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Becoming Like the World: Korean Articulations of Globalization
in the Global Zones, 1987-present

By

Jieheerah Yun

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Architecture

in the

Graduate Division

Of the

University Of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Nezar AlSayyad, Chair

Professor Greig Crysler

Professor You-tien Hsing

Fall 2011

Abstract

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After democratization and the successful hosting of the 1988 Olympic Games, various South Korean political actors, including the government, have criticized the reckless urban redevelopment projects under past regimes. The public clamour about the need to address the failings of developmentalist regimes has triggered the emergence of a new urban discourse that emphasizes considering non-economic aspects of development, such as environmental justice and broader citizen participation. In particular, the government has embarked on remaking South Korean landscapes in a series of urban renaissance projects through a deployment of “culture,” or what I call the cultural city discourse.

This dissertation examines the processes by which architectural aesthetics and spatial practices in Global Cultural Zones in Seoul rearticulate “Korean cultures” as well as those of “others.” Using the methods of urban history, critical theory, and geographical inquiry, this study examines how economic liberalization and the transnational movement of people have shaped changing urban discourses surrounding development projects. Each chapter analyzes a different urban redevelopment project in a Global Cultural Zone; these represent the city government’s efforts to promote an understanding of “Korean cultures” and the concept of a “multicultural society.” First, by examining the cases of remodeled *hanoks* in Bukchon, this study challenges the assumption that vernacular architecture represents the opposite of high architecture. Instead, it highlights the ambiguous status of the former. Then, I look at the construction of “Korean cultures” in Insadong, which takes the form of nostalgia-fueled resistance to change that can be detrimental to cultural diversity. At the same time, I examine how the government’s effort to build a “multicultural society” functions as a political ideology that aims to ease the tension arising from participating in the global economy. This study then turns to the construction of the Design Plaza and Park in Dongdaemun and questions the thesis that design-oriented spaces bring further economic growth, let alone producing “cultural space.” Lastly, the construction of “multicultural streets” in Itaewon is examined to show that the emergence of ethnic and cultural diversity in Itaewon is the result of coincidental historical events rather than consistent government policy.

This research shows that the emphasis on Korean “traditional culture” is not a simple

reflection of a desire to re-enact past customs but a project with an objective of reconfirming the modernity of the present. By examining the interlocking relationship between the state and civil society, this study illustrates the dialectical processes of globalization. This dissertation suggests that diversification of the rationales behind urban projects—the simultaneous emphasis on “Korean tradition” and a “multicultural society”—serves as a tool for the continuation of a growth-centered economic framework.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Production of Korean Global Space

Caught between the restraints of the developed countries and the chase of the late starters, South Korea is currently facing the difficulty of finding a new path. The rapidly aging population and the low birth rate resulting in a declining growth rate are some of the factors threatening our economy. . . . There are many difficulties inside and outside the country. However, there is enough possibility for our economy to achieve a rapid yet sustainable growth. Neighboring Chinese and Indian markets are on the track of rapid growth, and the Asian economy is undergoing such a dynamic development that it has become a new growth axis of the world. Segyehwa (globalization) presents threats of fierce competition but it can also be an opportunity for our economy to dynamically expand.

— Lee Myung-bak, in a speech on October 18, 2007 during his presidential campaign
All Translations Mine except Where Noted.

These words from a campaign speech by then presidential candidate Myung-bak Lee, emphasizing the importance of continued economic growth, illustrate the dilemma faced by South Koreans almost a decade after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. At a time when the Asian economic model and the “miracle on the Han River” no longer seemed valid, Lee reasserted the possibility of continued prosperity by citing the examples of China and India. The discussion of “a new growth axis” in Asian countries suggests that there still exists room to incorporate economic developments within the South Korean economic system if Koreans can take full advantages of *segyehwa* and find ways to tap into expanding markets in the larger Asian region. Characterized by economic stagnation and a high unemployment rate, the arrival of the new millennium in South Korea did not seem to quicken the pace of economic recovery. In the context of worsening economic signs, electing Lee, who possessed a business background and emphasized economic recovery, seemed a logical choice for many South Koreans.

Quite distinct from the controversial term globalization, *segyehwa* has served as a parallel South Korean term that became more widely known as a political slogan in the early 1990s in conjunction with the Kim Young Sam administration. Although the *segyehwa* campaign reflected a continuation of certain aspects of the modernization project, it also contained an important break from the previous national campaign to “catch up with the West.” From the economic perspective, it marked a break from the old model of the developmental state interfering with market forces through protective measures. The government’s project of *segyehwa* sought to differentiate itself from the previous regime by addressing the ills of its developmentalist approach, especially its disregard for the natural environment and social justice. The reformist policies reflected the larger processes of economic restructuring of East Asia and the formation of new institutional bodies such as ASEAN Plus 3 and the East Asia Summit. Yet they contained specificities, as the political economies of East Asian countries differed substantially. From a cultural perspective, it signified the need for South Koreans to throw out an outdated mode of ethnocentrism and undertake the cosmopolitan tolerance of different cultures. Lee’s speech reveals important divergences as well as continuities within the Korean perception of *segyehwa*. Although the Korean term had already been used as a political catchphrase in Kim’s administrations, Lee’s approach differs in that it acknowledges the dangers and challenges

associated with the attempt to nationalize and give regional specificity to the abstract concept of globalization.

In this socioeconomic milieu, efforts to propel the status of Seoul from the center of the national economy to a global hub have materialized in the initiation of several redevelopment projects. The contemporary urban projects differ from development projects of the past in that they renounce top-to-bottom and uncommunicative approaches focused solely on economic efficiency. Instead, the mission of many urban projects is to emphasize historical preservation and protection of the natural environment while encouraging balanced growth.¹ In the early 2000s, the city of Seoul embarked on the project of designating “cultural districts” and “historical and cultural inquiry streets” in order to improve the urban environments damaged by reckless development. Taking on the notion of “cultural city” defined at a meeting of the Council of the European Union in June 1985, the city of Seoul sought to renew its image from an industrial *nouveau riche* of the Third World to a sophisticated cosmopolitan cultural axis.² The effort to preserve cultural traditions resulted not only in a more careful maintenance of national heritage sites but also in the reconstruction and rediscovery of traditional Korean-style houses. At the same time, following the spirit of broadening one’s cultural perspective, places promoted as cultural spaces were diversified to include various urban sites previously considered too hectic or heterogeneous. Although the state had paid little attention to exotic cuisines in urban areas such as Itaewon, it now regards the presence of various ethnic restaurants as a source of cultural tourism.³ In a word, consumption patterns in South Korea have diversified to a significant degree as the result of faster information exchange rates.

This dissertation examines the processes whereby the rhetoric of segyehwa has contributed to shaping Seoul’s urban environments and how different responses from the social actors including local government, residents, and NGOs are expressed. Rather than engaging in lengthy theoretical discussions of the term “globalization,” I focus on the specific national appropriation of the term and the process by which the abstract qualities associated with globalization in current scholarship become transformed into a new type of urban discourse. The term *seggyehwa*—and the more contemporary Korean term *global-hwa*—have been used in describing many high-flown development projects sponsored by both central and local governments. Many local residents, journalists, investors, NGOs, entrepreneurs, and public officials have joined the government’s ambitious promotion of Seoul as a global city, and used the term “global” in the pursuit of their interests. Yet amidst the flood of the projects and institutions professing to embody the global entrepreneurial spirit, others have questioned the ways the spectre of the “global” has been utilized. I analyze how the different local aspirations and aversions to the state-led segyehwa project have been expressed through spatial practices in the urban sites targeted for redevelopment.

¹ The Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project was one of the many urban redevelopment projects that sought to pursue balanced growth by simultaneously seeking the protection of the natural environment, the preservation of history, and material accumulation.

² Seoul Development Institute, *A Study of the Improvement of the Efficiency of Seoul’s Culture Policy: With a Focus on Culture City Strategy* (Seoul: SDI, 2002).

³ Culture and Tourism Department of the Seoul City Government, *The World’s Seoul* (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 1999).

The Rise of the “Cultural City” Discourse

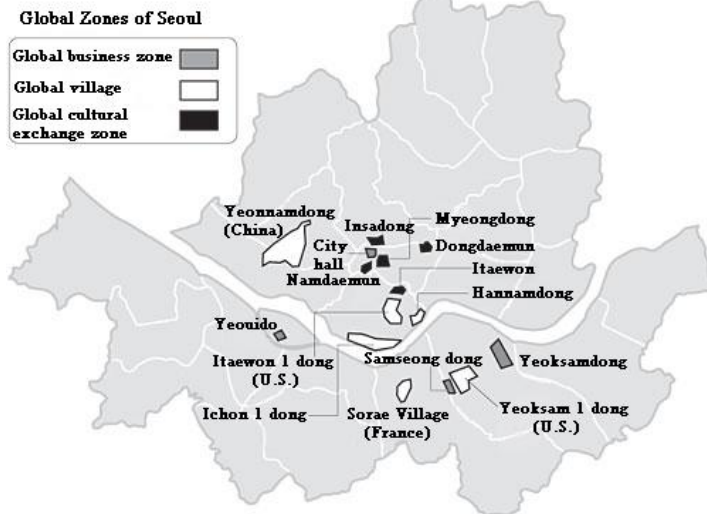


Figure 1.1 Global Zones of Seoul

Beginning in the early 2000s, the city government of Seoul started to engage in the development of an urban discourse which I shall call the “cultural city discourse.” In 2002, a study conducted by the Seoul Development Institute (SDI) concluded that there is a need to cultivate “cultural spaces” in Seoul in order to follow the global transformation from the industrial age to the post-industrial information age. The report introduced a survey conducted in 2001 among public officials and cultural/art department personnel which indicated that the biggest problem in Seoul was that “urban spaces in general are not conducive to the cultivation of cultures.”⁴ In another study, SDI noted that “it is possible to generate global investments if Seoul shifts its focus from manufacturing industries to cultural industries and to promoting a higher quality of life, acquiring the ‘image of a culture city.’”⁵ Following the definition given in the European Capital of Culture program which first started in 1985, the study defined the “cultural city” as “a new city with prerequisites for growth based on culture—such as environments conducive to cultural activities.”⁶ In addition, the study argued that culture industries basically require environment-friendly developments. The cultural city discourse proposed a new set of urban renaissance projects in order to recover from the ills of modernization and restore the balance between material growth and appreciation of the non-economic aspects of life.

Although the cultural city discourse did not address questions of defining urban culture, it appealed to policy makers and urban planners enough to influence many urban projects. For instance, several Culture History Routes within the historic part of Seoul were designated as places to preserve the national heritage and foster cultural exchanges. In a similar vein, the city government of Seoul designated fifteen areas within Seoul as Global Zones (fig 1.1) in 2007—four business zones, five cultural exchanges zones, and six villages—in order to “strengthen [its]

⁴ Seoul Development Institute, *A Study of the Spatial Distribution of Cultural Facilities in Seoul* (Seoul: SDI, 2002).

⁵ Seoul Development Institute, *A Study of the Improvement of the Efficiency of Seoul’s Culture Policy*.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

internal stability as a global city.”⁷ The designation of Global Cultural Zones came with the city government’s emphasis on the preservation of traditional Korean customs as well as fostering cultural exchanges between Koreans and foreign nationals. For instance, Insadong was promoted as the repository of traditional Korean culture while Dongdaemun and Itaewon were designated as exchange zones due to their diverse cultural forms and shopping opportunities. Undertaken as part of an effort to “re-design” Seoul, this series of new urban projects and the development of Global Cultural Zones (GCZ) represent important assumptions about culture which this chapter will go on to discuss in greater detail.

The process of positioning Seoul as a global city through the deployment of new urban aesthetics, or what I call the “cultural turn” in development, demonstrates an important break from the previous developmentalism in the sense that the goal of economic efficiency is mediated by the need to acknowledge emotional and social values. After the democratic transition, the South Korean state has striven to differentiate itself from the developmentalist authoritarian regime, and the invocation of the “global” was one of the important strategies to achieve such a distinction. For instance, emphasis on the appreciation of immaterial things has become an important aspect of the segyehwa campaign. As a part of the distancing mechanism, the invocation of segyehwa contained a strong reformist overtone that appealed to many South Koreans as both an economic and a political strategy. Thus, I examine the cultural work of segyehwa and global-hwa in the urban renaissance projects that deploy the discourse of “culture” and “tradition.”

