn out to be casual readers who are not particularly close to books. They share comments such as, “I was just stopping by a nearby pop-up and walked in because I recognized a booth I saw on social media,” or “I visited the pop-up hoping to discover new books.” Perhaps what readers were truly seeking through these visits was simply a gateway to encounter books. The joy of reading, which cannot be fully explained by the word “hip” alone, is being actively transmitted within these temporary spaces called pop-up stores.

TURTLENECK PRESS is a solo publishing house founded by veteran editor Kim BoHee. Although recently established, it has quickly become a rising star in the publishing industry, notably releasing the bestseller *Editorial Thinking*. The name itself playfully evokes the image of avid book lovers sitting for hours until their necks bend forward like turtles. True to its unique name, the publisher also runs a newsletter called “The Turtleneck Letter.” We sat down to hear about the vision and dreams of TURTLENECK PRESS, a company that does truly special things.

Q. Your publishing house has such an intriguing name. Why “TURTLENECK PRESS”?

TURTLENECK PRESS is a brand created for people who love books so much that they have developed a “turtleneck” (forward head posture) because of them. The name literally combines the words “Turtle” and “Neck.” While preparing to launch the brand, I knew I wanted to create something with and for people who genuinely light up just thinking about books.

One day, I was jokingly chatting with an author about what book lovers and bookmakers have in common. What do people in publishing share? As we were thinking about common occupational hazards for editors, like herniated discs or scoliosis, someone mentioned “forward head posture,” which is called a “turtle neck” in Korean. Turtle neck... Turtleneck... TURTLENECK PRESS?! That is how we accidentally stumbled upon the name. I really wanted it to capture the true identity of book lovers.



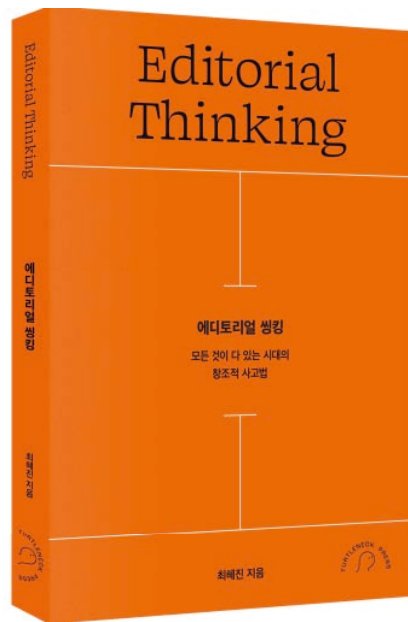
The symbol of TURTLENECK PRESS. [Click here to watch the brand video capturing the story of TURTLENECK PRESS.](#)

Q. For our overseas subscribers who might be unfamiliar with TURTLENECK PRESS, could you recommend just one book from your catalog that you would most highly suggest?

I would love to recommend *Editorial Thinking* by author Choi Hye-Jin, the very book that put TURTLENECK PRESS on the map for so many readers. Having recently gone into its 30th printing, it has been a beloved bestseller in Kyobo Book Centre's art category for over 100 consecutive weeks.

We live in an era of excess, overflowing with information, knowledge, and insights, a time when it feels as though nothing truly new is left to discover. Even more so today, when AI can replace us in everything from conducting research to drawing conclusions with just a single click, what matters most is having your own unique perspective. Possessing that perspective ultimately boils down to what you choose to select, what meaning you manage to uncover, and what new value you can create. *Editorial Thinking* encapsulates the exact process of that mindset.

Among the many reviews left by readers, what struck me most was how they felt a sudden urge to write, to create something, and to try new things after finishing the book. If you are looking for a fresh source of inspiration, this is the book for you.



Editorial Thinking, Choi Hye-Jin

Q. You also publish a newsletter. Could you share what makes your newsletter, “The Turtleneck Letter,” so special?

I wanted to publish a newsletter that feels like a radio program. There is something truly magical about radio. Just knowing that you are listening to the same program connects you to a broader community of listeners. I wanted the subscribers of “The Turtleneck Letter,” who are also the readers of TURTLENECK PRESS, to experience that exact same feeling of connection.

That is why I write it like a personal letter rather than a typical newsletter. Instead of trying to include trendy segments or curated information like most newsletters do, I opted out of any rigid format. I chose to fill it with

small, everyday stories, just like a letter you would receive from a close friend. We affectionally call our subscribers “Turtleneck Members.” Every time I write to them, it is with the same care and intention as drafting a handwritten letter. Rather than focusing on book promotions or data, I share the mindset of making books, the daily routines of running a brand, and the honest thoughts of a book-loving friend.

Perhaps that sincerity came through, because we receive an overwhelming number of replies from our readers, almost like listeners sending in their stories to a radio station. I used to reply to those messages individually to share them, but the volume eventually became too massive to handle alone. This naturally led me to launch a podcast called “Turtleneck Radio” to read and respond to those letters. Everything truly blossomed from that single, heartfelt letter.



The podcast <Turtleneck Radio> is available to stream on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Podbbang.

[The Turtleneck Letter](#)

[Turtleneck Radio](#)

Q. What does tomorrow look like for TURTLENECK PRESS? Could you briefly share the vision you are creating for the future of publishing culture?

