

【研究ノート】

# ‘Lieu de Mémoire’ and Space for Peace: Prospects and Challenges to Museum Exhibition and Digital Archives in East Asia

CHI Naomi \*

## 1. Introduction

In Pierre Nora’s *les Lieux de Mémoire*, he defines lieu de mémoire as, “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community”<sup>1)</sup>. Furthermore, “it may refer to any place, object or concept vested with historical significance in the popular collective memory, such as a monument, a museum, an event, a symbol like a flag...”<sup>2)</sup>.

As sites of memory become better known and made official by governments, they can tend to homogenize varied local memories. In Nora’s words, “In the past, then, there was one national history and there were many particular memories. Today, there is one national memory, but its unity stems from a divided patrimonial demand that is constantly expanding and in search of coherence”<sup>3)</sup>. Thus sites of memory may risk becoming “invented traditions”. Calling attention to the importance of “social forgetting”, historian Guy Beiner has argued that, “there is an evident need for major historical studies of lieux d’oubli to counterbalance the studies of lieux de mémoire”<sup>4)</sup>.

In East Asia, many of the museums and historical sites often portray its people as homogenous, and solely focus on its national history. However, in recent years, the creation of the “comfort women’s digital testimony and archives as well as museum dedicated to women

---

\* Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public Policy (HOPS), Hokkaido University.  
Email: n\_chi@hops.hokudai.ac.jp

- 1) Pierre Nora, “Preface to English Language Edition: From Lieux de Mémoire to Realms of Memory,” in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* ed. Pierre Nora. [http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan\\_of\\_Arc/OLR/03\\_PierreNora\\_LieuxdeMémoire.pdf](http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/Joan_of_Arc/OLR/03_PierreNora_LieuxdeMémoire.pdf) (last accessed on December 23, 2023).
- 2) Commission franco-québécoise sur les lieux de mémoire communs, “Lieux de mémoire,” <http://cfqlmc.org/lieux-de-Mémoire> (French-language link)
- 3) Pierre Nora, “The Era of Commemoration,” in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past Vol. 3* (Columbia University Press, 1996).
- 4) Guy Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 29.

and history offer “different” perspective on its people and history. Giving attention to the criticism by Beiner concerning the study of lieux d’oubli, this paper will attempt to explore the theme of museums as Lieu de Mémoire, while focusing on the new trends, particularly in Korea, on museum exhibitions of women. This paper will examine the digital testimonies and archives of former Japanese military “comfort women” and the Women’s History Museum in South Korea. The author would like to highlight that this paper was born and inspired from the international seminar, “Museum as ‘Lieu de Mémoire’ and Space for Peace,” hosted by the Graduate School of Public Policy, Hokkaido University, that took place in September 2022<sup>5)</sup>.

## 2. Digital Testimonies and Archives of the Japanese Military “Comfort Women”

### 2.1 Digital Testimonies as part of the “Eternal Testimony” Project

As of 2023, there are only 9 surviving Korean former comfort women<sup>6)</sup>, and they are all over the age of 90. Taking this into account, scholars working on the Japanese Military Comfort Women strongly felt the need to archive the testimonies of the surviving former comfort women. The team of scholars at the College of Media, Arts and Science, Sogang University in Seoul Korea, headed by Dr. Jusub Kim, started the project, “Eternal Testimony” from 2018 to 2022. The project has been funded by the Robin-Hwajin Yoon Kim Foundation, Comfort Women Action for Redress and Education (CARE) and the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. This section will conduct a general overview of the project, examine the project history and analyze the implications of the project vis-à-vis gender issues and violence against women.

The “Eternal Testimony” project was inspired by the “Dimensions in Testimony” by the Shoah Foundation and the Institute for Creative Technology at the University of Southern California (USC). The project was initiated to preserve the testimonies of Holocaust and genocide survivors in an interactive format. The pioneering project integrates advanced filming techniques, specialized display technologies (holograms) and next generation natural language processing to create an interactive biography<sup>7)</sup>.