In a broader sense, this dissertation analyzes the shifting notions of cultural modernity defined through the promotion of “tradition” and “multicultural society” in urban sites of the democratized South Korean society. Although the reformist tendencies in the segyehwa drive have resulted in the re-examination of overtly developmentalist approaches, the state’s faith in continuous material growth has not been abandoned. In this context, its simultaneous pursuit of cultural modernity and economic efficiency has become a difficult feat requiring a careful balance of power and deliberate planning. The preservation of “Korean tradition” and the promotion of a “multicultural society” in South Korea have become new state-led cultural planning strategies that lie behind many redevelopment projects in order to harmonize cultural modernity and economic efficiency. More specifically, I analyze the series of projects to create Cultural Zones in Seoul beginning in the early 2000s, and the city government’s effort to transform the image of Seoul from an industrial to a post-industrial city. By comparing how these Cultural Zones construct Korean identities and those of the imagined Others, this study illustrates the processes by which the distinction between them is both exaggerated and understated, and how these terms are contingent on different versions of Korea’s past and its future. This dissertation hypothesizes that the state’s simultaneous quest to rediscover Korean traditions and promote foreign cultural forms is a continuation of growth-centered economic framework mainly serving as a tool for what David Harvey called “flexible accumulation.”⁸

Despite the state’s effort to generate an aura of difference or freshness by invoking the spectre of the global, the cultural turn of the developmental impulses contains inherent paradoxes that help to undermine the validity of its projects. The movement against segyehwa has started to

⁷ National Geographic Information Institute, *Hankuk Jiriji: Sudogwon Pyun* [Korean Geography: Metropolitan Area] (Seoul: Ministry of Land, Transport, and Maritime Affairs, 2007), 57.

⁸ David Harvey, “Flexible Accumulation Through Urbanization: Reflections On ‘Post-modernism’ in the American City” in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 19:3, 1987, 260-286.

question the superficial notion of multiculturalism and nostalgic reconstructions of Korean tradition. The movement includes urban residents, NGOs, street vendors, and artists who question the governmental use of the word “global” in urban redevelopment projects. While the proponents of segyehwa-inspired urban redevelopments focus on the promise of a bright future, those who participate in the production of the counter-narrative emphasize the present conditions of structural inequalities and representational problems. This study examines the processes by which the construction of “tradition” and “culture” as a state project is mediated by the presence of de-developmental approaches as new meanings are attached to the political reproductions of urban discourses. By highlighting the unanticipated consequences of segyehwa policies, I argue that globalization is a multidirectional process that involves constantly shifting and negotiated local articulations rather than a simple top-down process.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of pinpointing the exact historical moment in which a given society becomes “democratic,” this study regards the year 1987 as the pivotal point since that is the time when democratic transitions through electoral reform began to take place, and when what scholars called the “crisis of political and economic success” began.⁹ Economically, the fast rate at which South Korea escaped the poverty associated with the Korean War and propelled itself into the international trade arena has led many scholars to remark on the “miracle on the Han River.” Politically, democratic movements that gained momentum and middle class support culminated in a peaceful regime change. Ironically, perceptions of successes shared by South Koreans contributed to institutional instability as well as making “the ideological cleavage” between democracy and developmentalism appear irrelevant.¹⁰

Although many South Koreans started to recognize the economic threat of globalization after the experience of financial crisis in 1997, this realization alone could not overturn the tendency of South Korean society to associate economic liberalization with political freedom. Unlike Western European states and the US, which gradually transitioned from a liberal economy in the late nineteenth century to a Keynesian economic model, South Korea did not enter a stage of unrestrained capitalist market ruled by robber barons. Instead, the combination of Japanese colonial rule and the military dictatorship that followed held capitalism at bay. Korea remained an underdeveloped agrarian society with an extreme minority of wealthy individuals willing to cooperate with the regimes. As Bruce Cumming has noted, capitalism in South Korean society “did not fit a textbook description of capitalism” due to the colonial legacy of the Japanese developmental regime and state-led industrialization thereafter.¹¹

Thus, although much seemed to change after the first successful democratic movement in 1987, some of the older lines of conflict remained. If democratic movements were an organizing principle designed to unite different generations, the following economic liberalization became a source of division even among those who marched together in the streets in the 1980s to support democratization. While the South Korean government began to loosen up its autocratic control in many spheres, the conglomerates gained more independence and power since there was no political authority figure that they had to try to please. Economic liberalization and restructuring resulted not only in a tremendous level of job insecurity and shifts (a decline for some and an increase for others) in economic opportunities but also a realignment of political camps. On the

⁹ Larry Jay Diamond and Byungkook Kim (eds.), *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹¹ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: a Modern History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2005), 205.

one hand, previous participants in the democratic movement joined hands with the old political camp to promote neoliberal economic policies. On the other hand, labor leaders started to utilize grass-roots democratic organization and formal government channels to oppose further economic liberalization as well as the remnants of the country's authoritarian past.

This study illustrates different paths and strategies South Koreans have taken in order to deal with such crises after the disappearance of the common social agenda to achieve electoral democracy. Instead of resorting to the binary construction of an “undemocratic” versus a “democratic” society, this dissertation takes a nuanced approach by examining the dialectical and interlocking relationships between the state and civil society in South Korea. By discussing the divisions within the government and civil society, this dissertation highlights the heterogeneity, rather than homogeneity, within historical developments of democratic institutions. Before delving into the discussion of research sites, this chapter discusses the historical background of South Korea's experience of globalization as well as theoretical issues concerning this study. I first examine the historical dimension of globalization and the rise of a new urban discourse following the Asian financial crisis. I then discuss the conceptual frameworks regarding culture and tradition, and how such concepts are being deployed in the South Korean context.

Segyehwa, or the Spectre of the Global

The most controversial, and most discussed, concept used in this dissertation is the term “globalization.” Some scholars question the ontological status of the term “globalization” by using the term “globalony” to describe the contemporary obsession for faster rates of exchange.¹² Similarly, Partha Chatterjee has pointed out that European countries such as Britain and France in the nineteenth century witnessed a greater flow rate of international capital in relation to total national incomes than in the twentieth century.¹³ Considering such claims—that globalization is a problematic term with room for various misuses, the question whether the term “globalization” is useful in examining the built environment has haunted the coterie of scholars interested in current socio-economic changes. Other scholars accept that the contemporary exchange of information, capital, and people entails important differences from previous patterns of exchange. Manuel Castells has provided an encompassing notion of the information technology revolution not just as an aggregate of new technologies, but also as a process including qualitatively different organization principles arising from previous technological innovations.¹⁴ Hence, despite the ambiguities, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a different pattern of exchange in the contemporary period, albeit with different interpretations and qualifications concerning the appropriateness of the term “globalization.”

In urban studies, the term globalization has induced various academic interpretations and debates. The theory of the global city postulates that the processes of globalization result in the concentration of functions in big cities despite the technological revolution which makes the dispersal of economic functions possible. For instance, Saskia Sassen has argued that “global cities” such as New York, London, and Tokyo have become ever more important financial centers due to the networking of specialized firms already located in such big cities.¹⁵ The global

¹² Michael Veseth, *Globaloney: Unraveling the Myths of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

¹³ See Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

¹⁵ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

city theory, despite its critical analysis of political economies associated with globalization, has generated criticism from post-structuralist and post-colonialist scholars. Scholars such as Aihwa Ong have criticized David Harvey's articulation of globalization and the role of capitalism as reductive in the sense that his account misses "human agency and its production and negotiation of cultural meanings within the normative milieus of late capitalism."¹⁶ On the other hand, the post-colonialist critique of global city discourse, unlike the post-structuralist approach, questions the understanding of globalization and modernity in the developmental framework. Jennifer Robinson criticizes Sassen's notion of a global city as "emphasizing [a] relatively small range of economic processes with a certain 'global' reach" while it "excludes many cities from its consideration."¹⁷

In the case of South Korea, the term *seggyehwa* signifies something quite different from the meta-term "globalization." It cannot be considered separately from the larger political economy within which South Korea is situated. The rhetoric of *seggyehwa* was first invoked during the culmination of democratic movement and the growing public awareness of the ills of past military regimes and reckless developmentalist projects. Scholars increasingly pointed out that development projects in the so-called "four Asian tigers" often ignored the non-economic costs of these projects, such as the environmental and social costs, due to the limited time they had to "catch up" with other developed nations.¹⁸ The fast rate of environmental degradation in urban areas and the depletion of the population in rural areas were understood as the consequence of reckless developments. At the same time, the close ties between *chaebol* (conglomerates) and the central government became a hotly debated issue since cases of corruption and political favoritism often decorated the front pages of South Korean newspapers. Within the urban context, the term "development dictatorship" was coined to describe the many large construction projects decided without any kind of democratic oversight. Despite being praised for the country's material growth, South Koreans yearned for political participation, social transparency, and environmental justice.

It was during this period of relative economic prosperity and political instability that the Kim Young Sam administration introduced globalization as a political slogan. Confident of recent political achievements such as the peaceful regime change and the successful hosting of the Olympic Games, Kim called for South Korean nationals to throw away "Korean diseases" (such as close state-conglomerate alliances, the presence of military secret societies, and the lack of financial transparency) associated with the previous developmentalist dictatorship. The new policy initiatives designed to reform the Korean economic system included measures such as the Real Name Financial Transaction System.¹⁹ Instead of resorting to an authoritarian emphasis on ethnocentrism, Kim's political speeches emphasized that Koreans need to adopt broader perspectives and take a proactive role by learning from the rest of the world.

At the same time that the project of *seggyehwa* sought to change the political culture of South Korea, it also introduced major policy changes contributing to economic liberalization. It is noteworthy that the project was part of the national development strategy that emphasized

¹⁶ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁷ Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 96.

¹⁸ Philip McMichael, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁹ The act of Real Name Financial Transaction System sought to normalize banking by making all financial dealings transparent and root out the source of corruption.

sharpening competitive edges “to become like the rest of the world.”²⁰ Many public programs to help the poor were also similar to “neo-liberal governments’ call for greater self-help” rather than involving structural welfare reforms.²¹ Although Kim’s political rhetoric often associated further economic growth with the phrase “globalization,” it mainly served as a political slogan since it lacked practical considerations. Despite the fast speed at which some South Koreans improved their economic and political conditions, democracy in South Korea was still in its infancy and lacked many institutional and policy reforms. While Kim’s regime attempted to address these shortcomings, it was not prepared to appropriately handle the potential backlash from a conservative middle class with vested interests. Consequently, Kim’s administration changed its fast pace of reform and began to restore a business-friendly environment. While labor and financial markets were liberalized, the power of conglomerates remained relatively intact. Gills and Gills argue that an abrupt reversal of the policy from decentralization to a growth-first strategy in the early 1990s left “Korean workers badly exposed when the subsequent economic crisis in 1997-8 brought high unemployment.”²²

Yet the mismatch between the ambition and reality associated with *seggyehwa*, which clearly manifested itself in the Asian financial crisis, has not resulted in the abandonment of the term. Rather, the phantasm of the global reappeared in a new form and new names such as *global-hwa*. As if using a new term can dispel the negative image of the IMF crisis associated with *seggyehwa*, the term “global”—and related terms such as “global network,” “global standard,” and “global leaders”—has come back with vengeance.²³ The targets of reform have widened and diversified as well. The images of “global” apply not only to business and marketing, but also to other, subtler, areas such as cultivating a sense of humor and appropriate manners for social activities. With respect to state’s nation building strategy, the spectre of the global signaled an important transition. For instance, the political power of the ideology of *hanminjok*, or a single Korean ethnicity, started to weaken in the 1990s as the rhetoric of *seggyehwa* criticized the ethnocentric tendencies of the previous regime such as blaming undesirable social phenomena on “foreign” forms of vice.²⁴ While the criticism in the early 1990s was confined to xenophobic reactions to admittedly foreign customs and people, political discussions in the new millennium have increasingly begun to challenge the very idea of a single Korean identity. Although scholars have argued that the ideology of a single Korean identity is largely a myth, it nevertheless played an important part in the nation-building process by generating defensive national sentiments against external powers.²⁵ However, the concept of *hanminjok* has increasingly been at odds with state policies such as encouraging transnational marriages and migrant labor, designed to ease the labor shortage and compensate for the falling fertility rate in rural regions. In the mid-2000s,

²⁰ Hyun-Chin Lim, “Stumbling Democracy in South Korea: The Impacts of Globalization and Restructuring” in Y.S. Chang and Donald L. Baker (eds.), *Korea Confronts Globalization* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 144.

²¹ Ankie Hoogvelt, “The Politics of Exclusion,” in *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (New York: Macmillan, 1997).

²² Barry K. Gills and Dongsook S. Gills, “Globalization and Strategic Choice in South Korea: Economic Reform and Labor,” in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *Korea’s Globalization* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

²³ In the National Assembly Library in South Korea, 853 books were found to contain the word “global” in their titles. Among them only 23 were published before 1997. More than 50% of the books containing the word “global” in their titles were published after 2007.

²⁴ Frank B. Tipton, *The Rise of Asia: Economics, Society and Politics in Contemporary Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 427.

²⁵ Ronald Cohen, “Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978), 384.

increasing numbers of migrant workers in South Korea and transnational marriages prompted the state to engage in “multicultural campaigns” to embrace various racial and ethnic populations within South Korean society.

