

## Knowledge

# Korean Publishing Market's Trends in 2024 and Outlook for 2025

2024.12.02



The era of "fandoms" has arrived in the publishing sector



Han Kang wins the Nobel Prize in Literature



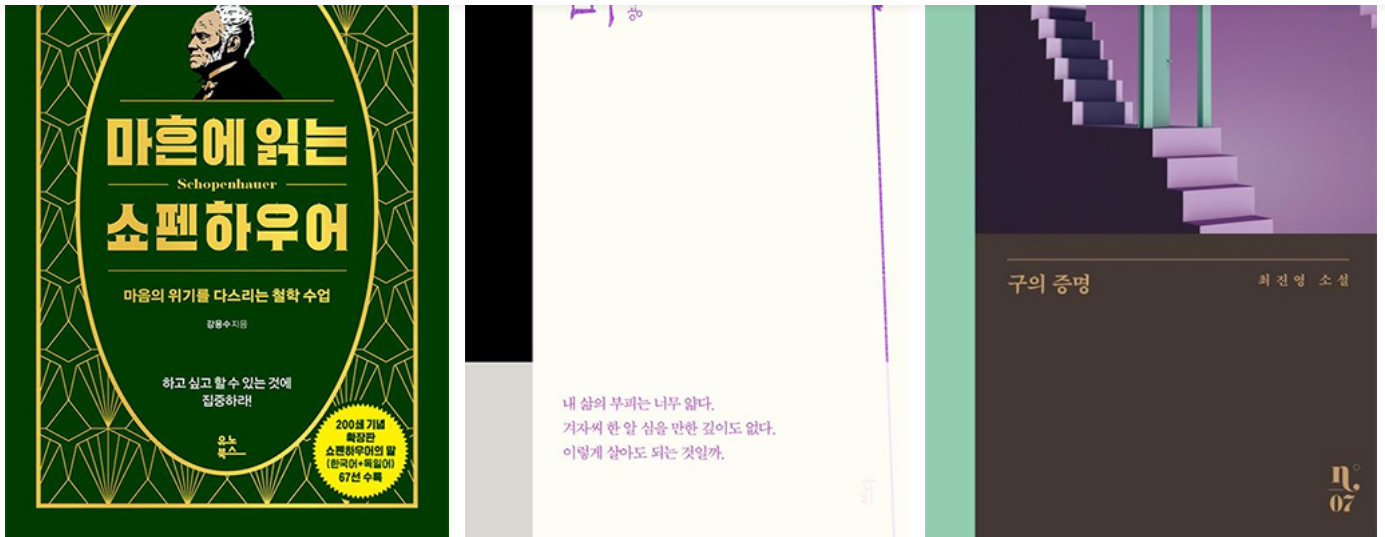
2025 will be the year of picture books

## Trends in 2024: Questioning life, fandoms, and Nobel Prize in Literature

Philosophy and psychology books have dominated the Korean publishing market, with *Reading Schopenhauer at Forty* (Uknowbooks) topping the overall bestseller list through August. Also, 11 of the 30 bestselling fiction titles in the first half of the year were "rebound" titles, meaning they were published more than 10 years ago. In addition, the nonfiction category returned to growth after 4 years of decline, and the cases of books becoming bestsellers after being recommended by celebrities increased.

*Reading Schopenhauer at Forty* has continued to grow in popularity this year after being featured on a TV entertainment series last year. The author, Kang Yong-Soo, who studied philosophy in Germany, introduces the life philosophy of Schopenhauer, who said, "Forty is the turning point in life." As the title suggests, it has many readers in their 40s. The sales growth rate of this book and other popular Western philosophy books has been quite high, and Eastern philosophy books have also shown growth. The Schopenhauer fever has been so strong that 8 titles with "Schopenhauer" in the title were published last year as well as 13 in the first half of this year. The interest in Schopenhauer has expanded to other philosophers such as Nietzsche, Machiavelli, Platon, and Kant. In the field of Eastern philosophy, interest in Zhuang Zhou has been particularly prominent, driven by the activities of the highly popular philosopher Kang Shin-Ju. The age-old, never-ending question of "how we should live" has fueled the Korean publishing market.

