

The New Silver Generation in South Korea: Understanding Cultural Characteristics and Developing Tailored Programs

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Abstract

As the population of older adults continues to grow, it is essential to meet their evolving needs and provide them with opportunities for active participation in society. It highlights the need for diverse policies and cultural programs to cater to their changing needs and promote active participation. To address this concern, this paper examines the characteristics and status of the growing New Silver Generation that differs from the current elderly population. The paper proposes customized museum education programs for seniors that emphasize the importance of financial sustainability and voluntary participation. By providing opportunities for cultural engagement, seniors can enjoy a fulfilling cultural life while contributing to its development.

Keyword : New Silver Generation, Cultural life improvement, Social and cultural policy, Cultural program

1. Introduction

Today's modern society is currently witnessing a pronounced surge in the elderly population, primarily attributable to a diminishing birthrate and the progression of an aging society. Furthermore, the entry of the baby boomers who were born between 1955 and 1964 into old age has engendered a significant expansion of the silver generation and it had already surpassed 7.26 million as of August 2017 [1]. Projections indicate that this figure will exceed 10 million by 2025 and surpass 15 million by 2035, thereby elevating the proportion of the silver generation to over 30% of the total population by the mid-2030s [2]. As the baby boomer cohort reaches their senior years, it is anticipated that the ensuing silver generation will exhibit heightened educational attainment, economic stability and individual autonomy along with a heightened inclination to actively participate and contribute to society.

Consequently, the transformation associated with the silver generation necessitates the fulfillment of four pivotal requisites. First, the implementation of diverse policies is imperative including the expansion of private infrastructure, augmentation of public services, diversification of services and enhancement of service quality that can cater to the multifarious needs that arise from increased leisure consumption.

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Second, it is incumbent upon society to perceive the elderly not merely as socially disadvantaged individuals necessitating economic assistance but rather as valued members thereof. Third, policies concerning the elderly, hitherto limited to welfare support in instances of illness and poverty, must be expanded to encompass seniors as significant consumers. Finally, a comprehensive range of measures is indispensable to accommodate the contemporary era and bestow upon the silver generation a wholesome existence through the improvement of their quality of life. Paramount among these measures is the development and provision of a diverse array of cultural and artistic programs that engender enjoyment and serve to elevate the cultural rights and status of the elderly within the cultural landscape [3].

By addressing these pressing requirement, this paper examines the characteristics and status of the New Silver Generation which are different from the current silver generation and analyzes the cultural characteristics of the new silver generation. Recent studies with the focus on this new silver generation have been conducted [3-5] but by looking at specific cases of developing and successfully applying cultural programs tailored to the New Silver Generation, the paper also suggests future directions in which cultural policies in South Korea need to go.

2. Definition and current status of the New Silver Generation

2.1 The concept of the New Silver Generation

‘Silver’ is a term designed to remove the negative connotations of the word ‘elderly’ since they are often associated with graying hair. The silver generation is a group of older people who have retired from the workforce and are no longer engaged in productive activities. In this paper, the focus is not the existing silver generation but the New Silver Generation that is the generation of seniors who are about to enter the silver generation. The New Silver Generation, also known as the Baby Boomers, were born between 1955 and 1963 during the post-Korean War birthrate explosion. They benefited from compulsory elementary education as the first to benefit from the elimination of middle school entrance exams and they were the first generation of high school equivalency. They are more educated and have a stronger sense of equality than previous generations [2]. Because of these generational characteristics, they are more down-to-earth, individualistic and self-satisfied. Therefore, their participation will be the key to the long-term development of cultural education programs in the future.

Of course, not all New Silver Generation members are fully prepared for retirement. Although the proportion of independent elderly people has increased compared to the past, there is still a large number of elderly people who need to be cared for under social protection. Because the New Silver

Generation is a baby boomer generation, the absolute number of people is large so the number of people who are not independent is inevitably large.

