

**2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award Nominee  
Republic of Korea**



**Writer**

**Lee Geum-yi**



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*"Readers sympathize with stories or characters that reflect their own life. It's the same for young readers. Children's books should also reflect their reality and life. Among their friends, they can have someone with a disability or someone from a dysfunctional family. I believe that children's books, like all great works of literature, must have this genuineness which is a reflection of readers' reality, and this never changes with time. And this is what moves the hearts of young readers."*

- Lee Geum-yi



Lee was born in a small town called Cheongwon in 1962, and in 1968, she moved to Seoul where she grew up. Every vacation she went to visit her grandmother, and she stated that she was able to have a positive outlook on life with strong self-esteem because of her grandmother's love for her. She grew up listening to her grandmother's stories, which became the foundation for her to become one of the best storytellers for young readers.

By listening to radio dramas and reading comic books, she fell more in love with stories and storytelling. From comic books, she moved on to reading the collection of world literature for children, which her dad had bought for her, and she began dreaming of becoming a writer. After reading *Heidi* by J. Spyri, she decided to become a writer like her. She believed becoming a writer was her destiny and said, "I didn't choose to write children's literature. Children's literature chose me." After finishing high school, she practiced writing on her own instead of moving onto college. She made her literary debut by winning the Saebeot Literary Award for her story *Younggu and Heukgu* in 1984. In the following year, she won the JoongAng Children's Literature Award, and the Kyemongsa Children's Literature Award in 1987.

In 1989, Lee moved back to the countryside after getting married, and there she found life on a farm to be different from her childhood memories. In the midst of rapid industrialization and development, the discrepancy between the haves and have-nots had become a serious issue even in farming communities, and had given rise to families breaking up and children being neglected, not to mention environmental problems. While studying and analyzing the problems she witnessed, she became sensitive to the issue of nature and the environment and people living in it. Around this time, she published the *Bamtee Village* series and *You Too Are a Twilight Lily* in which she dealt with life in the countryside and family problems.

In 1999, Lee moved back to Seoul, and she focused on writing children's books. Her books written around this time make it clear that her interest had moved from the lives of children and young adults in the countryside to those in the city. She became especially interested in young women's social and psychological problems, and the struggles and dreams of young adults, which led to the publication of novels such as *Yujin and Yujin* and *The Whale in My Pocket*, to name a few. She became a trailblazer in the genre of young adult books, of which there weren't many writers in Korea. In 2010, she published *Can't I Go Instead?* and *The Picture Bride*, both historical novels; *Can't I Go Instead?* made the 2018 IBBY Honour List, and *Yujin and Yujin* and *The Picture Bride* were made into musicals.

For the past forty years, Lee has been a prolific writer in the genre of children's and YA books. She has been recognized as one of the most beloved writers of our time, with some of her novels on the bestseller lists and some works included in school textbooks. She has constantly challenged herself by experimenting with different literary genres and has strived to understand and meet the expectations of her readers. In 2020, she founded the publishing company Bamtee, and published new editions of her previous novels after revising them to reflect the gender sensitivity and political correctness of contemporary society, an unprecedented move in the publication industry either in or outside Korea.

Lee is a recipient of the Socheon Children's Book Award, the Yun Seokjung Literary Award, and the Bang Jeonghwan Literary Award. She has been nominated as the Korean candidate for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2020 and 2024. It is about time for her and her wonderful books to be introduced to readers around the world.

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## Contribution to Literature for Young Readers

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### The focus on the socially vulnerable

In her books, Lee shines light on people including children, minorities, young adults, and women who are often neglected and pushed into the dark corners of society. In *Just Different from Me*, she begins with a story about physical disability and moves on to the topic of emotional disability, not a topic easy to find in children's books in Korea. As the title suggests, Lee's message in the story is clear: disability is just a difference and no one should be discriminated against because of one's disability.

Lee's open perspective on the definition of family stems from her affection for young readers. In *Keundori in Bamtee Village*, she presents a family who seems to go against the traditional definition of family according to blood ties. The stepmother in the story is a true adult who loves and cares for her stepson, and by reading about this stepmother, who is nothing like the characters in fairytales and old children's books, readers will ask themselves the question: how should a grownup care for a child? Just as Lee re-creates this stepmother from being flat and one-dimensional, she always introduces characters who need to be re-interpreted and rescued from traditional stereotypes.

"Women" is another keyword which runs through her stories. In 2004, Lee published *Yujin and Yujin* about survivors of sexual assault. Two girls with the same name are molested in preschool, and because of the difference in their mothers' reactions and attitudes toward the trauma, the two girls grow up to be very different. In the story, Lee shares her message that an adult's inappropriate reaction to a child's or teen's unfortunate experience of sexual violence can damage the child's self-esteem. This novel was published when children and teens as victims of sexual violence were first surfacing as a social problem in Korea, and the novel raised public awareness of this important problem by tackling the taboo topic of sex

in young adult books. With this novel as the start, YA genre books in Korea began tackling the topic of sex and sexuality in young adults.

In 2019, Lee published *Like the Rowdy Princess* by subverting the traditional idea of a princess in literature. By introducing unconventional and delightful characters such as the rowdy princess, Princess of Aengdu, and her friend, Jadu, Lee takes readers on a journey of self-discovery and shares with them what it is like to be freed from fixed gender roles and to discover who they really are.

In *The Picture Bride*, Lee tells the story of women who left their own country and settled in a foreign land as the first generation of Korean immigrants. The story takes place in Hawaii one hundred years ago when Korea was under the Japanese occupation. It is a beautiful story of the solidarity and courage of three strong young women.

Lee's affection for marginalized people in society including children, young adults, and women is found not only in her novels. After publishing books on the topics of sexual violence and teen pregnancy, and seeing the reactions of readers, she took the more proactive step of working for the Gender Equality Committee of the Korean Children's and YA Book Writers Association as a way of merging her life as an activist and as a writer.

Lee's affection for marginalized people in society including children, young adults, and women is found not only in her novels.

### The coming-of-age novels that transcend the boundary of their genre

It was in the early 2000s when Lee Geum-yi first made an attempt at writing a YA novel, and this attempt later led to her writing historical novels for young adult readers. She chose history because she wanted her young readers to ask questions about where they are now and to expand their own boundaries. Her novel *Can't I Go Instead?* became a milestone in her literary career. The story is set during WWII in Korea when the country was under the Japanese occupation. The main character Sunam faces the unknown world and writes her own destiny by traveling to different countries including America. It is a coming-of-age novel about a young woman and her life adventures; it is also a historical novel about Koreans who fought back against Japanese imperialism and oppression; it is also a story about aristocrats who became Japanese collaborators; it is also a drama about human nature and desire which is told with accurate descriptions.

The Japanese occupation was a time in modern Korean history which was marked by horror and atrocities, and the novels about this time period usually introduce liberation activists almost like saints, other Koreans as helpless victims, or the Japanese and their collaborators as inhuman villains. In Lee's novel, her characters are like real people who falter as they find themselves conflicted by own desires and morality. The main character Sunam couldn't be more different from a helpless woman. She leaves Korea and moves to China and then to America to live her own life. Lee said that her aim was not to draw an ideal woman; she wanted to show that a woman has the right to do whatever she wants but also the right to be imperfect. You don't have to achieve something great, for everyone's life is important and valuable just by being alive and living your life. It is this message that she wanted to share with her young readers.

*The Picture Bride* is a diaspora novel which expands its temporal and spatial setting to the world. The story takes place in Hawaii one hundred years ago when Korea was under the Japanese occupation. Inspired by the real case of picture brides, the story introduces three eighteen-year-old women who leave for Hawaii with only a picture of their would-be-husbands. In this vivid retelling of the stories of the first Korean immigrants to Hawaii, the first Korean-Americans to settle in a foreign land, the three picture brides become mothers, and this epic story continues on with their daughters as they also write their own history far away from the homeland of their mothers. The three women miss home, but they do not want to return to their homeland. Their country is occupied by Japan, and without a country to return to, they are outside their national boundary. In this novel in which words such as "ethnicity" and "nationality" have no meaning, Lee tells the stories of courageous individuals in a unique moment in history, whom readers around the world can sympathize with and admire for their unbreakable spirit.