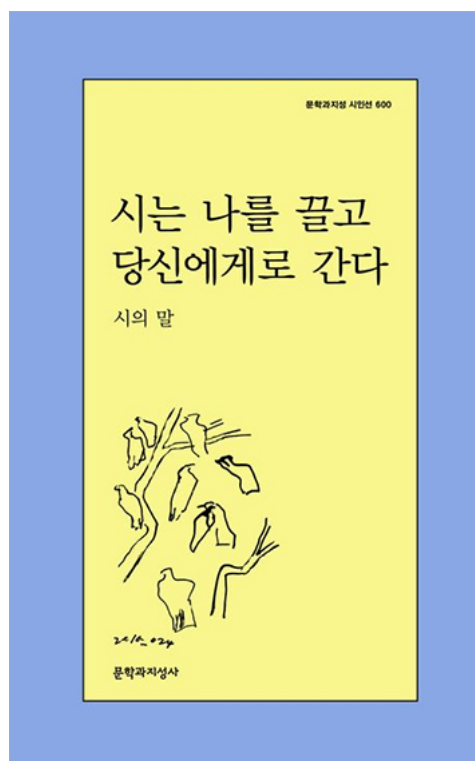
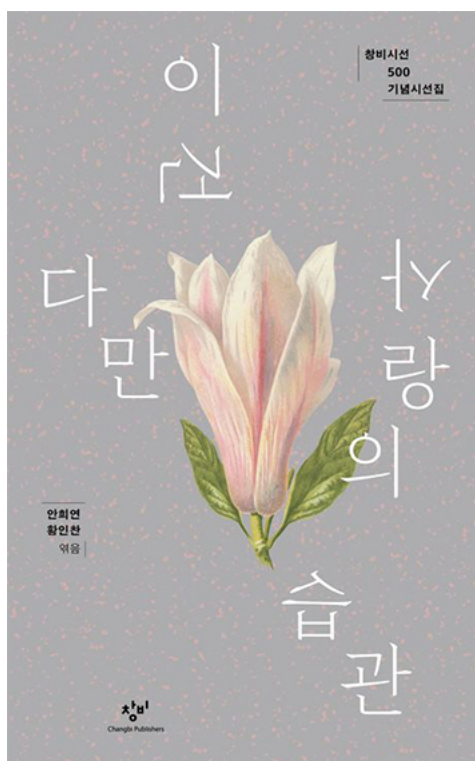
One of the most prominent characteristics of the fiction category was the rise of previously-published novels. For example, Yang Gui-Ja's *Contradictions* (Write Publishing), which topped the fiction category, was originally a bestseller in 1998, 26 years ago, and has since gone through 132 printings. Also, *Gu's Proof* (EunHaeng NaMu) by Choi Jin-Young, published in 2015, went viral and gained enthusiastic support from readers in their 20s. Other examples include world literature classics such as *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai, *Demian* by Hermann Hesse, *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami, and *3 Body Problem Vol. 1* and *Dune Vol. 1*, which were adapted into movies and OTT videos.



Reading Schopenhauer at Forty, Contradictions, Gu's Proof

Nonfiction titles were also strong. Patrick Bringley's *All the Beauty in the World*, the top-ranked title in the nonfiction category, has garnered significant attention, reaching the top of the overall bestseller list. The book began gaining traction late last year when film critic Lee Dong-Jin named it his personal “book of the year” on his YouTube channel. Such celebrity endorsements are powerful in terms of sales and marketing. For example, more than 13 titles hit the bestseller lists after being introduced by Lee Dong-Jin, a critic Korean readers “trust and read.” Also, books introduced by members of idol groups such as BTS, LE SSERAFIM, IVE, and others continued to make headlines.

The poetry collections of Changbi Publishers and Moonji Publishing, the twin walls of poetry publishing, have reached their 500th and 600th issues, respectively, sparking a boom in poetry collections. *Changbi Sisun* achieved this milestone 49 years after it first began publishing Shin Kyung-Rim's *Farmers' Dance* in March 1975, and *Poetry Collection by Moonji Publishing* reached the feat 46 years after it began with Hwang Dong-Kyu's *When I See a Wheel* in 1978. Every country with a thriving literary and publishing sector has poetry collections, but few have the production, distribution, and appreciation of poetry and poetry collections like those in Korea.



It was Han Kang's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature that struck the Korean publishing market in the second half of this year. The news that Han Kang, a novelist and poet, had become the first Korean to win the Nobel Prize in Literature broke on the night of October 10. The whole country rejoiced. Among the 121 winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Han Kang is the 18th female winner and the first Asian woman. As described by her father, the famous novelist Han Seung-Won, her sentences are "delicate, exquisite, and heartbreaking." At the heart of them are the suffering and pain of the Korean people who lived through turbulent modern history. Han Kang has never hesitated to plunge into tragedy with her incredible sense of empathy. The sales (including orders) of Han Kang's key titles, including *The Vegetarian* (Changbi Publishers), *Human Acts* (Changbi Publishers), *We Do Not Part* (Munhakdongne), *Greek Lessons* (Munhakdongne), and *Yeosoo's Love* (Moonji Publishing), exceeded 1 million copies in Korea's top three online and offline bookstores alone within five days of the award announcement, and over 3 million copies were printed within a month. However, local bookstores that missed out on sales by not being able to obtain the books early on publicly complained to publishers and wholesalers. Also in the spotlight was a small bookstore, "Bookstore Today (책방오늘)," which Han had run for 6 years. Though the bookstore has become a tourist attraction, she recently announced that she will be taking a break from running it for the time being.



