

**Person of Light,  
Population  
Associated with  
Locals**

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## 1. Perception and Prejudice: Darkening Local Areas

There are local romanticists who dream only of the beautiful nature of Nirvana; local denigrators who criticize local areas as provinces, countryside, rural areas, and the outskirts; local administrators who dryly and coldly divide local only as administrative districts; local imitators that consider foreign locals great and claim that we should imitate it; and people who provide local benefits thinking that spending money will solve problems, but they do not show any interest in how the money is spent.

Local may sound plausible in English and, sometimes, has a dark atmosphere like the countryside or areas outside of the capital region. However, the real local is found “here.” Seoul is a city and a local area at the same time. Any space where life exists is considered local. Therefore, not all viewpoints properly and precisely see locals. When these viewpoints intersect with each other over a long period of time, the local is pushed away as an object, failing to face it properly.

As the time of disregard and disinterest passes, perceptions of local areas also become prejudiced, which accumulates. In all of the local areas that we live in, only metropolitan areas are in the limelight, while other local areas are ignored as if they are dark areas. Even if the pandemic or every-man-for-himself mentality suffocates urban life, people filled with distorted prejudices would not want to stay long in a dark and unfamiliar local space.

## 2. Exit from the Metropolis: Following One's Heart to Choose Dark and Unfamiliar Local Areas

On one hand, people with a different perception for a long time continuously opted for exiting. Instead of moving for school, a job or work in a given structure, they actively search for a place that best fits them and make a choice.

It has already been more than a decade since publishing a book about living elsewhere for a month to find one's own place of rest. Some recommend spending all four seasons to truly feel what a local area has to offer. There are also people who actively live in double local, even if it is not for school or dispatches. Local life has already become a culture and a way of life.

Meanwhile, the “first-generation return migrants to rural homes,” which were the wealthy retired population building a vacation house, have shifted to the “second-generation return migrants to rural homes” who think that a local area is a space and opportunity for starting up businesses. People nowadays not only go on workations to take a break from urban competition and fatigue, but are heading to local areas to start new businesses.

In the 2010s during the early local startup trends, the most common type was one-person startups for independent bookstores, guest houses, cafes, and bakeries. They were treated as a new breed of outsiders like a remote island amidst gazes filled with skepticism, curiosity, and wariness as if commenting “What do you plan to do in such an old space?” “Can you make a living with that?” “They'll probably leave after a little while,” or “The space is so unfamiliar and it's scary to enter.”

As the types of startups became more diversified as time passed, one-person startups now work as teams, and teams

go beyond and collaborate with local residents. The method of starting a business has also become more creative. Independent bookstores act as cultural complexes where people hold discussions, watch movies, and lead local branding. Guest houses offer a range of programs like yoga, tracking, camping, and outdoor activities. They are not merely a place to sleep; they function as a venue for cultural interaction. Cafes have expanded to co-working spaces, bottle shops, and galleries. Some surfing shops have bookstores inside. The majority of popular areas each have their own craft beer brand. Closed schools and abandoned spaces are revamped into zoos, breweries, farms, and performance stages, as more places evolve into a site with a broad range of creative works and where people cross paths with one another.

Of course, such changes include not only outsiders but also native residents who have earned new perspectives and values. The issue no longer focuses on where a local is located geographically, but on the values it pursues. This is how the border between metropolises and local areas has been pulled down and reconnected.

### **3. Meeting with Population Associated with Locals**

There are many people who love and frequently visit local areas, making the claim that only residents living there should be viewed as locals unreasonable. They are the ones who journey off to local areas by setting up a goal. The destination is either hometown (U-turn), other local areas (J-turn), and becoming a farmer or living in the countryside (I-turn).

Those who exit the metropolis do not simply storm out of the city; they are the ones who mustered up the courage to leave. The longer you stay, the more friends you make and the more you will get fond of the local area. You might get to

the idea that you could frequent the place or stay longer, or come to a conclusion to settle down and live there.

You will feel a sense of intimacy when a familiar local area appears in the overflowing flood of information, and you will worry about someone you know when you hear news about a typhoon or other major incident. You will want to root for new events held in the local area and help with crowdfunding. You will begin to accept the locality of diverse places—not just the one you live in—without you even noticing. The locality has a geographical meaning, but it is also a concept that conveys the unique lifestyle of that region.

This is what you call a “population with relationships.” This type of population refers to the entire population between long-term residents and transient visitors. It can be called a supporting population, a friendly population, or local fans. There are now concepts like cooperative population and life population.

