

SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE IN KOREA: INFRASTRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT, TRANSLATION, AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

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Abstract

This article examines the Korean reception of Scandinavian literature as a process of co-produced literary value, focusing on Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish works translated and circulated in Korea. Challenging assumptions that small language literatures circulate primarily through Anglophone hubs, it demonstrates how Scandinavian writing attained durable visibility in Korea through minor-to-minor circulation sustained by local infrastructures. Drawing on translation studies, paratext theory, world literature research, and international-relations scholarship, the article conceptualizes literary value as an outcome of infrastructural alignment. Translators' ethical practices, paratextual grammars, publisher architectures, and critical mediation collectively shaped how Scandinavian literature became legible and credible within Korean reading cultures. Methodologically, the analysis relies on verifiable public indicators edition dynamics, paratexts, metadata, institutional signals, and discourse rather than proprietary sales data. These are examined across three genre clusters: Nordic noir, children's literature, and contemporary "quiet" prose, revealing distinct pathways to visibility. From an international relations perspective, the case illustrates infrastructural soft power: cultural attraction generated through routine mediation rather than promotional spectacle. Translation grants reduce risk; metadata standards stabilize discovery; critics cultivate interpretive communities, embedding foreign literature into everyday cultural life. By foregrounding mediation infrastructures, the article contributes to reception studies and cultural diplomacy debates, offering a transferable framework for analyzing literary circulation in non-Anglophone contexts.

Keywords

Scandinavian literature, translation ethics, paratexts and metadata, cultural diplomacy, infrastructural soft power.



Resumo

Este artigo analisa a recepção da literatura escandinava na Coreia como um processo de coprodução de valor literário, centrando-se em obras suecas, norueguesas e dinamarquesas traduzidas e difundidas na Coreia. Desafiando os pressupostos de que as literaturas de línguas minoritárias circulam principalmente através de centros anglófonos, demonstra como a literatura escandinava alcançou uma visibilidade duradoura na Coreia através de uma circulação «de minoridade para minoridade», sustentada por infraestruturas locais. Recorrendo aos estudos de tradução, à teoria do paratexto, à investigação em literatura mundial e aos estudos de relações internacionais, o artigo conceitua o valor literário como um resultado do alinhamento infraestrutural. As práticas éticas dos tradutores, as gramáticas paratextuais, as arquiteturas editoriais e a mediação crítica moldaram coletivamente a forma como a literatura escandinava se tornou legível e credível no seio das culturas de leitura coreanas. Metodologicamente, a análise baseia-se em indicadores públicos verificáveis — dinâmicas de edição, paratextos, metadados, sinais institucionais e discurso — em vez de dados de vendas proprietários. Estes são examinados em três grupos de géneros: noir nórdico, literatura infantil e prosa «tranquila» contemporânea, revelando caminhos distintos para a visibilidade. Numa perspetiva de relações internacionais, o caso ilustra o soft power infraestrutural: atração cultural gerada através de mediação rotineira, em vez de espetáculo promocional. As bolsas de tradução reduzem o risco; as normas de metadados estabilizam a descoberta; os críticos cultivam comunidades interpretativas, incorporando a literatura estrangeira na vida cultural quotidiana. Ao colocar em primeiro plano as infraestruturas de mediação, o artigo contribui para os estudos de recepção e os debates sobre diplomacia cultural, oferecendo um quadro transferível para analisar a circulação literária em contextos não anglófonos.

Palavras-chave

Literatura escandinava, ética da tradução, paratextos e metadados, diplomacia cultural, soft power infraestrutural.

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SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE IN KOREA: INFRASTRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT, TRANSLATION, AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

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Introduction

The Korean reception of Scandinavian literature complicates a widespread assumption in world-literature scholarship: that small-language literatures circulate internationally primarily through Anglophone hubs (Sievers & Levitt, 2020; Flotow, 2019; Bielsa, 2013). Over the past century, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish works have attained stable visibility in Korea not because they were first consecrated in English, but because local infrastructures gradually aligned. Translators cultivated recognizable voices and ethical transparency; publishers and editors developed paratextual grammars that stabilized reader expectations; libraries, platforms, and festivals provided institutional anchors; and critics and reader communities articulated why these works mattered. Together, these practices shifted Scandinavian titles from sporadic appearances to a durable cultural presence.

Despite extensive work on global literary circulation, relatively little attention has been paid to *minor-to-minor* routes—cases in which works travel directly between smaller linguistic communities without mediation by dominant languages (Jusdanis, 2010; HaCohen, 2014). Much existing research either privileges authors canonized through global centers or relies on proprietary sales data that are rarely accessible and difficult to audit (Saldanha, 2018; Cheah, 2014). As a result, the everyday infrastructures through which literary value is assembled—edition management, metadata discipline, and the mediating labor of librarians and critics—often remain analytically invisible (Saldanha, 2018).

This article addresses that gap by examining the reception of Scandinavian literature in Korea as a long-term case of co-produced literary value. Rather than treating value as an intrinsic property of texts, the study conceptualizes value as emerging from interactions among translation ethics, paratextual framing, and institutional interfaces. Building on translation-studies debates about ethical responsibility and visibility, paratext theory, world-literature approaches to circulation, and international-relations research on soft power and cultural diplomacy, the article shows how attention is stabilized through infrastructures that make reading credible, legible, and repeatable (Cheah, 2014; Sievers & Levitt, 2020; Shields, 2013; Genette & Maclean, 1991; Coldiron, 2012).



Methodologically, the analysis relies on independently verifiable indicators—edition dynamics, paratextual grammars, metadata and catalog fields, institutional signals (prizes, grants, festivals), and discourse traces in criticism—rather than inaccessible sales figures. These indicators are coded across genres and periods to reconstruct a trajectory from early pedagogical introductions to contemporary diversification across Nordic noir, children’s/YA classics, and contemporary “quiet” prose.

