
THE Q
KOREA

What is a Quantum Leap?

- After 2010, Korean SF made a quantum leap from a niche genre to the center of literature.
- In 2016, when DeepMind's AlphaGo defeated Go champion Sedol Lee, it demonstrated that SF is not just about the distant future.
- During this period, Korean SF grew dynamically, addressing social issues and feminism.



New Literary Status

Transition from marginal genre to mainstream literature with critical and commercial recognition.



Technology Impact

Real technological advances like AI demonstrated that science fiction concepts were becoming reality.

"A movement from margin to center, from imagination to reality"

7 Characteristics of the Quantum Leap

1. New Writers

Emergence of a large group of new writers, leading to an explosion in publication volume

2. Star Authors

Popular authors like Cho-yeop Kim and Seon-ran Cheon gained mainstream recognition

3. Female Readers

New readership centered on women formed, driving the growth of the entire market

4. Mainstream Entry

SF entered major literary platforms, no longer treated as a minor genre

5. Diverse Themes

Themes became more diverse, especially in social critique, feminism, and ecology

6. Literary Awards

Writers like Bae Myung-hoon won major literary awards, gaining critical recognition

7. Global Recognition

International interest and status grew significantly, with nominations for prestigious global awards

"Quantitative growth, qualitative depth, and international expansion"

A Bridge Between Eras

Pioneers of Modern Korean SF



Djuna

Pseudonymous author and former chair of the Korean Science Fiction Writers Union

Notable work: "Everything Good Dies Here"



Myung-hoon Bae

Acclaimed science fiction writer known for inventive world-building

Notable work: "Tower", "First Breath"

Their Impact & Legacy

Building the Foundation

- Proved the literary potential of Korean SF
- Demonstrated commercial viability of the genre
- Created the foundation for the new wave of authors

Key Contributions

- Satirical critique of Korean society through speculative structures
- Expanded SF's presence in mainstream literary discourse
- Connected Korean SF to global audiences

Myung-hoon Bae's World

The Satirist of Korean SF



Myung-hoon Bae

Born 1978, acclaimed Korean SF writer known for political satire and social critique

Literary Significance

- Pioneer of modern Korean SF
- Winner of multiple Korean literary awards
- Known for sharp social critique through SF frameworks
- Created innovative speculative structures as narrative devices

Speculative Structures as Heroes



Tower (2009)

A series of interconnected stories set in Beanstalk, a 674-story skyscraper that functions as a sovereign nation

"Through his satirical depiction of 'Beanstalk,' Bae criticized the power structures and absurdities of Korean society"



First Breath

Set in a space settlement made of two cylindrical city sectors holding 600,000 people

"First Breath was the largest space settlement ever built... an example of a space structure called an O'Neill Cylinder."

Bo-young Kim - Expanding the Horizon of Korean SF

Literary Pioneer



Bo-young Kim

Born in 1975, one of South Korea's most active and influential science fiction writers

Career Highlights

- Debuted in 2004 with "Experience of Touch"
- Published two acclaimed collections in 2010
- Script adaptation for Bong Joon-ho's "Snowpiercer"
- Multiple works translated internationally

Literary Evolution

- 2004: Won Science and Technology Creative Writing Award
- 2010: Published "A Far-Going Story" & "An Evolutionary Myth"
- 2013: Released novel "Seven Executioners"

Works & Impact

I'm Waiting for You

Seven Executioners

A Plagued Sea

Expanding SF's Horizon

- Innovative philosophical themes and complex world-building
- Challenging traditional genre boundaries with literary depth
- Exploring gender identity, environmental concerns, and posthumanism

Global Impact

- Works translated into multiple languages, including English
- Connecting Korean SF to international audiences
- Creating paths for future Korean authors on the global stage

Screenplay contribution — Snowpiercer (2013)

'Subversion' in Boyoung Kim's Work

Challenging Value Systems

"An Excellent Gene"

A short story that explores the relationship between technological advancement and human evolution.



Published in An Evolutionary Myth (2010)

> *From the Kiva's perspective, the Skydome people, unable to survive outside their artificial environment, are seen not as evolved but inferior...*

Key Message

Kim Bo-young powerfully questions the common belief that technological

The Subversive Flip

Skydome People
Technologically Advanced

Kiva People
Primitive Society

Subversive Twist

Kiva People
Spiritually Superior

Skydome People
Environmentally Dependent

Literary Technique

Through this dramatic reversal of hierarchies, the author subverts readers' expectations and challenges dominant narratives about evolution, progress,

'Redefinition' in Boyoung Kim's Work

Redefining Human Weakness

"The Stars Shine in the Sky of Earth"

A story where an alien perspective transforms our understanding of human sleep, shifting it from vulnerability to creative strength.