Rather than limiting ourselves to the definition of a “publisher,” we prefer to call TURTLENECK PRESS a “brand.” What we truly want to do is create books about things we want to learn alongside our fellow book-loving friends, sharing diverse experiences and growing old together with them. Currently, we communicate through three channels: books, our newsletter, and our podcast, but we want to explore even more varied endeavors in the future. Just as we write our newsletter like a letter to a friend, we are joyfully imagining and pondering what exciting projects we can undertake next to age beautifully with this community.



Kim BoHee, Publisher of TURTLENECK PRESS

Author Baek Heesung: The Architect Who Infuses Spaces with Memory and Designs for Humanity

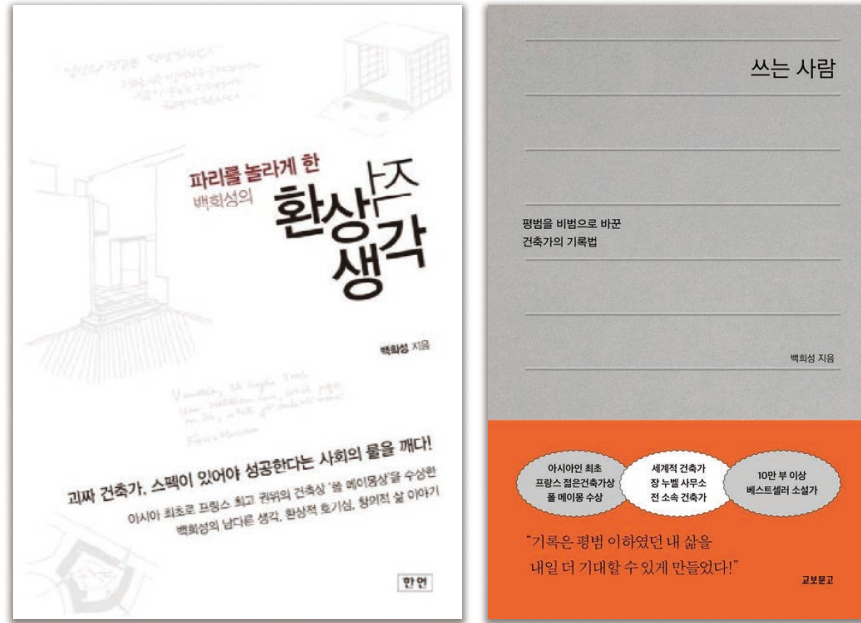
Interview by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Heesung BAEK | Novelist, Writer, Architect, Heritage Researcher, Painter

Heesung Baek is an architect and novelist who spent eight years in France studying architecture and collecting memories hidden within spaces. He is also a bestselling author whose book *Where the Light Leads* reached the number one spot on Kyobo Book Centre's comprehensive bestseller list. He practices "the architecture of memory," a philosophy that infuses physical structures with human narratives and emotional traces, and has recently been focusing on restoring the warm memories embedded within cities.

He describes himself as "someone who never discards the stray, casual thoughts of daily life, but instead ponders them, ferments them, and ultimately transforms them into tangible creations. More specifically, a creator who writes and designs architecture centered around the theme of 'memory,' a lifelong artist who will continue to explore human memory, urban memory, and the memory of objects through both the written word and architectural design."



Fantastic Thoughts, The One Who Writes

Heesung Baek is both an architect and a writer. He has authored works that deeply explore the relationship between architecture and humanity, including *Fantastic Thoughts*, *The Invisible House*, *Where the Light Leads*, and *The One Who Writes*. As an acclaimed author whose books are currently preparing for international publication, how did he first begin his journey into writing? Above all, Baek’s architectural work shares a profound similarity with his writing. He creates architectural spaces centered around the theme of “memory” and weaves narratives into them. We sat down to listen directly to the insights of this architect, who infuses physical spaces with the warmth of human life.

Q. Was there a specific turning point or occasion that inspired you to start writing?

For a long time, working as an architect, I found myself asking questions that diverged from conventional design. To find the answer to “How does a space record human emotion?” I began to use invisible “memories” as the

blueprints for my designs.

One day, a client approached me wishing to design a space for his father, who had run a restaurant his entire life. He wanted a space that resembled his father, so I met with the older gentleman to ask about his life. However, instead of dwelling on his decades of hardship, he spoke only of his son. There was one specific memory he shared that deeply moved my heart:

“On the day my son left to study abroad, the crimson sunset was melting into the alleyway. As he walked away, his back was enveloped in that brilliant light. The moment his long shadow stretched out and touched the tips of my toes, I realized it. My son was my brilliant light...”

His “memory” was overflowing with warmth for his son. I decided to visualize this exact memory into a tangible space.

First, I crafted a small, spoon-shaped sculpture to symbolize the father’s lifelong devotion to his restaurant. Across from it, I placed “the son’s chair.” The most crucial element was the lighting. The light installed directly above the sculpture was engineered not to illuminate the sculpture itself, but to cast a brilliant glow upon the son sitting across from it.

On the day the space was completed, the father asked why the light was shining on his son instead of himself or his sculpture. I explained to him that the name of this space was “Father’s Brilliant Light.” The son was deeply moved by his father’s true heart that regarded him as light, and the father was profoundly touched by his son’s thoughtfulness in recognizing that love.

In this way, the process of creating a space centered around a person’s

memory is akin to writing a novel. The way I practice architecture, the process of manifesting “memories” imbued with human emotion, already closely resembled the grammar of a novel. That was the true reason I ultimately picked up the pen.