The article makes three contributions. First, it provides an empirically grounded account of how Scandinavian literature became legible in Korea without Anglophone intermediation. Second, it proposes a portable framework for reception research that treats paratexts and metadata as primary evidence. Third, it reframes these dynamics through an international-relations lens, interpreting them as forms of infrastructural soft power produced not by messaging campaigns but by routine mediation practices.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework linking translation ethics, paratexts, world-literature circulation, and cultural diplomacy. Section 3 explains the methodological approach and coding protocols. Section 4 reconstructs the historical trajectory of Scandinavian literature in Korea. Section 5 analyzes genre-specific reception mechanisms. Section 6 discusses broader international-relations implications, and Section 7 concludes with reflections on research design, translator training, and policy considerations.

An earlier version of this research was presented at an international academic conference, and the present article substantially revises and expands that material through additional empirical coding, verified bibliographic evidence, and extended theoretical discussion.¹

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates four strands of scholarship—translation ethics, paratext theory, world-literature circulation, and international-relations research on cultural diplomacy and soft power—to examine how literary value is co-produced in non-Anglophone contexts. Rather than treating these traditions as parallel debates, the article brings them together around a single question: how do infrastructures mediate what counts as credible literature across languages?

Translation Ethics and the Design of Reading

Translation has long been framed as a technical problem of equivalence, yet contemporary debates emphasize its ethical and political dimensions. Spivak’s conception of translation as responsibility foregrounds attentiveness to voice, rhetoric, and singularity, resisting both mechanical literalism and aggressive domestication (Spivak, Landry and MacLean, 1996). Ricœur’s notion of *linguistic hospitality* similarly

¹ An earlier version of this study was presented as Hong, J.-U. (2025, June 26). *The translation status of Scandinavian literature in Korea and its significance* [Conference presentation]. Korea–EU International Conference on Peace, Language, and Cultural Diplomacy, Madrid, Spain.



conceptualizes translation as an ethical encounter that welcomes the foreign while preserving the integrity of the host language (Ricoeur, 2006). Taken together, these perspectives shift attention from accuracy alone to the design of reading experiences—how cadence, hesitation, silence, and sociolect are carried across linguistic borders.

This ethical orientation has institutional consequences. As Venuti has argued, translator invisibility is not neutral but part of a broader regime that obscures editorial decisions, abridgments, and adaptation bases. In small-corpus circulation, such opacity risks textual drift and erodes reader trust. Conversely, editions that acknowledge translator agency, disclose source lineage, and briefly explain difficult choices tend to be more readily adopted by libraries, educators, and critics. Translation ethics thus becomes inseparable from institutional credibility.

Paratexts, Metadata, and Infrastructural Legibility

Genette's theory of paratexts reconceptualizes covers, titles, blurbs, illustrations, and series frames not as decorative supplements but as thresholds through which readers enter the text (Genette & Maclean, 1991). In contemporary book ecosystems, these thresholds are closely coupled with metadata—subject headings, authority records, series identifiers, shelving codes, and platform categories. Together, paratexts and metadata function as coordinating devices: they frame expectations, align audiences, and allow institutions to recognize, classify, and circulate works.

For reception studies, this infrastructural role carries methodological implications. Because paratexts and metadata leave durable public traces, they can be inspected, archived, and compared across time. By coding image motifs, typography classes, taglines, series architectures, and catalog descriptors, researchers can reconstruct how interpretive expectations are assembled *before* reading occurs. In this article, paratexts and metadata are therefore treated as primary evidence rather than peripheral context.

World Literature Beyond Metropolitan Pipelines

World-literature scholarship has illuminated the asymmetries that shape global literary circulation, often emphasizing how metropolitan centers confer legitimacy on peripheral literatures. While such models remain indispensable, they risk obscuring circulation routes that do not pass through dominant languages. The Korean reception of Scandinavian literature suggests an alternative configuration: minor-to-minor circulation, in which value formation depends less on metropolitan endorsement than on the maturation of local infrastructures.

Field-theoretic perspectives help explain how such circulation becomes possible. When translators, editors, librarians, critics, and policy bodies converge around shared norms—edition transparency, catalog discipline, and recurring review venues—symbolic capital can accrue locally. Circulation thus appears not as a single pipeline but as a layered process of mediation, each layer leaving partial yet verifiable traces.



Cultural Diplomacy and Infrastructural Soft Power

International-relations research on cultural diplomacy and soft power provides a final lens for interpreting these dynamics. Soft power is commonly defined as attraction grounded in credibility and values, often associated with cultural exports, national branding, or high-profile events. The Korean–Nordic literary relationship, however, points to a quieter mechanism. Here, diplomacy emerges not from spectacle but from routine mediation: translation grants that reduce commissioning risk, prize circuits that narrate value, library policies that normalize discovery pathways, and platform standards that stabilize metadata.

These processes generate what may be termed infrastructural soft power—forms of attraction rooted in durable pathways that make foreign literature legible, reusable, and discussable over time. Such power is incremental and rarely visible as policy intervention, yet it shapes how readers imagine both foreign societies and their own cultural horizons.

Integrative Framework

Bringing these strands together yields an operational framework for analyzing reception as infrastructural alignment. Translation ethics directs attention to the micro-design of language; paratext theory highlights the framing of expectations; world-literature perspectives contextualize asymmetries and local agency; and international-relations scholarship clarifies why these alignments matter beyond the literary field. In practical terms, this framework focuses on:

- edition dynamics and transparency,
- paratextual and metadata grammars,
- institutional anchors across libraries, platforms, prizes, and grants, and
- discourse traces that sustain interpretive communities.