From the collection
An Evolutionary Myth

> *Through the eyes of an alien, sleep—which seemed like a disadvantage for survival—becomes the source that created humanity's unique culture and beauty.*

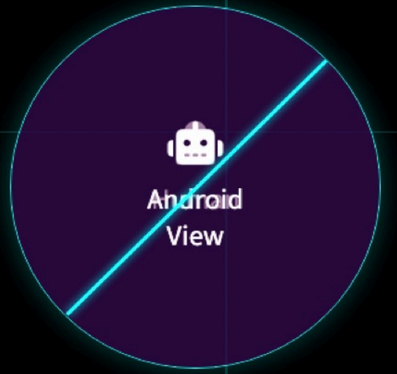
Key Message

Kim Bo-young transforms what appears to be a human flaw into our greatest strength, revealing how vulnerability creates cultural richness and imagination.

Challenging Perception

"How Alike Are We"

Through the limited perspective of a first-person android narrator, readers are forced to confront their own gender biases.



The reader sees the world through non-human eyes, revealing hidden biases in our perception

Philosophical Reflection

By shifting perspective to non-humans—aliens or androids—the author challenges readers to question the simple divisions we take for granted: superior and inferior, normal and abnormal.

Existential Inquiry: Seven Executioners

The Quest for Identity

Seven Executioners (2013)

Kim Bo-young's first novel and winner of the South Korean SF Award, exploring existential questions through a unique narrative structure.



Protagonist: Heuk-young

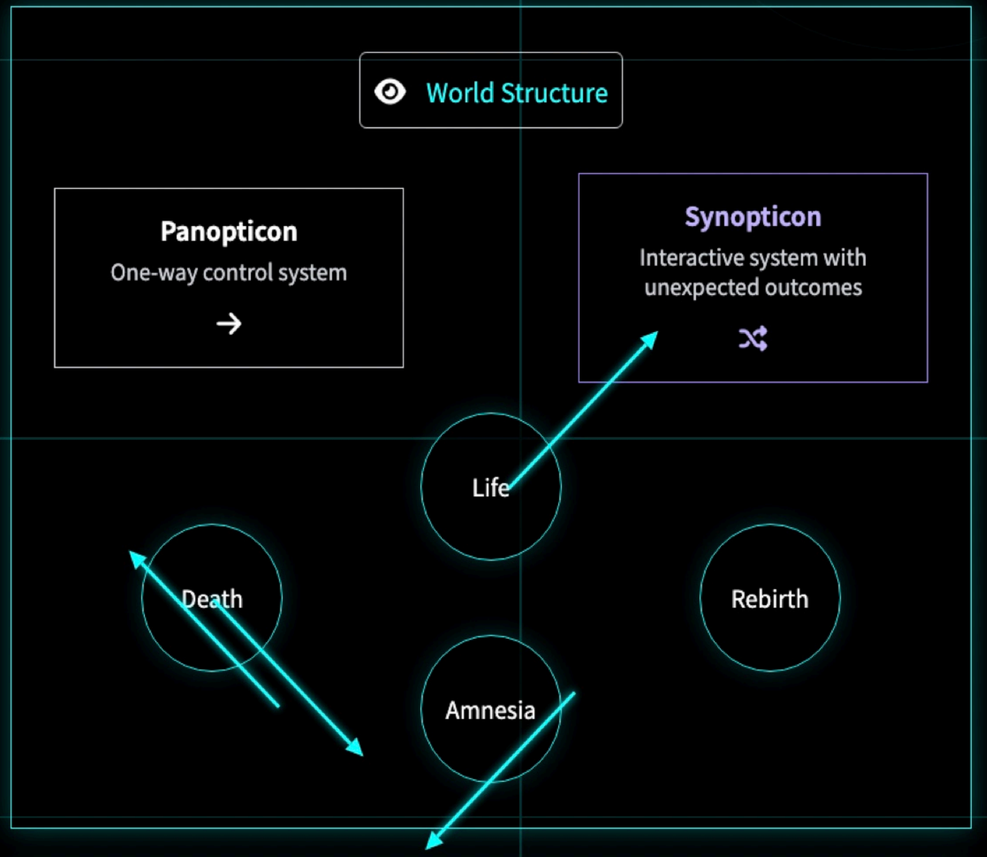
A man who repeatedly dies and comes back to life with no memory

> *"If I am me, who am I?" - The fundamental question Heuk-young asks as he struggles to find his true identity despite having no memory of his past lives.*

Philosophical Message

In this world where life feels like a game, we must become the 'executioners' who find our own life's meaning, even when everything seems predetermined.

From Panopticon to Synopticon



Beyond the Game Metaphor

The novel presents life as a designed system, yet suggests that even within deterministic structures, individuals can discover agency and create meaning through their choices and relationships.

The Return of Nonhuman: A Sea of Plague

Challenging Anthropocentrism

"A Sea of Plague"

A novel that uses cosmic horror to challenge humanity's central position in the world.



Novel exploring
Cosmic Horror & Ecological Themes

> *The 'Old Humans' in the novel symbolize the return of the Chthonic—the vast, non-human world that modern humanism has repressed and forgotten.*

Decentering Humanity

From Anthropocentrism to Cosmic Perspective



Key Message

By showing a huge 'other being' forming a relationship with an immigrant woman, who is a social minority, the novel suggests that a new kind of solidarity is possible, one that goes beyond the divide between humans and non-humans.

