

Introduction: Memories Toward the Future

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Cultural Studies emerged in the 1950s amid the long and uneven process of recovering from the traumatic legacies of World War II and the Korean War, and against the tense backdrop of the Cold War. This recovery was marked by unequal power dynamics between nations, since major political decisions to end armed conflicts were predominantly made by Western countries, especially the U.K., the U.S., and the Soviet Union. Asian perspectives were largely excluded from the negotiation tables, but Asian countries, such as Korea and China, have endured the consequences of those decisions, including the ongoing division between North and South Korea, revolutionary legacies in China, as well as the continuing wars between Israel and Palestine. Today, we are witnessing yet another devastating cycle of conflicts between neighboring states and governments, shaped by unresolved memories of colonialism and imperial domination.

Cultural Studies brings together a range of politically engaged critical approaches. As a radically interdisciplinary field, it requires both patience and courage to cultivate the perspective of a balanced observer and a rigorous cultural analyst. Always seeking meaning in contemporary culture—its social foundations, historical roots, and aesthetic significance—cultural studies scholars constantly grapple with questions of validity and legitimacy. With its commitment to being a progressive and inclusive international forum, *Situations*

proudly presents in its September 2025 issue five essays that address pivotal historical and cultural moments: the formation of Korean “pop,” the mourning of the Sewol Ferry Disaster, the trauma of division in Korea, the nostalgia for revolutionary days in China, and the global waste problem that turns China’s rural regions into wasteland. All these moments deserve to be remembered, recorded, and theorized. While these essays focus on incidents of the past, the memories retrieved and recollected here provide traces toward the future. What we encounter in our daily lives—whether pop music, poetry, films, essays, or even tragic events—emerges from ongoing struggles to prevent the repetition of past wrongs and to aspire to a more cosmopolitan inclusion beyond citizenship and species that must live within the socio-political negotiation of the present moment.

Hyunjoon Shin’s essay meticulously documents the vibrant yet underrepresented music scenes from the 1960s to the 1990s, when creative producers and songwriters negotiated between the demands of a globalizing pop music market and the preservation of Koreans’ unique cultural identity and musical taste. Minyoung Kim explores how collective mourning and grief in South Korea have become highly charged political issues. Public debates over who is grievable rely on moral and social evaluations of the victim’s life, producing additional tensions and divisive discourses within a society already strained by extreme competition and weak social safety nets. Teresa Gutmann analyzes Don Mee Choi’s recent trilogy, which reanimates forgotten histories and collective traumas that not only resonate with non-Korean readers but also gesture toward rewriting and translation as theatres of unending wars. Jiahan Lin examines how nostalgia, as a significant critical mode of structure of feeling, enables multiple memories and diverse receptions of Feng Xiaogang’s 2017 film *Youth*, presenting them paradoxically against today’s neoliberalism. Lucy Z. Fang investigates multiple editions of the Chinese science fiction novel *Waste Tide* to demonstrate how the world of consumption is turned into a “waste-land” where waste disposal, surplus management, and labor exploitation are brewing a storm of revolution from below.

Together, these essays urge us to recognize social and cultural

phenomena as meaningful signs and collective symptoms pointing us toward remembering the past and avoiding undesirable futures. They remind us that cultural writings and artifacts are not only traces of lived experience but also desperate calls for struggle and survival.