Together, these dimensions make it possible to analyze the Korean reception of Scandinavian literature not as linear diffusion but as the gradual co-production of value across ethical practice, material interfaces, and institutional routines.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on triangulation of publicly verifiable evidence. Because proprietary sales figures and internal publisher data in the Korean book market are rarely accessible and typically protected by nondisclosure agreements (Sapiro, 2008), the analysis deliberately avoids commercial indicators that cannot be independently audited. Instead, it reconstructs reception histories through the convergence of multiple observable traces of circulation and mediation, allowing claims to remain transparent and replicable (Golafshani, 2003).



The methodological approach should not be understood as a replacement for quantitative market analysis, but as an alternative strategy suited to contexts where reliable sales data are unavailable. By foregrounding public-facing artifacts—catalogs, paratexts, institutional records, and criticism—the study prioritizes evidence that can be re-examined by other researchers and compared across contexts (Jick, 1979; Olsen and Holborn, 2004).

Corpus and Scope

The corpus consists of Korean translations of Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish literary works circulating primarily through general trade channels. Academic translations intended exclusively for specialist readerships, language-learning materials, and excerpts published only in journals or magazines are excluded, unless there is clear evidence of sustained general readership.

Within this trade-oriented corpus, the analysis focuses on three analytically distinct clusters:

1. Crime fiction commonly grouped as *Nordic noir*
2. Children's and young-adult classics
3. Contemporary reflective or so-called "quiet" prose

These clusters were selected because they display contrasting reader pathways, paratextual grammars, and institutional anchoring, enabling structured comparison across genres within the same national reception context (Genette & Maclean, 1991; Ali, 2018).

Sources and Data Collection

The analysis draws exclusively on publicly accessible and documentable sources, including:

- National and university library catalogs
- Publisher catalogues and edition pages
- Metadata records on major Korean book platforms
- Prize announcements, festival programs, and translation-grant acknowledgments
- Professional criticism and long-form reviews in print and online media
- Physical and digital paratexts (covers, series frames, taglines, translator notes)

Coding and Analytical Procedure

Each item in the corpus was coded across six dimensions designed to capture both textual framing and institutional embedding:



- Genre and subgenre classification
- Paratextual grammar (image motifs, color palettes, typography, and tagline semantics)
- Framing rhetoric (ethical, pedagogical, entertainment-oriented, or reflective)
- Institutional anchors (publisher and series identity, grants, prizes, festivals)
- Reader pathways (school or library adoption, book-club circulation, platform curation)
- Edition transparency (source edition information, translator visibility, notes, adaptation disclosure)

This coding scheme enables comparison across historical phases and genre clusters while remaining sensitive to the specific conditions of the Korean literary field. Rather than producing quantitative generalizations, the method seeks patterned convergence across indicators, allowing reception to be analyzed as a process of infrastructural alignment rather than as an outcome measured solely by market performance. Parts of the empirical material and analytical framework employed in this study were previously presented at an international academic conference.

Each representative title was verified against at least two independently accessible public records, prioritized as publisher metadata, Kyobo listings, and the National Library of Korea catalog; archived cover/metadata evidence is indexed by Item ID in Table 3.

Historical Trajectory: From Pedagogical Entry to Infrastructural Consolidation

The reception of Scandinavian literature in Korea did not emerge as a sudden discovery or market breakthrough. Instead, it developed gradually through overlapping phases, each characterized by distinct infrastructures of mediation. Although the boundaries between these phases are necessarily porous, a heuristic periodization clarifies how translation practices, paratextual grammars, and institutional anchors slowly converged to stabilize visibility and credibility over time.

The earliest traces of Scandinavian literature in Korea appeared primarily within pedagogical contexts. Translations were often undertaken by scholars or educators and framed as morally instructive, socially meaningful, or culturally informative rather than as objects of leisure reading. Paratexts emphasized learning, understanding, and comparative knowledge, positioning these works as gateways to distant societies rather than as contemporary literary experiences. Circulation remained modest and frequently took place outside mainstream trade channels. Cataloging practices reinforced this framing by shelving such titles alongside world-literature surveys or educational materials rather than contemporary fiction. Translator visibility was limited, and metadata often provided minimal information about source editions.



Despite these constraints, this phase played a foundational role. It introduced authors' names, genres, and thematic associations into Korean intellectual discourse, establishing reference points that later mediators—editors, critics, and librarians—could recognize and reactivate. Scandinavian literature thus entered Korea first not as a market phenomenon but as a pedagogical resource.

A second phase emerged with the rise of curated publishing series. As Scandinavian titles were incorporated into children's and young-adult lines, world-classics collections, or contemporary literature series, paratexts became more standardized and legible. Visual continuity across covers, typographic systems, and series introductions signaled editorial intention and created recognizable packages for readers and institutions alike. Backlists generated internal cross-references, encouraging incremental exploration rather than one-off encounters.

This consolidation had three notable effects. First, it reduced risk: inclusion within a curated series signaled prior editorial selection, lowering the threshold for libraries, schools, and individual readers. Second, it amplified translator credibility, particularly when the same translators became repeatedly associated with specific strands of Scandinavian writing. Third, it stabilized cataloging and retrieval, as series identifiers and authority records enabled more consistent classification across institutions. In this period, Scandinavian literature in Korea ceased to be episodic and became repeatable, supported by infrastructures that encouraged sustained discovery.

Over time, genre differentiation intensified, giving rise to three particularly salient clusters. Crime fiction benefitted from seriality, recurring protagonists, and strong place-based branding. Paratexts emphasized atmosphere, ethical ambiguity, and social critique, while metadata consistently aligned these works with a recognizable transnational genre. Libraries reinforced these pathways through crime-themed displays and reading lists, further normalizing discovery.

Children's and young-adult literature followed a different trajectory. Here, credibility traveled through intergenerational trust. Edition transparency—clear translator attribution, stable source references, and visual continuity across reprints—combined with school curricula and library programs to embed Scandinavian titles into everyday literacy practices. Occasional grants, festivals, or reading campaigns added symbolic reinforcement without overwhelming the domestic framing.