In March 2018, the project team initiated a pilot recording session with Ms. Yong-soo Lee,

- 
- 5) The author would like to thank Dr. Jusub Kim (Sogang University), Dr. Mihyun Jang (Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery), Dr. Hyunsoog So (Donga University), Dr. Hyein Han (Asia Peace and History Research Centre), Dr. Sincheol Lee (Asia Peace and History Research Centre), Dr. Mokottunas Kitahara (Hokkaido University), Dr. Takehiko Inoue (Hokkaido University) and Dr. Naoki Amano (Yamagata University) for their valuable research and insights.
  - 6) 「‘위안부’ 피해자 할머니 별세... 생존자 이제 9명」 (Former “comfort women” victim passes away... only 9 surviving”), *The Hankyoreh*, May 22, 2023, [https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/1090307.html](https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/1090307.html) (last accessed on January 6, 2024).
  - 7) USC Shoah Foundation, “Dimensions in Testimony,” <https://sfi.usc.edu/dit> (last accessed on January 8, 2024).

one of the surviving former comfort women. Since then, the project team conducted few more interview and recording sessions in October 2019. The team had recorded over 44 hours of testimony from Ms. Lee. In 2020, the project was successful in obtaining funding from the Women's Human Rights Institute of Korea (under the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) and conducted another recording session with another former comfort women, Ms. Ok-Sun Lee, and created a beta version of the interactive testimony system. Between the May and December 2021, the project held temporary exhibitions in Seoul and Daegu, two of the biggest cities in South Korea, and had over 500 visitors that experienced the interactive testimonies using state-of-the-art techniques such as holograms and AI.

During the period of the temporary exhibitions in Seoul and Daegu, the project team had asked visitors to fill in a questionnaire regarding the digital interactive testimony. The following are the results obtained from 476 respondents:

Questions:	Responses: Response, (%)
Compared to watching the introductory video, having a conversation using the dialogue system increased my interest on the “comfort women” issue.	Strongly agree 333 (69.9%) Agree 115 (24.2%) Neither 25 (5.3%) Disagree 2 (0.4%) Strongly Disagree 1 (0.2%)
Compared to watching the introductory video, having a conversation using the dialogue system increased my desire to participate in the activities to resolve the “comfort women” issue.	Strongly agree 313 (65.8%) Agree 125 (26.2%) Neither 37 (7.8%) Disagree 0 (0%) Strongly Disagree 1 (0.2%)
This exhibition (as a whole) enhanced my understanding of the “comfort women” issue.	Strongly agree 297 (62.3%) Agree 138 (29%) Neither 35 (7.4%) Disagree 5 (1.1%) Strongly Disagree 1 (0.2%)
After seeing this exhibition (as a whole), I became more interested in participating in the activities to resolve the “comfort women” issue.	Strongly agree 290 (61%) Agree 139 (29.2%) Neither 44 (9.2%) Disagree 2 (0.4%) Strongly Disagree 1 (0.2%)
I would like to visit again when an official exhibition is held in the future.	Strongly agree 337 (71%) Agree 95 (20%) Neither 38 (8%) Disagree 6 (1%) Strongly Disagree 0 (0%)

<p>I am willing to recommend this exhibition to others.</p>	<p>Strongly agree 374 (78.6%)                  Agree 76 (16%)                  Neither 22 (4.6%)                  Disagree 3 (0.6%)                  Strongly Disagree 1 (0.2%)</p>
<p>If the interactive presentation with the “comfort women” survivors is provided both online and offline.</p>	<p>I will come to the offline exhibition to experience it. (49%)                  I will access the contents on my personal device again, after visiting the offline exhibition. (29.1%)                  I will choose to experience it on my personal device, rather than visiting the offline exhibition. (13.1%)                  I will visit the offline exhibition, after I first experience it on my person device. (8.6%)</p>

**Figure 1:** Audience Response to Questionnaire regarding the interactive testimony<sup>8)</sup>

The above responses indicate that most of the visitors felt that the interactive testimony increased their interest in the “comfort women” issue, and that they would recommend it others. Also, in general, the visitors also indicated that they would visit the exhibition again even if an online version of the testimony was available. This suggests that the in person or hands on experience of interacting with the holograms of the surviving “comfort women” was effective in raising awareness of the issue.

Dr. Kim and his team’s objectives of the project are twofold: 1) to effectively provide knowledge concerning the “comfort women” issue as well as violence against women worldwide; 2) to provide tools for history education concerning women’s human rights in the coming age when there are no survivors to tell their tale. Regarding the first objective, through the project it has become clear that the interactive digital testimony provides a new effective channel for audience to virtually experience a crucial historical moment through actual testimonies provided by survivors. Moreover, through the digitalization of the testimonies, it can now be provided in multiple languages anywhere around the world, making it more effective to disseminate knowledge through new technologies<sup>9)</sup>. Regarding the second objective, the use of new technologies enables a new way of disseminating knowledge and offering history education to young people. The “Dimensions in Testimony” project by USC Shoah Foundation

8) Jusub Kim, “Eternal Testimony,” *Proceedings from the International Seminar on Museum as ‘Lieu de Mémoire’ and Space for Peace: Prospects and Challenges to Museum Exhibition in East Asia*, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, September 7, 2022.