### **The storyteller who grows together with her readers**

Lee Geum-yi is a writer who has unwavering faith in her readers. She wants them to find the issues and problems of real life in her books and to think about the solutions to those problems. To do that, she does not stop her efforts to improve and rewrite her books so that they can truly speak to her readers.

In the 1990s, Lee wrote stories about growing up in the countryside in which she dealt with the problems of farming communities and family breakups. In the 2000s, she became a trailblazer in the genre of YA books in Korea. At the time, Koreans were not fully aware of the young adults' voices and their human rights, and not many writers were writing for

young adults as their readers. It was only in the 2000s that young adults were viewed not as people who should be educated and taught but as people who are consumers of literature in their own right. The writer who laid the foundation for this change was Lee Geum-yi, a writer who is always aware of the latest issues and concerns of her readers as she reinvents the type of writer she is. As a part of her effort to gently nudge her young readers to ponder more deeply where they are now in time and space, she began exploring young adults in history which led her to write *Can't I Go Instead?* and *The Picture Bride*. Lee is a writer of realism; however, she also wrote *Life Traveler*, a mystery thriller about a parallel universe, as a way of experimenting with a different narrative method for her teen readers.

She also revised some of her previously published books from the 1990s to reflect gender sensitivity as well as to delete any problematic words or ideas which might be taken to suggest stereotyping or discrimination or phobia against a certain sexual orientation or gender, age group, family type, migrant workers, or people with a disability. After publishing the redrafted editions of her children's and YA books in the 2020s, she also publicized her reason for the republication, which became a wonderful starting place for further discussion of the role of children's literature now. She makes it clear that a writer is someone who grows up, changes, and evolves with her readers.

Several of her books with heartwarming stories and realistic characters were made into TV dramas, musicals, and webcomics. *Just Different from Me* was made into a TV drama, and *Yujin and Yujin* and *The Picture Bride* were made into musicals. The musical director of *The Picture Bride* described Lee's work as "a historical story about the solidarity of three women who live through and overcome one hardship after another without losing their hope or positive outlook in life. This story set in a different time, place, and history can be re-interpreted in so many ways on stage and can help the audience ask questions about their own life." The heartfelt conversations of the three women were reborn as lyrics loved not only by readers but also by everyone who watched the musicals onstage.

Lee Geum-yi was listed as one of the best-selling writers of the 1990s, and since then, she has been ceaselessly challenging herself as a writer, re-inventing her literary world, and paving a new road for fellow writers. She will continue to find new ways to communicate with readers and always be by their side.

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Written by Oh Se-ran, a literary critic

**She makes it clear  
that a writer is someone  
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with her readers.**

## New Challenges and Possibilities in Lee Geum-yi's Literature

Since Lee Geum-yi's literary debut in 1984, she has been a writer of steady best-sellers which are also acclaimed by literary critics. From where does she draw her strength to be such a prolific writer? She believes writing is her vocation, and she is a professional who knows how to enjoy working as a writer. In addition, her unwavering love for and faith in humanity also have made her the writer she is.

"Coming up with ideas and developing them take much more time than the physical time of writing the words down. I call this time 'writing with my heart.' This is usually called conceptualization, and it is the time I enjoy most." She also said, "Instead of an open-ended or tragic conclusion, I prefer to end my stories with a heartwarming conclusion for readers." This is a very telling point of Lee Geum-yi as a writer. She spends more time conceptualizing her stories and enjoys what is usually considered the most painful part of writing. Her books restore readers' faith in humanity, and she wants her readers to be happy by reading her stories.

◆ Since her debut as a children's book writer, she has been writing stories of people's everyday life, and at the same time, her stories include her constant concern and interest in the socially marginalized. A good literary work is determined by its topic and narrative, but what's more important is that the story captures a truth and life which resonate with readers. Her in-depth exploration and reflection of children and their lives, coupled with her sensitive understanding and psychological descriptions, have made Lee Geum-yi the writer who represents children's book writers of Korea.

✦ In this society where people are thrown into never-ending competition, the question you should ask is how you should live your life, not what titles you would like to have in life. However, people are usually engrossed with only what is in front of them at the

moment instead of taking time out to ponder what is truly important in life. And teen readers are not exceptions. Young adults are still in the process of finding out who they are, and it is especially important for them to find the opportunities and the courage in themselves to plan their future. Lee begins her novels with this in mind, which is at the very root of her philosophy as a writer.

György Lukács once defined the novel as "a problematic individual's pilgrimage or path of development, which leads them from an unreflecting state of existence to a clear self-awareness." And this definition summarizes the characters in Lee Geum-yi's novels. Her characters are problematic individuals who have lost their direction in life in an unfeeling society, and her stories draw in readers for a moment of self-reflection by recognizing themselves in the characters who are spiritually impoverished. Therefore, her novels are what György Lukács described as "an exploration of humankind, and also case studies and expressions of life."

Lee said, "I wanted to write young adult novels with teens as main characters, but I had to wait until my children grew up and became teens because the life of teens now is so different from my own adolescence of thirty years ago that I had no confidence to write stories about what it's like to be a teen now." Before writing stories for teen readers, Lee made an effort to see the world from their eyes. It is certain that her popularity is not a momentary phenomenon and will continue for a long time, with her recently published short stories and novels marking a new turning point in her literary career, as well as a new chapter in young adult novels in Korea.

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Excerpts from 《100 Korean Children's Book Writers》(edited by Kang Jeong-gyu, Spoon Book, 2022), written by Hwang Suda, a literary critic.

## Local Topophilia in Lee Geum-yi's Children's and Young Adults' Stories

A majority of Lee Geum-yi's works are set in agricultural villages with local colors. The writer has a special topophilia towards local space. Her writings can roughly be broken down into three periods by her personal experience of developing local topophilia and her publication history by year.

Period 1 is from when Lee Geum-yi's development of local topophilia from her childhood to the publication of *Barefoot Children*. The rural village during this period is based on ecological values. After she moved to Cheongwon, Chungbuk, however, the reality of the agricultural villages oppressed her local topophilia. During this period, the rural villages are represented as a space of alienation.

Period 2 is from 1999 when she left an agricultural village for Seoul again in 2004 when she began to focus on writing novels for young adults with the publication of *Yujin and Yujin*. The rural village during this period is depicted as a hometown to return to with dreamy touches. The characters in her works have lost and missed their hometowns.

Period 3 is after the publication of *Yujin and Yujin* up to now. During this time, Lee Geum-yi moved from children to young adults, from agricultural villages to cities, although the rural space is still present in her works. With cities as primary space and local space as secondary one, people are hurt and in conflict in the primary space while they are healed in the secondary one.

Lee Geum-yi's view of the two spaces are very contrasting. Originally, agricultural villages were ideal spaces with a slight touch of dreaminess, but since *Barefoot Children* they degraded into a secondary space. Cities, however, have been made main place for living, which used to be an ideology oppressing rural areas, but have emerged as the primary space. Another point to make is that the positive power which embraces her original topophilia has enabled her to broaden her horizon of her literary world.

Lee Geum-yi's original local topophilia consists of trust in nature and ecosystem and of esthetic images. It is also about an infinite love that accepts one's own self and life. The local topophilia also helps Lee Geum-yi to overcome the simple binary division between cities and rural areas. Again, her characters go through a process in which they face and accept themselves as they are before they gain topophilia which 'spatializes' the world. That is to say, they gain the power with which they can accept the world they belong to. In this sense, topophilia is the product of self-acceptance and self-acknowledgement. Lee Geum-yi's local topophilia is reflected in the process where her characters gain topophilia. Thus, her agricultural villages are not simply the background for narratives, but the arena that offers power of 'growth,' an important value necessary to children's and young adults' literature, and they are deeply connected to the dominant theme of her literary world.

From the abstract of "A Study on Local Topophilia in Lee Geum-yi's Children's and Young Adults' Stories" by Cho Myung-ah, PhD Dissertation, Konkuk University 2016.