2.2 Current situation and problems of the New Silver Generation

In South Korea, the social status and level of the silver generation has improved due to the quantitative increase in the number of seniors and the improvement of their living and educational standards across the social, economic and cultural spheres. The New Silver Generation has higher assets and income levels than the previous generation as well as the ability of the elderly to acquire and utilize information, an increased desire for leisure and a higher level of cultural activities. It makes them active participants in cultural life. Unlike the previous silver generation who was a group that needed to be protected due to its dependence on the family, the New Silver Generation is a wealthy, active and healthy consumer group that has been called Neo-Silver and No 老老老 [6]. In the past, the silver generation was categorized as a socially disadvantaged group so it was care-driven due to the social responsibility to take care of them but the New Silver Generation is independent and active. Their main eight characteristics are listed in [Table 1].

[Table 1] Characteristics of the New Silver Generation

Keywords	Details
Comfortable	Prefer universal design as it is easy for everyone to use.
One to One	Prefer age-appropriate and high-quality products and services.
Nostalgia	Reflect on their lives through products and services.
Community	Remain active throughout their lives and capitalize on their experiences.
Identity	Seek to be themselves regardless of trends.
Edutainment	Pursue new knowledge and information with pleasure.
Relation	Always have someone around including grandchildren or pets.
Generation-free	Do not consider themselves to be silver.

The most important thing to consider when predicting the direction of New Silver Generation activities is that they do not feel that they are silver generation while enjoying the service. It can be seen that in 2021, outdoor hobbies such as walking, strolling and hiking were somewhat static and could be done in the surroundings but in just one year, they actively engaged in active hobbies such as traveling and dancing. This illustrates that the trend of seniors is gradually moving closer to that of younger people and pursuing fun. As the average life expectancy is gradually increasing due to medical and scientific advances, there is a lot of interest in how to make this period of life meaningful.

In response to this situation, museums are developing programs to create and offer new programs that the new silver generation wants. Thus, it is necessary to understand the consumer types and characteristics of the New Silver Generation in order to propose customized programs in museums to enhance their cultural rights and status.

Among the existing silver generations, the few silver generations with economic power are clearly a powerful economic class with significant assets and disposable income. They are liberated from childcare and work and have a lot of free time so they are active in cultural activities. However, in reality, there are only a handful of such capable seniors and the majority of them are in the habit of spending less, not spending and saving. In addition, due to the lack of welfare support, more and more people want to reenter the workforce after retirement [7].

[Table 2] Types and Features of New Silver Generation Consumers

Classification	Details
Show-off-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Get involved in new and different activities- Design a second life with new challenges- Actively seeking meaning in life through self-improvement consumption
Leisure-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Devoting time and energy to art, culture, travel, etc.- Pursuit of narcissistic activities, interest in health
Stability-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Self-disciplined, quiet, and low-activity- Feeling positive about themselves and pursuing a fulfilling life

As shown in [Table 2], the New Silver Generation consumers are ostentatious and leisure-oriented but at the same time, they have a stability-oriented personality. They want to participate in various new activities, design a second life with new challenges and actively pursue the meaning of life through self-improvement consumption. They are also self-disciplined and quiet in their leisure time and seek to feel positive and satisfied with themselves by reducing their activity level. Thus, narcissistic activities are pursued by investing time and energy in art, culture and travel and the growing interest in health is transforming into a leisure-oriented life [8].

3. Cultural life characteristics of the New Silver Generation

The New Silver Generation is changing into a generation that wants to lead their own cultural life by directly experiencing and participating in cultural life including musicals, exhibitions and concerts that can enjoy cultural life as an economic consumer. Thus, the role of cultural contents is important as a link for understanding and recognition of differences between heterogeneous groups that presupposes an

understanding of the different cultural backgrounds of various members of society. Cultural contents can be a medium for communication and unity in the absence of communication between social classes and ages not only in multinational and multicultural families with different cultures but also within a nation. By utilizing the medium to provide high-quality cultural facilities and learning programs, it can be seen that medium acts as a link to form empathy through the meeting of silver generations of similar age so that they can develop interest in new information and knowledge to experience various cultures [9].

4. Museum cultural programs and suggestions

Contemporary cultural and artistic education integrates experiential and theoretical aspects so that it enables students to understand art intellectually and communicate through their artwork. The Silver Target Program proposes a comprehensive educational program that combines emotional, cognitive and physical elements to foster bonding, intellectual growth, self-expression and physical vitality.