A third cluster comprised contemporary works characterized by interiority, restraint, and ethical hesitation. Their circulation depended less on plot-driven marketing than on careful translation, subdued paratexts, and sustained critical mediation. Reviews and essays taught readers how to value slowness, ambiguity, and understatement, while minimalist cover designs signaled distance from commercial spectacle. This cluster demonstrated that Scandinavian literature could circulate without sensational cues, grounded instead in affective resonance and interpretive guidance.

Across these clusters, mediation was never uniform. Yet in each case, alignment among translators, editors, librarians, critics, and platforms gradually converted sporadic curiosity into sustained attention.



A further phase unfolded with the growing dominance of digital platforms. As online catalogs, search interfaces, and recommendation systems became central to discovery, metadata discipline gained unprecedented importance. Subject headings, authority records, and series identifiers increasingly determined whether titles surfaced in searches, thematic carousels, or curated lists. Publishers responded by refining descriptive texts and maintaining continuity across reissues, while libraries adopted digital reading programs and thematic collections that extended visibility beyond physical shelves. Festivals and embassy-supported events provided complementary symbolic anchors, situating Scandinavian literature within broader cultural conversations.

In this environment, reception increasingly depended on whether books were legible to infrastructures—discoverable, sortable, and reusable across platforms. Visibility was no longer secured solely by editorial selection or critical acclaim but by the capacity of texts to circulate smoothly through interconnected systems.

Taken together, these phases reveal a cumulative trajectory. What began as pedagogical introduction evolved into series-based consolidation, diversified through genre-specific pathways, and adapted to platform-mediated discovery. At no single moment did Scandinavian literature suddenly “arrive” in Korea. Instead, credibility accumulated through repetition, revision, and institutional memory.

Crucially, this history underscores that reception is not merely a matter of taste or promotion. It is the outcome of co-produced infrastructures: translation ethics that foster trust, paratextual grammars that frame expectations, metadata systems that stabilize visibility, and institutional programs that invite participation. Where these elements align, Scandinavian literature attains a durable place in Korean reading cultures; where alignment falters, titles drift into obscurity.

This periodization therefore provides the empirical foundation for the genre-specific analyses that follow, clarifying how historically formed mechanisms continue to structure reception in the present. Together, these patterns demonstrate how translators, editors, platforms, critics, and policy or prize bodies co-produce durable attention when their practices align (see Table 1).

Table 1 consolidates the historically accumulated evidence discussed above by mapping how different genre clusters are anchored in publicly observable infrastructures. Rather than summarizing market success, the table visualizes the distinct mediation pathways through which credibility has been stabilized across genres.

Together, these verified edition trajectories indicate that durability depends less on isolated breakthroughs than on repeatable infrastructures of mediation—series architectures, transparent edition lineage, and stable metadata—whose observable traces are consolidated in Table 1.



Table 1. Reception of Scandinavian Literature via Public Data Sources

Data Source	Nordic Noir	Children's & YA Classics	Contemporary "Quiet" Prose
Library Catalogs & Metadata	Integrated into crime-themed displays and international genre search fields.	Integrated into school reading programs and long-term literacy practices.	Metadata often oscillates between literary fiction, essays, or "healing literature."
Publisher Catalogs & Series	Established through serial branding and recurring protagonists.	Included in world-classics or specialized children's series to maintain visual continuity.	Planned as refined literary collections emphasizing translation craft.
Prizes, Festivals & Grants	Visibility boosted through crime-themed festivals and book club programs.	Symbolic weight added via translation grants and embassy-linked cultural events.	Validated through critical essays, long-form reviews, and literary awards.
Physical & Digital Paratexts	Uses stark typography, cold landscapes, and social critique taglines.	Features prominent translator credits, stable source references, and consistent designs.	Employs minimal imagery, muted palettes, and spacious typography.

Genre-Specific Pathways to Visibility and Credibility

While the historical trajectory outlined in Section 4 clarifies how Scandinavian literature gradually entered and stabilized within the Korean literary field, genre-specific analysis reveals how these infrastructures operate unevenly across different narrative forms. Genre does not merely classify texts; it structures expectations, mediating practices, and institutional responses. Examining reception through genre therefore makes visible the differentiated "recognition grammars" through which credibility is assembled (Alacovska, 2015; Verboord, Kuipers and Janssen, 2015).

To enable systematic comparison, this section applies a shared analytical framework across genres, operationalized through six dimensions: genre categorization, paratext grammar, framing rhetoric, institutional anchors, reader pathways, and edition transparency.

Table 2 outlines the six analytical dimensions used to compare genre-specific pathways in the Korean reception of Scandinavian literature. The framework operationalizes reception as an infrastructural process by coding how genres are stabilized through paratextual framing, institutional anchoring, metadata practices, and reader pathways. Applying a shared set of dimensions across genres enables controlled comparison while remaining sensitive to differences in narrative conventions and mediation practices.

Table 2 summarizes the coding scheme used throughout this section. By holding these dimensions constant, the analysis avoids treating genre clusters as isolated cases and instead examines how similar infrastructural elements are configured differently depending on genre conventions and reader expectations.