## 4 Interview with Lee Geum-yi 1



Writer Lee Geum-yi who supports and encourages young adults to dream big and broaden their horizon

**Q** In your children's books or young adult novels, there are stories about children who live with single parents, children carrying painful childhood memories, or children struggling with emotional disabilities. What is your reason for choosing these stories for your novels?

**A.** I believe it is the role of a writer to bring out into the open stories not only of those who are like your next-door neighbors but also of those who struggle with pain and hurt in their lives. I believe that was how literature began, with the stories of those characters, and this is the very essence of literature. Everyone has their painful memories in life. A person can come from a wealthy family, but he can grow up feeling unhappy and pressured by his parents' too high expectations of him. I like stories about these personal and painful memories that children or young adults carry with them.

**Q** You also dealt with realistic themes in your books for children or young adults. How do you find stories you would like to write about? And what message would you like to convey in your books about real problems in life?

**A.** Just because I'm a writer, there isn't anything special in my daily life. The only difference is that I am able to pick out interesting ideas from everyday life, which I believe is an important ability for a writer to have. So in my books, there are stories about what you would see in the news or in the life of people around you. After finding ideas from everyday life, I weave them into a narrative along with messages I want to share with my readers. So making observations of what I see in everyday life is a habit of mine, which I do almost instinctively. I don't try to look for a special idea or a story. Rather, I just try to be very aware of everything in my daily life.

I am more confident about expanding my imagination in a realistic setting than in a fantasy or surreal setting. People are too busy, and this is especially true for young adults as they struggle to get ahead in the system of competition created by adults, and it is not easy for them to take time out for a moment for self-reflection. When they are reading my books, I hope my readers can think about whether they are moving in the right direction or whether it is the right decision to put aside their happiness now and prepare for the future.

**Q** *You Too Are a Twilight Lily* was first published in 1999 and 300,000 copies of it were sold. It is a much-loved novel by many, and it is also included in an elementary school textbook. The story is about three children who experience a loss in their lives and their growing pains. Do you have any thoughts on what should be the responsibility and obligation of adults as they care for young adults who suffer from a traumatic experience?

**A.** That is something I always think and worry about as a writer of YA novels. It is easy for an adult to think, "Because I've been through it and I have experienced it, what I say is the right answer." The first thing you have to do is throw away those thoughts and listen to children and teens. Sometimes just talking about their problems and conflicts can be a solution. Instead of simply preaching to or lecturing them as an adult, it is my obligation to listen to them and give them a voice in my stories.

**Q** After writing children's books, you published *Yujin and Yujin* in 2004, your first YA novel. What was the reason for you to write a YA novel when you had been a children's book writer?

**A.** There are books you have to read at different growing stages in life. When you don't read them at the right stage, you will not be able to read them. In the past, there was a



Yujin and Yujin musical poster ▶

shortage of books that were right for readers of different age groups, so people could not read books appropriate for their reading age and ended up reading books that were too easy or too hard for them. When I first thought about becoming a writer, I wanted to write books that were right for readers of different age groups.

In the past, YA books that Korean teens read were mostly translations of foreign titles or stories about the writer's own adolescence. I wanted to write stories that teen readers could read and see themselves in. And that's why I wrote *Yujin and Yujin*.

**Q** What is it that you want to tell teen readers who love to read and write?

**A.** I want to tell them that they shouldn't put aside their happiness now for the future. And this is something that runs through all my books: they should not give up happiness they can have now for the uncertain future. When they look back on their past, I hope they will not be reminded only of unfulfillment and missed opportunities. I believe there is happiness one can have only at certain ages, and I want young people to pursue happiness at their own time.

And for those who are dreaming of writing their own stories, I would like to tell them that they should make literature a part of their everyday life. Writing practice is important, but they can learn the technical aspect of it later. First, they should think about whether they have fulfilling and diverse experiences and ideas in their life. And for the same reason, I would like to tell them that they should not fear failure or disappointment. Every experience will enrich their life and make it plentiful. It might sound as if I'm telling them not to pay attention to reality and just enjoy their life now, but when you compare life to a day, being in their twenties is like the morning. Instead of worrying about what might lie in the future, they should set goals, and be present in the moment of now. They should dream big and have eyes to look far and wide.

Interviewed by Lee Sanhui, a reporter for Hongdae Newspaper, Nov 20, 2018.



## Interview with Lee Geum-yi 2



“I wanted to share with young readers and teens the happiness that I felt while reading books as a little girl.”

**Q** What motivated you to become a children’s book writer and to write your early novels about children growing up in the countryside?

**A.** My grandmother couldn’t read, but she loved stories. Every night, carrying me on her back, my granny visited her next-door neighbor. I loved listening to and reading stories until I went to Seoul to go to elementary school. And I started reading collections of world literature for children that my dad had bought for me, and I began dreaming about becoming a writer. And I practiced writing on my own after finishing high school in 1980. When my dad found out what I wanted to be, he told me not to waste my time thinking I’d become a writer just out of high school, but I couldn’t understand why I had to go to college to learn how to write.

I realized that the stories I had written were children’s stories when I read the stories that were selected for children’s book literary contests. I had a short story titled *A Bird and a Child* which I entered in the JoongAng Children's Literature Award in 1984. The story made it to the finals, and it was then that I realized with certainty that I wanted to write children’s books. And I won the Saebeot Literary Award and the JoongAng Children's

Literature Award back to back, and that was how I became a writer.

And I fell in love with a man who was working for the farmers’ movement at the time. In the 1980s, college students were the main force behind the democratic movement against the dictatorship, and as I couldn’t be a part of it, I had respect for and felt indebted to those people who dedicated their lives to the movement. My parents were against my marrying him, but I married him, and we moved to the countryside.

Because I had spent a happy childhood in the countryside and had wonderful memories of the place from every vacation, living on a farm was my ideal. I wasn’t afraid to move there, and had high expectations of raising our children there. But living there as a newlywed wasn’t easy. Before then, my life centered around my books, which proved my value in life, but my life on the farm was different. Women living in the countryside worked as much as their husbands, on top of doing all the household chores. I didn’t have to do any farm work, but I felt that I had my hands full taking care of the house and children by myself. Still, I looked for ideas from everyday life while raising my children, and I wrote stories by cutting down on sleep.

My early books—*The Flower-Scented Wind Blowing at the Ranch*, *The Heart Tree*, *Younggu and Heukgu*—are all set in the countryside, but I had drawn ideas for them while still idealizing the place instead of thinking of it as a place of real life and trials. It was only after living there and raising my own children there that I wrote about real life in the countryside and the children living there in *Keundori in Bamtee Village* and *Barefooted Children*, which I wrote with a sense of mission.

**Q** After 2000, you started to write YA books. What motivated to write in a different genre?

**A.** For a long time, I wrote stories with main characters in the upper grades of elementary school. I read many YA books in translation, and I had this passion and desire to write stories about teens in Korea. But I didn’t know much about what it was like to be a teen then. Before my son entered middle school, I would see teenagers on the street, and all that I knew about them was from the news related to them. On the street, they all looked like delinquents, and in the news, they committed crimes as horrific as those of adult criminals. Seeing them this way, I couldn’t write anything about them. After my children entered middle school, I worked as an assistant librarian at their school and volunteered to proctor school exams, and I had the chance to see them up close. I realized up close, they were all lovely children like my own kids.

My first YA book is *Yujin and Yujin* which was published in 2004. It is a story about child molestation, which I had thought about for a long time but couldn’t write as a children’s book. The YA books I wrote in the first five years after *Yujin and Yujin* were published when my children were in middle and high school. I was not a mom who

checked and fretted over my children's grades. I believed that one's direction in life was more important than one's school grades and that my role as a parent was to help them find their own path in life. And these ideas are in *Whale in My Pocket*.