Q. Your book is being introduced internationally. How do you feel about this upcoming global publication?

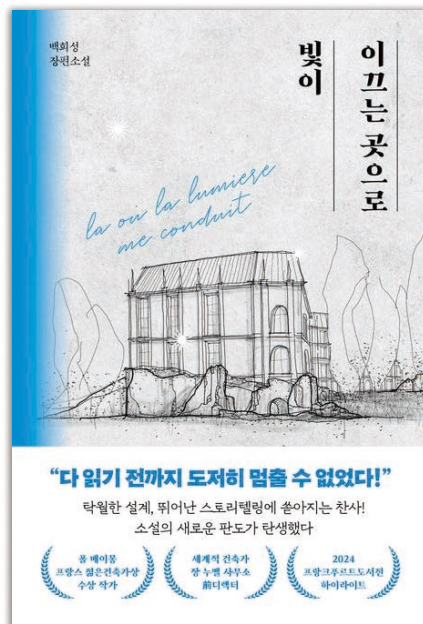
I recently received the wonderful news that my novel, *Where the Light Leads*, will be translated and published through Orion Books, one of the largest publishing houses in the United Kingdom. Not too long ago, I also happened to come across an article on an international online media outlet introducing me as a writer, and moments like that always bring back a flood of deep emotions.

This book is rooted in the detailed records of historic old houses in Paris that I personally researched during my eight-year stay in France. As an architect collecting the strange and unfamiliar “memories” nestled within those spaces, I felt a powerful desire to return these stories back to Paris, the very place where they all began.

These archives were living proof of the vibrant lives of French architects and Parisian citizens, something that should not be kept to myself. However, to protect the private personal information and addresses of the individuals who had closely communicated and interviewed with me, I chose the genre of fiction. By dressing factual records in the garments of a narrative, I wanted to protect their privacy while delivering the core essence of those spaces on a much deeper level.

Currently, the Chinese edition, 光指引的地方, has already been published, allowing me to receive warm, real-time feedback from local readers, and the US edition is scheduled for publication next year. To be honest, this entire process still feels like an unbelievable miracle to me. I am incredibly joyful and happy that the sentences I wrote are being translated into the languages of different cultures, connecting with readers there, and allowing us to converse about the universal value of “memory” that we all share.

I sincerely hope that *Where the Light Leads* serves as an opportunity for readers around the world to discover the warm light hidden within their own hearts.



Where the Light Leads

Q. Are there any similarities between writing and architecture? What are your guiding principles when writing a book versus designing a building?

Writing and designing a building are profoundly similar in that they both

Writing and designing a building are profoundly similar in that they both fundamentally involve the act of “building” something. When I first began to write, I was repeatedly amazed by how much the process mirrored architectural design.

The defining keyword that runs through both my writing and my architecture is, without question, “Memory.” I design spaces and stack sentences based on the themes of human memory, urban memory, and the memories embedded within objects. Unless something completely unexpected changes my path, I will continue to adhere to this method of “restoring memory” in the future.

The similarities I see between writing and architecture can be summarized into five key areas.

First is the establishment of a “Concept.” Just as a novel begins with a specific purpose and thematic focus, determining the core concept and function is the most critical first step in architecture.

Second is “Sequence” and connectivity. In a novel, you meticulously ponder the connection between sentences, the twists, and the foreshadowing. Similarly, in architecture, you constantly question how different spaces meet and connect with one another.

Third is a “Fundamental Understanding of Humanity.” Deep reflection on human nature is essential for a novel, and architecture similarly requires an understanding of how people experience and perceive a space before a proper design can ever come to life.

Fourth is the “Open Ending.” Once I establish the characters in a novel, I prefer to leave them to their own devices. The characters then begin to

drive the events themselves, and I simply record their journeys from the perspective of an observer. Architectural spaces function the same way. Even when an architect designs with a specific intent, the beauty of an open ending exists in both fields, where actual users occupy the space in completely different ways or find themselves moved by unexpected details.

Fifth and final is the process of “Continuous Conceptualization.” When designing architecture, the ideas in my head never stop. I often find solutions for a space while walking down the street or even in my dreams. Writing is exactly the same. Once the characters are set, I constantly simulate different situations in my mind, changing the scenarios over and over. This joy of immersion is something that cannot be stopped, even if I tried.

Q. You have written across various literary genres, including essays and novels. What are your future goals and vision?

I have recently completed the final manuscript for a new novel that traces the memories of objects. Provisionally titled *VÊTEMENT* (the French word for “clothing”), this work uncovers the mysterious memories layered within old garments. Alongside this, I am in the final stages of writing another novel that portrays the shared memories and philosophical reflections on architecture between a master and a disciple.

Moving forward, I will continue to pursue diverse forms of writing under the overarching theme of “Memory.” Naturally, my journey as an architect will not stop either. People occasionally ask me if it is difficult to balance both writing and architecture. However, I have never lived my life with titles like writer or architect as my ultimate goal.

If I were asked to describe myself after stripping away all external labels, I would like to answer this way: “Someone who ponders the stray, casual thoughts of daily life for a long time, ferments them, and transforms them into tangible creations.” For me, professions such as writer, architect, and artist are merely different tools used to shape everyday thoughts into results. Implementing a story by choosing the most appropriate tool for the circumstance is my way of life.