In the context of urban development, attempts to deal with the “crises of successes” and the need to reform have contributed to the rise of a new urban discourse which emphasized the experiential and emotional aspects of urban projects rather than their functional aspects. The perception of the ills of modernist design was even stronger in South Korea, where the functionalist modernist aesthetic was strongly associated with dictatorship, than elsewhere. Instead, exploring the connection to one’s past as well as incorporating room for the user’s participation became more important. The concept of a “soft city” promoted in the Design Seoul project emphasized the appreciation of invisible things—such as cultural traditions and emotional well-being.²⁶ In order to achieve the goal, what is imperative is not to provide a comfortable environment but to generate a distinctive image of the place, attractive and unique in its own way. It is notable that most of the controversies regarding urban development involved the term “cultures” or some variation thereof. In the case of Global Cultural Zones in Seoul, the project was started as a way to transform the image of Seoul from a monotonous industrial city to a versatile “cultural” city filled with tangible and intangible resources. However, the consensus on the need to restore cultural aspects of the city sprung out of the ambiguous status of the term “culture.”

The Question of Urban Culture and Representations

The aforementioned studies by SDI assumed that there exists a fundamental dichotomy between manufacturing industry and culture. The cultural city discourse produced sets of similarly dichotomous terms such as “hard city” versus “soft city,” which symbolize the industrial and post-industrial city respectively.²⁷ Besides constructing an indelible division between manufacturing industries and cultural industries, SDI’s rhetoric lacks a critical examination of the elusive term “culture” and what constitutes the “urban cultures.” Specific standards or guidelines about what merits the designation “culture” remain uncertain although theoretical debates regarding culture have shaped developments within academic disciplines such as anthropology and geography.

Prior to the emergence of critical cultural studies, urban cultures were considered as self-contained units reflecting the specific value system of subgroups in a given society. For instance, an anthropological study by Oscar Lewis on the urban poor coined the influential term “culture of poverty,” which argued for the presence of a distinct subculture among slum dwellers.²⁸ However, many scholars have pointed out the inapplicability of such a concept given the diverse patterns of urban developments and the cultural exchanges among different socioeconomic classes. Anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz criticized the intellectual phenomenon of “taking thin descriptions for the thick” when the epistemological question of culture remains unanswered.²⁹ Other scholars, such as Lefebvre, argued that space is not simply a medium but a

²⁶ Young-gol Kwon. *Seoul ūl Design Handa* [Designing Seoul: the 22 Principles] (Seoul: Design House, 2010).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Oscar Lewis, *Five Families; Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Science Editions, 1962).

²⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York : Basic Books, 1973).

continuous spatial relation that is socially produced.³⁰ Other scholars have emphasized the political dimension of the discussions of urban cultures. Don Mitchell argued that culture is indeterminate in the sense that it can encompass all aspects of society as well as none of them.³¹ Mitchell further argued that many types of social struggles will be over “culture wars” in the sense that culture wars are “about defining what is legitimate in a society, who is an ‘insider’ and who is an ‘outsider.’”³² Thus, what matters more is not the issue of culture itself, but what and whose cultural representations are socially constructed as “legitimate.”

While earlier studies of the dichotomy between the dominant and marginal groups tended to focus on a single factor—such as race, gender, or ethnicity—cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall pointed out the need to reject the essential notion of a subject by, for instance, differentiating the new phase of Black cultural politics. Unlike the previous phase, which assumed the “essential black subject,” the new phase was characterized by “the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural categories which compose the category ‘black’.”³³ On the other hand, scholars such as Gayatri Spivak have focused on the problem of cultural representation by questioning the “assumed transparency of representation.”³⁴ Spivak argued that the “epistemic violence” pretending to represent the subaltern results in the further marginalization of colonial women subjects.³⁵ As what once seemed to be an immovable and fixed identity of a marginalized group became increasingly elusive, disoriented academics faced the formidable task of tackling the baffling concept of culture while admitting their own lack of authority to do so. Given such complexities involved in the term culture and issues regarding cultural representations, it appears that any further discussion of urban culture is a moot point. However, abandoning discussions regarding urban culture can bring even more negative externalities by not representing the minority voices at all.

In contemporary South Korea, the politics of culture has gained a strategic importance as an increasing number of transnational laborers and marriages have necessitated inter-ethnic understanding and the provision of cultural resources for multiethnic families. The political rhetoric of the South Korean government’s campaign of building a “multicultural society,” however, is based on the notion of the presence of a single culture in the past. This study does not accept the construction of a dichotomy between “culture” and “multiculture.” Instead of resorting to meta-narratives of cultural politics, this dissertation engages in multiple methods of examining how cultural representations shape and are shaped by spatial practices. Taking on Hall’s notion of diversity of subjective positions, this dissertation demonstrates that the distinction between the Self and the Others involves negotiation as different political actors seek to represent themselves in urban environments. The problem of urban cultures is interpolated not only with categorizations such as class, gender, and age, but also with historical experiences and geopolitical structures. While the term “globalization” has been used in many societal contexts as a call for lifestyle changes, *segyehwa* in South Korea contained a strong political overtone

³⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

³¹ Don Mitchell, “There’s No Such Thing as Culture: Towards a Reconceptualization of the Idea of Culture in Geography,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 102-116.

³² Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³³ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” in Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (eds.), *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 166.

³⁴ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

emphasizing the reformation of Korean identities. Although the term *segye* literally means “world,” it is not a value-neutral word that contains all the societies of the globe on the same representational level. As the subsequent chapters demonstrate, diverse processes in which Korean identity is constructed and consumed cannot be understood separately from the larger global processes of economic liberalization and increasing transnational movement of labor. Thus, instead of renouncing the analysis of urban cultures, I engage in what Linda Alcoff called “interrogatory practices,” which involves critical reexamination of my own use of the term “culture” as well as of its actual effect.³⁶ The more important aspect of cultural representations then becomes examining the inherent assumptions regarding the way discussions of “cultures” are framed.

Although the project of *segryehwa* started out as a top-to-bottom political slogan, the distinction between the Self and the Others is constantly being redrawn as the result of new subjectivities and alliances generated by changing socioeconomic forces. Changes in political economy bring opportunities as well as threats, and the discussions of “multicultural society” even in a rhetorical sense can ignite different positions and articulations of urban cultures. Contestations with regard to what constitute “Korean tradition” and “multicultural society” have been expressed in the mass media and governmental documents dealing with the historical preservation and development of urban districts. Despite the dominant trend of mapping “urban culture” onto specific demographic groups or geographical areas, this tendency is mediated and confounded by different interpretations of abstract concepts and new spatial practices. This dissertation examines how concepts such as “tradition” and “multicultural society” overlap with the aims of urban projects and how they are appropriated and challenged by local aspirations.

Tradition as a “Project”: Tradition, Modernity, and In-between

Throughout this dissertation, I engage in discussions of abstract concepts whose meanings need to be explored due to the complex nature of the terms. In particular, this study examines the dual processes of rediscovering Korean “tradition” and building a “multicultural society” in the construction of Cultural Zones. Similar to the term “globalization,” “tradition” and “modernity” are another set of terms that often become used in very different contexts without close examination. Paul Oliver took a descriptive approach by defining tradition as something handed down from generation to generation.³⁷ Building on the widespread understanding of tradition as the opposite of modernity, Yi-fu Tuan defined tradition as involving constraints or lack of choices.³⁸ On the other hand, Edward Shils criticized such essentialized notions of tradition by observing that it is important to distinguish between tradition as a fashion and substantive traditionality.³⁹ Commenting on the rampant reproduction of traditions elsewhere and the consequent obsessive quests for authentic traditions, Nezar Al-Sayyad has remarked that “what has ended is not tradition, but tradition as a place-based, temporally situated concept.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20, (1991-92): 5-32.

³⁷ See Paul Oliver, “Handed Down Architecture: Tradition and Transmission,” in *Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Nezar Al-Sayyad and Jean-Paul Bourdier. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 53-75.

³⁸ Yi-fu Tuan, “Tradition: What Does It Mean?” in *Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition*, ed. Nezar Al-Sayyad and Jean-Paul Bourdier. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 27-34.

³⁹ Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁴⁰ Nezar Al-Sayyad, “The End of Tradition, or the Traditions of Endings?” in Nezar Al-Sayyad (ed.), *The End of Tradition?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 23.

Another group of scholars have remarked on the impossibility of separating tradition and modernity. For instance, Jane Jacobs argued that tradition is inextricably linked to the modern since the imagination of modernity is predicated on tradition as the mirror image of itself.⁴¹ Similarly, anthropologists have observed that lamenting the disappearance of cultural traditions, or what Marilyn Ivy has called “discourses of vanishing,” is a distinctively modern phenomenon.⁴² Narratives of loss and the nostalgic view of tradition are social constructions which play upon the very modern fear of losing one’s identity. Dean MacCannell pushed the argument further, observing that “the best indication of the final victory of modernity . . . is its artificial preservation and reconstruction [of a pre-modern world].”⁴³ Thus, tradition becomes a target that is constantly revisited as “rediscoveries” in order to constantly confirm one’s modernity.

In contemporary South Korea, the construction of tradition as a means to rediscover individuals’ identity has become particularly strong for two reasons. First, the colonial experiences have heightened the contrast between the traditional and the modern, on both discursive and perceptual levels. The political construction of Korean subjects as “un-modern” and the unequal economic relationships between Korea and Japan have contributed to the emergence of strongly patriotic interpretations of tradition. For instance, Laurel Kendall observed that for South Koreans the rural past “was not so much ‘lost’ as taken away by someone else.”⁴⁴ He argues that colonial legacies have generated a close link between “the loss of an imagined rural authenticity [and] the loss of Korea itself.”⁴⁵ Secondly, the double bind of colonial subjects, which constructed Koreans as recipients of a modernizing project yet never “fully modern” compared to their Japanese counterparts, has resulted in an ironic phenomenon. Although Korean traditions are regarded as targets of preservation, the conditions for their preservation were constantly undermined through the rapid modernization drive of the early South Korean republic. Situated in the paradoxical situation of having to prove their modernity while preserving Korean traditions, South Koreans have experienced floods of “re-discoveries” of traditional artifacts, rituals, and sites. Thus, the strong association of globalization with reform did not result in an abandonment of the ideology of a single Korean heritage. Rather, urban planners and policy makers have incorporated certain Korean traditions into the larger rubric of urban redevelopments. Protecting the authenticity of Korean traditions became part of the *segyehwa* drive since the effort to preserve cultural forms was part of reforms pursuing a path of balanced growth.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, the preservation of authenticity and the invocation of common cultural traditions in South Korea has acquired another dimension. As Stephen Vlastos argued, traditions are not only the byproduct of nation-states but a byproduct of

⁴¹ Jane Jacobs, “Tradition is (Not) Modern: Deterritorializing Globalization” in Al-Sayyad (ed.), *The End of Tradition?*, 29-44.

⁴² Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁴³ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁴⁴ Laurel Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

rising capitalism.⁴⁶ Just as there are many versions of capitalism, the articulation of tradition in the South Korean context reflects distinctively Korean ways of dealing with crises of capitalism and threats presented by globalization. In the case of contemporary South Korea, tradition is not simply something that needs to be preserved and protected. The deeply felt sense of debt to the past, shared by many South Koreans, is the byproduct of the hyper-urbanization and modernization drive of the past regime. As such, nostalgia for traditional artifacts does not stop at individually preserving and restoring artifacts. Instead, traditions become a project with the objective of reconstructing structures/objects/sites on a massive scale. In the subsequent chapters I analyze how the project of traditions has influenced the generation of urban discourses in Cultural Zones of South Korea. Local governments and the national government have embraced the discourse of rediscovered traditions in order to carry out “the regeneration project,” a movement to industrialize the production of rediscovered traditional forms. Such movements illustrate the historical continuity between the past development projects and the current versions which conjures up the spectre of traditions.

However, there are other kinds of traditions as well. Traditions include subtler patterns of activities that occur spontaneously. They are not necessarily a project of recovery but involve unselfconscious yet recalcitrant practices that unintentionally follow the past patterns of urban history. Although less visible, these unselfconscious traditions nevertheless find their way into the everyday landscape. In an odd way, spatial practices are also the result of dealing with changing everyday forces of life, making them simultaneously modern and traditional. This is particularly true when one considers that there is no such thing as “pure” modernity or “pure” representations of a singular cultural tradition. Understated traditions pick up and build on traces of ancestral uses of public space. Although such practices are rarely acknowledged as forms of tradition by the performers themselves, they share the political aspect of resistances to state regulations of space. Despite the fragile presence of such understated traditions, their presence illustrates that elements of Korean tradition defy categorization since performative aspects of tradition are messy and uneven.

Multicultural Society

As these trends converge, a mighty river of cultural change is at Korea's doorstep. In many ways, Korea has already passed the tipping point on diversification. Korea's demographics demand diversification. Korea will become multicultural. That is unstoppable.⁴⁷

—*The Korea Times*

By 2009, the number increased another 50 percent, reaching 1.5 million, and the number of naturalized people is steadily rising. . . The ratio of interracial marriages is now over 10 percent. As of 2009, foreign residents in Korea were over 1.1 million people. A report estimates that by 2050, one out of every 10 people in Korea will be a foreign resident.

