

**Where should the culture of our lives and memory be preserved?  
- Rethinking the role of the library**

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**Abstract:**

*The abilities to store and transfer memory, to learn from others' experiences, or to share one's knowledge with the world are the drivers of social development. This driving force derives from the library's unique function and role to collect and service cultural assets. The National Library of Korea has recently expanded its scope of collection from printed media to online materials and broadcasting contents, and it opened its Memory Museum. The National Library of Korea has successfully demonstrated the example of a sustainable library in the new paradigm by strengthening its ability to preserve cultural memories.*

*Meanwhile, public libraries in Korea have taken an initiative to preserve and transfer memory of a local community, which encourages locals' participation and revitalizes community spirit that has disappeared as a result of rapid economic growth. In this paper, cases of integrating a museum's archiving function into a library that led to social integration and community revitalization will be introduced; in addition, the paper will argue where and how the culture of our lives and memory should be preserved and utilized.*

**Keywords:**

library service, memory archiving, social inclusion, community revitalization, cultural reproduction

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**1. Introduction**

Along with rapid economic growth, the gap between the wealthy and the poor became polarized after the 1997 foreign exchange crisis, which called for social inclusion to ease the problem. Social inclusion is characterized by maturity where various individuals and regions come together to make 'dynamic harmonization and co-existence' while maintaining individual or local idiosyncrasy, competence and characteristics. To maintain social inclusion successfully, a healthy and free community should exist where individuals can mature their characters and realize themselves.

In response, a series of grassroots movement emerged such as co-nursery, alternative schools, or consumers participating in the production, creating various livelihood and village

communities. Starting in the mid-1990s, private-led village libraries started to emerge, targeting children and housewives in the region.

Village libraries contributed in part in changing the image of public libraries as a ‘study room’ into a culture center by offering a friendly and family-like atmosphere to users. Beginning in the 2000s, the government budget office initiated a village library installation project as part of Urban Improvement Policy. Urban improvement and restoration project have invited public participation in the form of residence-involved restoration projects and village community projects.

There has been an increasing number of village libraries building an archive to capture memories of the villages that increasingly disappear due to urban restoration; this trend has catalyzed village and local memory archiving projects in other public libraries.

In the context of decreasing jobs, sluggish economic growth, and gradual job replaced by AI globally, the village library service will be an ultimate alternative for a sustainable development of the society.

This paper was written based on interviews with library staff. Through the paper, I would like to share Korean libraries’ effort to making society more inclusive by serving as a local community’s memory media.

## **2. Personal Memory Becomes a History**

Since 2010, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in cooperation with the National Library of Korea has operated a ‘Humanities Studies on the Road’ program which enables participants to read a book with an author and visit the book’s background setting to newly discover lessons of life and local culture. The program re-highlighted a local culture and awakened traditional values that were lost previously. Depending in the participating libraries, the program also offers an autobiography program and archive building opportunities to record memories of a town.

Public libraries are a community’s hub where residents share a sense of community and acknowledge the local identity; in particular, various programs offered by village libraries were capable for producing and collecting the village’s history in a natural way: an autobiography program for the elderly who have lived in a town for a long time or an archive program which collects photos of village events are such examples.

### **2.1. Writing an autobiography**

Amadou Hampate Ba, a Malian writer in his 1960 speech at UNESCO said that “In Africa, when an old man dies, it’s a library burning.” How we were drawn to stories of our grandparents when we were young! It is still vivid in our minds, the moment when we were fascinated by their stories. Indeed, our grandparents who were storytellers were living libraries.

However, this is already a yesterday—we no longer wish to hear stories. In the Internet age where everything can be searched, people nowadays do not wish to hear old stories; on the contrary, the elderly ask questions to young people to obtain new information.

Korean public libraries in the aging society run various programs for the elderly, which have been considered a success. Among them, an autobiography program for the elderly is particularly noteworthy.