9) 「위안부 피해 ‘영원한 증언’ 과 인공지능이 만났다」 (“When AI meets the ‘Eternal Testimony’ of Victims of Comfort Women”), *The Hankyoreh*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/area/yeongnam/1020857.html> (last accessed on December 13, 2023).

was also effective in educating young people about the holocaust, therefore, the “Eternal Testimony” provides yet another example to utilize technology to provide innovative ways to provide education to our young generation<sup>10)</sup>.



**Figure 2:** Photo of the recording session (Photo courtesy of Dr. Jusub Kim)<sup>11)</sup>



**Figure 3:** Photo of the Hologram and Digital Testimony (Photo courtesy of Dr. Jusub Kim)<sup>12)</sup>

- 
- 10) “Hologram Enables the ‘Eternal Testimony’ on the Tragedy of the Comfort Women in the Japanese Military,” *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, October 29, 2019, [https://english.khan.co.kr/khan\\_art\\_view.html?artid=201910291815447&code=710100#csidx7f45f9e591361e3b8277bf5665c4826](https://english.khan.co.kr/khan_art_view.html?artid=201910291815447&code=710100#csidx7f45f9e591361e3b8277bf5665c4826) (last accessed on December 28, 2023).
- 11) “Eternal Testimony,” Creative Computing Group, Dept. of Art and Technology, School of Media, Arts, and Science, Sogang University, <https://www.creative-computing.org/post/eternal-testimony-2018-2020> (last accessed on January 14, 2024).
- 12) Ibid.

## 2.2 Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery Digital Archive 814

The Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (RIMSS) was established in 2018 during the Moon Jaein administration. RIMSS is a subdivision of the Women's Human Rights Institute of Korea, which is under the umbrella of the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. The institute was established as a support centre for victims of violence, however, since December 2020, under Article 46.2 of the Framework Act on Gender Equality<sup>13)</sup>, the institute has taken on the task of research and education concerning the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery. One of the projects at RIMSS is the Archive 814, which is a digital archive not only on the Japanese "comfort women" but also about gender discrimination and sexual violence. This section will examine the background to Archive 814<sup>14)</sup> and the prospects and challenges to the archives.

The first victim to come forward publicly and testify about her experience as a "comfort woman" was Ms. Kim Hak-Sun. Since her testimony in 1991, hundreds of women from Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and the Netherlands came forward with their testimony about their experience as Japan's military sexual slaves. The first testimony by Ms. Kim Hak-Sun raised awareness and increased people's interest in the issue, and many scholars and experts made great efforts to continue the research and collect materials concerning the "comfort women" issue for about 20 years between 2001-2017, which had been collected and managed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. These research and collected materials were then compiled into a collection as part of the e-historical archives by the Ministry, which were then provided and transferred to Archive 814.

Initially, Archive 814 faced challenges concerning intellectual property rights and copyrights, as well as privacy issues as many of the materials contained sensitive personal information. However, experts got together to overcome these challenges, and took the time to clear these obstacles to proceed with the establishment of the digital archives. As of today, the materials can be searched by the following three methods: 1) Contents concerning women's human rights and peace (sub-categories include: oral history of comfort women victims, documents by the Asian solidarity conference concerning the issue and resolution of Japanese military sexual slavery, war diary of the Japanese Imperial Army, documents of the UN Commission on Human Rights and the documents related to the 2000 Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery; 2) Types of documents (documents, publications and audio-

---

13) "Article 46-2 Establishment of Women's Human Rights Institute of Korea," *Framework Act on Gender Equality*, [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=55456&lang=ENG](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=55456&lang=ENG) (last accessed on January 10, 2024).