Table 2. Analysis by Six Core Dimensions

Analytical Dimension	Nordic Noir	Children's & YA Literature	Contemporary "Quiet" Prose
1. Genre Categorization	Classified as international crime fiction or socially diagnostic thrillers.	Defined as world classics, pedagogical resources, or coming-of-age tales.	Positioned as contemplative literary fiction or "healing" essayistic prose.
2. Paratext Grammar	Subdued palettes, stark typography, and atmospheric motifs (e.g., northern darkness).	Consistent series frames, recognizable illustrations, and high-readability fonts.	Minimalist covers with muted imagery and ample white space.
3. Framing Rhetoric	Entertainment/Social Critique: Focuses on institutional failures and moral ambiguity.	Pedagogical/Ethical: Focuses on character formation and social meaning.	Reflective/Affective: Focuses on interiority, everyday relations, and rhythm.
4. Institutional Anchors	Crime-themed series identities, genre festivals, and specialized critics.	Publisher series, translation grants, and school/library adoption.	Literary awards, critical mediation via long-form reviews, and workshops.
5. Reader Pathways	Genre-based discovery via platforms and crime-themed library lists.	Intergenerational trust passed from parents/teachers to children.	Curation through book clubs, social media "healing" trends, and critical essays.
6. Edition Transparency	Focuses on atmospheric branding and multi-volume continuity.	Highest: Explicit translator credits, stable source references, and explanatory notes.	Emphasis on the translator's sensitivity to rhythm and tonal shifts.

The discussion focuses on three clusters that have proven especially durable in the Korean context: Nordic noir, children's and young-adult literature, and contemporary "quiet" prose. Each cluster is illustrated through one representative case, selected from the verified corpus and documented in the evidence registers.

Nordic Noir: Seriality, Atmosphere, and Institutional Repetition

Nordic noir occupies a distinctive position in the Korean reception of Scandinavian literature. Its visibility is strongly shaped by seriality, place-based branding, and a paratextual emphasis on atmosphere rather than plot resolution (Hill, 2018; Stougaard-Nielsen, 2016; Dodds & Hochscherf, 2020). Covers frequently deploy muted color palettes, stark typography, and visual cues associated with cold landscapes or social isolation, while blurbs foreground moral ambiguity and institutional failure.

Representative case: *Stieg Larsson, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Korean edition)

In the Korean editions of Larsson's Millennium series, credibility is stabilized through three intersecting mechanisms. First, serial continuity reduces entry risk: once readers and libraries commit to the first volume, subsequent installments benefit from cumulative familiarity. Second, critics and reviewers routinely frame the series as "socially



diagnostic,” emphasizing its engagement with gender violence, corruption, and welfare-state contradictions rather than positioning it as mere entertainment. Third, libraries, book clubs, and crime-themed reading programs repeatedly circulate the series, producing episodic but sustained visibility.

At the same time, Nordic noir illustrates the risks of over-calibration. Marketing strategies that exaggerate brutality or “northern darkness” can narrow interpretive horizons, flattening Scandinavian societies into a homogeneous landscape of crime and despair. When paratexts drift toward spectacle, long-term interpretive communities weaken, even if short-term attention increases (Genette & Maclean, 1991).

Children’s and Young-Adult Literature: Trust, Continuity, and Intergenerational Mediation

Children’s and YA literature follows a markedly different pathway to credibility. Here, legitimacy rests less on novelty or intensity than on continuity, transparency, and intergenerational endorsement.

Representative case: *Astrid Lindgren, The Brothers Lionheart* (Korean editions)

Across multiple Korean editions, *The Brothers Lionheart* exemplifies how trust accumulates through stable mediation. Translator names are consistently foregrounded, source editions are clearly specified, and reprints maintain recognizable design architectures. These features reassure parents, teachers, and librarians that the text has not been arbitrarily abridged or domesticated.

Institutional anchors play a decisive role. School reading programs and library initiatives integrate the book into recurring literacy practices, while occasional cultural events and reading campaigns reinforce its status without overt promotion. Over time, the work becomes familiar not as a foreign classic requiring justification, but as a reliable companion in childhood reading.

The primary risk in this cluster is over-pedagogization. When paratexts emphasize moral instruction too heavily, literature risks being reduced to an educational instrument, losing the emotional openness that sustains rereading across generations. Nevertheless, when transparency and continuity are maintained, children’s literature demonstrates one of the most durable reception pathways in the Korean context (Bradford, 2011). The following representative titles anchor the genre-cluster analysis; each was verified through at least two public records and indexed with a cover/metadata evidence ID (see Table 3).

Building on these verified anchors, the analysis now examines how paratext and institutional mediation differ across the three clusters. The patterns observed in this representative case are not idiosyncratic but recur across verified Korean editions of Scandinavian children’s and young-adult literature, as summarized in Table 3, which maps the recurring presence of Scandinavian titles across genre clusters in the Korean market.



While children's and YA literature demonstrates how trust and continuity stabilize reception over time, the next cluster illustrates a contrasting pathway in which credibility depends less on transparency and more on translation craft and critical mediation.

Table 3. Representative Scandinavian Works in the Korean Market

Cluster	Representative work (Author, Original title)	Verified Korean edition year	ISBN	Verification sources	Cover evidence ID
Nordic noir (Sweden)	Stieg Larsson, <i>Men Who Hate Women</i> (2005), Millennium series	2017	9788954646581	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-01
Nordic noir (Sweden)	Hennig Mankell, <i>The Troubled Man</i> (2009), Wallander series	2013	9788901161204	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-02
Nordic noir (Sweden)	Maj Sjövall / Per wahlöö, <i>The Man Who Went Up in Smoke</i> (1966), Martin Beckseries	2017	9788954644440	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-03
Children/YA (Sweden)	Astrid Lindgren, <i>The Brothers Lionheart</i> (1973)	2015	9788936446734	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-01
Children/YA (Sweden)	Tove Jansson, <i>Moominpappa at Sea</i> (1965), Moomin Series	2023	9791160269765	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-02
Children/YA (Sweden)	Maria Gripe, <i>The Glassblower's Children</i> (1964)	2006	9788949170800	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-03
Quiet prose (Sweden)	Fredrik Backman, <i>An man called Ove</i> (2012)	2023	9791130605210	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-01
Quiet prose (Sweden)	Jonas Jonasson, <i>The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared</i> (2009)	2013	9788932916194	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-02
Quiet prose (Sweden)	Lena Andersson, <i>Duck City</i> (2006)	2010	9788937490170	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-03
Nordic noir (Denmark)	Jussi Adler-Olsen, <i>A Conspiracy of Faith</i> (2009) Department Q series	2019	9788932919454	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-04
Nordic noir (Denmark)	Peter Høeg, <i>Frøken, Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow</i> (1992)	2005	9788989351733	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-05
Children/YA (Denmark)	Hans Christian Andersen, <i>The Snow Queen</i> (1845)	2019	9791189660949	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-04
Children/YA (Denmark)	Bjarne Reuter, <i>The Boys from St. Petri</i> (1991)	2010	9788964291016	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-05
Children/YA (Denmark)	Jakob martin Strid, <i>Mimbo Jimbo and the Long Winter</i> (2014), Mimbo Jimbo series	2016	9788932374147	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-06