Since 2012, Gwangjin District Public Library (GDPL) has operated an autobiography program for the elderly based on its hope to make records of tumultuous lives of the older generation that had lived through Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, and Korea's industrialization in the 1970s. Although these are personal lives, their lives also constitute an important element of Korea's modern and contemporary history.

Titled 'Chatting on Lives and Resonating with Each Other', this autobiography program is offered as a lifelong learning program, being held once a week for 15 weeks.

To increase its effectiveness, the program is supervised by a cultural program liaison, supported by the library's PR work and funded by a publishing company. The library staff helps the elderly who have difficulties using the word processor, and a local publishing company edited the autography as a talent donation. A total of 29 autobiography books have been published so far.

In addition, GDPL installed a Story-writing Room in 2013 to foster creative storywriters from elementary school students to adults. The program was a big success: recording a total of 1,500 participants, among which a group of young adults produced a short film, 'Tree and Forest', which was entered in the 4<sup>th</sup> Olleh Smartphone Film Festival and was well received; women in their 40s wrote a script for 'Sungnyemun Gate', a historic drama series.

Through such programs, libraries have transformed themselves into places where the majority of local community members participate in collecting and recording local history and being trained to become future writers.



Figure 1. Senior Autobiographies Exhibition in GDPL

## 2.2. Chatters Bloom into Flowers

Maenbal Dongmu Library (MDL) started in 2005 as a small children's library with about 1,000 donations in Hwa-myeong, Busan City. After Hwa-myeong became a new town, 7 local residents who were acutely aware of the need for a library in the town formed Bukgu Co-childrearing Cooperative and began running the library. The name of the library 'Maenbal Dongmu' indicates a place where people can come at ease even with bare feet.

The Hwa-myeong village was also known as Daechun village where there was an agricultural community for a long period of time; unfortunately, the town began getting developed with

modern houses and apartments, isolating locals from the community and losing the local identity.

As of 2010, MDL has grown into a privately established public library housing 24,000 holdings with over 300 donors and 3,000 users. Through its livelihood and cultural community building projects such as a writing program, publishing a village newspaper, performance and exhibition by locals, and running a flea market, residents are restoring the community that was lost previously and learning to communicate and interact with one another.

In 2012, ‘Picture Book Chatter Flower’, a book club consisting of village wives in the 30-50 age group was formed to discuss books and make records of everyday life. The book club members also visit a senior citizen center once a week to interview the elderly and record their stories. In the process, the women often burst into tears after hearing colorful stories of the elderly who are just ordinary people—their stories were in fact extraordinary. These stories were collected to be published into a book, which became a soil for reflecting individual lives and also a history of the town.

Spurred by these projects, MDL became a place where there are stories, histories, and community lives. Autobiography classes for the elderly and middle-aged women are still being held at the library.

The other exemplary project by MDL is building a village archive, collecting photos of the village before urbanization: held in 2013, the exhibition showcased photos that narrated a story on the history, nature, and livelihood of the village, becoming a treasured resource to think of the village today and tomorrow. Here, the library functioned as an archivist who interwove stories of the village.

As a result of these library projects, local residents gained confidence in their lives as the protagonists of their stories and they also got more attached to their village. At the same time, the library became a cultural hub where locals can communicate with one another, which restored and revitalized the local community.

Memories get forgotten, but records become a history. Concurrently, individual memories last longer than a nation’s memory, which is an assembly of individuals. Personal records left by ordinary people may be private records—but as soon as they are preserved by the library, they not only become public but they are also given a greater meaning, which is being a foundation for humanity’s creativity.