14) Archive 814, *Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (subdivision of Women's Human Rights Institute of Korea)*, <https://www.Archive814.or.kr/main.do> (last accessed on January 14, 2024.)

visual materials); and 3) time period (categorized from 1930~2020 in 10 year increments). There is also a whole section dedicated to historical collections, including documents and materials concerning the UN Commission on Human Rights, official statements declared by former Japanese Prime Ministers concerning the “comfort women” issue, materials concerning the comfort station, materials concerning the recruitment and transporting (passage to various comfort station) of the comfort women, resolutions and statements within and outside Japan concerning the “comfort women” issue and collection of photos.

Aside from these documents and materials, there is a very detailed chronological timeline concerning all the events, trials, testimonies, special reports and resolutions concerning the “comfort women”. There is also another section dedicated to research and education.

One of the most striking collections of the Archive 814 is the oral history of 21 of the victims, which is supplemented by the audio-visual of their testimonies. Many of them have already passed away, therefore, the oral history and their testimonies are indispensable to future research and education.

The next step for Archive 814 is to continue to collect and archive materials, documents, photos as well as other related items concerning women’s human rights and peace. One of the objectives of the Archive 814 is to create a platform to raise awareness and increase people’s interest in not only the “comfort women” issue but also violence against women and women’s human rights. Moreover, one of the other important objectives of Archive 814 is to attempt to create a digital archive from a feminist perspective, which is challenging as technology oriented digital archiving itself is relatively male dominated<sup>15)</sup>.



Figure 4: Collections of Archive 841

15) Mihyun Jang, “Creating a Website for Women’s Human Rights and Peace: Case of the Digital Archive 814 of the Research Institute on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery,” *Proceedings from the International Seminar on Museum as 'Lieu de Mémoire' and Space for Peace: Prospects and Challenges to Museum Exhibition in East Asia*, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, September 7, 2022.

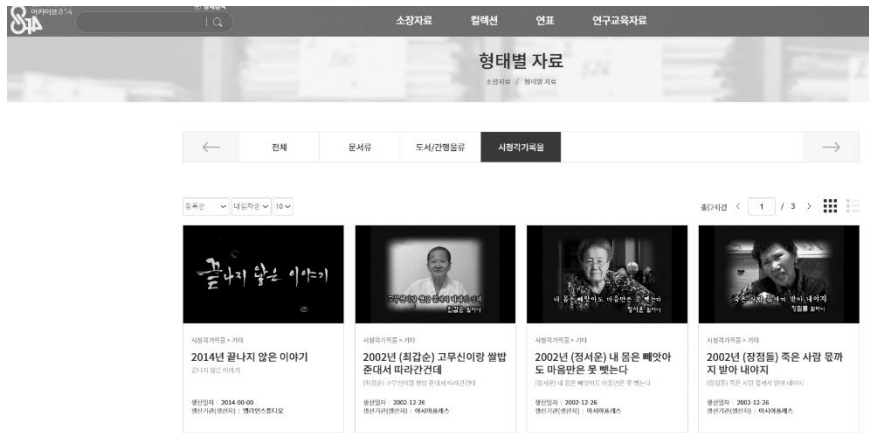


Figure 5: Testimonies of the Victims, Archive 841

### 3. Women’s History Museum

Museums were originally created to house the spoils of colonization, therefore, most exhibitions at museums are masculine or gender blind in nature, as women’s realm was considered to a private sphere, which has no “historical value”. However, since the 1980s, there has been a significant movement concerning the establishment of women’s museums, and in 2008, the first ever International Women’s Museums Congress (IWMC) was hosted in Italy, which led to the founding of the International Association of Women’s Museum in (IAWM) 2012. The movement toward a creation of a museum from a women’s perspective was also prevalent in Korea, which led to the opening of several women related museums since the early 2000s. This section will examine the various women’s museums in Korea, the purpose of these museums and the move toward the creation of a “national” women’s museum in Korea.



Figure 6: Women’s Life History Museum (Photo courtesy of Dr. Hyunsoog So)





**Figure 7:** Textile Exhibition at the Women's Life History Museum  
(Photo courtesy of Dr. Hyunsoog So)

The first women's museum, Women's Life History Museum, is a private museum founded in 2001 by a textile artist named Ms. Min-jung Lee. The museum was established using an old elementary school and has over 3500 items on exhibition. The items range from clothes, kitchenware, textiles as well as other necessary items for everyday life, from the Goryeo Dynasty to the present. Though this is the first women's museum in Korea, it has not had a significant impact in terms of offering an alternative or women's perspective on national history.