4.1 Working 1:1 with a painter

Leveraging artist residency programs supported by museums, this initiative aims to provide educational opportunities and cultural engagement for seniors. Historically, access to art education and exposure to artistic experiences were limited primarily focused on survival. Addressing the marginalization of the silver generation from the arts, this program targeted to the New Silver Generation aims to broaden their horizons and expose them to the beauty of art beyond mere survival concerns.

The program focuses on outdoor sketching while incorporating the keyword health that which resonates with the seniors' primary interests. Each participant is paired with a senior citizen and together they explore nearby natural destinations such as mountains and the sea. Through light exercise, walking and observational drawing, participants are encouraged to maintain physical and mental well-being while developing an interest and enjoyment in art. Furthermore, the program fosters inter-generational connections by facilitating interactions between the silver generation and younger artists. Participants collaborate on drawings while sharing personal stories, memories and historical experiences. This process promotes mutual understanding and bridges the generation gap.

A select number of participants who complete the basic course will have the opportunity to enroll in an advanced course. Exceptional students with potential for professional painting are chosen to engage in systematic classes conducted by artists to provide a pathway for further artistic development. By providing this comprehensive program, the initiative aims to empower the silver generation through

artistic education promote their well-being and foster inter-generational dialogue.

[Table 3] 14 weeks of an advanced curriculum for a 1:1 teaching program with a painter

Week	Class	Contents
1	Orientation	Expressing identity through storytelling
2	Visiting Art Museum Exhibits	Visiting an art museum exhibit and discussing impressions of the paintings
3	Drawing Diary	Documenting a Day in Pictures
4	Outdoor Sketching 1	Exploring the local neighborhood (mountains) and photographing plants (objects)
5	Precision Drawing Class	Reviewing photos taken during outdoor sketching and creating a detailed drawing
6		
7	Outdoor Sketching 2	Capturing the essence of the neighborhood (sea) and its landscapes through photography
8	Landscape Painting Class	Creating landscape drawings based on photos taken during outdoor sketching
9		
10		
11		
12	Artist-Elderly Communication	An artist-led class where elderly individuals share their life stories, which are then translated into drawings using the artist's unique style
13		
14	Exhibition and art product production	The artwork created in the class will be transformed into art products and exhibited for sale.

As shown in [Table 3], the program encourages active engagement rather than monotonous theoretical classes. Given the decline in memory during late adulthood, improvisational art activities that stimulate the senses serve to invigorate the brain. The process of imagination and creation instills a sense of accomplishment, positive energy and vitality. Dynamic classes such as outdoor sketching offer an opportunity to enhance health and foster a renewed perspective on nature as a medium for appreciation beyond its utilitarian function.

Moreover, through interactions with younger artists, participants can combat the potential depression associated with aging through attentive care and meaningful connections. For the artists involved, it presents an invaluable opportunity to perceive the world from the unique perspectives and thoughts of the silver generation. By developing art products based on the outcomes of the program and selling them in museum art shops, job opportunities can be created and the resulting profits can be utilized for the welfare of the participants.

4.2 Train docent program

In order to facilitate equitable access to cultural enjoyment, it is crucial to address their basic living needs. Providing suitable employment opportunities that do not compromise their health and offer fair compensation is essential. Presently, certain public museums offer docent training programs targeted at the general public. However, these programs primarily cater to experiential learning for young individuals or focus on volunteer training. Introducing this course to seniors as shown in [Table 4] would afford them the opportunity to work in a pleasant environment engaging with people without excessive physical demands. In countries like Japan, many art galleries and museums have elderly mothers serving as docents. Their life experiences render their explanations of artworks relatable and captivating so that it can often evoke nostalgic memories and personal connections. It is anticipated that the New Silver Generation with their varied social experiences will bring empathy and focus to their roles akin to maternal and paternal figures. Their extensive life experience enhances the reliability of their information to amplify their educational impact as guides in life.