Figure 2. Book “Chatters bloom into flowers”

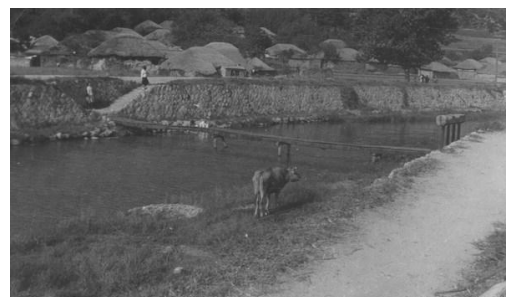


Figure 3. Photo “Daecheongcheon stream” from Archive of MDL

### **3. Library Embracing a Village's Memory**

Humanities studies in Korea were regarded as something exclusively for the university intellectuals; their popularity and utility gradually decreased, resulting in a closure of several humanities classes in the universities. However, thanks to the efforts of the libraries trying to revitalize humanities studies, they have become more deeply embedded in people's everyday lives. People nowadays often say "humanities studies are not a rocket science—our lives are humanities studies and schools!"

As seen above, there has been an increasing trend in publicizing humanities studies in Korea, along with national policy supports; at the same time, more people are trying to restore the community by building a village archive. Combining these two factors, village memories in people's everyday lives have been revived. The memory archive project initiated by village libraries represents a new function of the library.

#### **3.1. Review the Old and Learn the New**

Yeongjong Island Library (YIL) is located in Yeongjong Island, a reclaimed island from three adjacent islands in Incheon city where the Incheon International Airport is. During its new urban restoration project that created a new city and also established the airport, Yeongjong Island lost its old trace. To make matters worse, there has been a rising conflict between the original locals and people who newly moved to the city: they have different interests. Documents about the city are also disappearing. To solve the problems, YIL has carried out 'Review the Old and Learn the New' project which collects local materials and documents.

The project began in 2014 and it has been initiated in the course of 1) hosting a forum and seminar with local speakers, 2) promotion, 3) building a local network, 4) collecting and managing materials, 5) utilizing collected materials.

In details, the library firstly invited a local historian, a resident who had lived in the town for a long time and a public official from the town to host a forum which introduces the project, welcomes ideas, and builds a common understanding in building a local archive.

Secondly, after producing promotion materials and souvenirs, the library made a presentation on the project to local stakeholders and residents, distributing the promotional goods. The library also published an article on its website and through the press advising that it would begin a project to find the old Yeongjong Island's trace, asking people to submit photos they owned. Then, the library held a special exhibition on the collected photos to draw the locals' attention to the project.

Thirdly, the library overcame budget deficiency and staff shortage by building a network with local university research institutes, museums, and development institutions.

Fourthly, the scope of collection was defined by the library as materials/immaterial records of Yeongjong Island and locals' personal records on the island. Materials were acquired from the library users who had donated their privately owned photos and yearbooks, and also from institutional donors who had donated a large volume of photos, videos, and oral records. A total of 111 items were acquired from 2014 to 2016.

In addition, stories on Yeongjong Island have been collected as an audio file and a transcription. The library staff have also made frequent visits to various parts of the island to take photos of the changing island due to development work. *Yeongjong-in: Exploring the Town*, a local magazine which is contributed by the local young adults is also published and distributed through a local media. Finally, the collected materials are serviced at the library website under “local materials” search section.

In short, ‘Review the Old and Learn the New’ project which was initiated in part of the urban restoration project has provided an opportunity for a public library to store a local memory which is disappearing due to rapid modernization and industrialization; it also improved the library’s function as a memory media.

### **3.2. Reinventing Local Values**

Hwadojin Public Library (HPL) is suitable for carrying out local history classes as it is adjacent to a region where the traces of Chinese, Japanese, and Russian architecture are left and to Hwadojin Park where the ‘Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation, United States-Korea Treaty of 1882’ was signed. In this context, Hwadojin Public Library opened a Hwadojin History and Culture Reference Room in 1999, exhibiting reference documents and photos on Hwadojin from the late 1800s when Incheon opened a port to the present day.

In July 2000, the reference room was designated as a Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism Specialized Library—since then, the library has collected and preserved even more materials to provide them to local residents, local historians, public institutions and other organizations.