⁴⁶ Stephen Vlastos, “Tradition: Past/Present Culture and Modern Japanese History,” in Stephen Vlastos (ed.), *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁷ Josh Broward, “Korea at the Tipping Point of a Multicultural Society,” *Korea Times*, November 12, 2009.

Korea used to be the “Land of the Morning Calm,” but it is not a land of hermits anymore.⁴⁸

—*The Korea Times*

In the mid-2000s, the South Korean media started to report on the increasing number of international marriages between South Korean men and foreign brides in rural areas. At the same time, an increasing number of foreign migrant workers were mentioned in Korean newspapers as cases of workplace abuse were reported by NGOs and workers. The South Korean government was quick to respond to such demographic and economic changes. In 2005, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism held a public debate regarding “cultural policies toward a multicultural society” during a migrant workers’ festival titled Migrants’ Arirang.⁴⁹ Subsequently, a new committee devoted to supporting multicultural families was set up under the prime minister, and various studies and surveys were conducted in government branches, including the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. Peter Underwood, a descendant of an early missionary in South Korea, observed such increased attention to the issue of ethnic diversity by noting that “the media in Korea is abuzz with the new era of multiculturalism.”⁵⁰

South Korea’s demographic changes are partly a result of government policies taking place since the late 1990s, such as promoting the increasing flexibility of the labor market and relaxing regulations on marriage immigrations. With the start of the industrial trainee system implemented during Kim Young Sam’s administration, an increasing number of unskilled workers from foreign countries were allowed into Korean workplaces.⁵¹ International marriages between Southeast Asian women and Korean men became common in the mid-2000s. Although the increased immigration may have been an inevitable result of economic growth, media and government reports observed various problems arising from the rapid transition, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and social exclusion.⁵² Many cases of domestic abuse by Korean husbands and workplace abuse were reported in the media. For instance, *Chosun Ilbo*’s opinion corner noted that most international marriages hastily arranged through marriage agencies result in “tragic endings” due to the fact that the system creates inequality by making “Korean men pay for all the expenses needed for the marriage and pick a bride from less well-off countries.”⁵³ Many NGOs, including Migrant Laborers’ Human Rights Solidarity, have pointed to the unfairness of the existing industrial trainee system, which severely limits the job mobility of foreign workers.⁵⁴ In other instances, media reports mentioned social exclusion and language

⁴⁸ Jae-ho Eun, “Korea Ready to Embrace a Multicultural Society,” *Korea Times*, May 19, 2010.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism “*Culture Policy for the Multicultural Society*”: *Prelude to Migrants’ Arirang* (Ansan: Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2005).

⁵⁰ Peter Underwood, “Multiculturalism in Korea,” *Korea Joong Ang Daily*, August 26, 2010.

⁵¹ Hyun-Ho Seok, “Globalization of Labor and Corporate Enterprises in South Korea,” In *Korea Confronts Globalization* Chang Yun-Shik, Seok Hyun-Ho, and Donald L. Baker (eds.) (London and New York : Routledge, 2009).

⁵² Soon-yang Kim and Yeong-gyun Shin, “Multicultural Families in Korean Rural Farming Communities: Social Exclusion and Policy Response,” (paper presented at The Fourth Annual East Asian Social Policy Research Network (EASP) International Conference, Tokyo, Japan. October 20-21, 2007.)

⁵³ “Nong-chon Gukje Gyo-hon Patan: Bangchiheson Andeol Sanghwang” [The Destruction of Rural International Marriages: The Situation Cannot be Left as It Is], *Chosun Ilbo*, April 16, 2007, A35.

⁵⁴ In 2003, the Foreign Workers’ Consultation Office in Gyeong-nam Province filed a constitutional appeal against the industrial trainee system.

problems facing the second generation of international couples, also called Korsians, a new term which combines Koreans and Asians.⁵⁵

In response to various social problems, the South Korean government embarked on significant policy initiatives in dealing with demographic changes. In 2004, the controversial industrial trainee system was replaced with an employment permit system, which allowed changes of workplace. In 2006, the South Korean government established the Foreigners' Policy Committee under the prime minister. In the following year, the central government announced the Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea, which included a clause recommending that provincial governments support immigrants and their children by providing Korean language and culture education.⁵⁶ It also stipulated that "the heads of local governments shall establish yearly action plans" to improve the treatment of foreign residents.⁵⁷ In addition, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family announced the Support for Multicultural Families Act to "contribute to the social integration of multicultural families."⁵⁸ The act defined a "multicultural family" as "a family consisting of a marriage immigrant or a family consisting of naturalized person."⁵⁹ Following the policy recommendation, local governments began developing language programs designed to facilitate foreign brides' acculturation and learning the Korean language.

Despite much hyped discussions of "multicultural society," there is no formal definition given to the term. One definition of "multicultural society," given by the Korean Women's Development Institute, is "a society where ethnic and cultural diversity is generally acknowledged as an important issue."⁶⁰ Other scholars, such as Park Se-hoon, argue that South Korean policies are not multicultural in the sense that they do not show "consideration to acknowledge and maintain ethnically independent languages, cultures, or lifestyles."⁶¹ Instead, they insist on using the alternative term "foreigner policy" or "immigrant integration policy."⁶² While the state's promotion of a multicultural society was regarded as a more inclusive policy, scholars expressed concern regarding the South Korean government's use of "multiculturalism" and "multicultural society." The presence of many quasi-NGOs promoting multicultural campaigns has led Han and Han to observe that the current multicultural discourse in South Korea may have been generated as a strategic effort "to survive in a global age rather than [a] sincere critique of the concept of single ethnicity."⁶³ If this is the case, they argue that efforts to build a "multicultural society" can easily be given up once it proves to be a threat to the economy or national competitiveness. Scholars remain skeptical of the effectiveness of multicultural

⁵⁵"Mal An-tong-hanun Om-ma: Yuchiwondo Mot Ganunde..." [Moms Who Cannot Communicate: Cannot Go to Preschool Either...], *Chosun Ilbo*, Special Report Series, May 5, 2008, A3.

⁵⁶Act on the Treatment of Foreigners in Korea, article 12.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, article 6.

⁵⁸Support for the Multicultural Families Act, March 21 2008.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, article 2.

⁶⁰Yi-son Kim, Jong-mi Hwang, and Jinyoung Lee, *Daminjok Da-munhwa Sahoe ro-ui Yihengul Wihan Jongchek Paradigm Guchuk 1: Hanguk Sahoe Suyong Hyonsil gwa Jongchek Gwaje*. [Construction of Policy Paradigm for the Transformation to a Multiethnic and Multicultural Society 1: The Reality of Acceptance in Korea and the Policy Implications] Seoul: Korean Women's Development Institute, 2007, 22-23.

⁶¹Se-hoon Park et al., *Reinventing Urban Policy in Response to Ethnic Diversity II: Localizing Immigrant Integration Policy*, Seoul: Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements, 2010, 9.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 10.

⁶³Gyunggu Han and Gunsoo Han. "Hangook jok Damoonhwa Jooui ui Yisang gwa Hyunshil" [The ideal and reality of Korean Multiculturalism], in Korean Sociology Association (ed.), *Hangook jok Damoonhwa Jooui: Chojong Bogoseoh* [Korean Multiculturalism: Final Report] (Seoul: Northeast Asian Committee, 2007), 106.

campaigns when the current situation of a divided Korea calls for continuous utilization of the concept of single Korean ethnicity.⁶⁴

Thus, whereas multiculturalism is a very broad concept and is the subject of various academic debates, this dissertation focuses on a specific national appropriation of the term in the context of contemporary South Korea. The term “multiculturalism” has become an ubiquitous political catchphrase to describe the heightened economic and demographic changes occurring in South Korean society in the new millennium. In terms of the built environment, changes have included the designation of global cultural zones, foreign villages, and the increasing use of English signs. Migrant workers have started forming their own communities near their workplace, and some have been named as “multicultural streets.” This dissertation examines how the project of segyehwa and changing labor policies have contributed to the emergence of multiethnic neighborhoods. At the same time, it analyzes the presence (or lack thereof) of considerations of sustaining such cultural diversity in urban environments.

Research Sites and Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is broadly organized by two themes. The first part examines how the process of segyehwa has contributed to refashioning “Korean traditions” by analyzing the preservation discourse regarding Korean folk houses and pre-industrial street layouts. Renewed interest in Korean customs and “lost heritages” is part of the reformist tendency in the segyehwa drive. The soft city discourse emphasizes the need to restore the “historical quality” of Seoul that is believed to have deteriorated during the industrialization and urbanization process since the Korean War. This part of the dissertation analyzes how the rise of the minjung movement, a movement to study Korean folk cultures, occurring in conjunction with the democratic movement in the 1980s, influenced the preservation of historical sites. Whereas the initial minjung movement was initiated to give voices to the under-privileged and under-represented, its success has contributed to the romanticized and class-based notion of a “timeless” Korean tradition. At the same time, the government-led project of promoting vernacular house forms has become a force for gentrifying historical neighborhoods.

In chapter 1, I focus on the architectural discussions surrounding the remodeling of urban *hanoks* (Korean-style houses) in Bukchon, a historic neighborhood in Northern Seoul. In Bukchon, the government’s attempt to reconstruct national heritages has been channeled into remodeling old and deteriorating hanoks. Although the project has contributed to the generation of renewed interest in hanoks, it has also generated gentrification and increasing commercial encroachment. The state’s effort to construct Bukchon as the repository of Korean cultures would not have been successful without the consent and aid of the local residents. I examine how the shifting relationship between grass-roots community organizations and the local government has shaped the course of neighborhood development. Chapter 2 analyzes the urban changes in Insadong, a commercial district famous for intricate street patterns and sales of traditional paintings, artifacts, and “authentic Korean food.” The government’s promotion of the district as involving “historic and cultural streets” involved various street beautification measures such as

⁶⁴ Hyun-mi Kim, “Gongjonghan Tonghap?”: *Gyolhon Yiju Yohsong gwa Hanguksik Damunhwa Ju-ui, The Fair Integration?*: *The Marriage Immigrant Women and Korean Multiculturalism* (Seoul: Korea Institute for Future Strategies, 2008).

stone pavements and implementation of a Car Free Zone. Although the changing ambience brought by redevelopments generated a “narrative of loss” among professionals and historians, the effort of NGOs to save smaller shops and the use of streets by human rights activists suggest the emergence of a new kind of civic space. By tracing the continuity between the current use of public space and the March 1st independence movement in the colonial era, I conclude that invisible traditions live on despite the tendencies to channel the concept of tradition into a new development strategy.

In the second part, this study moves on to examine the theme of migration and generation of new minority neighborhoods amidst the segyehwa policies and the state-led efforts to build a “multicultural society.” The changing labor and immigration policies since the early 1990s have ushered in a flow of migrant workers and foreign brides, changing the ethnic makeup of South Korea significantly. I analyze the historical backgrounds of existing multiethnic communities and how urban policies in the past decades unwittingly contributed to the formation of such communities. By examining how expressions of new subjectivities were molded in urban environments, this part illustrates that economic policies during the segyehwa drive have brought unanticipated yet positive side effects such as the formation of Little Russia and the Muslim community. I question the applicability of design-oriented space to producing “multicultural streets” and the “world design capital.” The presence of multiethnic neighborhoods is threatened by the city government’s urban redevelopment plans when current policies regarding a “multicultural society” do not include consideration for economic justice and housing provision.

Chapter 4 follows the urban history of Dongdaemun Market from a center of the textile and fashion industries to the formation of an immigrant community as the result of changing economic structures and labor policies. The demolition of a sports stadium and the construction of a large-scale park in Dongdaemun Market were efforts to elevate the status of Seoul by rebranding it as the “world design capital.” At the same time, this modernization was possible only through the negation of colonial history and selective appropriation of anti-colonial sentiments. However, the continuation of the world design capital project is operable only through hidden socioeconomic costs including poor working conditions and job instability of migrant workers. In chapter 5, urban developments in Itaewon, considered the most exotic place in Seoul, are analyzed in order to trace the impact of changing demographics as well as diversifying consumption patterns on built environments. Although the area was initially developed due to the presence of the US military, it later became the center of religious and sexual minority communities. Chapter 5 examines urban planning schemes to construct “multicultural streets” in Itaewon, and the process by which a cosmopolitan consumption pattern has replaced the base-town economy of the Cold War era. Although the initial growth of the district had a lot to do with the presence of the US military base, recent commercial development of the area has been the result of the increasing transnational movement of labor. A careful examination of Itaewon’s history suggests that the current cultural diversity in the area was the unanticipated byproduct rather than the direct result of urban policies. On the other hand, the current plan to redevelop the larger Yongsan area, as well as the plan to build theme streets, endangers the incipient yet vibrant local multiethnic neighborhood.