However, once my children entered high school, the school turned out to be no different from a cram hagwon. To get into college, they had to give up everything, and I became very skeptical about the whole education system. Sometimes Lee Geum-yi the writer collided with Lee Geum-yi the mom, and it was a confusing time for me. My two children wanted to drop out of school. I was worried and anxious about my children straying from what was considered the conventional path, but I had no choice but to respect and support their decision. You can read about my worries and struggles at the time in the novel *Cliff*.

**Q** After that, you started to write long historical novels for young adult readers. What were you most concerned with as you were writing historical novels specifically for young adult readers?

**A.** When I first started to write YA novels, I wanted to capture teens in my stories as realistically as I could, but after writing nine novels, I felt a bit stifled. Because I wrote about their daily life, the settings in my novels became very limited. As teens find it stifling to go from their house to school and to hagwon, I also felt stifled. That was when I decided to write stories that I had been carrying with me since my childhood. And this new challenge led me down an untrodden path. While writing *Can't I Go Instead?* I learned so much and became more interested in the time and space of the Japanese occupation of Korea, and it also inspired me to imagine more stories from that time period. I also liked the fact that I was able to examine the life of many women at the time, including that of my grandmother, who had lived as a poor farmer's wife all her life.

While writing that historical novel, I realized the importance of research and finding relevant materials, but what was more important than that was imagination. It was only when my imagination was given free rein on the foundation built on thorough research that the characters and events transcended me the writer and gained a life of their own. And after that, I had to believe in my characters. *Can't I Go Instead?* was written as a chronicle which follows the trials and tribulations of the characters. Regardless of how important or trivial their parts are in the novel, they all live their lives to the fullest with passion and commitment. Because I believed in every one of my characters, I was able to arrive at the end of their journey, and I am grateful to them.

What I think is most important in writing a YA novel is fun. Teens have to read so many uninteresting books such as their textbooks, workbooks, or reference books. When they are tired from studying and assignments, a story about one hundred years ago must seem

irrelevant to them. When I am conceptualizing a story, I think about how I can make my readers interested in the characters and story. Also, I tried to shape this story about one hundred years ago so that young adults now can read it and think about their own life now.

**Q** *The Picture Bride* and *Like the Rowdy Princess* are stories related to feminism, and you have also published new editions of your previously published titles after making revisions in light of gender sensitivity. What motivated you to do that?

**A.** I started writing stories with girls as the main characters as my daughter grew up. My girl is headstrong and has to say what's on her mind. She is very different from the traditional stereotype of what a girl should be. On the other hand, I grew up with the oldest child complex and the good girl complex, and I tried to live up to the expectations of those around me, so it was difficult for me to understand my daughter. At the same time, I was worried that she might get hurt by fighting back or by being misunderstood by others. We had conflicts, but my daughter never stopped her efforts to make me understand her better, and I also never stopped trying to understand her, and through this process, I learned about and became very interested in gender issues. And this naturally was reflected in my novels.

I rewrote my novels and published new editions of them because, when I reread them with a changed perspective, there were parts I didn't feel comfortable with. I would feel ashamed if young readers read the first editions. I felt that it was also the obligation of a writer to reflect changing social values and ideas in her works, and that was why I published new editions of my novels. When I work on a new edition, I make sure to look for expressions or ideas which might suggest not only gender insensitivity but any stereotyping or discrimination against a certain gender or age group as well as different family types, migrant workers, or the disabled.

**Q** Is there anything else you would like to share with your readers?

**A.** The process of writing a story and giving it life is often painful and difficult. But being a writer is such an attractive job with an incredible sense of achievement that you are willing to put yourself through it every time. I have several stories which I have been mulling over. As I grow older, I feel more responsibility and passion to properly write these stories which have been aging with me. I know that books exist in this world because of readers, and as a writer, I would like to share with young readers the joy and comfort I experienced reading books as a child.

Interviewed by Oh Seran, a literary critic.

## YA Novels

### The Picture Bride

Changbi Publishers, 2020.

### Life Traveler

Munhakdongne Publishing, 2019.

### Can't I Go Instead?

Sakyejul Publishing, 2016.

### Youth Stories

Sakyejul Publishing, 2014.

### Searching For the Hidden Path

Prooni Publishing, 2014.  
| (rev.)Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

### The Moment Ice Sparkles

Prooni Publishing, 2013.

### Us, In the Land of the Giants

Prooni Publishing, 2012.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2022.

### So-hee's Room

Prooni Publishing, 2013.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.



### A Marionette's Dance

Prooni Publishing, 2010.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2022.

### Goodbye, My First Love

Prooni Publishing, 2009.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

### Cliff

Prooni Publishing, 2008.

### The Whale in My Pocket

Prooni Publishing, 2008.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

### Yujin and Yujin

Prooni Publishing, 2004.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2020.

### You Too Are a Twilight Lily

Prooni Publishing, 1999.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

## Children's Books

### Pet Food for You

Prooni Publishing, 2012.

### Foster Care

Prooni Publishing, 2006.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

### A Very Tiny School

Prooni Publishing, 2004.



### Mito's Poop Is Cute Too

Prooni Publishing, 2003.

### Handy Boy

Prooni Publishing, 2002.

### Jaedeok My Friend

Prooni Publishing, 2002.

### Mother Earth

Prooni Publishing, 2000.

### Just Different from Me

Prooni Publishing, 2000.

### The Country of My Mother

Prooni Publishing, 2000.

### A Rat Called Hamster

Prooni Publishing, 1999, 2000.

### Kkebi from Dodeulmaru

Sigongsa Publishing, 1999.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2021.

### My Teeth on the Roof

Doosan Donga Publishing, 1996.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2001.

### Sand Pebble School

Daekyo Publishing, 1996.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2002.

### Barefooted Children

Hyeonamsa Publishing, 1996.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2007.

### Bamtee Village Series

#### • Keundori in Bamtee Village

Daekyo Publishing, 1994.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2004.

#### • Yeongmi in Bamtee Village

Prooni Publishing, 2000.

#### • Bomi in Bamtee Village

Prooni Publishing, 2005.



### Children at Solmoru Ranch

Donga Publishing, 1994.

### Younggu and Heukgu

Hyeonamsa Publishing, 1991.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2002.

### The Flower-Scented Wind

Daekyo Publishing, 1988.  
| Prooni Publishing, 1999, 2007.

### Be the Bridge

Kyemongsa Publishing, 1987.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2005.

## Early Reader Books

### Looking for Cha Daegi

Sakyejul Publishing, 2021.

### They Called My Name

Suntree Books, 2019.

### Like the Rowdy Princess

Sakyejul Publishing, 2019.

### One Night

Sakyejul Publishing, 2016.

### The Granny Riding a Tiger

Prooni Publishing, 2011.

### Hate It, Don't Know It, Just Because

Prooni Publishing, 2010.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2022.

### Not the Way I Want

Prooni Publishing, 2009.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2022.

### Secret Helper at Our House

Prooni Publishing, 2008.

### My Teacher Hates Me

Prooni Publishing, 2008.  
| Bamtee Publishing, 2022.

### Popsicles and Water Skiing

Prooni Publishing, 2007.

### Twelve Animals in the Tripitaka Koreana

Prooni Publishing, 2005.

### I'm Right, It's a Whale!

Prooni Publishing, 2002.

### Pruni and Gouni.

Prooni Publishing, 2002, 2007.

### Kimchi Is Kimchi Even in English

Prooni Publishing, 2001.

### Betting Your Calf

Junghan Publishing, 1991.  
| Prooni Publishing, 2008.

## Other Titles

### Fermata Italy

Sakyejul Publishing, 2021.

### Lee Geum-yi's Children's Book Creative Class

Prooni Publishing, 2006, 2011.



## Yujin and Yujin

Prooni Publishing, 2004.  
(Revised edition) Bamtee Publishing, 2020.  
304pages | ISBN 9791197120541  
YA Novel



**A modern classic;  
a coming-of-age tale  
with a message for  
readers:  
“It’s not your fault.”**

On the first day of school, two girls meet in the same classroom. They are both eighth graders and have the same name, Yujin. Big Yujin remembers they went to the same preschool and is happy to see Little Yujin again, but Little Yujin says she never went to that preschool. They were both molested at the preschool, and Big Yujin thinks Little Yujin doesn’t want to be reminded of it. The truth is that Little Yujin has blotted out the experience from her memory; however, she suffers from the broken pieces of the repressed memory which she has buried away. Big Yujin, who believes she has overcome the painful memory, also suffers from its unexpected side-effects. Told in a narrative like a mystery novel, the story reveals detailed emotional descriptions of the painful truth buried in the two Yujins’ memories.