Literary Technique

Kim uses cosmic horror to pull humanity from the center of the world from the start. This fundamentally challenges our narrow, human-centered way of thinking and opens possibilities for new kinds of relationships with the non-human world.

Choyeop Kim: The Core of a New Sensibility

Catalyst for a Literary Revolution



Choyeop Kim

Born in 1993, holds a BA in Chemistry and MA in Biochemistry from Pohang University of Science and Technology

Career: First burst onto the Korean literary scene in the late 2010s, became the catalyst for SF's explosive growth

Breaking Boundaries

- Massively expanded SF readership in Korea
- Brought ecological themes into mainstream SF
- Merged scientific expertise with literary imagination
- Created relatable protagonists that resonated with young readers

Major Works & Cultural Impact



Greenhouse at the End of the Earth

A post-apocalyptic narrative where women rebuild communities with plants after civilization collapses.

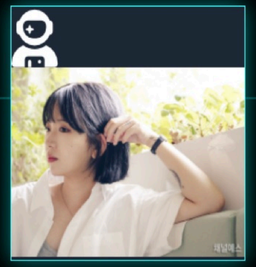
- Deep ecological imagination
- Powerful message of solidarity
- Captured hearts of countless readers

A New Cultural Sensibility

- Addresses modern anxieties through speculative frameworks
- Combines scientific accuracy with emotional resonance
- Represents the voice of a new generation of readers
- Helped shift the literary landscape toward embracing SF

Seon-ran Cheon: Expanding the Horizon of Solidarity

A Voice for Non-Human Beings



Seon-ran Cheon

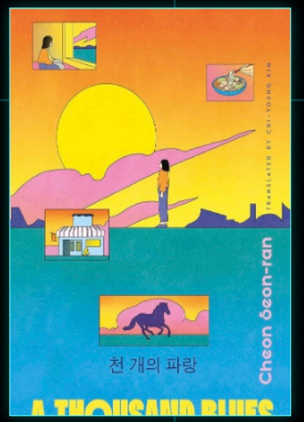
Born in 1993, Cheon is a beloved author by the 'MZ Generation' (Millennials and Gen Z) of South Korea

Career debut: "Broken Bridges" (2019)

Key Themes in Her Works

- Inter-species relationships and solidarity
- Care and healing in the technological age
- Breaking boundaries between human and non-human
- Hope and connection in dystopian futures

A Thousand Blues



Redefining Care and Connection

A story about a robot jockey, a horse, and people around them who heal each other's pain. Set in 2035, it explores relationships between humans, animals, and artificial intelligence.

> *"A hymn to our earth and to our humanity, giving powerful voice to those left behind in a fast-moving world of toxic productivity and commodification."*

Impact on Korean SF

- Expanded readership among younger generations
- Brought ecological and ethical perspectives to the genre
- International recognition through translated works

A Widening Spectrum and Globalization

Diverse Voices in Korean SF



Kang-myung Jang

Former journalist pioneering 'STS SF' approach

Notable work: "The World You Want to See"

Explores the relationship between science, technology, and society, analyzing issues like the post-truth era



Bora Chung

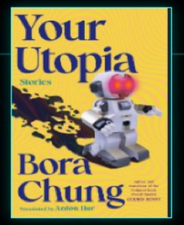
International breakout author and translator

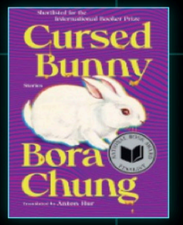
Notable works: "Cursed Bunny", "Your Utopia"

First Korean nominee for the Philip K. Dick Award, significantly raising Korean SF's global profile

Global Recognition & Cultural Impact







International Recognition

- Korean SF translations gaining global distribution
- Nominations for prestigious awards like Philip K. Dick Award
- Growing interest from international publishers

Expanding Spectrum

- Diversification of themes: social justice, post-truth, speculative fiction
- Cross-genre works blending SF with horror and fantasy
- SF anthologies like "Readymade Bodhisattva" introducing Korean voices globally

Beyond the Quantum Leap

The Future of Korean SF

Korean SF Today

- Built on the foundation of pioneers like Djuna and Myung-hoon Bae
- Grew with the philosophical depth of authors like Boyoung Kim
- Bloomed with a new generation of writers like Cho-yeop Kim and Seon-ran Cheon
- Achieved global recognition and international appeal

"Korean SF has become a literary genre that responds most intensely to the questions of our time."

Looking Forward

Expanding Universe

As Korean SF continues to evolve, it will further expand its literary territory, exploring new themes and reaching broader audiences worldwide.

Discover More

There is much more fascinating Korean SF to explore beyond this presentation. I encourage you to discover these works for yourself.

For more information:

THANK YOU!

Questions & Discussion

THANK YOU

Contact