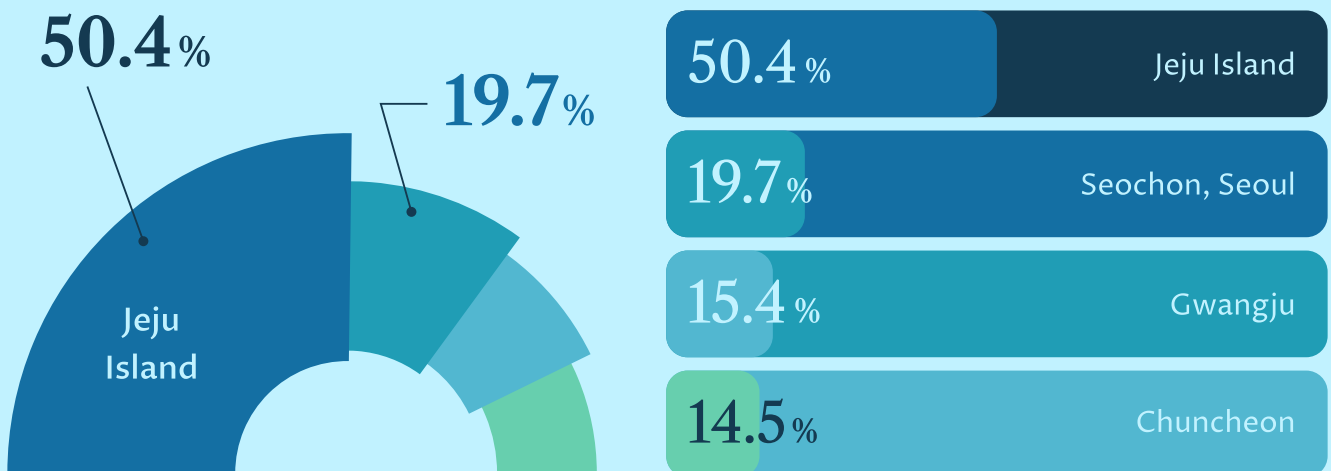
I hope to present even more works to the world in the future. In the realm of literature, I desire to look beyond essays and novels to experiment with as many genre variations as possible. In architecture, I am already enjoying adventures without any limitations on genre. Having executed a wide range of projects from churches, libraries, and art museums to residences, factories, pavilions, and hotels, I hold a vision to expand my own “map of memory” by taking on even more unfamiliar and new genres.

Wandering through Pages, Reading through Places

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Q. Which literary destination in Korean literature would you like to visit?



In our latest survey, we asked readers to select the destination featured in Korean literature that they most desired to visit. The results unveiled a rich tapestry of literary landscapes, ranging from the fresh, contemporary sensibilities of modern fiction to the profound resonance of Korea's modern and contemporary history. While author Chung Serang's Jeju Island secured an overwhelming first place with 50.4% of the votes, every single location featured in this survey holds its own unique literary value. Regardless of their ranking, here are the four literary destinations that captured the hearts of our readers.

1st Place: Jeju Island – Chung Serang (50.4%)



School Nurse Ahn Eun-young, From Sisun Onward

Jeju Island, chosen by more than half of the respondents, serves as a prime example of how contemporary Korean literature reinterprets a traditional space. In Chung Serang's works, such as *School Nurse Ahn Eun-young* and *From Sisun Onward*, Jeju is far more than a mere tourist destination; it is a distinctive literary world where the mundane and the

fantastical coexist. Her portrayal of Jeju, where the mythologies of a volcanic island intersect with the anxieties of modern life, offers international readers a compelling glimpse into the new possibilities of Korean literature.

2nd Place: Seochon, Seoul – Yun Dong-ju (19.7%)



Counting the Stars at Night

Seochon, which secured second place with 19.7% of the votes, is a place where the enduring traces of Yun Dong-ju, one of the most beloved poets in Korean literary history, still linger. In the 1940s, while attending Yeonhi Technical College (now Yonsei University), Yun resided in a small boarding house in Seochon, where he composed his finest masterpieces, including *Counting the Stars at Night* and *Prologue*. His poems, which profoundly capture the agony and conscience of an intellectual during the Japanese colonial period, continue to resonate deeply with people today. Walking through the Seochon alleys and visiting the Yun Dong-ju Literature House allows visitors to fully immerse themselves in his timeless

poetic spirit that transcends generations.

3rd Place: Gwangju – Han Kang (15.4%)



Human Acts

Gwangju, which rose to third place with 15.4% of the votes, serves as a profound literary space that bears witness to the most painful moment in modern Korean history through Han Kang's *Human Acts*. Documenting the horrors of the May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980, this work records a historical tragedy with deep empathy and restrained language. Visiting the May 18th National Cemetery and the former Jeonnam Provincial Office allows visitors to gain a deeper understanding, through the power of literature, of the courage and sacrifices of those who fought for democracy. Han Kang's work beautifully demonstrates how literature can act both as a witness to history and as a force for healing.

4th Place: Chuncheon – Kim Yu-jeong (14.5%)



The Camellia Blossoms, Spring, Spring

Chuncheon, which garnered 14.5% of the votes, is the literary home of Kim Yu-jeong, a master of the Korean short story. His renowned works, including *Spring, Spring* and *The Camellia Blossoms*, portray the rural life of Gangwon Province in the 1930s with rich humor and a warm, compassionate perspective. Visiting Kim Yu-jeong Station and the Kim Yu-jeong Literary Village allows visitors to experience his literary world, which is filled with a simple yet profound humanity, within spaces that faithfully recreate the countryside landscapes of that bygone era.