The story makes it clear that the parents of the two Yujins deal with their trauma differently. Big Yujin’s parents help their daughter to deal with it openly, but Little Yujin’s parents push it under the carpet as if it never happened. Given these different reactions and attitudes, the two girls grow up differently. The writer’s message is clear: when a child or a teen experiences sexual molestation or violence, the reaction of the adults around them plays a crucial role in the child’s overcoming the violence. When the adults react inappropriately, the child ends up blaming herself or himself and loses self-esteem.

The story presents the two main characters and their relationship not only at the time when the molestation takes place but also during its aftermath, and their experiences prompt readers—children, teens, and adults—to think about

how everyone has a painful experience or memory, how they carry it with them, and how they should deal with it. Although the book deals with a serious theme, the story is not dark or bleak. The story is full of playful and light-hearted moments of teens in school and their everyday life, expressed in the language of teens nowadays. At the same time, the story draws in readers to see how the memory of violence shapes the main characters’ lives and turns them upside down. As the story progresses, Big Yujin and Little Yujin begin to see each other as their other self, and “with the wings they have gained from their emotional wounds,” they decide to soar even if they might fall. And at the end of the story, readers are also empowered by Yujin and Yujin’s optimism, which is “sad, terrifying, and sweet” at the same time.

### ●●● Review

#### Perception and Acceptance of Shadow for Self-Integration

One of the most important subjects of human is human itself and life. Therefore, humans thoroughly examine themselves and their life continuously. More specifically, to those who are in modern lives in which one should pay attention to the outside world to survive changes, self-realization is a very critical task.

This study scrutinizes how characters in a novel *Yujin and Yujin* by Lee Geum-Yi, go through internal process as they accomplish self-realization, This is because looking at a piece of the characters’ self-realization process enables us to discuss the recovery of life authenticity. A shadow that faced upon the course of transforming from subconsciousness to consciousness in self-exploration was mainly inspected and how the character’s ego is confronted and becomes integrated with the shadow was described.

To begin with, this study reveals that, although Yujin and another Yujin are individuals with different shadow, the process that one personality undergoes self-integration and realization is expressed symbolically by dividing Yujin into two separate individuals, according to two characters’ cross-description, a contrast effect resulting from having same names and the fact that contexts are developed by homogeneity based on identical events.

Also, because the attitude of perceiving and accepting a shadow eventually is the important starting point for self-realization, this report observes a series of course that characters confront and accept shadow and therefore, achieve self-realization. Characters affirmed the existence of shadow through the projection of subconscious contents and had reserved the perception by mechanisms of defense. Finally, they went through the process of self-realization, by which separated ego and shadow became integrated.

The perception and acceptance of shadow gives an answer to the question that how to accomplish self-integration, that is, a mind unity. The perception and acceptance of shadow provide us with expanded senses and adequate insight about human and life. This is practical to modern persons who pursue self-realization and happiness.

From the abstract of the academic paper of the same title by Son Min-young, a researcher. *〈The Journal of Humanities Studies〉* (Humanities Research Institute Chungnam National University, vol.38, 2011)

## Can't I Go Instead?

Sakyejul Publishing, 2016.  
612 pages | ISBN 9791160940602  
YA Novel



### The captivating story of a girl who is always ready to be on the road and build her own life

Sunam is a seven-year-old girl living in a small countryside village. Her parents sell her for a plot of land, and she has to move to Seoul to be a present for a viscount's daughter. After she grows up, she travels outside the country and reaches the farthest end of the world before returning to her homeland. Chaeryeong, the viscount's eight-year-old daughter, meets Sunam, who is a present for her birthday. After growing up in such an affluent family, Chaeryeong faces one terrible hardship after another. As they leave the country and travel together, Chaeryeong and Sunam overcome their difference of social position as they fight against gender, racial, and ethnic discrimination. The story begins during the Japanese occupation and continues until the final liberation of Korea, and by reading about these two girls' journey, which takes them to faraway places around the world and helps them grow into strong women, readers will have a better understanding of the time period and the history of modern Korea. Lee tackles historical atrocities during the Japanese occupation of Korea, including the sexual slavery committed by the Japanese military. However, instead of focusing on the violence and brutality of this time period, Lee brings readers' attention to the story of Sunam, a trailblazer who fights her way against all odds and overcomes whatever is thrown in her way. The writer said she wanted to tell a story that expands the spatial limitations of young people living in Korea, the only divided country in the world, and to do that, she has the main character from the very southern end of her own country travel across the Pacific and arrive at a new continent on the opposite side of the world before returning home again.

### Review

#### A Woman Who Travels to a New Continent to Overcome Her Social Position and Destiny

*Can't I Go Instead?* tells the story of a young woman and her life adventures; it also includes the story of a young aristocratic woman during the Japanese occupation; it is also the story of people and their desires told in a matter-of-fact narrative. The book prompts readers to ask themselves questions: how do you judge a person? what is a fulfilling life? how should you understand people's lives during the Japanese occupation of Korea? A person's life is so complex that it is not easy to understand its complexity and all that is at play.

The beauty of this book is the fascinating stories of the characters who seem to step out of history and become living and breathing people. The life stories of Sunam and Chaeryeong, as well as of the people around them, are told with realistic detail to reveal human nature at its best and worst. The book tells the story of Koreans who were caught in the historical turmoil around the 1920s as their country became occupied and exploited by powerful nations, and includes vivid descriptions of Seoul, Tokyo, San Francisco, and Shanghai at the time.

Out of all the characters in the story, Sunam is the most captivating one. When a viscount arrives in the countryside to find a girl servant for his daughter, he finds a girl crying in front of him, saying she is too scared to go with him. At that moment, Sunam steps in and asks fearlessly, "Can I go instead?" That question changes the life trajectory of Sunam, who was destined to live her life as a poor tenant farmer's daughter. Sunam is an intelligent little girl who is not afraid to leave her parents and the village she was born in, and when she grows up and becomes a young woman, she travels to Tokyo and America. And in America, she participates in the liberation movement and leaves for the provincial government in Shanghai with a secret mission to deliver money. It is a story of riveting adventures that take her around the world.

The most memorable moment in the story is when Sunam and the viscount's son, Kang Hwi, whom she has been in love with from the moment they met, vow their love by Lake Baikal. A girl who was forced to live in the servitude of others overcomes all obstacles and social constraints, and openly declares her love and passion; it is the most dramatic and romantic moment in the story.

Excerpts from <Changbi Review of Children's Literature>(vol.54, 2016) by Kwon Hyeok-jun, a literary critic.



## Like the Rowdy Princess

Sakyejul Publishing, 2019.  
Illustrated by Go Jung-soon  
88 pages | ISBN 9791160944570  
Early Reader Book



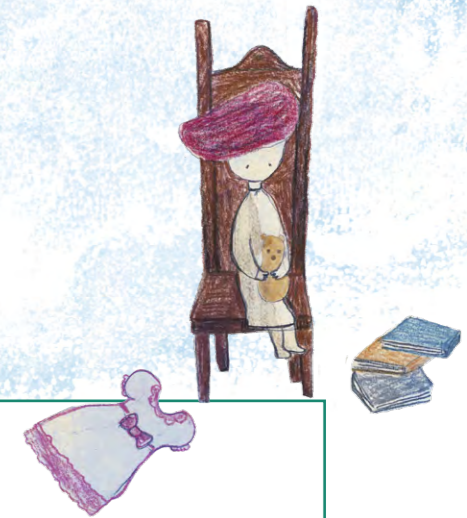
### A never-seen-before story of a princess by a wonderful storyteller

In a small kingdom faraway, there is the legend of a rowdy princess. The legend has it that the princess was so rowdy that everyone left her kingdom. Aengdu is the princess of another small country, and she tries to do everything right and not be like the rowdy princess. One day Princess Aengdu visits Jadu's house to experience the life of commoners, and there Jadu tells Princess Aengdu that she has been stressed out because of Princess Aengdu, who is so perfect at everything. And Jadu's grandmother tells Princess Aengdu the rowdy princess's entire story, which Princess Aengdu did not know. The grandmother tells Princess Aengdu that the rowdy princess's people did leave the country because of her, but later she became such a great ruler who cared for everyone in her kingdom that her people returned and respected her. After hearing the story, Princess Aengdu thinks about what it means to be a princess and to be herself. As she becomes good friends with Jadu, Princess Aengdu decides to write a new legend.