In November 2007, the library gathered original materials (photos, postcards, other artifacts and maps) of Incheon’s open port era in the late 1880s to host a permanent exhibition at ‘Incheon Port-Opening Culture Exhibition Hall’ to enhance citizens’ understanding of Incheon’s modern history and culture through easily accessible materials and to utilize the exhibition as an educational resource for students.

The exhibition showcases about 10,000 materials on modern and contemporary Incheon history such as the Maritime Customs rare documents (which is Incheon Customs today), printed copies of the regional map housed at Kyujanggak, textbooks from the Open Port era.

The exhibition also displays portraits and photos on surroundings of the Open Port and the Enlightenment period, photos of public offices, finance offices, factories and other buildings before the 1950s, photos on the locals’ everyday lives, school materials (textbooks, grade sheets, certificates of merit, diploma, yearbooks), rare materials, trademarks, forms, and printed advertisements.

Local historical and cultural materials are generally expensive due to their scarcity: there is a limitation in acquiring them all with a set budget. Instead, the library locates scattered local materials to acquire them or induces owners to donate them. Such collected materials are then assessed by ‘Local Open Port Era Material Advisory Committee’ which evaluates the materials’ value and historicity to be accepted into the collection. Among them, rare materials will be stored in a special preservation cabinet installed with temperature and humidity control. Other materials are stacked in the shelves to be used freely by users.

The HPL has been publishing a series of reference books on its Open Port era holdings to promote their use: *One Century of Incheon in Photos* (2003), *Incheon Historical Materials Catalogue* (2006), *The Hwadojin Library Local Material Holdings Catalogue* (2008), and *Portrait of Incheon* are such examples. In addition, elementary school tours and photo exhibitions are hosted by the library to promote its resources to elementary school students. Incheon field tours are organized for citizens wishing to study Incheon's history, 'Incheon Local History Research Group Program' is run for adults who will be learning a historical transition of the region, Incheon's natural environment and public figures through lectures and field trips.

In addition, the HPL has contributed to revamping the streets near the Incheon Port (which is now a popular tourist spot) with a modern feel by providing historical information on the area in creating information boards and decorations. In other words, the library had played a role in recreating a cultural asset in the form of a renovated street with historical significance.

Last but not least, the library runs a class on Incheon Studies outside of the library using its collections; the library is also a popular place frequented by students, teachers, and scholars wishing to study the city's history. Its quality collections also led to the creation of a history affinity club.

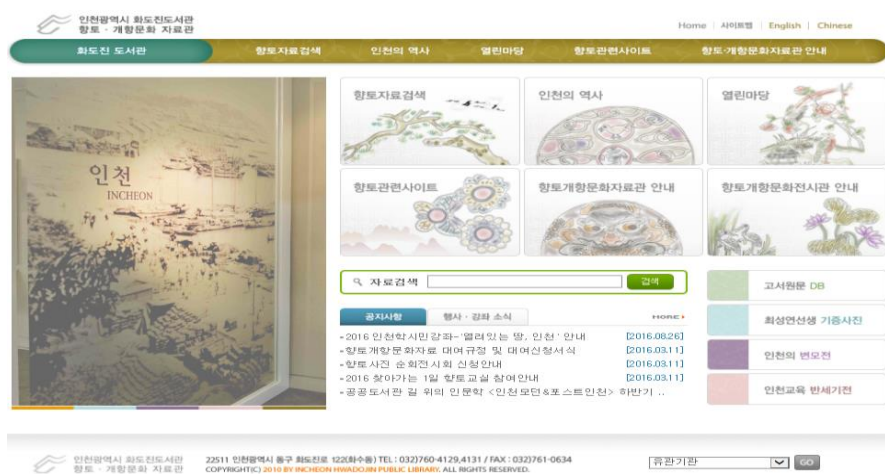


Figure 4. Incheon Port-Opening Culture Exhibition Hall homepage of Hwadojin Public Library

### 3.3. Building a Memory Database in the Region

Gyeonggi-do Cyber Library (GCL) was established in 2001 to provide qualitative library services to Gyeonggi provincial residents through a seamless cooperation with other public libraries within the Gyeonggi Province using digital information technologies.