Although the government-led urban projects in the Global Zones are in large part a continuation of the growth-centered developmental framework, they have been challenged on different levels, both rhetorically and physically. While the redevelopment plan near Insadong has brought the increasing presence of large businesses and the rising cost of land, NGO-led activities to build walkable streets have stalled construction of mega-structures in the main street.

The city government's effort to promote Dongdaemun Market through the construction of landmark architecture has brought a backlash from NGOs and artists who challenge the definition of "global" by producing their own version of urban aesthetics. Since real lived experiences and urban experiments continually shape the making of Korean global spaces, the status of Seoul remains far from being defined. As scholarly works about "hyperbuilding" practices in other Asian cities suggest, monumental buildings have not produced the desired identification of the cities as a container of a transparent society in which local residents confer different meanings on the same built form.⁶⁵ The effort to shift Seoul from a "hard city" to a "soft city" through the redesign of urban environments thus has important implications for the political role of urban planning and architecture in other fast-growing Asian metropolises. While neoliberal economic forces and state-led ambitions seek to supersize cities, grass-roots movements and local activism continue to challenge such unsustainable urban visions.

⁶⁵ Aihwa Ong. "Hyperbuilding: Spectacle, Speculation, and the Hyperspace of Sovereignty," in Ananya Roy and Ong Aihwa (eds.), *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

Re-discovered Traditions: Remodeled Hanoks in Bukchon

“This looks marvelous. Very snug, but isn’t it still a bit uncomfortable to live in?” This is the typical response of people who visit a *hanok*. For us, a *hanok* is largely recognized as an uncomfortable and inefficient form of residence despite its stylistic elegance. However, newly remodeled *hanoks* have changed significantly from conventional *hanoks*. . . . Renovations, which revive the traditional appearance of a *hanok* while sparing the advantage of modern living, are taking place in areas such as Bukchon.

—*Herald Media*, November 16, 2007

Life in Seoul, characterized by traffic jams, uninterrupted routines, and getting off work and emerging into a gray forest of apartments, contains room for enjoyment of leisure just like life in the countryside. The convenience of urban life and the relaxing composure that suburban life offers can be enjoyed in urban *hanoks*.

—*Munhwa Daily Newspaper*, July 3, 2003

Beginning in the early 2000s, there was a surge of interest in remodeling *hanoks*, Korean-style houses, in various urban landscapes, including residential and commercial structures. Often described by the popular media as the “*hanok renaissance*,” the increasing popularity of remodeled *hanoks* in the early 2000s included commercial adoption of the vernacular form in restaurants, cafés, and hotels, as well as unlikely applications, such as offices and dental clinics.¹ Remodeled *hanoks* generated favorable responses from the popular media, who described the phenomenon as a novel approach of reviving *hanoks* while not neglecting the practical aspects of domestic life. The combination of a modern facility and traditional aesthetics, one of the crucial characteristics of the remodeled *hanok*, is celebrated as a sign of the diversification of lifestyles. The portrayal of residences in remodeled *hanoks*, as reflected in popular magazines and newspapers, hinges upon the idea of a dialectic between two opposing forces, such as the material vs. the immaterial, technology vs. spirituality, and fast-paced urban life vs. leisurely slowness.

The increasing popularity of the *hanok* is perhaps best reflected in government efforts to reconstruct and remodel the vernacular houses in Bukchon (North Village) (Fig 2.1) of Seoul. Bukchon, located in the historical center of Seoul, refers to an area between the Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung palace complexes. Its name comes from its location being north of the Cheonggye River, which divides the historic part of Seoul into two parts. The relative concentration of vernacular dwellings in the area has prompted the city government to remark that “the area can be called a ‘street museum in the urban core’ with many historical spots, cultural heritages, and folk materials.”² Efforts to remodel deteriorating *hanok* dwellings in the area in order to restore the historical character of Seoul were materialized in the *Bukchon Hanok Regeneration Project* in 2000, which received the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award in 2009.

¹ For instance, *JoongAng Ilbo*, one of the three leading newspapers in South Korea ran an article titled “Hanok Runaangsang Yolrynda” [“Hanok renaissance is beginning”] on March 17, 2007.

² From the official homepage of North Village, <http://bukchon.seoul.go.kr/eng/index.jsp>.

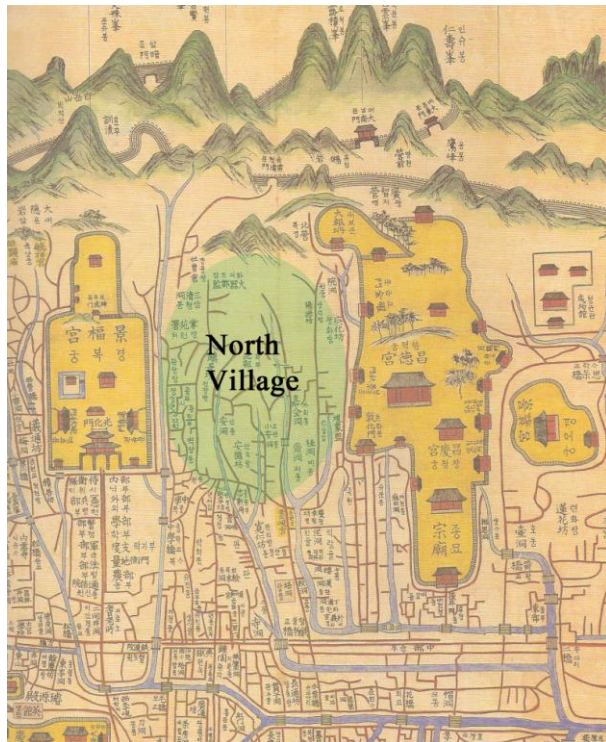


Figure 2.1 The old map of Seoul showing Bukchon Living in Bukchon meant having more political opportunities as well as geographical advantages. Color and text added by the author.

Analyzing the process of the Bukchon Regeneration Project is crucial for understanding the larger processes of rediscovering the “traditions” in the South Korean context of globalization. The process of remodeling hanoks in Bukchon illustrates that the status of the hanok is closely linked to the effort to transform Seoul from an industrial to a postindustrial city. In the “cultural city” discourse, it is often emphasized that the cultural and historical aspects of the capital city in past decades were neglected due to the heavy emphasis on economic efficiency. In other words, Seoul has needed its own repository of artifacts and historical landmarks in order to become a truly global city. The Bukchon Regeneration Project is a part of the larger urban rubric of creating several Cultural Districts to transform Seoul into a global city by marketing the hanok village as a source of local and global tourism. While changes in hanok preservation policy reflect the changing attitude of the government with regard to residents in Seoul, they also stem from the need to make Seoul “the soul of Asia,” where a visitor can simultaneously enjoy modern conveniences and indulge in the exploration of historical artifacts.

On another level, the increasing construction of remodeled hanoks challenges the unspoken assumptions about vernacular houses in developing countries in general. Vernacular houses are often viewed as the opposite of high-brow architecture and defined as structures built for the common people. They are imagined as the dwellings for the indigenous or the poor, who cannot afford to live in contemporary houses. While such a premise holds true in many cases, the case study of Bukchon illustrates that vernacular houses can be incorporated into a high-brow consumptive pattern through the process of reinvention. In the case of the hanoks in South Korea, the rapid process of modernization has resulted in the flattening of different types of hanoks into one representational type based on the *yangban* (Confucius literati) residence with wooden post-

and-beam constructions. In this chapter, I argue that remodeled hanoks have become an example of the blurring line between the vernacular and the high architecture, although hanoks are hailed as the epitome of Korean “tradition.” Remodeled hanoks represent a significant level of both symbolic and tangible capital. They are symbolic due to their association with an upper-class lifestyle. They are also tangible since the presence of hanoks brings in more profits by increasing real estate prices and the number of tourists who visit the area.

Besides showing a Eurocentric conception of time, the so-called “hanok renaissance” reveals complex patterns of development impulses and moral values intertwined together to produce a powerful driving force behind urban renewal. The association of remodeled hanoks with a rediscovery of virtues, and the large amount of symbolic capital attached to hanoks, has important ramifications for the politics of aesthetics. Partly generated by criticism of state-led modernization, the increasing popularity of hanoks shows that the vernacular has become closely associated with cultural modernity, as well as with the greatness of Korean civilization. As the feeling of deprivation resulting from colonial experiences had the effect of conferring a sacred status on “Korean tradition,” most attempts to revive or allude to traditional forms have garnered public support.³ Ironically, such historical experiences allow gentrifying forces to take diverse forms without appearing to threaten local communities. While the state-led project to remodel hanoks may help to relieve doubts about an unstable Korean identity in the era of *seggyehwa*, it also poses a danger of erasing important issues regarding class, colonial history, and cultural representations. The government’s rhetoric of protecting the “historic character” of Seoul sometimes becomes a pretext for subsidizing the rich by providing tax breaks for the maintenance costs of hanoks. This chapter demonstrates that the subordination of preservation under the state’s goal of promoting global and local tourism not only resulted in an increasing rate of gentrification but also in highlighting a cleavage within neighborhood organizations established for the cause of protecting and supporting urban hanoks.

The Hanok Boom as a Rediscovery of Korean Cultural Traditions

The current remodeling boom of urban hanoks in South Korea illustrates the process in which hanoks and Korean identity become essentialized. Hanoks are reinvented as the cultural representation of the collective Korean past without a trace of cultural hybridization and class conflict. Although the concept of the hanok implies the timeless presence of the building type, stretching more than a millennium, the term itself is new. The term *hanok* was included in Korean dictionaries in the middle of the 1970s in order to distinguish between Western-style houses and conventional ones.⁴ Although the built forms associated with hanoks were not the products of “invented traditions” in the sense that they did not derive from fictitious rituals, the process of positioning hanoks as the antithesis of modernization indicates that they were reinvented as a new category of housing. Thus, notwithstanding the diverse prototypes and construction styles of the hanok, it is easier to grasp the notion of the hanok when it is imagined as the opposite of contemporary dwellings.

³ Laurel Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011)

⁴ Keun-young Kim, “Hyondae Doshi esoh Hanok ui Ui-mi: *Seoul Bukchon ui Saryeh Yongu*” [“The Meaning of the Traditional House Hanok in Urban Korea: A Case Study of Bukchon in Seoul”], (Master’s thesis, Seoul National University, 2003)

One of the factors behind the recent hanok renaissance is the mounting criticism of the monotonous urban landscape of Seoul, or “apartment forests,” consisting of endless rows of rectangular concrete boxes. The proliferation of apartments as the popular residential choice goes back to the modernization drive of the early Korean republic. Beginning in the 1960s, individual detached houses, including hanoks, began to be associated with inefficient land use and an underdeveloped lifestyle, whereas apartment residences were deliberately promoted by the state as part of a larger modernization project. One of the reasons for the government’s promotion of apartment houses was the urgent need to provide housing to accommodate a rapidly urbanizing population, including migrants from rural areas.⁵ The city government battled against the rising number of squatter settlements in Seoul. Already in the 1960s, Hochul Lee’s popular novel *Seoul un Manwon Ida* (*Seoul is Full*), described the explosive population growth of Seoul as well as various social maladies arising from rapid urbanization and lack of economic opportunities.⁶ Hyun-Ock Kim, the mayor of Seoul, nicknamed “bulldozer” due to the many demolitions carried out during his term, made plans to forcibly relocate the squatters to large apartment complexes.⁷ However, the initial reactions to the government-led constructions were skeptical due to poor construction quality and the collapse of the Wa-woo Apartment in 1970.⁸ In the end, the mayor’s plan to relocate squatters to the new apartment complex in Gwanju was cancelled due to opposition to and criticism of the forcible removal of squatters to hastily-built housing. Not surprisingly, the public perception of apartment houses was that of “modest-sized dwellings designed for the low-income bracket residents.”⁹ Even the Mapo Apartments, constructed in 1964 and mainly targeting middle-class residents, suffered an initial lack of prospective residents due to skepticism regarding safety, which included the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning.¹⁰

However, such low status associated with apartment residences began to change as the South Korean state changed its strategy and started to market apartment houses to middle-class consumers rather than utilize them as relocation sites for squatters.¹¹ While most South Koreans were initially skeptical about living in apartments, the improvement of infrastructures, which included upgraded central heating systems, elevators, and flush toilets, began to attract the middle and upper-middle classes.¹² The new apartments marketed for these groups were often named “demonstration apartments” by the state, using them as a showcase of modern living (fig.

⁵ Sang-in Jon, *Apatũ e Michida: Hyõnde Hanguk ūi Jugõ Sahoehak* [Crazy for Apartments: The Sociology of Contemporary Residences] (Seoul: Esoope, 2009)

⁶ In the novel, Kil-nyõh moves from a rural village to Seoul only to end up as a prostitute. Sang-hyun, a male character from the same village, comes to Seoul to find her. They return to the village together after realizing that there are no places for them in Seoul. See Hochul Lee, *Seoul un Manwon Ida* [Seoul Is Full], (Seoul: Moonwoo Publishing Company, 1966)

⁷ Jõng-mok Son, *Hanguk Doshi Yuksip Nyõn ūi Yiyagi, II* [A Story of Sixty Years of a Korean City, II], (Seoul: Hanwul, 2005)

⁸ The collapse of Wawoo Apartment, constructed by the unlicensed construction company, was due to the sparse use of construction materials. During the trial, it was revealed that the company offered a bribe to government officials to get the construction job. This practice drove the construction cost higher, which in turn led the company to spend less money on the construction materials.