This survey underscores that readers wish to move beyond simply reading Korean literature, deeply desiring to personally experience the very spaces that served as the backdrops for these stories. From Chung Serang's fantastical Jeju to Kim Yu-jeong's pastoral Chuncheon, each location functions as a literary bridge connecting the past with the present, and tradition with modernity.

At a time when Korean literature is capturing global attention, these literary destinations have evolved beyond mere tourist attractions to become vital gateways for a deeper understanding of Korean culture. In the future, even more readers will surely step beyond the pages of their books to visit these actual locations, encountering the extraordinary moments where literature and reality meet.

Midnight Light: Can Light Become Pollution?

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

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

[Submit your story](#)

A Story from an Office Worker Living in Donggyo-dong, Mapo-gu, Seoul:

At some point, massive electronic billboards began taking over the building facades along the streets near Hongik University Station. Saturated with these overwhelming digital displays, Hongdae today is constantly flooded with brilliant, piercing light, even in the dead of night. Passersby often call it spectacular or find themselves captivated by the latest advertisements, but I look at these billboards through a slightly different lens.

“It is so bright that the night no longer feels like night.”

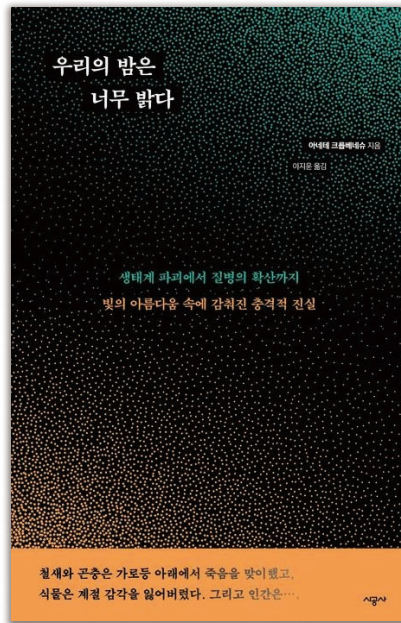
While others merely catch a fleeting glimpse of these screens as they walk past, I am forced to look down at them from my apartment window every single day. From where I stand, these neon monoliths do not evoke the sleek aesthetic of a futuristic city; instead, they feel like a pure form of environmental pollution. Blackout curtains have become an absolute necessity in my home. On the rare occasions I have to step outside after dark, the billboards illuminate the streets with a blinding intensity akin to stadium floodlights, prompting me to keep a civil complaint app permanently installed on my phone.

Of course, most electronic billboards are not this extreme. Even so, it takes just one or two of these screens to artificially turn the hours when everyone should be asleep into broad daylight, making life incredibly difficult. People only seem to notice the futuristic aesthetic of streets lined with massive advertising displays, remaining largely

oblivious to the actual distress experienced by the residents who live there.

Is it truly so difficult for electronic billboards and human life to coexist in harmony?

Recommended Book for This Story



Our Nights Are Too Bright (Licht aus!), Annette Krop-Benesch, Lee Jee-Yoon (translator), 2021

This story was shared by an office worker living in Donggyo-dong, Mapo-gu, the neighborhood surrounding Hongik University Station. Recently, advertising billboards have been popping up along the streets at a rapid pace. While some cheer for the futuristic vibe it creates, things are not always so pleasant for the actual residents. To address the concerns raised in this story, we would like to recommend the book *Our Nights Are Too Bright*.

Since city nights became excessively bright, light pollution has been reportedly causing sleep disorders and elevating the risk of depression. Given that the area around Hongik University Station and Yanghwa-ro is a highly developed commercial district, the abundance of artificial lighting is, to some extent, inevitable. However, no street exists solely for commerce. Because these neighborhoods are also places where residents clearly live out their daily lives, the amount of light must be regulated to balance both the vibrancy of the night streets and the quality of life for the people.

Our Nights Are Too Bright is a book that analyzes the profound impact of artificial, late-night light on human beings and issues a stark warning about its hazards. While this book cannot directly resolve the pollution you are currently facing, it serves as an excellent resource to educate stakeholders on the severe dangers of light pollution. Furthermore, it will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable reference for anyone who has ever paused to wonder whether the current brightness of our night streets is truly acceptable.

Allowing the night to be a true night. This is a story about the spaces we inhabit, and a question that all of us must carefully ponder.

What Do Life and Death Look Like for Single-Person Households in South Korea?

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.



Kim Su-Young, *The Inevitable Loneliness*, 2026.

In 2021, Professor Kim Su-Young, author of *The Inevitable Loneliness*, launched the <ALONE> project, a two-year study documenting the lives of 109 single-person households. This book brings to light the stories of 56 participants from that research. As of August 2025, South Korea officially entered an era where single-person households exceed ten million. Recognizing that living alone is a structural landscape carved out by late-industrial society, the author conceptualizes this phenomenon as a mechanism of self-production and self-reproduction.

Under the heavy shadows of an unstable labor market and a rapidly aging society, individuals in single-person households must live as the sole authors of their own life narratives. To maintain their social identity, they walk a precarious tightrope, burning through their own time and relationships. What constantly threatens and bleeds into their lives is loneliness. In November 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially designated loneliness as a pressing global health threat. According to the WHO, the health hazards of loneliness are as damaging as smoking

fifteen cigarettes a day.