In the story, Jadu, who becomes Princess Aengdu's friend, is also an interesting character who wants to come up with a new name for herself. The moment when Princess Aengdu and Jadu decide to write their stories will touch readers' hearts and make them think about what it means to be



themselves, not someone's son or daughter or brother or sister, or even a man or a woman. The story makes you think about finding who you are, what you like, and what you want to do. Many writers have subverted traditional princess stories, but in this story, writer Lee Geum-yi presents young readers with a short yet fun story about discovering yourself without cliches or trite moral lessons.



### ●●● Review

#### “A Princess Can Be Rowdy. Why Not?”

In a kingdom faraway, there is the legend of a rowdy princess. She did whatever she wanted to, so her people left the kingdom and the land became desolate. Princess Aengdu, who knows this legend, tries hard every day not to be like the rowdy princess. It is difficult enough for her to always act like a princess in the palace, but to make matters worse, she is given a new task: she has to live one week with commoners to experience their life. She worries how she can maintain royal decorum, but when she gets to the house, everyone treats her with respect, and she discovers from Jadu what it feels to have freedom. Jadu complains that it is the children of the kingdom are stressed because Princess Aengdu is so good at everything. When Princess Aengdu tells Jadu that she, Princess Aengdu, has to be careful of everything she does so that she will not become like the rowdy princess, Jadu lets her in on the secret that there is more to the story.

Like the Rowdy Princess is not simply a story that breaks away from traditional gender roles or stereotypes. At the end of the story, Princess Aengdu must return to the palace. She takes the bus with Jadu, and they decide they will write their own stories and become the main characters of new legends. Young readers will easily sympathize with Princess Aengdu, who feels trapped by the thought that she shouldn't be like the rowdy princess, and also with Jadu, who is stressed from being compared to Princess Aengdu. Reading about these two brave and intelligent girls will prompt young readers to think about who they are and who they want to be.

From *The Hankyoreh* Apr. 12, 2019 by Kwon O-seong, a reporter.

## Life Traveler

Munhakdongne Publishing, 2019.  
256 pages | ISBN 9788954658263  
YA Novel



### How would your life turn out differently if you made a different decision at a crossroads in life?

In 1988, Sangman is a high school student living with his poor uncle in a small town in the countryside. Sangman works part-time jobs to support himself. One day a new student transfers to Sangman’s school, a boy who gets the nickname Fibber. Pampered by his wealthy parents, Fibber doesn’t think twice about spending money, and Fibber and Sangman, who couldn’t be more different, become friends, and their friendship changes Sangman’s life. As Sangman spends time at Fibber’s house, he shares not only Fibber’s books and workbooks but also the love of Fibber’s parents. One day Sangman reads a story in Fibber’s notebook, and with Fibber’s permission, Sangman submits the story with his name on it to a writing contest and wins an award. But Sangman has no idea how this will change his life.

Thirty years later, Fibber’s obituary is uploaded in the high school friends’ chatroom. The alumni find out that it was Sangman who uploaded it. What happened to Sangman and Fibber during the past thirty years? Becoming friends with Fibber changes Sangman’s life in the most unexpected way, and the story reveals the secret Fibber has to carry all his life.

The nickname “Fibber” refers to a person who makes up things, a person who lies. Fibber describes himself as Traveler K in the story of his notebook, someone who travels to a parallel universe and lives his whole life as an outsider. Using a mystery narrative, the writer takes turns telling the story of Sangman, who wants nothing but to live a life like everyone else, and Fibber, who lives as an outsider.

### ●●● Review

#### Growing Pains

In a high school friends’ chatroom, someone uploads an obituary with an invitation to the funeral, including the time and the location. It was uploaded by their friend whose nickname was Fibber. His friends take it as a prank by Fibber, who disappeared from their lives thirty years ago. However, it turns out that Sangman, who was a close friend of Fibber, uploaded the notice.

This is how the story begins, and it goes back to 1988 when Sangman and Fibber meet for the first time. In 1988, Sangman and Fibber are in high school, and their lives couldn’t be more different. Fibber is a new student who came from Seoul to live in the small town with his wealthy parents. His parents dote on him, which he seems very dismissive of, and he seems more concerned with getting attention from his schoolmates by spending money on them and telling them hard-to-believe adventure stories. Sangman used to live only with his mother, but she died when he was in elementary school, and now he lives with his uncle. Sangman studies hard while helping his uncle, who runs a store. At school, his classmates call Sangman “Scrooge,” and he has no friends.

One day Sangman delivers a sack of rice to Fibber’s house, and after that, they get to know each other. While spending the night in Fibber’s room, Sangman finds Fibber’s notebook and reads a story Fibber wrote about a character called K. K travels to alternate universes. Fibber tells Sangman that he made up the story, but Sangman doesn’t know what to make of Fibber, who seems to predict the future.

This story is about boys who grow up in the 1980s when capitalism and material success were considered most important in people’s lives. Thirty years later, they become middle-aged men who see the obituaries of their friends. This coming-of-age story will make readers reflect on their own youth and how it shaped their own lives.

From *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* Nov. 08, 2019 by Kim Gyeong-hak, a reporter.



## The Picture Bride

Changbi Publishers, 2020.  
392 pages | ISBN 9788936456955  
YA Novel



### A wonderful depiction of the solidarity of women

One hundred years ago when Korea was occupied by Japan, three young women risk their lives and leave for Hawaii with only a picture in their hand. To cast off the yoke of living as women in an occupied nation, the three young women make a daring decision to change their destiny by traveling across the Pacific to find a better future with nothing but a picture of the man who will be their husband.

Hongju, who dreamed of falling in love with the man in the picture, finds out that the man is actually in his forties. Songhwa wanted to get away from her life of living with her grandmother, a shaman who was looked down on by everyone. However, the man in her picture turns out to be an abusive, lazy drunkard. Unlike Hongju and Songhwa, Beodeul meets Taewan, who is a young man just like in the picture. However, Taewan is still in love with his first love and unable to open up to Beodeul.

Beodeul works at a sugarcane farm where, along with other Korean workers, she is discriminated against not only by the white farm manager but also by the Japanese workers. Beodeul planned on sending money to her family and also going to school and studying, but her life at the sugarcane farm in Hawaii is so much more arduous and difficult than she expected. Fortunately, she finds people she can rely on, the other women at the sugarcane farm: Julie's mother who came to Hawaii before Beodeul, Hongju who writes to Beodeul to support and encourage her, and Songhwa who stays optimistic despite her abusive husband and a life of hardship. In *The Picture Bride*, the women help one another and become a family. This story of making a life for yourself

in a foreign country, the love these characters have for one another, and their courage will move readers' hearts and empower them.

The book was inspired by and based on real picture brides in history, and it is a vivid retelling of the stories of the first Korean immigrants to Hawaii, the first generation of the diaspora who settled in America. The women in the story become friends and family to one another, and the story of this new community of women will warm your hearts and affirm your faith in humanity.