⁹ Valerie Gelezeau, *Apatũ Gonghwaguk* [The Apartment Republic], (Seoul: Humanitas Books, 2007), 34.

¹⁰ Junman Kang, *Gang-nam, Natsõn Dehanminguk ūi Jahwasang* [Gang-nam, a Self-portrait of the Unfamiliar Korea], (Seoul: Inmul gwa Sasang, 2006), 22.

¹¹ Chõlsu Park, *Apatũ ūi Munhwasa* [A Cultural History of Apartment Houses], (Seoul: Salrym, 2006).

¹² Gelezeau writes that the central heating system using an oil boiler was revolutionary for the majority of Koreans, who at the time used charcoal briquettes, which sometimes caused fatalities due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

2.2). In addition, the South Korean state aggressively promoted the apartment lifestyle as desirable by portraying it in advertisement, movies, and other popular media. In *Ju-teck (Housing)*, a magazine owned by the Korea Housing Corporation, interviews with residents of new apartment houses were published in 1968. Most interviewed praised the lifestyle of the apartments as “revolutionary” and “convenient.”¹³



Figure 2.2 This 1970 advertisement of “demonstration” apartment houses in Yö-üido, of Seoul, was advertised by the mayor of Seoul. In a smaller font, the advertisement reads “new village with good atmosphere, apartments with dignity.”

Not only did residence in apartments become associated with higher socioeconomic status, but the rising prices of apartment units also meant that it was more profitable to purchase an apartment, if one could afford it. Government policies included not only the preferential provision of urban services to apartment complexes but also various tax breaks.¹⁴ As finding new sites for large apartment complexes became more difficult in the historic part of Seoul, the state encouraged the development of Gang-nam, the area south of the Han River. Coupled with the policy recommendations and increasingly favorable public perception of apartment houses, the newly constructed apartment houses in Gang-nam became hot commodities. In the late 1970s, explosive demands for new apartment houses drove the acceptance rate to as low as one out of fifty-five purchase applications in some apartment complexes.¹⁵ In Mok-hwa Apartments, the market price of an apartment unit became twice as much as the original price within a year of initial sale.¹⁶ As Gelezeau put it succinctly, apartment complexes became “factories manufacturing middle class citizens” by almost ensuring that buyers would make profits when they resold the apartment units.¹⁷

On the other hand, there was a general lack of effort to improve the quality of life in the hanoks. In the context of the rapid urbanization and modernization drive, living in a hanok became less attractive, as the deteriorating conditions of the urban hanoks were considered a

¹³ Junman Kang, *Gang-nam, Natsön Dehanminguk üi Jahwasang*, 2006, 38.

¹⁴ Myöng-reh Cho. “Shinsangryuchöng üi Bangju rosöb üi Gangnam” [Gangnam as an Ark of the New Power Elite] *Hwanghae Munhwa* 42 (2004): 25-40, 28.

¹⁵ Kang, *Gang-nam, Natsön Dehanminguk üi Jahwasang*, 65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gelezeau, *Apatü Gonghwaguk*, 143.

symbol of poverty and unprogressiveness. Such a notion was furthered when President Park, the military dictator in the 1960s and '70s, issued a presidential decree to replace thatched roofs with tiled roofs, which were considered more advanced. Not only were outhouse toilets and conventional kitchens denounced as troublesome, but the buildings were also regarded as a threat since architectural features such as raised door thresholds were believed to contribute to bad posture. The association of hanoks with underdevelopment went hand in hand with the promotion of high-rise apartment housing as the only solution for the increasing density of Seoul. Although older architectural forms and craftsmanship were revered even during the time of industrialization, the end product was considered unsuitable for contemporary urban lifestyles. The horizontal organization of spaces and courtyards were regarded as wasteful in the rapidly urbanizing city of Seoul. In addition, the rising values of apartment housing induced the relocation of many Seoul residents to high-rise apartments.

However, the significance attached to modern living in apartment houses began to be challenged in the late 1980s. Invigorated by the successful democratic movements, urban theorists and intellectuals began to claim that the urban landscape of Seoul had become barren and uninteresting due to the disregard for cultural and historical artifacts. One of the characteristics of the South Korean democratic movement since the 1970s was the emphasis on the notion of *minjung*, the common people, and simultaneous efforts to excavate forms of Korean folk culture. According to Chong, *minjung* is different from the mass since “mass” refers to people with “no common custom or traditions” while *minjung* implies the presence of “shared customs and social norms.”¹⁸ In the sense that the *minjung* movement emphasized the rights of the oppressed, including the economically marginalized, it reflected larger global critiques of modernization and capitalism in general. Many scholars have acknowledged the influence of Marxist analyses and “utopian socialism” on the *minjung* movement.¹⁹ On the other hand, the cultural specificity of the Korean movement lay in the South Korean intellectuals’ perception of what Lee called the “crisis of historical subjectivity.”²⁰ The shared feeling that South Koreans had been deprived of the opportunity to choose their own course of history due to the strong presence of foreign powers began to manifest itself in intense interest in various folk customs such as masked dances. Although the *minjung* movement stood in sharp contrast to the authoritarian state’s emphasis on *minjok*, they shared a similarity in the sense that both promoted the idea of common ancestry and cultural traditions.

Criticism of apartment houses should be understood in the context of the *minjung* movement, which sought to represent the interests of the oppressed. Korean architects and architectural historians argued that academic discussions regarding modernization were discouraged while “only productivity and efficiency were considered modern virtues.”²¹ Yim Sokchae argued that while the origin of modern architecture in the West goes back to philosophical and multidisciplinary debates regarding the human condition, Korean perceptions

¹⁸ Chi-chang Chong, *Minjung Munhwaron* [The Cultural Theory of Minjung], (Kyöngbuk Kyongsan-si: Yongnam Taehakkyo Chulpanbu, 1993), 13-14.

¹⁹ Kenneth M. Wells, *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 7.

²⁰ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

²¹ Sokchae Yim. “Söyang Gündae Gönchuk üi Suyong kwa Han’guk Hyündae Gönchuk üi Munje” [The Acceptance of Modern Western Architecture and the Problem of Modern Korean Architecture], *Gönchuk Yöksa Yöngu*. 4(2), (1995): 135-139, 136.

of modern architecture were confined to technological advances associated with International Style glass boxes.²² In a similar vein, Kim criticized the “violent production method” of modern Korean architecture that exhibited characteristics of high-energy consumption, large-scale developments, and high concentration.²³ In this sense, the influence of “postmodern” architecture in the Korean context was evaluated by scholars as stopping short at “indulgence in morphologic amusements.”²⁴ However, the Western debates about modernism/postmodernism had a bigger influence since they functioned as the opportunity to “dispel [Koreans’] general tendency to perceive modernist architecture as the only representation of Western architectural thoughts.”²⁵

In the context of a shared feeling of political oppression and historical subjectivity, criticism of apartment housing was focused on its methods of production and consumption rather than its aesthetics. Beginning in the 1980s, the portrayal of apartment housing in popular literature discussed social alienation and distorted relationships among neighbors.²⁶ However, even sharper attacks were made on the economic aspect of apartment housing, representing a deeper socioeconomic critique of unrestrained capitalism. Rising prices of high-rise apartment housing units, reflecting the commercial success of this residential type, encouraged a high level of real estate speculation. The very commercial success of high rises also generated social controversy, as the continual increase in apartment housing prices rendered the purchase of homes in Seoul extremely difficult for the majority of the population. While the ownership of multiple apartment units in Seoul, especially in the Gang-nam area, is a source of envy for many South Koreans, it has also become associated with the ills of modernism and capitalism.

The renewed interest, or the so called “rediscovery,” of the hanoks should be understood in the larger context of a general surge of interest in pre-industrial artifacts and things considered as part of the “Korean heritage.” As part of the critique of reckless developmentalism in the past, the insufficient maintenance of cultural artifacts and heritage sites became the source of constant attack. Perhaps the most notable literature on this within the academic community was a book series titled *Na ūi Munhwa Yousan Dapsagi (My Survey of Cultural Heritage) I, II, III* (1993, 1994, 1997) by Yu Hongjun, which sold more than two million copies. Yu was trained as an art historian—after studying aesthetics at Seoul National University, he went to Hong-ik University to do graduate work in art history. His interest in Korean ethnic arts was expressed when he joined the Minjok Misul Hyōp ūi Hoe (Council of Korean Ethnic Arts), an organization heavily influenced by the minjung movement. Yu’s argument was that cultural judgment based solely on the scale of artifacts is inappropriate and that South Korea contains many subtler yet important cultural artifacts. The surge in public interest in cultural artifacts and the national heritage was followed by the establishment of various historic societies and organizations aiming to preserve

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Hong-sik Kim, “Pokryōkjōk Sengsanbangsik Bōtgo Nūri-go Dayanghage: Hyūndae Han’guk Gōnchuk ūi Banghyang gwa Gwaje” [Getting Rid of Violent Production Methods and Going Slowly with Diversity: The Direction and Task of Contemporary Korean Architecture], *Munhwa Yesil* 302, (2004): 89-92, 89.

²⁴ In-su Song, “Hugi Gūndae Gunchuk ūi Suyong kwa Kū Koeri” [The Acceptance of Late Modern Architecture and the Gap (with the Concept of Architectural Amnesia)], *Gōnchuk Yōksa Yōngu*. 4(2), (1995): 140-145, 145.

²⁵ Dong-Hon Lee, *Hanguk Hyondae Gunchuk ui Ttalgundaejok Japum Gyonghyang eh Gwanhan Yongu* [A Study of “Post-modern” Trends in Contemporary Korean Architectural Works], (master’s thesis, Sungkyunkwan University, 1988.)

²⁶ In a novel titled *Mold Flowers*, apartment residents were described as finding out information about their neighbors by rummaging through garbage instead of by engaging in normal social interactions. Song-ran Ha, “Gompang-yi Ggot [Mold Flowers]” 1999 30-hoe *Dong-in Munhaksang Susang Japumjip* (Seoul: Chosun Ilbo-sa, 1999)

and protect historical artifacts and rituals. The popularity of remodeled *hanboks* (Korean-style clothes) as well as increased local tourism including temple stay programs, reflected the desire to recover and validate South Korean identities in the context of an increasingly competitive modern life. One resident in a remodeled hanok echoed such sentiment when he explained that he decided to move to a hanok after looking at the sketch of his child depicting his home as a cold concrete box.²⁷ It is feared that while members of the older generation, with the memory of hanoks, can manage to retain their Korean identity, the younger generations with no such prior experience would lose the sense of who they are if they continued to live in high-rise apartments.

Interestingly enough, the start of the tradition boom in South Korea was simultaneous with the globalization drive of the Youngsam Kim administration in the early 1990s. The most frequently recited phrase at the time was “What is the most Korean is the most global.” It is important to note that the reevaluation of national culture and history went hand in hand with that of other nations. Yu’s argument appealed to South Koreans, who started traveling abroad in increasing numbers after the liberalization of international travel in 1989 and who would come back with a defeated feeling after visiting foreign heritage sites such as the Forbidden City and the Palace of Versailles. The affirmation and maintenance of cultural artifacts became the sign of becoming a developed country. Thus, the “tradition boom” in the 1990s and the subsequent “hanok renaissance” simultaneously reflected the desire to recover “lost histories” as well as the desire to be associated with higher cultural accomplishments and higher rank in the international community.

In particular, remodeled hanoks appealed most strongly to middle-aged South Koreans—those exposed to the minjung movement, tired of living in apartment houses, and who had limited childhood memories of living in a hanok. According to news articles, most people who prefer living in a hanok are Koreans in their forties who seek to reenact childhood experiences.²⁸ Older residents fully aware of the inconvenient aspects associated with residence in hanoks were less enamored with the idea of living in one. Sunjoo Kim, a columnist for the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, noted that she decided to move to a hanok, although her husband, “who had been living in a hanok until he got married,” was opposed to the idea.²⁹ An architect working on remodeling hanoks has observed, “Some old-timers who have memories of all the inconveniences (associated with hanoks) still have trouble ‘forgiving’ the hanoks.”³⁰ For the younger generation in an urban area who grew up in apartments, hanoks feel exotic, just like those houses that appear in television history drama series.