Quiet prose (Denmark)	Martin Andersen Nexø, <i>Pelle the Conqueror</i> (1906-10)	2009	9788950917739	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-04
Quiet prose (Denmark)	Karen Blixen, <i>Babette's Feast</i> (1950)	2016	9788954616584	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-05
Quiet prose (Denmark)	Eva Tind, <i>Origins</i> (2019)	2021	9788965457343	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-06
Nordic noir (Norway)	Jo Nesbø, <i>Killing Moon</i> (2017), Harry Hole Series	2025	9791173323614	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-06
Nordic noir (Norway)	Karin Fossum, <i>Don't Look Back</i> (1996), Konrad Sejer Series	2007	9788975275746	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-07
Nordic noir (Norway)	Anne Holt, <i>Dead Joker</i> (1999)	2012	9788937474040	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	NNO-08
Children/YA (Norway)	Jostein Gaarder, <i>Sofies Verden</i> (1991)	2015	9788932317663	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-07
Children/YA (Norway)	Maria Parr, <i>Astrid the unstoppable</i> (2009)	2013	9788974141486	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-08
Children/YA (Norway)	Håkon Øvreås, <i>Brown</i> (2013)	2019	9781592702121	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	CYA-09
Quiet prose (Norway)	Per Petterson, <i>Out Stealing Horses</i> (2003)	2020	9788935663415	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-07
Quiet prose (Norway)	Dag Solstad, <i>Professor Andersen's Night</i> (2016)	2016	9788954642231	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-08
Quiet prose (Norway)	Karl Ove Knausgård, <i>My Struggle I-III</i> (2009-2011)	2016	9788935670123	Publisher / Kyobo / NLK	QP-09

Contemporary “Quiet” Prose: Translation Craft and Critical Mediation

A third cluster encompasses contemporary works characterized by interiority, ethical hesitation, and subdued narrative tempo. These texts circulate without sensational cues and depend heavily on translation craft and critical framing (Baker, 2019; Genette & Maclean, 1991).

Representative case: *Jon Fosse, Morning and Evening* (Korean edition)

In the Korean reception of Fosse’s prose, credibility is stabilized primarily through translator sensitivity and critical mediation. Short paratextual remarks occasionally signal attention to rhythm, silence, and repetition, preparing readers for a reading experience marked by slowness and restraint. Covers tend toward minimalism, with ample white space and understated imagery.

Critical essays and long-form reviews play a disproportionate role in this cluster. Rather than summarizing plots, critics instruct readers in how to approach ambiguity and ethical openness as literary virtues. Metadata classification, however, often oscillates between literary fiction, essayistic prose, and so-called “healing literature,” revealing institutional uncertainty about how to categorize restraint.

The central risk here lies in over-therapeutic framing. When paratexts promise comfort or emotional repair, they risk flattening the ethical complexity of the text, transforming



literature into a lifestyle artifact. Sustainability therefore depends on mediators—translators and critics—who protect interpretive openness rather than enclosing it within self-help discourse (Chamberlain, 2015).

Comparative Synthesis Across Genres

Read comparatively, the three clusters reveal patterns that remain invisible when genres are analyzed in isolation. Alignment emerges when translation ethics, paratext grammars, and institutional anchors reinforce one another, as in the transparency-driven pathways of children’s literature or the serial branding of Nordic noir (Alacovska, 2015; Genette & Maclean, 1991). Drift appears when marketing promises detach from textual experience, whether through oversensational crime framing or excessive pedagogical or therapeutic cues (Drucker, 2018).

Table 4 synthesizes the genre-specific findings by applying the six analytical dimensions to representative works from Nordic noir, children’s/young-adult literature, and contemporary “quiet” prose. The table highlights points of alignment, drift, and infrastructural coherence across genres, showing how different configurations of translation ethics, paratext grammars, and institutional mediation produce distinct forms of literary credibility and durability within the same national reception field.

Table 4 synthesizes these observations by applying the six analytical dimensions from Table 2 across representative works in each cluster. The comparison highlights how infrastructural coherence—stable metadata, recurring institutional programs, and consistent framing—enables repeatable discovery pathways, while misalignment produces fragility even for otherwise acclaimed texts.

Taken together, the genre-specific analysis confirms the article’s central claim: literary reception is not the outcome of inherent textual value alone, but of co-produced infrastructures that align ethical practice, framing strategies, and institutional mediation. This conclusion prepares the ground for Section 6, where these dynamics are interpreted more explicitly through the lens of cultural diplomacy and infrastructural soft power.

To consolidate the cross-genre comparison, Table 4 summarizes the six coded dimensions across the verified item set indexed in Table 3.

Taken together, the patterns in Table 4 show that reception becomes durable when translation ethics, paratext/metadata framing, and institutional anchors align into repeatable pathways of discovery and interpretation—an alignment that underpins the discussion that follows.