### ●●● Review

“Historical fiction buffs and readers interested in little-known history will enjoy.”  
— Library Journal, starred review

“An engaging picture of a time and a place.”  
— Publishers Weekly

“Written with great historical detail about Korean immigrants in Hawai'i, Geum-yi's beautiful novel weaves an extraordinary tale.”  
— Booklist

### Why Did the Girls Leave Their Homeland?

Traditionally, adventure stories begin with men who go on their adventure, with their wives and daughters waiting for them at home. Unlike these traditional romance narratives, Lee Geum-yi wrote several novels by subverting this patriarchic narrative structure of men leaving for adventures and of women waiting safely at home. For example, *Can't I Go Instead?* tells the adventure story of Sunam, a young woman who refuses a life of servitude and gender stereotyping, and travels to the opposite side of the world. In the story, Sunam transcends the limitations of her gender and nationality as a woman born in an occupied nation, and she fights against all obstacles thrown in her way. *The Picture Bride* shares this theme of adventure with *Can't I Go Instead?* but *The Picture Bride* foregrounds the theme of solidarity and tolerance in a story of pioneering women who arrive in Hawaii as the first generation of Korean immigrants.

*The Picture Bride* begins with the tragic reality of women in Korea under the Japanese occupation. The story includes the geopolitical situation in the early 1920s, the history and economic background of Hawaii, and the political circumstance of Korea at the time, which explains why Koreans immigrated to Hawaii in



## Other Works

the context of the occupiers and the occupied as well as the rulers and the ruled. America was in need of cheap labor at the time and therefore, accepted workers from different countries, but it did not allow interracial marriages. The marriage between Korean men and American women was prohibited by law, which led to the strange phenomenon of picture brides. The women were not simply lured into coming to a foreign country by innocent lies. There was a systematic social mechanism which brought these women as labor. Lee's book does not shy away from these historical facts, but it focuses more on the courage and unbreakable spirit of the women who made the decision to cross the Pacific with nothing but one picture in their hand. These weak and vulnerable picture brides come from a Japanese-occupied country which couldn't protect them, and the fact that they are picture brides shows how they become marginalized and displaced because of their gender. However, the story does not compromise their individuality, and presents them as women who carve out their destiny.

In the beginning of the story, the three women are confronted with what they did not expect at all, as well as with hardships and trials, but their story cannot be simply summarized as a victim's narrative dealing with lies, failure, and downfall. Despite trials and despair, the three women rise up to rewrite their destiny. Beodeul, who believed Taewan's lie that he's a landowner, becomes a landowner herself. Hongju becomes a businesswoman who enjoys her freedom as a single woman, and Songhwa also frees her own life of taunts and scorn for being a shaman's granddaughter. To them, Hawaii becomes a land of freedom where they can be away from the oppression of Japan as well as from the gender and social constraints of their own country.

The lives of the three women are not easy, and the only support they find is their friendship and solidarity with other women workers. This new concept of family and community among the picture brides can be seen as an alternative to our twentieth-century world, which is divided and broken up by conflict and self-interest. The elements that re-affirm our identity, including blood relationships, ethnicity, race, religion, and ideology, can also function as barriers which hold us back from empathizing with others or allow us to justify discriminating against them. The picture brides in history crossed these barriers, and what they were in search of wasn't a place of material affluence but a place of freedom.

Excerpts from <Changbi Review of Children's Literature>(vol.69, 2020) by Kim Eun-ha, a literary critic.



### Bamtee Village series

Illustrated by Yang Sang-yong | children's Books

- Keundori in Bamtee Village  
143pages, ISBN 9788957980019, Prooni Publishing, 2004/1994
- Yeongmi in Bamtee Village  
119pages, ISBN 9788957980026, Prooni Publishing, 2000
- Bomi in Bamtee Village  
135pages, ISBN 9788957980033, Prooni Publishing, 2005

Keundori and Youngmi in an agricultural village are without their mother as she left them. One day Youngmi was sent away for adoption to a family in the city by an old neighboring woman's arrangement. Youngmi's foster parents have hearts of gold, but she cannot adjust herself to life in a city. Back in Bamtee, Patji Mom married Keundori's father and started to put together family members. Though Patji Mom is big and tough with a pockmarked face, she is good enough to bring back Youngmi and accept the children like her own. The sequel works, based on the tightly-bonded family with Patji Mom's love, deal with the problems of aging agricultural villages and the issue of motherhood through the encounters of the real mother and foster mother.



### You Too Are a Twilight Lily trilogy

YA Novels

- You Too Are a Twilight Lily  
228pages, ISBN 9791191826005, Bamtee Publishing, 2021/1999
- So-hee's Room  
316pages, ISBN 9791191826029, Bamtee Publishing, 2021/2013
- Searching For the Hidden Path  
212pages, ISBN 9791191826036, Bamtee Publishing, 2021/2014

*You Too Are a Twilight Lily*, still set in an agricultural village, looks at single-parent families, which was a neglected topic in Korea though it was a part of modern families. Its sequel works show three teenagers suffering from changes in their families, revealing their psychological conflicts in the midst of family disintegration. For example, *So-hee's Room* portrays the protagonist Sohee's alienation and anxiety from her mother's re-marriage and encounters with new family members. The novel ends with how Sohee overcomes all the difficulties. *Searching For the Hidden Path*, on the other hand, shows three boys and three girls trying to find their goals and future careers after graduating middle school.



### One Night

Illustrated by Gwen Lee | early reader book  
96pages, ISBN 9788958284468,  
Sakyejul Publishing, 2016.

Through this book, readers can think of their memories from their childhood and the love given from their grandparents, furthermore, the death and the eternity. One night without mom, dad tells a special story from his childhood inside the tent in the living room. On that day when dad left for fishing with his grandfather, a fish barely caught by his grandfather asked him to be free, and then, his three wishes will be come true. Therefore, dad released a fish and went to the sea palace, however, the soldiers in the sea palace tried to punish him by poking him 765 times and pinching him 949 times with pincers of a lobster. How come could dad come back home safely? The precious memory and exciting adventure of dad and his grandfather during one night is interestingly happening.

### Looking for Cha Daegi

Illustrated by Kim Jung-eun | early reader book  
136pages, ISBN 9791160947304,  
Sakyejul Publishing, 2021.

This book is based on a story which the main character, Cha Dae Gi, who used to be shy and introverted due to his nickname, restoring his self-esteem while hanging out with his friends and family members. The writer has come up with this story after seeing an elementary school homework to interview with a person with the same name by accident through the Internet. She thought that if a child has a unique name, that child would feel difficult doing this kind of homework, and then, she came up with the name of 'Cha Dae Gi'. The writer has delicately expressed how characters have felt in this book and made them realistic characters in this book. Moreover, she also contained ordinary episodes or common concerns of children such as episodes related to nicknames, searching my name in the Internet, taking care of wandering cats, or children dreaming of becoming a YouTube creator.



### The Country of My Mother

Illustrated by Lee Seon-ju | children's Book  
 167pages, ISBN 9788957981030,  
 Prooni Publishing, 2000.

It is a story of a south Korean boy who accompanies his grandfather's visit to Mt. Geumgang. His grandmother was displaced from his hometown in North Korea during the Korean War. The writer paid a visit to Mt. Geumgang herself and wrote down her wish for Korea's reunification and the reunion of separated families. It depicts the beauty of Mt. Geumgang in North Korea and sketches a variety of people including the protagonist's grandfather. It also delivers concerns over the North and South Korean relationship and future prospects. This work can show both Korean children and international children the tragedy of war and the importance of community through this rare and sad history of the Korean division.

### Foster Care

Illustrated by Oh Seung-min | children's Book  
 128pages, ISBN 9791197120596,  
 Bamtee Publishing, 2021/2006

This book is a collection of five short stories that dives deep into the childhood in the contemporary world. Each short story explores a pair of conflicting ideas: friendship and animosity, communication and detachment, restraint and freedom, and convention and openness. The children in the stories feel lost between the two contradicting worlds. Delving into the issues that feel close to the heart of the children here and now, such as gender roles, economic polarization, technology and animal rights, this collection of short stories provides guidance and support for children and the parents alike.

