

Overseas Korean Literary Awards ceremony 'Writing in Korean abroad has great meaning'

Awards presented to 13 winners online and offline; novelist Koo Hyo-seo delivers lecture

The Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Lee Sang-duk) held the 26th Overseas Koreans Literary Awards ceremony at the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center in Songdo, Yeonsu-gu, Incheon, on Dec. 11. At the awards ceremony held online and offline, 13 people were honored with awards, including the grand prize winners in three categories: Poetry, Short Stories and Essays/Memoirs. The winners live abroad, and therefore most of them attended online. Cho Seong-guk (USA), who received the grand prize in the Short Stories category, said through a video call, "I find it very meaningful that I wrote in Korean overseas," and expressed his thoughts on continuing to be interested in the things around him and enjoying his creative activities.

Author Lee Myeong-ran (New Zealand), who received the grand prize in the Essay/Memoir category, said in her acceptance speech: "I wanted to tell the story that we cannot live alone. I wanted to convey the message that we must live together, even if we are foreigners with different skin colors and cultures."

Author Jang Hye-young (United Arab Emirates), who received the grand prize in the Poetry category, said, "I am grateful that we were able to communicate through literature as a link."

Author Lee Ji-young (Jordan), who is working in the travel industry in Jordan and received the excellence award in the Essay/Memoir category, attended the awards ceremony in person and said, "I was happy and encouraged by the news of the award because I heard it when I was having a hard time because my travels had been interrupted due to the war in Israel."

After the awards ceremony, Koo Hyo-seo, a representative novelist of modern Korean literature who served as a judge, was invited to give a lecture. Koo encouraged the winners, saying, "As the years go by, the level of the award-winning works has improved so much that they could easily win even if they were submitted to the New Year's Literary Contest."

Koo made remarks on the attitude of those who write, saying: "People who write should cultivate and nurture others well. They should not be obsessed with their own thoughts, nor should they force their thoughts on others. We have learned since childhood that



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk (L) presents a plaque and prize money to Lee Ji-young (Jordan), who won the excellence award in the Essay/Memoir category, at the 26th Overseas Koreans Literary Awards ceremony on Dec. 11.

the school bell rings 'ding ding ding.'

"However, the actual bell does not ring ding ding ding, but we hear it that way. That is the power of language." He emphasized that writers should not be restricted by language. "Humans are thrown into the sea of language. Writers should be able to escape that sea."

OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk emphasized: "The Overseas Koreans Literary Awards have served as a bridge that connects the lives of all overseas Koreans who are separated from each other, and thanks to the hard work of overseas Korean writers, the horizons of Korean literature have expanded and the status of our culture has also been elevated. I will actively support and encourage the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards so that they can become a gateway for writers."

Meanwhile, the Overseas Koreans Literary Awards have been held annually since 1999 to support the creative activities of Korean literature by 7 million overseas Koreans around the world, and to discover and introduce excellent literary works that contain the identity of the Korean people. These awards are evaluated to have contributed to expanding the horizons of Korean literature through the challenges and passion of numerous overseas Korean writers, and many of the winners are active in their respective domestic literary spheres. 