



TCS LOUPE **COMMUNAL** **ARCHIVING OF** **CHINA, JAPAN AND** **KOREA**

LECTURE **FOUR**

**Why is 'Nostalgia
and Memory'
Recently
Becoming So Hot
in Korean
Society?**

January 29, 2015

Delivered by
HONG Sammy
Memory Collector
Memory in Seoul Project

LECTURE SUMMARY

Why is 'Nostalgia and Memory' Recently Becoming So Hot in Korean Society?

Overview

The fourth lecture of the TCS LOUPE was delivered by Ms. HONG Sammy, the memory collector of *Memory in Seoul Project* on “Why is ‘nostalgia and memory’ recently becoming so hot in Korean Society”. The lecture by Ms. HONG introduced *Memory in Seoul Project* that gathers memories of ordinary citizens to redesign the history of Seoul, in relation to the recent Korean context of the retro boom and the resurgence of oral memory as an alternative to written history. Subsequent TCS presentation explained similar cases of communal archiving in Japan and China.

TCS Presentation 1.

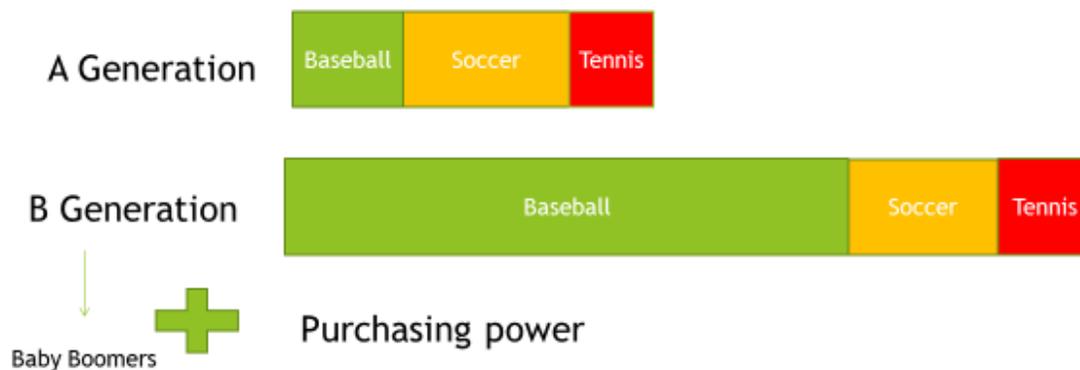
Emerging Interest in Nostalgia and Memory

Nostalgia is sweeping the whole Korean society as witnessed from the recent popularity of ‘Saturday, Saturday is for Singers!’, the special episode of the nation’s variety show, *Infinite Challenge*, which brought audiences back to the 90s. The recent retro boom, in part, can be attributed to the economic recession;

people tend to romanticize their 'good old days' in difficult times, and the market often appeals to retro tastes that are already familiar to large group of people.

Yet economic factor alone does not fully explain why it is the 90's retro boom that appeared in Korea at this particular time. The 90's retro boom only started to appear in the society with the drama *Answer Me 1997* in 2012. This suggests the emergence of a new generation that leads social trends. That is, the 2nd baby boom generation with growing purchasing power now takes the lead of creating social boom. It is their nostalgia that is reflected in the 90's retro boom.

Diagram 1. Conditions for Social Boom



In a society where A and B Generation live, it is likely that baseball boom will occur. That is, a cultural phenomenon supported by the generation with large number and big purchasing power engenders social boom.

Memory, on the other hand, is another hot issue of the society. The resurgence of oral memory as an alternative to written history facilitated people's interest in memory. Written history refers to an understanding of the past focused on the

deeds of famous men, which presents history as objective fact and regards time as linear and progressive. On contrast, oral memory conveys the experiences of the nameless ordinary people, emphasizes multiplicity of individual experiences, and considers time as circular and repetitive. With the growing importance of oral memory, Popular Culture is now incorporating this understanding of the past into various contents by the reinterpretation of historical figures and events.

Table 1. Features of Written History and Oral Memory

| | Written History | Oral Memory |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Focus | Deeds of famous men | Experiences of nameless ordinary people |
| Understanding of the past | Objective fact | Multiplicity of individual experiences |
| Understanding of the Time | Linear, progressive | Circular, repetitive |

Interests in nostalgia and memory stimulate people's desires to talk about one's personal memories. In fact, people in China, Japan and Korea are now sharing their memories related to one's community through communal archiving, and this communal history is transformed into new cultural contents.

Expert Lecture

Memory in Seoul Project and Communal Archiving in Korea

HONG Sammy

Memory Collector of *Memory in Seoul Project*

What is a Memory Collector?

I am a memory collector of *Memory in Seoul Project* started in 2013 by Seoul Cultural Foundation. The Project aims to preserve citizens' memories about Seoul to enrich the historical memory of the city and share the outcome with the future generations. Memory collector gathers stories of those who lived and remember such historic moments as the Korean War and the introduction of a streetcar.