Not only exits or unique items can complete a settlement in a local area. The time it takes for an outsider to migrate and form relationships is in no way easy.

But the gateway to the local area which initially appeared to be air-tight will eventually show friendliness after a series of polite greetings, brief conversations, and new efforts. Criticism like “Can you make a living with that?” will turn into concerns like “Make sure you are not skipping meals” and the doubt that “they’ll probably leave after a little while” will shift to warm encouragement of “keep up the good work.” Frequent encounters will act as a catalyst for overcoming anonymous disregard.

It will upgrade all of the routine activities—eating together, drinking together, speaking with each other, and arguing and reconciling with one another—into a process of partici-

pating, making, and practicing. However, there are still many issues that must be tackled in local areas before meddlers are accepted and welcomed there.

#### 4. People of the Land, Wind and Water

In Japan, residents who live in local areas are called “people of the land” and outsiders or a population with relationships “people of the wind.” Institutes or people that connect the land and wind are referred to as “people of the water.” Obviously, there are more other elements besides land, wind and water. Locally raised children are called “people of the wood,” while frontiersmen who take the initiative as leaders are called “people of metal.” It resembles the Five Elements Theory of wood, water, fire, earth, and metal in some ways.

Locals may appear to be dark or dwindling by standards, yet in the real life of locals, people from many different backgrounds and classes mix together. The time-focus mindset that people who lived long in the area are the actual owners is just as important as the one focusing on relationships since there are many individuals who come and go. This is the subject of conversation the population with relationships suggests.

In fact, the idea of the population is a made-up concept, and the population with relationships is just one of the many concepts about population. The term “population with relationships”, which originated in Japan in the late 2000s, is rapidly spreading in Korea these days. We need to examine the implications the population with relationships suggest if the term is merely another made-up concept.

Kamiyama, a small town in Japan with a population of about 5,000, has been holding the Artist in Residence AIR program since a few decades ago. Rather than forming a one-way relationship where residents simply see the works of famous artists, residents get to select and invite creative artists around

the world who they believe can live in the local area and contribute to the community regardless of the content they work with. Whether they be cartoonists, webtoon writers, or painters do not matter.

Program participants are provided lodging for a certain period of time, and they do not complete their works in solitude while they work on their creations. They share the creation process with residents and appreciate the outcomes together. Outside artists engage in arts with children and local residents rather than just stopping by to feel nature alone. A forest, an abandoned warehouse, or a closed store—anywhere can be a great venue to host a gallery.

Sessions on artwork also take place for residents who do not normally have many opportunities to encounter art or foreigners. You may find some artists settled in Kamiyama after falling in love with the small town that formed a pleasant harmony. Some got married, some have children, and some have opened craft beer pubs.

Kamiyama has further developed the AIR program, offering exciting programs like “Chef in Residence”, “Writer in Residence”, and “Startup in Residence”.

## **5. People of Light: Local Artists**

Seomida, a local food and beverage company in Jeju, means “Jeju, a place with many sparkling differences.” The Chinese character for “seom” does not represent the usual meanings of “sparkling” or “remote”, according to the founder, Kim Jong-hyun. Rather, he sees the character as it is, as if a person is standing in front of a door to represent the “shine that enters a dark room when a person walks in.” He said that when naming the company, he imagined the moment when light shines after an outsider so far away that is not visible enters the local area. Just as how artists who stay in local areas discover local

resources and people through AIR are called “people of the land, wind, or water,” we may also refer to them as “people of light.” This is not limited to the AIR program. Anyone who visits local sites to sublimate local elements, unnoticed by people who have been living there for a long time, into art-work can be “people of light.”

They function as frontiers who take on the challenge of dark local life, as catalysts who pursue independence, as connectors that connect the disconnected ones, and anchors and leverages that make networking possible.

There are times when lofty traditional and grandiose galleries, brilliant exhibition halls, and high-priced works and performances are highly appreciated by the public. But even if one does not reside locally, encountering and interacting with locals and activities that shed light on dark and invisible local areas through a variety of creations are also considered culture and art. This is because, in addition to appreciating and purchasing art, art becomes more attractive when enjoyed by everyone and when anyone can create art.

### Heejung Cho

Heejung Cho is a full-time researcher at the Sogang University Institute of Social Science. She is a doctor of politics who has been traveling to local areas for six years to conduct her research. Mainly interested in new values and methods, she believes that everyone’s interests and collaboration must be performed dynamically to provide the conditions that can enhance the quality of life. She worked at the National Election Commission and the National Assembly Research Service, and she is currently serving as the research chief at The Possibility Lab where the possibilities of locality and youths are studied.