"Bookstore Today," a small 10-square-meter bookstore in Seoul run by Han Kang



*The Vegetarian; Human Acts; We Do Not Part*

*Sayno Love* (Day One), a down-to-earth life guide for young people by an anonymous, self-made, super-rich author, has sold more than one million copies, hitting 60th printing in July this year, 17 months after its publication. The book is a symbol of “practical reading” for young readers, looking for books that are immediately useful and cost-effective. Relatedly, e-book reading platform Millie Seojae analyzed that there is a strong preference for books that give “wise solace” through a scientific approach. Examples include emotional and psychological books based on research findings in brain science, such as *Brain Science When Depressed* and *Your Brain Wants Optimization*. This shows that the trend of so-called “how-to” books is spreading beyond practical and self-help books to include other genres such as nonfiction, psychology, and liberal arts.

Meanwhile, one of the hot issues in the Korean publishing world this year was the Seoul International Book Fair, which celebrated its 70th year (it turned international in 1995). This year’s event, which was held for five days starting June 26, attracted a historic record of 150,000 paid visitors, making it an iconic symbol of the so-called “Text-Hip,” a culture passionate about reading. The book fair featured 452 exhibitors from 19 countries, presenting more than 450 different programs. Among the exhibitors, publishers specializing in genre fiction such as SF, fantasy, and romance were particularly popular, and many young female readers’ purchase of books and participation in events confirmed that “genre fiction is the mainstream.” Book fairs, too, have now entered the era of fandoms.

\* *K-Book Trends* Vol. 73 – Go to the article about the 2024 Seoul International Book Fair

At the “2024 K-Book Copyright Market” organized by the Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea (KPIPA) at Lotte Hotel in Jamsil, Seoul, two days before the opening of the book fair, business meetings between about 100 Korean publishers and 100 buyers, including overseas publishers, took place. The event, which was held on the largest scale this year with the expanded publishing export support policy, garnered strong responses both at home and abroad, as overseas buyers were invited to hold copyright consultations and visit the book fair together in an effort to export copyrights of Korean books.

\* *K-Book Trends* Vol. 71 – Go to the article about the 2024 K-Book Copyright Market



The 2024 K-Book Copyright Market (June 24-26, 2024)

## Outlook for 2025: The “year of picture books,” expanding reading horizons

The global economy is mired in recession and high prices. Readers' demand for reading and search for new pursuits and growth will also affect publishing. I look forward to the performance of self-help books and all kinds of practical books in the Korean publishing market. Additionally, education-related books, such as study guides for elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as books on parenting, which have a structurally significant share in the market, are expected to perform well. The growth of literary publishing, boosted by the "Han Kang effect," is also anticipated. Furthermore, as Korea enters an ultra-aging society, there will be an activation of publishing plans targeting the elderly, along with the production of large-print books. The release of new works by famous authors and the continued fandom phenomena driven by celebrity recommendations will also persist. Also, it is expected that many books will be published marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan.

Meanwhile, AI digital textbooks will be introduced to schools in Korea from 2025 for the first time in the world. The Ministry of Education explains that AI textbooks will provide optimized learning paths, customized plans, and support for students based on the AI-based diagnosis and analysis of students' learning capacity. The plan is to introduce them first in math, English, computer skills, and special education for grades 3 and 4 of elementary school, grade 1 of secondary school, and grade 1 of high school from 2025, and to replace paper textbooks with AI digital textbooks for all subjects by 2028. If the introduction of such digital textbooks is fully implemented as planned, the ecosystem of reference books interconnected with paper textbooks will be severely affected, and the negative impact on the publishing market is likely to be devastating.

Private organizations related to books in Korea are planning to organize various activities for 2025, designating it as the Year of Picture Books. While they have been rolling out “Year of Books” projects for different readers since 2020, the next five years will feature picture books (2025), literary books (2026), history books (2027), science books (2028), and art books (2029). Why picture books? Because they are books that anyone from 0 to 100 years old can easily read together, books that are at the beginning of reading life, and literary and art books that have a message. In Korea, there is a city (Wonju, Gangwon-do) that proclaims itself the City of Picture Books. There are more than 100 bookstores specializing in picture books across the country, and there are picture book libraries and museums throughout many cities. I expect next year to be a year in which more people will fall in love with picture books and have more fun reading them.

[#Fandom](#) [#Han Kang](#) [#Nobel Prize in Literature](#) [#Year of Books](#) [#Picture Books](#)

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