
The Useful Past and an Access to the Future: Designing a Community-Based Archive of the Korean Diaspora

Minhyoung Kim

minkim@hufs.ac.kr

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, South Korea

This study first aims to recognize the significance of the Korean diaspora in narrating the history of modern Korea. About 7 million Koreans are estimated to live in 160 different countries around the world. This population of overseas Korean residents is equal to roughly 10% of the total combined populations of South and North Korea. The Korean diaspora was an unintended consequence of the unfortunate events of modern Korean history, including famine, colonial oppression, and war. Despite the Korean diaspora's relatively short history from around the mid-19th century, it is characterized by myriad challenges and responses in various settings. Indeed, each wave of Korean immigration was driven by different historical factors in Korea as well as the host countries, and thus the motivations and characteristics of Korean immigrants in each period were also substantially different.

Secondly, this study intends to design a community-based archive of the Korean diaspora. The Korean diaspora consists of various classes and generations so that their history is hardly written from a single perspective with limited resources. Thus, this study investigates the importance of community archives, and in particular the role of these archives in the production of collective identities via academic and popular public histories, exhibitions and other interactions. By utilizing a variety of digital media technology as well as knowledge mapping tools, this study aims to root and reconnect the Korean diaspora in flux so that it would suggest a way of re-balancing misrepresentation and absence in the modern Korean history. To build community-based archives as community-owned spaces is eventually not about a return to the past but about an access to the future.