Gyeonggi Province's Memory Project is about building a database of local records in cooperation with provincial culture centers; the project was carried out in part of expanding the GCL's digital information services. Commenced in 2014, objectives of the project are to foster the growth of local identity by increasing the access to information on Gyeonggi Province's cultural heritage and providing a variety of information on Gyeonggi Province.

The project is operated in cooperation with provincial public libraries, culture centers, regular users, and Gyeonggi-do Provincial Government. Provincial public libraries acquire and send the collected materials to GCL to digitize and build a database; once receiving the collected

materials and their digital files. Using this process, GCL services and preserves them in its memory archive website

Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation, Gyeonggi Research Institute and Gyeonggi Provincial Museum contribute to the project by providing professional knowledge and ideas in understanding materials on Gyeonggi Province. Meanwhile, library users play a role of contents creator who share their personal accounts and contents in the ‘e-Memory Box’; such service are supported by the Gyeonggi Provincial Government which helps the service to be provided in a sustainable and permanent way.

Main features of the Gyeonggi Memory Project are the Gyeonggi Province Database, *Gyeonggi at a Glance in Photos*, *Materials by Themes*, *LINK* which is Gyeonggi Province’s major cultural resource and Gyeonggi Provincial History and Folk Materials. The Gyeonggi Province Database houses materials on Gyeonggi Province that are valuable for preservation and service; historical materials; publications on music, art and film; administrative documents, of which all of are linked to the Open Access Korea portal of the National Library of Korea to show in the Google and other search engine results.

The ‘e-Memory Box’ was promoted with its motto to “create the history of Gyeonggi Province by collecting individual records”; the full-text database of Gyeonggi province residents’ collection and creations is the result of such effort.

*Gyeonggi at a Glance in Photos* is a website where the past and present of Gyeonggi Province can be surveyed in photos; only photos are available on the website to highlight the graphics.

*Materials by Themes* is a website where the theme of the year is selected to service related materials and audio interviews; each year’s theme varies, including stories of displaced people from North Korea, or a story of a locally brewed alcoholic beverage.

*LINK*, Gyeonggi Province’s major cultural resource, provides a linked data-based search service to identify interconnectivity among cultural resources of Gyeonggi Province and collect related information sources.

Gyeonggi Provincial History and Folk Materials service was made from *Gyeonggi Provincial History and Folk Research Materials Catalogue*, a compilation of research findings on Gyeonggi Province’s history and folk traditions. The catalogue of the research findings are serviced through its bibliographic records database.

Overall, Gyeonggi Province’s Memory Project is an exemplary case of cooperation among libraries to build a local material collection. Through the cooperation, the collection has been managed efficiently while its acquisition and maintenance cost was reduced—most importantly, the Project has contributed to increasing the total number of library patrons.