Following the establishment of the Women's Life History Museum, in 2002, the National Women's History Exhibition Hall was established in a government building in Goyang City, Gyeonggi-do, just outside of the city of Seoul. The objective of the museum is to, "highlight women's roles in history and people who have contributed to the development of history and serving as a venue for women's education and uplifting of people's awareness of gender equality"<sup>16</sup>). The exhibition is divided into different periods and areas, and includes stories of how women have contributed to the development of history, however, it still remains a linear narrative of the national history<sup>17</sup>). In order to overcome its shortcomings, since 2012, there has been a lively debate on the establishment of a National Women's History Museum. This has also been stipulated in Article 50 (Establishment and Operation of Women's History Museum) of the Framework Act for Gender Equality<sup>18</sup>).

---

16) The National Women's History Exhibition Hall, <http://cherstory.mogef.go.kr/eng/PageLink.do> (last accessed on January 14, 2024).

17) Hyunsoog So, "Women's History Museum as Public History: Prospects and Challenges in Korea," *Proceedings from the International Seminar on Museum as 'Lieu de Mémoire' and Space for Peace: Prospects and Challenges to Museum Exhibition in East Asia*, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, September 7, 2022.

18) "Article 50 Establishment and Operation of Women's History Museum," *Framework Act on Gender*



**Figure 8:** National Women's History Exhibition Hall (Photo courtesy of Dr. Hyunsoog So)



**Figure 9:** Permanent Exhibition at the National Women's History Exhibition Hall (Photo courtesy of Dr. Hyunsoog So)

#### 4. Tentative Conclusion

The case studies concerning the digital testimonies and archives of “comfort women” offer a conflicting history, and the women’s museums offer alternative narrative to the linear national history, however, these exhibitions and archives are also lieu de mémoire of important historical events. Moreover, these conflicting and alternative spaces can be considered as also a space for understanding, reconciliation and peace. However, it comes with several challenges as well.

The digital testimonies and archives face challenges regarding copyright issues and the vulnerability of digital materials. Moreover, with only so few survivors left, it is not only important to collect the self-narratives of the survivors, but also to collect the ego-documents,

---

*Equality*, [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=55456&lang=ENG](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=55456&lang=ENG) (last accessed on January 10, 2024).

such as letters, diaries, biographies, autobiographies, medical reports, legal documents, oral history, as well as photos, as source of history to offer insights into life worlds. As Greyerz points out, "For all practical historical purposes, what we are looking at in self-narratives are primarily persons in their specific cultural, linguistic, material and, last but not least, social embeddedness. Ultimately... these materials probably tell us more about groups than they do about individuals<sup>19)</sup>".

Traditional museum exhibitions that used to be "closed" spaces for preservation and education have transformed into a more "lively" space using state-of-the-art technology and allowing interactions between the audience and the exhibition. Moreover, museums are no longer a place to exhibit things from the past, but should be positioned as an institute for public service where the audience finds meaning to the past through a long historical context. In this context, museums must provide alternative perspective than the linear national narrative and provide different "voices" and "narratives" to represent the people of today's society, including various minority groups. Currently we are seeing movements toward establishment of museums that provide an alternative, women's perspective around the world, however, it is crucial that such efforts not only portray women, but also provide the realities of women in various realms including work, labour, family, reproduction and sexuality. Ultimately, the digital testimonies, archives as well as the founding of women's museums should not be mistaken as a tool to pass historical judgement, but utilized for the creation of public history based on understanding and reconciliation.

---

19) Kaspar von Greyerz, "Ego-Documents: The Last Word?" *German History* (Vol. 28, No. 3, 2010) pp. 273-282.

# **‘Lieu de Mémoire’ and Space for Peace: Prospects and Challenges to Museum Exhibition and Digital Archives in East Asia**

**CHI Naomi**

## **Abstract**

In East Asia, many of the museums and historical sites often portray its people as homogenous, and solely focus on its national history. However, in recent years, the creation of the Comfort Women’s digital exhibition and the proposal for the creation of the National Women’s History Museum in South Korea offers a “different” perspective on its people and history. Giving attention to the criticism by Beinert concerning the study of lieux d’oubli, this paper will attempt to explore the theme of museums as lieu de mémoire, while focusing on the new trends, particularly in Korea, on museum exhibitions of women. This paper will highlight the digital testimonies and archives of former Japanese military comfort women and the Women’s History Museum in South Korea.

## **Keywords**

Gender, representation, museum exhibition, borders of memory, lieu de mémoire, peace