The rising popularity of hanoks and the romanticization of a pre-industrial lifestyle among middle-aged Koreans are reflected in a series of publications regarding hanoks. For instance, in a book titled *I’ll Trade My Apartment for a Hanok* (2008), the authors argued that apartments are a thing of the past industrial era while hanoks are the new solution for contemporary life. Other books, such as *Going Back to Earth House: A Study of 52 Earth Houses* (2009), *True Life: Hanok* (2006), and *Yuri’s Home: A Story of Housekeeping in a Small Yet Sufficient Hanok* (2009), all refer to life in the hanoks as a way to appreciate the true meaning of life by being in close

²⁷ Hyangsun Cho, “The Most Beautiful House in the World,” in *Hanok e Saroriratta* [Let’s Live in Hanoks], Sanghae Lee et al. (Seoul: Dolbaegae, 2007), 18.

²⁸ Beck-hyun Jung. “Apatū Nūn Gara, Hanok eh Sarōrirata” [Get Rid of Apartments, I Want to Live in a Hanok], *Economics Review*, August 10, 2010.

²⁹ Sunjoo Kim. “[Kim Sunjoo Column] Hanok eh Yisa Waboni...” “[Kim Sunjoo’s Column] After Moving to Hanok...” *Hankyoreh Newspaper*, December 14, 2009.

³⁰ Dujin Hwang, *Hanok i Dora Watta* [Hanoks Have Returned], (Seoul: Gongansa, 2006), 50.

contact with nature. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, the rediscovery of hanoks was followed by repercussions including generalizations that had the effect of flattening various housing types as well as eradicating socioeconomic conflicts.

Imagining Korean Life in a Hanok: the Blurring Line between Vernacular and Modern

In South Korea, academic discussions of vernacular houses centered on the term *minga*, equivalent to the English term “folk houses” rather than the ambiguous and elusive term *hanok*.³¹ Although there is no conclusive definition of *minga*, most Korean scholars argue that *minga* are ordinary people’s houses that retain traditional qualities. For instance, Chang argued that *minga* are “houses of the low-income people with traditional characteristics rather than houses exhibiting contemporary and universal characteristics.”³² Young-hwan Kang made the connection between *minga* and the *minjung* movement more explicit, by noting that *minga* belongs to “*minjung*” or “the subjugated class.”³³ Mentioning Amos Rapoport’s concept of pre-industrial vernacular, Kang argued that there is no fundamental difference between Korean *minga* and vernacular houses despite some differences in their focuses.³⁴ Cho, on the other hand, acknowledged the difficulty involving academic categorizations of housing types. However, he reaffirmed the boundary of *minga* by noting that “upper class residences tend to exhibit standard elements due to the same social norms, while *minga* exhibit stronger regional characteristics.”³⁵

The notion that vernacular houses are “traditional architecture” was prevalent among Korean scholars until in very recent academic discussions the question started to be asked whether apartment houses should belong to the category of the “new Korean vernacular.” For instance, Valerie Gelezeau has argued that while South Korean lifestyles have changed during the modernization drive, apartment houses have also gone through changes to suit uniquely Korean sociocultural norms.³⁶ In the South Korean context where a heightened modernization drive has resulted in the rapid spread of modernist architecture, housing does not always follow Bernard Rudofsky’s descriptions of typical vernacular houses, which are “anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, [and] rural.”³⁷ Nor is Paul Oliver’s observation—that buildings designed by professional architects do not “come within the compass of the vernacular”—adequate to describe South Korean apartment houses.³⁸ Most Korean apartment houses are designed by professional architects hired by large construction companies, although they are not necessarily as bent upon making strong visual statements as star architects. In fact, the rapid

³¹ Po-ung Chang, *Han’guk Minga ūi Chiyōkjōk Chōn’gae* [A Regional Study of Folk Houses in Korea], (Seoul T’ūkpyōlsi : Pojinjae, 1996), 44.

³² *Ibid.*, 22.

³³ Young-hwan Kang, “Han’guk ūi Minga wa Hŭk ūi ūimi” [Korean Traditional Houses and the Meaning of Earth], *Gonchuk* 166 (1992): 56-61, 56.

³⁴ Young-hwan Kang, “Han’guk Jōntongminga Yōngu ūi Donghyang gwa Gwaje” [The Direction and Task of the Korean Traditional Minga Study], *Gonchuk* 147, (1989): 31-35, 31.

³⁵ Song-gi Cho, *Han’guk ūi min’ga* [The Folk Houses of Korea], (P’aju-si: Hanul Ak’ademi, 2006.)

³⁶ Gelezeau, *Apatu Gongkwaguk*.

³⁷ Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 1.

³⁸ Paul Oliver, *Dwellings*, (London: Phaidon Press, 2003.)

urbanization process of South Korea has made it extremely difficult to find examples of vernacular houses, if one takes the definition of Rudofsky or Oliver.

On the other hand, many South Koreans do not live in apartment houses for various reasons despite the rapid increase in apartment residences. At the same time, more “traditional” style houses built by local residents continue to exist, albeit in small numbers. Therefore, the renewed interest in hanoks should be regarded partly as an effort to diversify the scope of “Korean vernacular houses” in the context of rising criticism of modernist architecture. Notwithstanding the close association between the vernacular and a lack of sophistication, the cases of the remodeled hanoks in South Korea illustrate that vernacular houses can become a form of symbolic capital and a sign of aesthetic superiority. Living in a remodeled hanok is far from having an anonymous, spontaneous, or rural lifestyle. Rather, one can enjoy all the urban amenities while at the same time visibly marking one’s socioeconomic position with very clearly stated aesthetics. At the same time, aesthetic ideas are often given more importance than the devices or mechanical aspect of remodeled hanoks. The consumption of the house form becomes not the act of “noble savages” but the symbol of being “nobler Koreans.” In other words, urban hanoks have become an example of the blurring line between the vernacular and modern architecture, or what Bernd Huppauf and Maiken Umbach called “vernacular modernism.”³⁹ The high level of cultural sophistication associated with living in remodeled hanoks in contemporary South Korea shows that appreciation of the vernacular practices and being culturally modern are interdependent of each other.

Although many middle-aged South Koreans fantasize about living in hanoks, not many can realize their dreams. The construction cost of a hanok is twice as much as that of a detached single-family house with steel frames. Not only is the construction of a hanok expensive, but finding the carpenter and artisans who possess the skill to build the hanok is challenging because of the shortage of such specialized labor. Finding the right material, such as the lumber and *hanji* (Korean rice paper used for paper screen walls), is also a very difficult task. In *Arumjigi’s Story of Building a Hanok*, Minja Kim, an owner of a remodeled hanok and a member of the Hanok Advisory Committee for Seoul Metropolitan City, describes her involvement in the complicated three-year-long design process as difficult, yet “offering a chance to learn many aspects of life, such as the value of patience.”⁴⁰ Moreover, becoming a resident of a remodeled hanok requires a tremendous expenditure of both time and money, which average South Koreans cannot afford. As more upper-class South Korean people began living in remodeled hanoks, hanoks soon became a status symbol and evidence of cultural sophistication.

For instance, recent media interviews with dwellers of remodeled hanoks portrayed living in a hanok not as underdeveloped but as heroic and elegant. In an interview with a resident in the Gahoe-dong section of Bukchon who recently moved into a remodeled hanok, the reporter noted that “while it was necessary to get rid of the enormous furniture, which she used to have in an apartment, it did not particularly feel uncomfortable. Rather, she remarked that it felt refreshing and light to have simplified housekeeping.”⁴¹ Although a positive portrayal of the lifestyle in hanoks has come mostly from the popular press, there has been a tendency to romanticize hanoks

³⁹ Bernd Huppauf and Maiken Umbach (eds.), *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.)

⁴⁰ Minja Jung, *Arumjigi’s Story of Building Hanok*, (Seoul: Joong Ang M&B, 2003), 122.

⁴¹ “Gahoedong Adamhan 29 Pyeong Hanok” accessed August 12, 2010.
http://article.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?total_id=2729391.

and their aesthetics in academic literature as well. Influenced by the “heritage” discussions that began with Yu’s work, many architectural historians started writing about the rediscovered beauties of hanoks and how they might become relevant in contemporary contexts. For instance, Kim Bongryul, a professor of architecture at the Korean National University of Arts, has published three books under the series name “Rediscovery of Korean Architecture” that became very influential among both architects and general public.⁴² In another instance, Kim Gaechon, a professor of architecture at Kookmin University, published *Myöngmuk ui gōnchuk* (*The Architecture of Light and Calm*), which celebrated the structural characteristics of the hanok as embodying an aesthetic of emptiness. The lack of color and absence of decoration on the paper-screen walls and doors have been hailed as reflecting the core Taoist belief in “nonaction.”⁴³ Instead, features of natural beauty were framed and emphasized in a very purposeful way by surrounding the house with emptiness and accentuating it. Too much artificiality or construction is discouraged as interfering with meditation or a study of one’s mind. Such harmonious coexistence of design and non-design within the architectural language of the hanok was praised as a philosophical statement that “simultaneously sought to overcome the limits of artificiality and inactivity.”⁴⁴

Scholars argue that the minimalist aesthetics believed to be inherent in the hanok’s structural forms possess a moral dimension. For instance, a book published by the Society of Hanok Space notes that simplicity as a rejection of extravagance is “an expression of yangban class philosophy, emphasizing a graceful and restrained lifestyle rather than a luxurious or indulgent attitude.”⁴⁵ In another case, the book observes that use of naturally curvy wooden members for columns and beams represent a “tolerance of nature” and a “generous spirit characteristic of Taoism.”⁴⁶ Most of the remodeled hanoks are wooden post-and-beam structures reminiscent of yangban literati residences from the late Chosun Dynasty (Fig. 2.3). According to the Hanok Aid Ordinance prepared and implemented by the Seoul city government in 2002, hanoks are defined as “wooden post-and-beam structures.”⁴⁷

⁴² Bongryul Kim. *Kim Bongryöl ui Han ’guk Gōnchuk Yiyagi* [Bongryöl Kim’s Story of Korean Architecture], 3 vols., (Seoul: Ideal Architecture, 1999.)

⁴³ Gaechun Kim and Jo Kwan, *Myongmuk ui gunchuk* [The Architecture of Light and Calm], (Seoul: Ahn-Graphics, 2004), 231.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ Society of Hanok Space, *Cultural Space of the Hanok*, (Seoul: Kimoonsa, 2004), 259.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 244-245.

⁴⁷ Seoul Metropolitan City, *Hanok Jiwon Jorye* [Hanok Aid Ordinance]. (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2002.)



Figure 2.3. Most of the remodeled hanoks in Bukchon, like the one shown in the photo, are wooden post-and-beam structures.

The hanoks' strong association with a supposedly higher moral standard has been challenged by several architectural critics and historians. For instance, Seoh noted that the use of naturally curved wood in the hanok merely reflects the lack of lumber due to the increasing housing demand of the late Chosun Dynasty (roughly from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century).⁴⁸ However, romantic interpretations of the hanok's structural characteristics were reproduced and often exaggerated by the popular press. A willingness to endure small inconveniences is celebrated as evidence of independence and mental fortitude. The maintenance of the existing hanok structure, notwithstanding the new construction of the hanok, involves much more work than living in an apartment complex with a twenty four hour security guard/repairman. New meaning is attached to the more specific architectural features previously regarded as irksome. A newspaper article introduced a journal written by a mother who noted that while her children tripped at the high door threshold in the beginning, "they soon learned to avoid falling, which reminded me of a story that living in a hanok is conducive to a child's physical development and cultivation of careful behavior."⁴⁹ In another case, handling the paper sliding doors of the hanok, which often requires a slow and careful maneuver, is cited as teaching children to seek a roundabout solution rather than to use sheer force.⁵⁰ Individual tenacity to adhere to design integrity is associated with upper-class culture as well as with the expression of environmental consciousness. Overcoming minute annoyance is rendered as a heroic attempt to break out of the banal modern life in which people are enslaved by addiction to technology.

Whether the decision to move to a hanok is based on criticism of living in high-rises or the simple desire to find alternative housing, the moral discourse surrounding remodeled hanoks

⁴⁸ Yunyoung Seoh, *Uriga Saraon Jip, Uriga Saragal Jip* [*The House We have been Living in and Will Continue to Live in*], (Seoul: Critical Review of History, 2007.)

⁴⁹ Jaemyung Kim. "[CoverStory] Madangjip Joah Ahyiga Utunda" "[Cover Story] 'I like Madang, Children Smile'" *Dongah Ilbo*. July 3, 2009.

⁵⁰ Cho, "The Most Beautiful House in the World," 21.

suggests that “Korean culture” is imagined to be inherent in the formal characteristics of the hanok. Although the high door threshold of the hanok is not intended to promote careful behavior, it is imagined to instill in children fastidiousness. Regardless of whether the “inconvenient aspect” of the hanok is appreciated as the wisdom of the ancestors or minor nuisances to be overcome, both discourses imagine hanoks as the antithesis of artificiality. The confusion between the intentions behind and consequences of design remains prevalent due to the mental construction of an insurmountable dichotomy between the natural and the artificial. In this case, the construction of the hanok as traditional architecture contains an element of cultural essentialism which, despite the mostly positive evaluation of Korean culture, can work to conceal existing structural socioeconomic problems.