[Table 4] 15 weeks of a docent program curriculum

Week	Class	Contents
1	Orientation	Understanding and communicating in museums and the role of a docent
2	Visiting and Experiencing On-site Exhibits	Observing and learning from experienced docents in prominent museums
3	Writing Docent Materials	Visiting skilled docents and acquiring manuscript writing skills
4		
5	Public Speaking	Engaging a professional speech instructor for voice and speech training
6		
7	Lecture on Western Art History	Basic Western Art History
8	Lecture on East Asian Art History	Basic Eastern Art History
9	Modern Art History Lecture	Basic Modern Art History
10	Art Museum Studies	Acquiring familiarity with the museum where training will be conducted
11		
12	Study of Exhibitions and Artworks in Museums	Studying current exhibitions at the training museum
13	Writing Docent Scripts	Creating your own docent manuscript
14	Group study	Forming a study group with peers
15	Final Practicum	Final docent practice, evaluation and completion ceremony while visiting the exhibiton

Within the New Silver Generation, there exists a significant number of highly skilled individuals who have accumulated extensive experience and know-how throughout their social lives. When these individuals retire, many seek reemployment opportunities. By engaging them as providers of cultural

activities instead of solely as participants, it is possible to foster more active involvement. The maturity and reliability associated with their age will instill a sense of trust and stability distinct from explanations provided by younger generations. Moreover, their familiarity will alleviate the difficulties often experienced by the general public in the formal and rigid environment of exhibition halls.

Considering the challenge of memory loss among the New Silver Generation, it may be necessary to assign staff to specific sections rather than expecting them to oversee the entire exhibition hall. Currently, larger museums in Korea separate the roles of artwork protectors and docents but through basic training, it can be done to assign individuals to specific artworks or sections of the exhibition hall.

4.3 Traditional Culture and Arts Education Specialist Course

Existing cultural and artistic education programs primarily reflect Western influences and are built upon Western culture. Given Korea's rich cultural heritage, it is crucial to preserve and educate our traditional practices. In this regard, a professional training program is designed to empower the silver generation who have lived through our historical traditions to become educators responsible for upholding and safeguarding our customs. Etiquette embodying understanding, consideration, respect and honor for others plays a pivotal role in establishing social order. Consequently, traditional educational institutions such as etiquette schools and temples are being revived to teach children and adolescents through hands-on experiences. In cases where visits are not feasible, instructors are dispatched to these institutions for direct teaching. As the educators mainly consist of seniors, their participation in the program is expected to meet little resistance given their credibility and the program's authentic atmosphere. To nurture artistic sensitivity, the program also includes a craft experience segment focused on creating tea bowls. The tea ceremony serves as a natural educational platform where students learn manners through the processes of understanding and caring and interacting with others. In addition, crafts as practical arts that embody beauty while serving everyday purposes promote creative thinking and enhance expression. By infusing the tea ceremony and crafts into etiquette education, the program aims to create a more approachable and engaging learning environment, thereby stimulating the interest of participants and maximizing the educational impact.

The combination of craft education and the tea ceremony will contribute to emotional stability and cognitive improvement among seniors to act as a stepping stone for them to become experts in tea ceremony etiquette. Moreover, this training program underscores the social responsibility of passing down the manners and traditions of the New Silver Generation to future generations. In recent years, with the

increasing fragmentation of family communities, breakdowns in communication and the absence of grandparents, children are growing up without acquiring essential manners that should be cultivated in early childhood. When a senior citizen assumes the role of educator, they naturally inspire trainees with respect for tradition and the importance of preserving it and eventually the program can exert a positive influence.

5. Conclusion

The cultural welfare of the elderly population has become a pressing social issue and there is a need for realistic alternatives to address their needs. This paper proposes a customized museum education program for seniors with the purpose to promote their active participation. By examining the changing dynamics of the New Silver Generation and analyzing their goals and influences, the need for cultural education for this demographic is established. Art museums, as educational spaces, are well-suited for lifelong education initiatives targeting the elderly. In this paper, the three programs are proposed to provide opportunities for the New Silver Generation to engage in cultural activities including art practice, art theory and traditional culture with methods including one-on-one teaching, docent training and tea ceremony etiquette education. By linking these activities to employment and addressing financial concerns, seniors can become active participants in cultural activities. The paper emphasizes the importance of securing capital for cultural welfare through the voluntary participation of seniors and it can lead to sustainable and self-sustaining cultural welfare in the long term. This approach envisions a future where seniors can enjoy cultural life while contributing to its development.

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