Picture 1. *Memory in Seoul Project*



'메모리[인]서울프로젝트'는 빠르게 진행되는 서울의 발전 속에서 무심히 흘려 보냈던 기억으로서의 역사를 재발견하는 프로젝트입니다. 서울 사람들의 다양한 기억들을 목소리로 기록하고, 함께 들으며 공감하는 역사를 만들고자 합니다. 동시대 사람들의 목소리로 기록되는 서울의 역사는 미래 세대들을 위한 지혜의 보고가 될 것이며, 예술가와의 협업을 통해 새롭게 재현되는 서울 사람들의 다양한 기억들은 우리들의 일상을 더욱 즐겁고 풍성하게 만들어 줄 것입니다.

(Source: Memory in Seoul Project Website, <http://sfac.or.kr/memoryinseoul>)

More than 26 people with diverse backgrounds are now working as the memory collector. Anyone who is a good listener and enjoys new encounters can be a

memory collector after receiving a 10-week training required for gathering people's memories from micro-history to interview methods.

The Process of Gathering Memories of Seoul

Interviews with Seoul citizens are often conducted in a memory studio located at Seoul Citizens' Hall. People interested in sharing their old memories visit the studio and return with new memories by sharing their stories with their children (and sometimes with their grandchildren). On the other hand, collectors often pay a visit to such historical sites as *Sungwoo* Barbershop, a 200-year old shop ran by 3 generations. The interview at the actual site enables the interviewees to elaborate their stories more vividly.

Picture 2 to 4. Collecting Memories: Memory Studio at Seoul Citizens' Hall



(Source: Memory in Seoul Project Website, <http://sfac.or.kr/memoryinseoul>)

Picture 5. Collecting Memories: Visits to the Actual Sites



(Source: Memory in Seoul Project Website, <http://sfac.or.kr/memoryinseoul>)

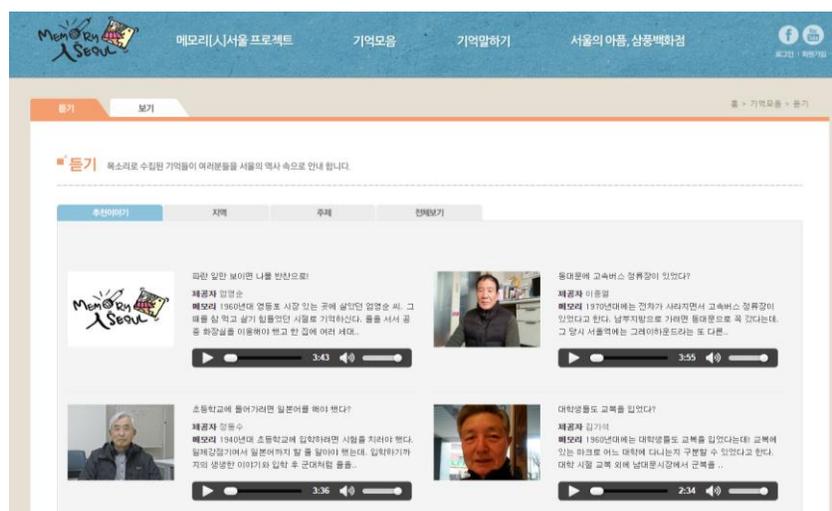
Unlike the professional researcher of oral history who mainly gathers stories of subalterns, memory collectors focus on ordinary citizens, especially the ones above their 50s who still remember spaces and values that no longer exist. For the last two years, memory collectors have encountered 700 people who shared diverse experiences including the introduction of electricity and one's lifelong business at *Joongbu* Market since its establishment after the Korean War.

Findings and Outcomes of *Memory in Seoul Project*

It is notable that particular key words which characterize certain periods are often mentioned, when talking about one's past. Those who were born in 1940s often talked about the ship with pickled shrimps that sailed from Han River to the West Sea by tide. They also had clear memories of the Korean War and even remembered the ticket price of a streetcar. For the people in their 50s, *Eat More Wheat & Less Rice* Campaign was the key word that well-defined the generation's memory.

Once they are collected, all the memories are archived in an online database according to time, place, and topics. This archiving ensures easy public access to Seoul's communal history. In addition, in order to increase data's availability and promote public interest, the Project also utilizes archived materials in producing cultural contents. That is, based on the interviews, artists reproduce the images of the historic periods and landscapes of Seoul into illustrations.

Picture 6. Online Archive of *Memory in Seoul Project*



(Source: Memory in Seoul Project Website, <http://sfac.or.kr/memoryinseoul>)

Special projects are now organized as the second stage of *Memory in Seoul Project*. In its initial stage, the Project gathered full range of memories available to redesign communal history. Now it concentrates on particular topics to conduct in-depth interviews. The themes of the three special projects are 1) *Seoul's Pain* related to the collapse of *Samsung* Department Store in 1995, 2) *Seoul's Memory* about the change in *Dongdaemun* area, and 3) *Seoul's Joy* of 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup.