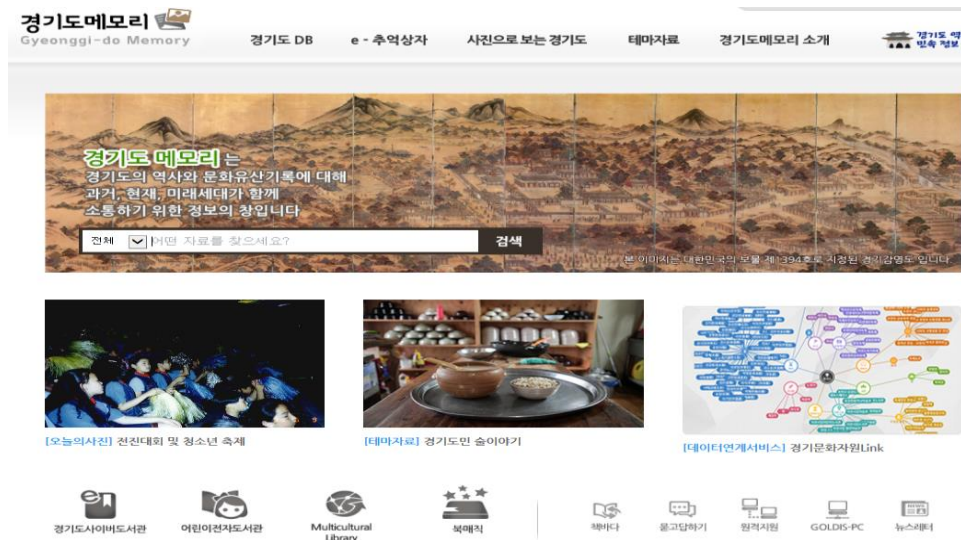


Figure 5 Gyeonggi Province's Memory website of GCL (<http://www.library.kr/memory/index.do>)

#### 4. National Memory Museum

The National Library of Korea (NLK) is a nationally representative library which collects, categorizes, catalogues, and preserves national documents and materials. In 2015, the NLK hosted a special ceremony to celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and 10 million holding collection. In February 2017, the Memory Museum was opened to showcase the recording history of human lives and thoughts at one glance. Exhibition items of the Memory Museum are from rare materials, donations and purchased artifacts held by the NLK. From an epigraph to contemporary computer memory storage, a variety of recording media such as books, audiovisual materials, and floppy disks are exhibited to show the evolution of recording media.

At the Memory Museum, visitors are given an opportunity to view the Memory of the World on a digital screen and they can also convert obsolete media such as diskettes to digital files at an experience zone. The NLK's goal was to enhance collection accessibility for patrons and to clearly show where the memories are stored through the Memory Museum; in addition, the Museum has been awakening creative ideas of the members of the society in the issue of whether people will be able to store memory in digital formats as permanent as analogue ones. The NLK plans to service the linked archived materials of each affiliated library and institution to bring the national memory project to another level through the library services such as *OASIS*, the library's web archive which adds a vast amount of memories in addition to the existing printed books.



Figure 6. The view of the Memory Museum of NLK (<http://www.nl.go.kr/memory/>)

## 5. Conclusion

From village libraries to megalopolis areas, Korea's libraries have been initiating a memory building project in the form of autobiography programs and archiving of local records, which have transformed the libraries from a typical library that collects, categorizes, cataloguing, and preserves into locally fit institutions that store records of the local community members and traces of the villages.

Autobiography programs and creating a local archive are local-participatory archive projects driven by the library. Building a local archive titled 'Making a Village' is a prime example of a library revitalizing a village through policy making and implementation.

The NLK's Memory Museum and web archiving project is also a process of archiving national records.

In 1986, Michael Harris borrowed Bourdieu's theory on how the culture of one society is reproduced to theorize the library as a systematic entity like school and to argue that such a mission should determine the structure and functionality of a library's services.

In a theory of cultural reproduction, education reproduces a distribution structure of culture to reproduce power and symbol relations across class. Here, culture capital which is critical in cultural reproduction indicates various linguistic and cultural faculties passed down to individuals through class rules which each person's family is part of. Educational development is strongly influenced by a learning culture; in this context, the library can become a hub of cultural reproduction through reading, writing, and lifelong learning programs.

It is time to consider re-determining structural and functional characteristics of library services and the theory of library as a system.

This paper will end with a quote from one publisher who discusses library's new functions:

"We communicate a lot through social media—there are rumors, buzz, and small incidents that are shared widely here. However, we are not hoping to record the history in this way. Library should become an archival square. There may be more computers in the libraries than books in the future; nonetheless, there are grace, friendliness, gentleness, and serenity in the library unlike the dark, noisy, lonely, and merciless world outside. The ideal of a library is something like a lighthouse that keeps the flames of the human intelligence burning." – *Cheol-Hee Han, Dolbegae.*

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