Living alone, however, does not inherently equate to isolation or alienation. To clarify this, the author distinguishes between a “single-person household” and a “single-person family.” While those in single-person households live alone but often remain connected to their families of origin, a single-person family refers to a state where both parents have passed away and there are no family members or friends left to offer support. Professor Kim Su-Young categorized and interviewed these single-person units based on their economic, social, and cultural capital, analyzing their similarities and differences in depth. Interestingly, regardless of financial stability, the participants universally shared a profound need for consistent, intimate relationships and a vague apprehension about what happens after their death. When connections with others are severed, it takes a severe toll on both physical health and the overall quality of life. Individuals become highly vulnerable to illness, and the narrative surrounding their death becomes unstable. Strikingly, the interviewees involved in the study expressed a strong aversion to the negative, pitying gaze with which the media typically depicts lonely deaths.

Wishing for a dignified death, one that leaves a positive memory for others and imposes no burden on anyone, is a universal desire and a final hope. A complete, wholesome death encompasses the grand closure of oneself, the time and space one has inhabited, and the very relationships and objects that shared that journey. This should be recognized as a sacred right to dignity afforded not just to single-person households, but to all human beings. To achieve this, the author emphasizes the concept of a “communitarian embrace.” We must stop viewing someone’s passing merely as a closed case, and instead foster a society equipped with a culture

and system of care that collectively mourns their existence and honors them with respect. Only then can we truly alleviate the bittersweet, isolating fear of a lonely death.

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, asserted that what keeps a human being alive even amidst profound suffering is the “will to meaning.” Discovering the purpose of existence, sharing it, and having it recognized by others will serve as the ultimate wisdom that bridges the gap between loneliness and isolation. The author maintains that what we truly need in our later years are relationships, community, and connection to sustain us. Caring for one another means keeping each other alive, and such life-saving relationships can fully thrive even outside the bounds of kinship. As sociologist Ray Oldenburg captured in his concept of the “third place,” whether one has a space to simply be oneself, stripped of social roles and hierarchies, while comfortably connecting with a diverse range of people serves as the true benchmark for both individual quality of life and the inclusivity of a society.

Bestsellers for the First Week of May: Family Month Special


Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.





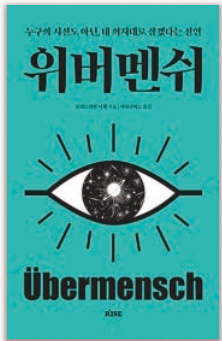
Major franchises dominate the majority of South Korea's offline bookstore market. Currently, four major franchises—Kyobo Book Centre, Youngpoong Bookstore, Jongno Books, and Arc N Book—are competing in the offline retail sector. Starting with Kyobo Book Centre, which has the largest number of branches, followed by Youngpoong Bookstore, Jongno Books, and Arc N Book, we will examine the top 10 best-selling books.

In our last issue, we explored the bestseller chart at Youngpoong Bookstore. For this June edition, which marks the fourth installment of our offline bookstore bestseller analysis, we conclude our look at the “Big Four” franchises by examining Arc N Book’s top sellers from the first week of May. Taking the number one spot at Arc N Book during this period was *EBS CSAT Special Lecture: Korean Language & Literature*. As the academic season kicks into high gear, students hitting the books for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) propelled this exam prep guide straight to the top. However, it was the only literary textbook to make the top 10. Instead, Arc N Book’s chart for the first week of May was overwhelmingly dominated by children’s books.





Led by *Children’s Scary Math Puzzles 2: Read and Use Right Away 71* at number two and *Princess Catch! Teenieping Mini Sticker Book: Dianaping* at number four, children’s titles claimed an impressive six out of the top ten spots. Rounding out the upper ranks of the chart were steady sellers like *Übermensch* and *Rapid*, both of which continue to enjoy enduring popularity.

Arc N Book Bestsellers: 1st Week of May 2026		
Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
1		<i>CSAT Special Lecture: Korean Language & Literature</i>
		EBS Educational Broadcasting Editorial Department
		Korea Educational Broadcasting System
		Middle & High School Study Guides

Jongno Books Bestsellers: 1st Week of April 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
2		<p>Children's Scary Math Puzzles 2 : Read and Use Right Away 71</p>
		<p>Hannal (Author, Illustrator)</p>
		<p>Blue Garden</p>
		<p>Children's Books</p>
3		<p>Don't Let Your Mood Become Your Attitude (Hello Kitty Edition)</p>
		<p>Lemon Psychology (Author) / Park Young-ran (Translator)</p>
		<p>Galleon</p>
		<p>Poetry/Essays</p>
4		<p>Princess Catch! Teenieping Mini Sticker Book: Dianaping</p>
		<p>Haksan Publishing</p>
		<p>I-Nuri</p>
		<p>Children's Sticker Books</p>
5		<p>Zootopia 2: Find Judy and Nick!</p>
		<p>T. Orsi (Author) / Tomato Fram (Illustrator) / Jung Nae-Hyun (Translator)</p>
		<p>The Modern</p>
		<p>Children's Books</p>
6		<p>Übermensch: A Declaration to Live by My Own Will, Not by Anyone Else's</p>
		<p>Friedrich Nietzsche</p>
		<p>RISE</p>
		<p>Humanities</p>