Conclusion

One thing that I have realized while collecting people's memories is that many people gladly share their memories. They devote their precious time to talk about their experiences of Seoul throughout their lifetime and find comfort from attentive listening of the collectors. Young generations, on the other hand, want to understand their parents' romance and aspirations by sharing the older generations' past stories. As the Project's motto indicates, many memory collectors around Seoul are now working on gathering the voices that become history and making stories that become arts.

TCS Presentation 2.

Communal Archiving in Japan and China

Communal archiving usually evolves from a particular art genre to a social movement. Japan's communal archiving also began as an art form from 1992 and developed into a social movement in the 2000s to empower social minority groups to speak out. The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 was a turning point for the communal archiving in Japan, and different projects were launched to preserve the memories of the victims.

Memory Salvage, for example, aims to restore damaged pictures of the earthquake-torn area to reconstruct communities' past. By converting printed pictures into electronic files, the Project helps people to recover their happy memories of the past. Moreover, NHK's *Great East Japan Earthquake Archive* utilizes cutting-edge technology of Google's location system to locate eyewitness accounts to relevant places on the map; users can find out what kinds of incidents happened at particular places during the earthquake.

Picture 7 & 8. Japan's Communal Archiving after the 2011 Earthquake

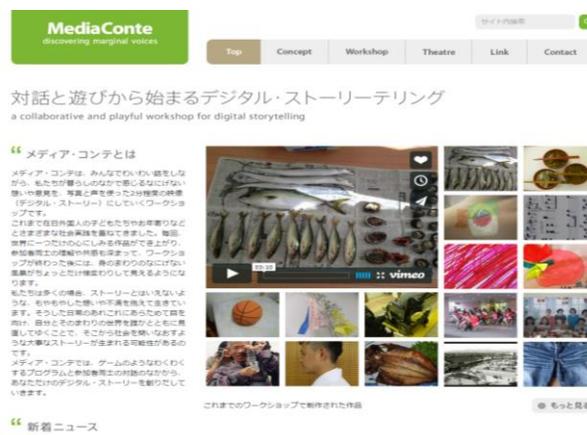


(Source: Memory Salvage Website, <http://jsis-bjk.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/>)

(Source: Great East Japan Earthquake Archive Website, <http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/>)

On the other hand, Japan's communal archiving is developing along with the advancement of the aging society. That is, there is a growing desire of the older generation to talk about their memories of the past. *Media Conte* is one of the projects that are designed to meet such desire; young students support the older generation in making an online video using their old photos.

Picture 9. Japan's Communal Archiving in Relation to Aging Society



(Source: Media Conte Website, <http://mediaconte.net/>)

China's communal archiving has now been established as an art genre. Professional photographers display pictures of the past to organize various intriguing exhibitions. For example, one photographer reproduces pictures of the present exactly referring to the ones of the past in order to demonstrate how the places and people in the past photos have changed.

Picture 10. China's Communal Archiving: Photo Exhibition



(Source: QQ Photo Exhibition Website, <http://news.qq.com/photon/photoex.htm>)

The cases of communal archiving of China, Japan and Korea indicate that the three countries' people all wish to remember their past and share their experiences with others. Such longing for the past in fact well demonstrates the commonality of the people in different countries and areas around the world.

Comments from the Floor

Two audiences on the floor expressed their thoughts on the possibility of the trilateral cooperation in communal archiving. Although there are political and historical confrontations among China, Japan and Korea, they said that the lives of the ordinary people of the three countries seem to be not much different from one another; they share common desire to enjoy freedom, equality and stability throughout their lives. In this sense, they mentioned that the establishment of the network of communal archiving among China, Japan and Korea can be a wonderful option to overcome the recent conflicts among the three countries.

LECTURE FOUR AT A GLANCE

Communal Archiving of China, Japan and Korea

| Country | Project | Feature |
|---------|---|--|
| Korea | Memory in Seoul | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Extensive gathering of Seoul citizen's memories-Online archiving according to time, place and topic-Utilizing the archive to create new cultural contents in collaboration with artists |
| Japan | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Memory Salvage2) Great East Japan Earthquake Archive3) Media Conte | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Communal archiving started as an art genre in 1992 and evolved into a social movement to empower social minorities from the 2000s-Reconstruction of memories of the earthquake-torn areas (Memory Salvage)-Combination of cutting-edge location system to locate eyewitness accounts on the map (Great East Japan Earthquake Archive)-Accumulation of the memories of aging population (Media Conte) |
| China | Special photo exhibitions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Communal archiving as an art genre-Special exhibitions featuring the comparison of photos of past and present |



Ms. HONG Sammy is one of the first memory collectors of *Memory in Seoul Project*. Since 2013, she has gathered various memories of Seoul citizens and redesigned the city's communal history based on such records. She is now engaging in the special project of *Seoul's Pain* that deals with the collapse of *Sampoong Department Store*.

Edited and Translated by: Soo Young YANG