



## **K-Books Are Coming!**

**An interview with  
Beatrice Lin, MatchWHALE**

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KENNEALLY: K-dramas and K-pop have placed the Republic of Korea at the center of the media universe. Are K-books about to join them?

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

From *Squid Game* to *Parasite*, BTS to Blackpink, Korean popular culture has ascended to the summit of global attention. Korean books, especially novels by women authors, are also finding enthusiastic readers far beyond native audiences. *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo, a fictionalized memoir with factual footnotes, ignited a feminist groundswell in South Korea and has sold over 1 million copies worldwide since its publication in 2016. *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang received the 2016 Man Booker International Prize and has been translated into two dozen languages.

An online database of titles called MatchWHALE is set to add many more Korean titles to libraries and bookstores around the world. MatchWHALE founder Beatrice Lin joins me now from Seoul. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Beatrice. *Annyeong haseyo*.

LIN: *Annyeong haseyo*. Hello, everyone. Thanks for inviting me to this CCC podcast.

KENNEALLY: We're looking forward to speaking with you, Beatrice. On the MatchWHALE homepage, you offer "trendy Korean books." Do Korean authors and publishers think it's now their turn to benefit from the fascination with Korean culture that has already captured enormous global audiences?

LIN: Yes. Definitely, I can say yes. Because as you already highlighted, we've already seen Korean authors like Han Kang winning Man Booker International awards for her work *The Vegetarian* and Lee Suzy receiving the BolognaRagazzi award for her work *Summer*. So it has sparked an increased interest in Korean literature and illustrations.

Here's another example like that, the novel *The Murderer's Memoir* by Kim Young-ha. His work's also received a good response in European countries. Especially its German edition won 2020 German Independent Publishers Literary Award and German Mystery Literary Award in the international category. It went on its fifth printing within the first



year of its publication. *Kim Ji-young – as you mentioned – born in 1982*, depicting the life of a Korean woman, has set the record of copyright sales to 16 countries.

Here's one very interesting statistic from KLTII. When we're looking at the statistics from 2017 to 2021, the Korean literature published overseas shows an average increase of 10%. And if we add the number of books translated and published overseas with private support, more than 200 Korean literature has been reaching overseas readers every year. We expect – it's growing and will reach to maybe more than 300 Korean literature works soon published overseas.

In addition, amid the k-pop craze, nonfiction books, such as humanities books that analyze the world and the meaning of k-pop idol music, is also emerging.

**KENNEALLY:** The MatchWHALE offering will include publishing rights to novels and nonfiction books as well as audiobooks and digital content, such as ebooks and webtoons. Describe how the rights-matching service works.

**LIN:** Apart from the bestsellers, Korea produces a variety of high-quality literature, nonfiction, and illustrated books for adults and children every year. So we thought we need very powerful tools that can introduce its wonderful books more effectively to overseas readers and publishers, especially recommending books that align with their interests. So we launched MatchWHALE.

Especially when we say the function of a rights matchmaking and management service – in short, we say RMS – this is for the Korean-language books for the global copyright market and copyright management. It matchmakes potential acquiring rights managers in foreign publishers or agents, scouts, and the like in the publishing industry to Korean rightsholders directly online 24/7, so Korean rightsholders can manage the entire lifecycle of copyright-related tasks, such as copyright inquiry, offer negotiation, contract signing, or royalty and sales reporting during the publishing contract period with their potential foreign publishers' acquiring rights editors who have to license their rights for their publications.

The beauty of MatchWHALE that enabled this matchmaking happens is book DNA technology and multinational translation of book metadata. This allows the users to intuitively understand books per their interest, and they continue encountering books with the keywords of their interest, even though they are written originally in Korean language.

**KENNEALLY:** MatchWHALE will also act as a distributor for Korean-language digital content. Has it been difficult up to now for Korean publishers to get their books into overseas markets?



LIN: Yeah, that's right, because we at MatchWHALE – we support the ONIX standard, which is virtually the global standard we know for distribution, but it hasn't yet been widely adopted in South Korea's publishing market. We also employ the international subject codes, such as Thema and American system BISAC, to distribute Korean books in bulk to tours, bookstores, and digital libraries overseas. And we also plan to include popular Korean webtoons and web novels in the variety of Korean offerings as well.

KENNEALLY: Korean government subsidies have long played an important role in supporting film production in Korea, Beatrice Lin. Is there a similar role for government to have in publishing?

LIN: Yes, that's right. So KPIPA – we call the Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea – they are carrying out a variety of projects that support publishers in Korea and new services, like MatchWHALE, to promote and foster Korean publishing culture domestically and also spread it overseas. Every year, for example, they operate a Korean exhibition hall at major international book fairs and also invite overseas publishers into Korea, and at the end, strengthening the support programs to export Korean books overseas through copyright exchange events as well.

KENNEALLY: South Korea has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, Beatrice Lin. How important are books and reading to Koreans?

LIN: Yes, it's true that Korean culture of loving books still persists. Historically, Koreans love books. However, unfortunately, according to a 2021 national reading survey published by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism Korea, it shows the overall reading rates, including ebooks and audiobooks, has decreased by 24 points over the last eight years. And the proportion of reading rates – reading or listening only to non-paper books, such as ebooks and audiobooks – has risen from less than 1% towards 6%. As a conclusion, we still show the Korean reading ecosystem is still very centered on paper books.

However, when we're looking at the paper books alone, the number of books that adults read per every year has decreased in half in just two years – for example, like six books in 2019, but now, we only have 2.7 books per year that adults read in 2021. This phenomenon happens the same to students from elementary towards high school, because it also shows their number decreased per every year, and maybe it's around 23% decreased, reaching only 24 books per year they read in 2021.

On the other hand, the number of ebooks increased significantly, but it is still way below to make up the decrease the decrease in paper book reading. So it's unfortunate that this decline in reading rates in Korea happened, and also it negatively impacted the Korean publishing industry. Yet we are glad that the global publishing industry has begun to



recognize the power of Korean publishing in variety and also quality of the books. So I'd like to ask for your interest and support of MatchWHALE, because we highly promote and bring the universe of Korean publications into this global overseas publishing market.

KENNEALLY: Beatrice Lin with MatchWHALE in Seoul, thank you so much for joining me today. *Gamsahamnida.*

LIN: *Gamsahamnida.* Thank you very much, CCC, for your invitation for myself and MatchWHALE and the audience who listen to this podcast.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for joining me.

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