Table 4. Cross-Cluster Summary of Mediation Dimensions (coded items indexed in Table 3)

Analytical dimension (coded)	Nordic noir (Item IDs)	Children’s/YA (Item IDs)	Quiet prose (Item IDs)
1. Genre / subgenre positioning	Transnational crime; “Nordic noir” branding; serial/series logic dominates discovery (NNO-01-NNO-03)	Classic children’s/YA; canon/heritage framing; intergenerational trust cues (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Literary fiction / reflective prose; “contemplative/quiet” positioning; often cross-listed (QP-01-QP-03)
2. Paratext grammar (cover motif, typography, tagline)	Cool/dark palette, stark typography; taglines emphasize social critique, institutions, moral tension (NNO-01-NNO-03)	Illustration/character-centered imagery; stable series design across reprints; taglines emphasize growth, courage, imagination (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Minimal or restrained design; spacious typography; taglines emphasize ordinary life, ethics of care, introspection (QP-01-QP-03)
3. Framing rhetoric (promises made to readers)	“Diagnostic” framing (society/institutions); suspense + ethical ambience; credibility via recognizable noir cues (NNO-01-NNO-03)	Safety/appropriateness + literary value; “recommended reading” rhetoric; affective/educational balance (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Aesthetic/ethical nuance; ambiguity/slowness framed as value; risk of “healing/therapy” overframing (QP-01-QP-03)
4. Institutional anchors (publisher/series, prizes, grants, events)	Series lines and multi-volume packaging; festival/curation spikes; sometimes anchored by crime-themed lists (NNO-01-NNO-03)	School/library adoption and reading programs; classic series lines; occasional embassy/grant visibility reinforces legitimacy (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Critics/long-form reviews and curated “literary” lines; festivals/author events can punctuate attention (QP-01-QP-03)
5. Reader pathways (how books become discoverable/repeatable)	Platform search + series recognition; readers follow “next volume” logic; book clubs/genre lists recirculate backlist (NNO-01-NNO-03)	Parents/teachers/librarians as gatekeepers; school/library collections create recurring rediscovery; reprints sustain familiarity (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Discovery via criticism/interviews/curated lists; slower uptake; sustained by interpretive communities rather than algorithmic momentum (QP-01-QP-03)
6. Edition transparency (source edition, translator visibility, notes, adaptation disclosure)	Generally adequate metadata; main risk is expectation mismatch rather than edition opacity; translator visibility varies (NNO-01-NNO-03)	Transparency is central: translator credit, edition lineage, illustration cycle; risk rises when abridgment/adaptation is not signposted (CYA-01-CYA-03)	Translator/editor notes can be high-leverage for tone/rhythm; risk is marketing drift (“healing” tags) flattening ethical complexity (QP-01-QP-03)



<p>Synthesis: main “alignment” drivers</p>	<p>Series coherence + noir paratext grammar + platform discoverability (NNO-01-NNO-03)</p>	<p>Edition transparency + institutional gatekeeping (school/library) + series continuity (CYA-01-CYA-03)</p>	<p>Critical mediation + restrained framing + translator craft/visibility (QP-01-QP-03)</p>
<p>Primary “drift” risks</p>	<p>Over-sensational marketing; flattening Nordic societies into “darkness” cliché (NNO-01-NNO-03)</p>	<p>Over-pedagogization; edition opacity in reprints/adaptations (CYA-01-CYA-03)</p>	<p>Over-therapeutic framing; category ambiguity harming discoverability (QP-01-QP-03)</p>

Note. Item IDs refer to Table 3, where each representative title is verified through at least two public records and archived with cover/metadata evidence IDs.

Discussion and Implications

The analysis of historical phases and genre-specific pathways reveals that the Korean reception of Scandinavian literature has not depended on a single agent—neither publishers, translators, critics, nor state institutions alone. Instead, value has emerged through a distributed process in which multiple actors, artifacts, and infrastructures gradually align. This section synthesizes those findings and discusses their broader implications for translation studies, reception research, and the study of cultural diplomacy.

The findings invite a rethinking of literary value beyond conventional binaries such as center/periphery or original/translation. Scandinavian titles in Korea gained credibility not because they were canonized elsewhere first, but because local infrastructures learned how to stabilize them: translators cultivated ethical clarity, paratexts framed expectations, metadata made titles searchable, and institutions generated recurring occasions for attention.

In this sense, value appears less as an essence carried by texts than as the outcome of infrastructural alignment. When alignment holds, books become repeatedly discoverable and discussable; when it fractures, even strong literary works fade from view. This perspective shifts the analytical spotlight from symbolic prestige to the mundane routines that sustain literary circulation (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007).

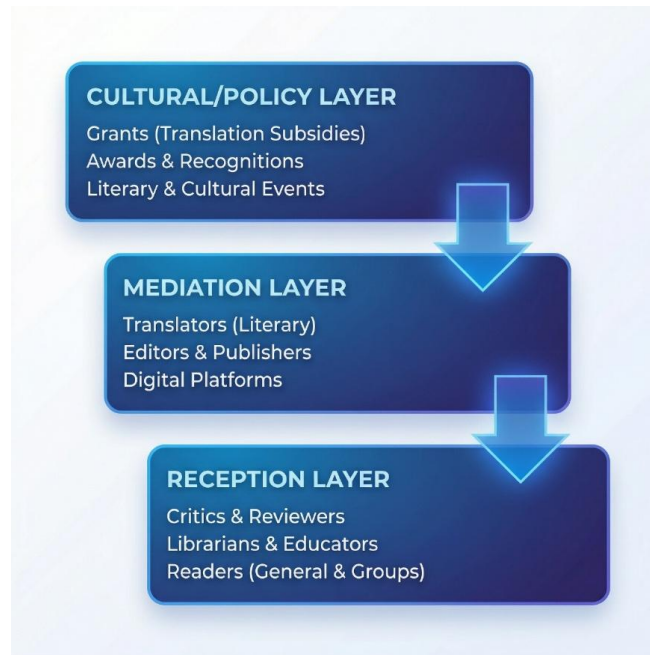
Figure 1 should be read not as a linear transmission model but as an ecological diagram. The arrows indicate recursive feedback rather than one-directional flow, emphasizing that credibility is continuously negotiated across policy, mediation, and reception layers.