Jongno Books Bestsellers: 1st Week of April 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
7		Hunhan Nammae's Common Curiosity 14
		Hunhan Nammae (Original Work) / Choi Jae-Yeon (Writer) / Yoo Nan-Hee (Illustrator) / Lee Jung-Mo, Hunhan Company (Editors)
		Mirae N Iseum
		Children's Books
8		Super Fan Men's Hidden Science Hunt 7
		Super Fan Men (Original Work) / Seo Hoo (Writer) / Ryu Soo-Hyung (Illustrator) / Sandbox Network, Jung Jae-Hyung (Editors)
		Mirae N Iseum
		Children's Books
9		Hunhan Nammae 21
		Hunhan Nammae (Original Work), Yoo Nan-Hee (Illustrator) / Hunhan Company (Editors)
		Mirae N Iseum
		Children's Books
10		Rapid (Today's Young Writers 40)
		Jeong Dae-geon
		Minumsa
		Fiction

A Literary Journey to Gangneung in June: When the Plantain Flowers Bloom

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

My heart is a lake,
Row toward me, love.
Your white shadow I'll take in my arms,
I'll break like jade on your prow.

Like the poetic lines of Kim Dong-Myung, Gangneung is a city where quiet resonance and deep lingering emotions reside. His literature no longer stays confined within the pages of a book. Instead, his words have gently dissolved into the sea, the open fields, and the serene, timeless pathways of this beautiful region.

Kim Dong-Myung Literary Museum

Following the quiet, secluded paths of Sacheon-myeon, where the Kim Dong-Myung Literary Museum is located, the birthplace where the poet was born and raised quietly reveals itself. In the center of the courtyard stands a monument inscribed with his famous poem Plantain, while the actual plantain trees planted nearby raise their white flower stalks in late spring. Spending time in this space feels less like a mere visit and more like stepping directly into the world of literature.

As you venture just a little further from the birthplace, the sea of Sacheon unfolds before you. The scenery of the East Sea stretching far beyond the wide open fields naturally makes one realize why the poet so frequently sang of the ocean in his verses.



Kim Dong-Myung Literary House (Source: Visit Gangneung, <https://visitgangneung.net>)

Gyeongpodae, Gangneung Municipal Central Library, and Independent Bookshops

The landscapes of Gangneung naturally inspire literary contemplation. Climbing up to Gyeongpodae Pavilion brings the lake, the sea, and the dense pine forests into a single, breathtaking view. Celebrated in the verses of the Joseon-era poet Jeong Cheol, this pavilion is a timeless sanctuary where the hearts and minds of poets have layered over generations. Walking along the lakeside at dusk, you might find yourself naturally composing a line of poetry.

When you wish to pause your steps for a moment, the Gangneung Municipal Central Library reveals yet another layer of the city's literary texture. If you prefer a lighter, warmer atmosphere, cozy independent bookstores like Gorae Bookstore or Midday Ocean are wonderful alternatives. The harmonious blend of books, coffee, and the warmth of these spaces gently softens the overall texture of the journey.

The Gangneung Danoje Festival

The most beautiful moments of traveling through Gangneung arrive alongside the seasonal gifts nature bestows. From mid-May to early June, the plantain trees in the courtyard of the poet's birthplace quietly raise their white flower stalks. Around the very time these flowers bloom, the exact ones that once inspired a line of poetry from Kim Dong-Myung, Gangneung raises the curtain on the Danoje Festival. In this brief, magical window, the city seamlessly harmonizes into a capital of literature where vibrant tradition and cultural heritage intertwine.



Poster of 2026 Danoje Festival (Source: <https://korean.visitkorea.or.kr>)

Gangneung and Coffee

When autumn arrives, the city’s atmosphere transforms completely. In October, the time when Gangneung heats up most passionately as a city of coffee, the Gangneung Coffee Festival raises its curtain, filling the entire city with a rich coffee aroma. Crimson autumn leaves, the autumn sea, and a warm cup of coffee harmoniously intertwine, leaving a uniquely deep and lingering resonance that belongs only to Gangneung.

Spring and autumn are two seasons where poetry, tradition, and coffee seamlessly blend. Whichever you choose, Gangneung completes its literary canvas with a distinctly different texture.

Standing for a moment beneath the white plantain flowers, a line of poetry naturally catches on your lips before you even realize it. Gazing at the very ocean Kim Dong-Myung once stared at, holding a warm cup of coffee, and

pausing for just a brief moment, that short window of time is more than enough. For Gangneung is not merely a city to be read, but a place that slowly saturates your heart, lingering long after like a beautifully crafted sentence.



Gangneung Coffee Street (Source: Visit Gangneung, <https://visitgangneung.net>)

Address

Kim Dong-Myung Literary Museum: 30-2, Saetdol 1-gil, Sacheon-myeon, Gangneung-si, Gangwon State

Gangneung Municipal Central Library: 448, Gangneung-daero, Gangneung-si, Gangwon State

Gangneung Danoje: Gangneung Danoje Festival Preservation & Education Center, 1, Danojang-gil, Gangneung-si, Gangwon State (June 15 to 22)

Gangneung Coffee Street: Around Anmok Beach area, 20-1,
Changhae-ro 14beon-gil, Gangneung-si, Gangwon State Republic of
Korea

2026 K-Book Market In Seoul

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

A 3-day market to connect Korean publishing rights and IP with invited global buyers.

Expect tailored 1:1 rights meetings, IP showcase & pitching (online + on-site), and K-Book Exhibition. You'll also find export consulting (by region/genre), a publishing trends seminar, a networking reception, and Seoul International Book Fair access for overseas participants.