### Us, In the Land of the Giants

YA Novel  
 248pages, ISBN 9791191826050,  
 Bamtee Publishing, 2002/2012

A teenage daughter takes a trip with her mother to Gobi Desert, Mongolia. Dain, a fifteen-year-old girl, is rather irritated when she hears of her mom's plan to visit Mongolian deserts, although it is her first-ever trip abroad. She will be stuck with her 47-year-old mother and her boring friends, in the middle nowhere. She feels completely isolated in the middle of the desert. On the other hand, the mother Sukhee is dealing with her own emotional turmoil. She is distracted with the jealousy she feels for her friend, the unresolvable love-and-hate relationship she has had with her own mother, and the anxiety she feels for her children's future. Nearing the end of the trip, a mirage appears across the horizon. When it vanishes, the mother and the daughter are left with a secret to confront.

### The Whale in My Pocket

YA Novel  
 264pages, ISBN 9791197120558,  
 Bamtee Publishing, 2021/2008

This book is a story about teens and their dreams to become the next K-pop star. Min-gi is a handsome young boy, but his parents only approve of his sister, an A+ student. After receiving offers from multiple celebrity agencies, Min-gi is determined to become the next K-pop star. Min-gi finds a chance at success when he becomes friends with two very talented teenagers, Yeon-ho and Jun-hee. Yeon-ho's mother is a financially irresponsible cabaret singer. Yeon-ho is left to take care of his blind grandmother, while his mother gets herself in more troubles. Jun-hee faces obstacles as an adoptee, despite the love and care his adoptive parents provide for him. The two fear of being under the spotlight, and naturally refuse when Min-gi asks them to form a team with him for auditions. Will the struggling teens finally achieve their dreams? Which of them will become the next K-pop star?

# 8

## List of Awards and Distinctions

- 2024, 2020 **Nominated as the Korean nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award**
- 2020~2022 One City One Book: The Picture Bride
- 2020 YES24 Book of the Year: The Picture Bride
- 2019 Open Children's Book Literature Award: They Called My Name
- 2019 Nadaum Book by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family: Like the Rowdy Princess
- 2018 IBBY Honour List: Can't I Go Instead?
- 2018 One City One Book: One Night
- 2017 Bang Jeonghwan Literary Award: One Night
- 2014 One City One Book: So-hee's Room
- 2013 One City One Book: Pet Food for You
- 2012 Yun Seokjung Literary Award: Pet Food for You
- 2011 One Library One Book: Just Different from Me
- 2007 Socheon Children's Book Award: Foster Care
- 2006 10 children's book writers loved by Korean by Interpark Bookstore
- 2005~2009 One City One Book: You Too Are a Twilight Lily
- 1999 10 Korean children's books that represent the 20th century by Korean Children's Book Association: Keundori in Bamtee Village
- 1996 20 Best Children's books by Korean Association of Children's Literature: My Teeth on the Roof
- 1987 Kyemongsa Children's Literature Award: Be the Bridge
- 1985 JoongAng Children's Literature Award: Uncle Bongsam
- 1984 Saebeot Literary Award: Younggu and Heukgu

# 9

## List of Translated Editions

### Yujin and Yujin

유진과 유진, Prnoon Publishing, 2004  
 | Bamtee Publishing, Korea, 2020  
 有真与有真, Beijing Yuchen Culture, China, 2023  
 (forthcoming), Linking Publishing, Taiwan, 2023  
 Yujin et Yujin, Picquier, France, 2011



### Like a Roughneck Princess

망나니 공주처럼, Sakyejul Publishing, 2019  
 A Princesa indomável, Atalante Editores Ltda.  
 /Casa Oito, Brazil, 2022



### Can't I Go Instead?

거기, 내가 가면 안 돼요?, Sakyejul Publishing, 2016  
 Can't I Go Instead?, Forge Books  
 /Macmillan, USA, 2023  
 そこに私が行ってもいいですか?, 里山社,  
 Japan 2022



### The Picture Bride

알로하, 나의 엄마들, Changbi Publishers, 2020  
 The Picture Bride, Forge Books/Macmillan, USA, 2022  
 The Picture Bride, Scribe Publications, Australia, 2022  
 (forthcoming), Märchenwald Verlag München, Germany  
 (forthcoming), Mann, Ivanov and Ferber, Russia  
 (forthcoming), Jamsai Publishing, Thai  
 (forthcoming), Futabasha Publishers, Japan



## Exhibitions, Lectures, Fairs, etc.

### 2022

▼ THE KOREA SOCIETY(New York): Author Talks



▶ Invited Speaker of 2022 Asian Festival of Children's Content in Singapore.  
Topic 1) Depicting the 'Unspeakable'  
Topic 2) Of Women and Girls:  
A Study of the Female Figure in Korean Children and YA Literature



▼ Korea-Georgia Arts Festival 2022



◀ Musical<Aloha, My Moms>  
(Based upon *The Picture Bride*)



### 2021

● Webtoon<Can't I Go Instead?>(Based upon the same title)

▼ Musical<Yujin and Yujin>(Based upon the same title)



▶ Theater Play<Yujin and Yujin>(Based upon the same title)



▶ Book Concert in Gwangyang Yonggang Library

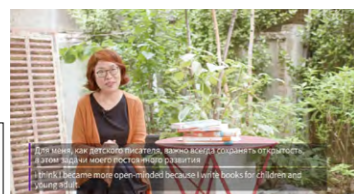


▶ 2021 One City One Book in Ansan

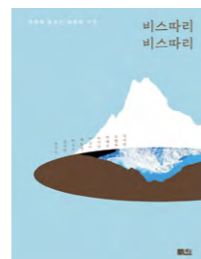


### 2020

▼ Moscow International Book Fair 2020 The Guest of Honor: Republic of Korea  
Interviews with 5 Korean authors of picture books and books for children and youth



▶ Published a travelogue in Nepal <Bistari Bistari> with fellow writers, all royalties were donated to remote villages in Nepal.



### 2019

▶ International Book Fair for Children and Youth (FILIJ) in Mexico



▼ Special lecture in Cheonbo Middle School



▼ One City One Book in Uijeongbu



### 2018

◀ Special lecture in Gusandong Library Village



▼ Visiting the historical site of forced labor during the Japanese colonial period in Sakhalin, Russia



▼ IBBY Congress 2018 in Athens (IBBY Honour List)



### 2017

▼ 3rd visit to Nepal with fellow writers, donation of children's books to schools in remote villages



▼ Book Talk in Yongsan Element School





◀ Special lecture on children's writing with Yes24 Bookstore

2016

▶ Visited a Korean school in Usttobe, Kazakhstan, donated Korean children's books



2015

▼ 2nd visit to Nepal with fellow writers, donation of children's books to schools in remote villages



▶ Book talk with teenager in Seoul Metropolitan Library



2014

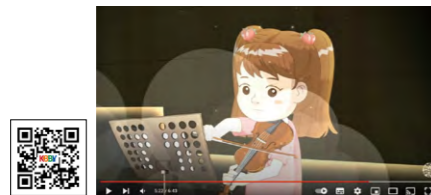
▼ Special lecture in Gwangju City Library



◀ Interview with Interpark Bookstore

2013

▼ Short Animation for Improving Awareness of Disabled (Based upon *Just Different from Me*)



▼ Special lecture in Changwon International Kid Literature Festival 2013



2012

▼ Special lecture in Jinju Middle School



2011

▼ Special lecture in Boryeong Library



2008

▼ Special lecture in Jaesong Children's Library in Busan



2004

● Opened a lecture on how to create a children's book.(~2006)

2010

▼ Interview with Aladin Bookstore



2006

▶ Published *Lee Geum-yi's Children's Book Creative Class*



2002

▼ EBS Children Literature in TV Drama: *Just Different from Me*



2001

● KBS TV Drama: *Keundori in Bamtee Village*

1999

● 20 recommended books for summer vacation by Korean Association of Children's Literature

1996

● Selected 50 best children's books by Korean Association of Children's Literature

1994

▼ Book Festival for reading 10 Korean Children's Literature by Korean Association of Children's Literature



1992

◀ Selected 20 best children's books by children's writers



1984

● Made her debut as a children's book writers by winning the Saebeot Literary Award

**2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award Nominee from Korea**

**Writer Lee Geum-yi**

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