A tripartite model helps clarify these dynamics by illustrating the interaction between institutional support, mediation and gatekeeping, and socio-cultural reception. Rather than functioning as linear transmission, these layers operate through feedback loops in which credibility is gradually reinforced or weakened over time. Paratexts and metadata play a central role in this process. Far from being peripheral add-ons, they constitute primary evidence for understanding reception, because they leave durable and publicly



inspectable traces that shape how readers are invited to approach foreign literature before reading even begins (Genette & Maclean, 1991).

Figure 1. Reception-Mediation Ecology of Scandinavian Literature in Korea



Treating such materials as primary evidence also has methodological implications. Because catalogs, covers, authority records, and classification systems are publicly accessible, claims about reception can be audited, revisited, and challenged by other researchers. This contrasts with arguments grounded primarily in proprietary sales data or anecdotal impressions, which are difficult to verify and often inaccessible. The Korean–Scandinavian case thus demonstrates how small-language literatures can circulate along minor-to-minor routes when local infrastructures mature, without dependence on Anglophone consecration. Translators, librarians, editors, and critics collectively exercise agency in shaping these routes, building recognizable grammars of trust within peripheral fields (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007).

Viewed through an international-relations lens, these dynamics resemble a form of cultural diplomacy that operates quietly, without overt messaging or spectacle. Embassy events, translation grants, festivals, and library initiatives do not dictate meaning. Instead, they reduce risk, establish continuity, and normalize discovery. The result is what may be called infrastructural soft power: attraction grounded not in slogans or campaigns, but in durable pathways that make foreign literature feel credible, reusable, and worth revisiting (Nye, 2017).

This perspective carries pragmatic implications. For publishers, consistent series architectures, transparent edition notes, and restrained marketing help build long-term



trust, whereas over-sensational framing may generate temporary attention at the cost of interpretive communities. For translators, modest visibility—clear acknowledgment of choices and constraints rather than self-promotion—supports credibility across institutions. For libraries and schools, curated reading programs and stable catalog descriptors can anchor foreign titles beyond market cycles. For cultural agencies, small and repeatable supports may prove more effective over time than sporadic high-profile events.

At the same time, caution is necessary. The findings emerge from a single national context and rely primarily on public indicators such as catalogs, paratexts, institutional records, and criticism. These traces cannot fully capture informal exchanges, private reading communities, or the affective dimensions of reader response. Nor do they allow precise measurement of market impact. The approach therefore explains how credibility is stabilized, not how much influence specific titles ultimately exert.

Taken together, the Korean case illustrates that the circulation of small-language literatures depends less on singular breakthroughs than on the slow accumulation of infrastructures that reduce risk, preserve transparency, and invite participation. Investing in these mundane but durable mediations may ultimately matter more than any single promotional campaign. If the goal is not merely to export books but to cultivate shared interpretive worlds, then the work of building infrastructures becomes central both to literary reception and to the quiet practice of cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

This article has traced how Scandinavian literature became visible and sustainable in Korea through a long process of mediation rather than through intrinsic textual value or prior consecration by Anglophone centers. Across historical phases and genre-specific pathways, the analysis demonstrated that credibility emerged gradually from the alignment of translators, editors, librarians, critics, platforms, and cultural agencies. Literary value, in this account, appears not as a property carried by texts alone, but as the outcome of infrastructures that make reading credible, legible, and repeatable within a given reception field (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007).

Methodologically, the study showed the analytical value of treating paratexts and metadata as primary evidence for reception research. Because such materials leave durable and publicly inspectable traces, they allow transparent and reproducible analysis of how readers are invited to approach foreign literature—often before reading even begins. Covers, taglines, catalog records, and classification systems collectively script expectations and delimit interpretive horizons. Focusing on these public artifacts offers a viable alternative to approaches that rely primarily on proprietary sales data or anecdotal impressions, which are often inaccessible and difficult to verify. Detailed evidence registers and coding protocols are provided in the appendices to enable replication and re-examination of the analytical claims advanced in the main text.

Substantively, the article identified three genre-specific pathways—Nordic noir, children’s and young-adult literature, and contemporary “quiet” prose—each assembling credibility



through a distinct configuration of mediation practices. Crime fiction relied on seriality and calibrated atmosphere; children's literature accumulated trust through transparency and institutional continuity; and quiet prose depended on restrained framing and critical guidance. These clusters revealed that sustainability in reception is genre-sensitive and contingent on how translation ethics, paratextual grammars, and institutional anchors reinforce one another over time.

Theoretically, the Korean–Scandinavian case reframes debates in world literature and translation studies by foregrounding infrastructural alignment rather than symbolic prestige. It also contributes to international-relations scholarship by suggesting that long-term reading infrastructures can function as a form of infrastructural soft power: attraction generated without spectacle or overt messaging, but through routine mediation that normalizes discovery and reuse (Nye, 2017). In this sense, cultural diplomacy operates less through campaigns than through the slow stabilization of trust across institutions and interpretive communities.

At the same time, the findings must be interpreted with caution. The analysis is limited to a single national context and relies primarily on public indicators such as catalogs, paratexts, institutional records, and criticism. These traces cannot fully capture informal circulation, private reading practices, or the affective dimensions of reader response, nor do they allow precise measurement of cultural impact. The approach therefore explains how credibility is stabilized not how much influence specific titles ultimately exert.

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