DATE: 2026.6.22(Mon)–24(Wed) | PLACE: Lotte Hotel World, Seoul | Host: Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea(KPIPA)

We hope you'll show your continued interest and support for the 2026 K-Book Copyright Market!

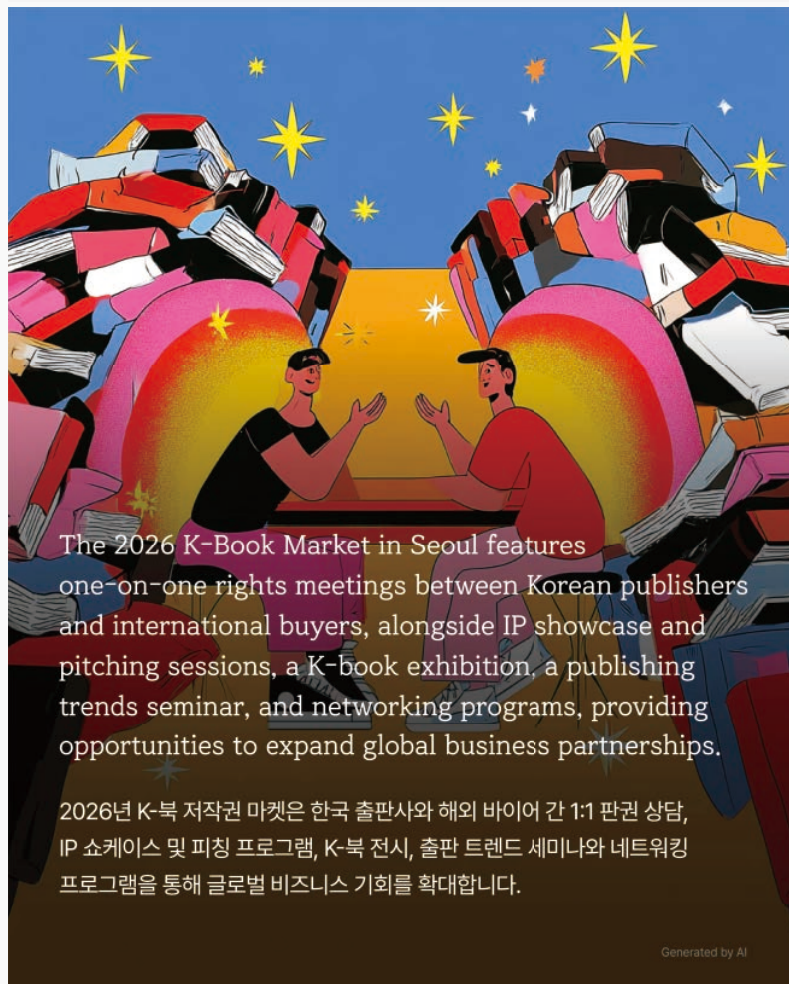
INFO



2026 K-Book Market In Seoul

해외 바이어와 저작권·IP를 연결하는 3일
3 days to connect rights and IP with global buyers

K-Book Trends



The 2026 K-Book Market in Seoul features one-on-one rights meetings between Korean publishers and international buyers, alongside IP showcase and pitching sessions, a K-book exhibition, a publishing trends seminar, and networking programs, providing opportunities to expand global business partnerships.

2026년 K-북 저작권 마켓은 한국 출판사와 해외 바이어 간 1:1 판권 상담, IP 쇼케이스 및 피칭 프로그램, K-북 전시, 출판 트렌드 세미나와 네트워킹 프로그램을 통해 글로벌 비즈니스 기회를 확대합니다.

KEY PROGRAM 주요 프로그램

1:1 RIGHTS MEETINGS

1:1 Rights & IP 상담 : 해외 바이어와 미팅

**IP SHOWCASE & PITCHING
[ONLINE + ON-SITE]**

IP 쇼케이스 피칭 : 온-오프라인 발표

**K-BOOK EXHIBITION
[LOBBY]**

로비 도서 전시 : 국내 출판사 도서 한눈에 보기



MORE THAN MEETINGS 미팅을 넘어, 더 많은 비즈니스 기회

EXPORT CONSULTING

수출 컨설팅: 권역·장르별 진출 전략 점검

**PUBLISHING
TREND SEMINAR**

출판 동향 세미나
: 참가국 시장 및 트렌드 공유

**NETWORKING
RECEPTION**

네트워킹 리셉션
: 국내외 출판 관계자 교류 확대

**SEOUL INTERNATIONAL
BOOK FAIR
ACCESS SUPPORT**

서울국제도서전 참관 지원
: 해외 참가사 대상 참관 지원



2026 K-BOOK MARKET IN SEOUL K-북 저작권 마켓

K-BOOK

2026 K-BOOK MARKET IN SEOUL

DATES JUN 22 (MON)-24 (WED), 2026

VENUE LOTTE HOTEL WORLD, SEOUL

**HOST KPIPA (KOREA PUBLICATION
INDUSTRY PROMOTION AGENCY)**

기간 6/22-24 | 장소 롯데호텔 월드 | 주최 출판진흥원(KPIPA)

KPIPA



Let's build global partnerships for K-books in Seoul.
Join us at the 2026 K-Book Market in Seoul.
Save this post and share it with a publishing friend!

서울에서 K-북 글로벌 파트너십의 기회를 만나보세요.
2026년 K-북 저작권 마켓에서 여러분을 기다립니다.
이 글을 저장하고, 출판 업계 관계자와 공유해 주세요.