The history of the hanoks reveals important divergences from the aforementioned romanticized readings of the hanoks’ physical qualities. Dwellings of the yangban literati were far from being minimal and simple. Conforming to the numerous requirements specified in Confucius’s teachings meant that the ruling elite’s dwellings had to be large enough to contain separate functional spaces. For instance, women’s quarters had to be separate from men’s quarters since one of the five basic tenets of Confucianism is the “separate roles of the sexes.” Upper-class residences also featured a separate quarter near the main gate reserved for servants to answer the visitor’s call and to tend to household animals. In addition, an extra space dedicated to ancestor worship was needed in order to uphold filial duties specified in Confucian ethics. Observing such an emphasis on spatial hierarchy was critical in defining the identity of yangban literati since their formal status was not determined simply by the inheritance of the title. One had to earn the status by passing the national examinations as well as by observing Confucius’s rules in every aspect of daily life.

Contrary to the strong association of the hanoks with absence of artificiality, many aspects of architectural elements in the hanoks show that each design element is very deliberately placed. Not only are the locations of the Ahn and Sarang complexes in relation to the heating system very deliberate, but the slope of the staircases is designed so that land is used more efficiently while reducing the danger of structural failure. In another instance, it has been pointed out that the location of the wife’s room is strategically placed within the Ahn complex in such a way that it can easily be observed from the mother-in-law’s room.⁵¹ The difficulty of household labor associated with low fire stoves is regarded as a common burden for women, although such an architectural feature disproportionately affected servant-class women. A typical yangban male did not feel the inconveniences of hanok life since servants carried portable tables full of food to his room and regularly emptied his chamber pot. Although the influence of class hierarchy in the layout of the hanok is acknowledged, specific experiences associated with them are rarely discussed both due to historical distance and a strong tendency to romanticize the hanok. Thus, the negative realities associated with the elitist tradition are downplayed while abstract spiritual meanings are emphasized.

What in fact have contributed to the popular notion of hanoks embodying a minimalist mode of living are the physical qualities of the urban hanoks in Bukchon, resulting from an intense urbanization process during the colonial times. During the Chosun Dynasty, Bukchon remained a desirable residential quarter for high officials of the yangban literati class since its proximity to the monarch meant more political opportunities. However, older hanoks began to

⁵¹ Bong-ryul Kim. *The Re-discovery of Korean Architecture 1: A Container of an Epoch*, (Seoul: Ideal Architecture, 1999), 251.

disappear due to the declining socioeconomic status of the yangban literati class as well as the weakening national economy as a whole. At the same time, the increasing pace of urbanization in Seoul pressured the colonial administration to readjust and divide the existing lots into smaller and standardized subdivisions. The establishment of many housing companies in the 1920s, such as Gun-yang Company, facilitated the process of the industrial production of hanoks.⁵² The process of demolition of hanoks was well described in an article written in 1935, as follows:

Elegant Chosun Dynasty-style buildings are destroyed one by one while two-, three-, or five-story brick houses and stone houses replace them. Streets in Seoul are always under construction with an increasing number of paved streets with cars, bicycles, and motorcycles passing on top of them.⁵³

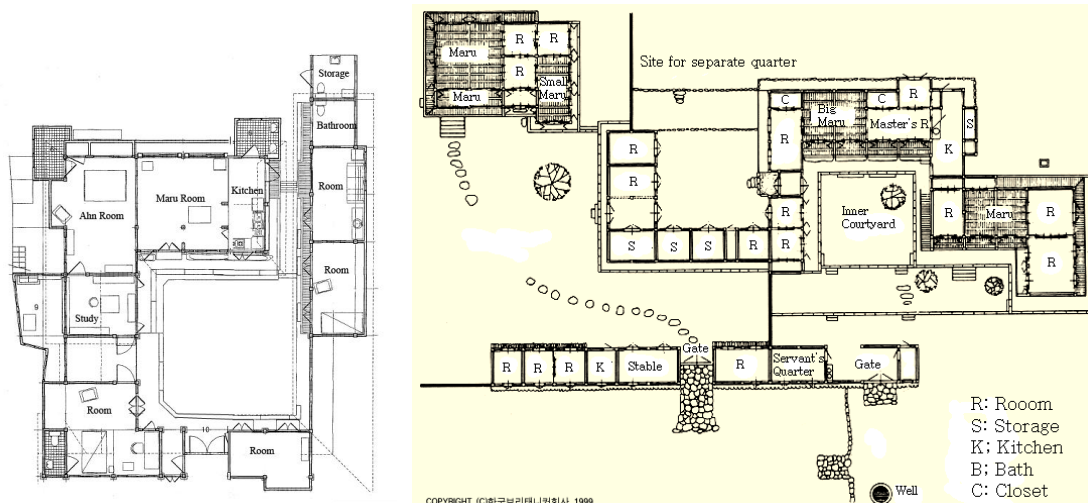
Also, the unprecedented migration of the rural population to Seoul, the rising cost of land, and sociopolitical pressure to adopt a new lifestyle inhibited the construction of hanok complexes, which required a substantial amount of land.

Housing shortages in Seoul and the beginning of the capitalist housing industry contributed to the birth of a new type of hanok suitable for urban residences. Changes in street layouts, instituted by the colonial administration in 1934, resulted in the rectilinear street grid, necessitating that hanoks adapt to standardized subdivisions. Reduced house size as well as the standardized construction method rendered the hanoks much less glamorous. The stylistic changes reflected in new urban hanoks were similar to the housing of the *jung-in* class, mostly technicians and governmental clerks situated between the yangban literati class and the common people.⁵⁴ The floor plan of a hanok at 135-1 Gye-dong in North Village exhibits the characteristic of an urban hanok (Figure 2.4).

⁵² Joon-bum Cho, "The Transformation of the Urban Architectural Regulatory System and Urban Tissue in the Bukchon Area," (PhD diss., University of Seoul, 2003), 112.

⁵³ Quoted in Jingsong Kim, *The Formation of Modernity: Allowing Dance Halls in Seoul*, (Seoul: Reality Culture Studies, 1999), 284; Gwang-yul Yu, "The Scenery of Kyungsung," *Sahaegongrun*, October 1935.

⁵⁴ According to Professor Song, the characteristic of the urban Hanok is the simplified U shape of the floor plan instead of the traditional composition of an L + I structure with more open space between the two building masses. Song, In-ho, "A Study of the Types of Urban Traditional Housing in Seoul from 1930 to 1960," (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 1990.)



Figures 2.4: A remodeled hanok at Gyedong 135-1 of Bukchon on the left shows the floor plan of a simplified version of an urban hanok, while the floor plan of Sungyojang, a hanok complex originating from the eighteenth century, on the right, exhibits a series of courtyards and multiple complexes.

Although the house was a part of a larger complex with an additional Sarang complex, it was subdivided into two housing units in 1924.⁵⁵ Currently used as a guest house, it presents a radical departure from the older hanok complexes, as it dissolved several characteristics of older hanoks. Due to the shortage of land, the two building compounds were combined into one building mass, which also meant that instead of the conventional system of multiple courtyards, the new urban hanok contained only one courtyard. In general, a decrease in the lot size was complemented by the introduction of Western furniture and the enlargement of individual rooms.⁵⁶

The urban hanoks that emerged in the 1920s were generally despised due to the use of cheaper materials and lack of proper functional spaces. Industrially-produced hanoks were often derogatively called *jipjangsa-jip*, meaning houses of home sellers, which implied that they lacked any sense of individuality. The low status associated with urban hanoks can be detected in the following remark made by an individual who worked as a city planning official in the 1970s:

It was already too late to save the hanoks worth preserving. Most hanoks in [Bukchon] were not hanoks from the Chosun Dynasty but houses mass-produced in the late colonial period by *jipjangsa*. They were not even properly maintained, looking shabby and vulgar. Therefore there was no need for preservation. They were just evidence of poverty, and we hoped they would disappear.⁵⁷

Such controversy regarding what hanoks should look like shows that that there is no *a priori* category of hanok, and that what constitutes “Korean” is not always clear.

⁵⁵ Seoul Metropolitan City, *Bukchon Gakugi Gibon Gyeheok* [Basic Plan for the North Village], (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, December 2001), appendix 45.

⁵⁶ Kim Eun-ha, “Doshihyong Hanok ui Jung-gaechuk eh Gwanhan Yongu: Seoul-si Gahoedong, Yongdudong, Jegidong ul Jungsim Uro” [“A Study of the Extension and Renovation of Urban Traditional Housing in Seoul: The Case of Gahoe-dong, Yongdu-dong, and Jeagi-dong”], (master’s thesis, Jung Ang University, 1995.)

⁵⁷ Quoted in Do-young Song, *Ilryu Hakja Song Doyoung ui Seoul Il-ki* [The Anthropologist Song Doyoung’s Reading of Seoul], (Seoul: Sohwa, 2004), 186.

The tendency to essentialize the definition of hanoks overlooks changes in residential patterns during the urbanization process and due to the increasing socioeconomic polarity. Although servants who guarded the main gate and cooked foods in the fire stove are gone, they have been replaced with security cameras and housekeepers. In addition, the cultural capital necessary to afford the high construction costs of the hanok distinguishes modern-day yangban from the rest of society; their material benefits generated by the industrial mode of life outweigh the cultural benefits. More importantly, reverence toward the “hanok tradition” shared by most South Koreans has been appropriated by the government as a means to redevelop a hanok village and promote local and international tourism. The governmental project of marketing the “historical character” of Seoul has tapped into the desire of middle- and upper- class South Koreans to own an ideal (often second) home. Ironically, urban redevelopment capitalizes on the strong association of hanoks with minimalist and modest households in order to bring further economic growth of the Gangbuk (North of the Han River) area. The dominance of commercial interests and the speculation process are not unique to forms of modern architecture and apartment houses. Contrary to common assumptions, the remodeling process of hanoks in Bukchon shows that hanoks can also function as profit-generating machines.

Hanok Village as a Commodity in the Global Heritage Market

The North Village Hanok Regeneration Project began to be implemented in 2001 when the first comprehensive plan by the city government was carried out through policies such as a hanok registration system and governmental aid for remodeling registered hanoks. While the project is primarily funded by the city government, the initiation of the project was the product of collaboration between Jongro North Village Keepers’ Association (JNVKA) and the city government. Such collaborations with the local associations marked an important break from the previous authoritarian planning approach of the government. The neighborhood association was formed in order to protect the community from the imposition of restrictive laws that sometimes threatened residents’ safety. On the other hand, the subsequent development of the hanok village illustrates how the process of preservation can result in the subordination of a community movement to the state’s ambitions and private interests in boosting tourism. In the case of South Korea, the deep sense of an historical crisis and the cultural customs shared by the minjung movement have been appropriated by the state to enable remodeled hanoks in Bukchon “to serve as ‘banks’ of national memory and pride and to ward off the subversive effects of historical changes.”⁵⁸ In other words, many remodeled hanoks in Bukchon have become visual statements to ameliorate possible criticisms of urban redevelopment projects hiding under the phrase of “preservation.”

During the 1970s and 1980s, residents of North Village were vehemently opposed to the government hanok preservation policy that strictly limited any form of repairs and renovations. Although such a draconian measure restrained demolition of many vernacular dwellings, worsening housing conditions produced a significant level of objections from residents unable even to replace molding wooden columns.⁵⁹ At the same time, governmental preservation policy

⁵⁸ AlSayyad Nezar, *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism*, (London ; New York : Routledge, 2001), 9.

⁵⁹ Such an inflexible prohibition on any form of repair contributed to the collapse of a hanok in the 1990s, resulting in the deaths of a whole family.

was inconsistent and opportunistic since it precluded a site planned for governmental functions. Demolition of many vernacular dwellings in the late 1980s to clear the site for the Constitutional Court contrasted sharply with the inability of residents to make simple improvements to their own homes.⁶⁰ Ironically, the formation of the Jongro North Village Keepers' Association (JNVKA) can be traced back to 1988 when the Committee for the Revocation of the Hanok Preservation District was established to protect residents' rights and to protest against the inflexibility of government preservation policy.⁶¹

However, changes in the political climate after the democratic movement of the late 1980s made the implementation of autocratic policy seem unwise. At the same time, relaxed regulations in the early 1990s resulted in "reckless developments of multiplex housing" and worsening living conditions.⁶² Close collaboration between the Seoul city government and the JNVKA led to a consensus between the two parties in 1999. In the new plan, the government provides aid to repairs made to a hanok as long as it meets the guidelines designed to maintain the historical ambience of the neighborhood. In the official policy, the city government supports up to two-thirds of the exterior repair cost (to a maximum of \$25,000) and up to one-third of the new construction of a hanok (to a maximum of \$50,000).⁶³ The plan not only encourages residents to register their hanoks by providing financial aid for the renovation of existing hanoks, but also encourages the construction of new hanoks. The city government also purchased several urban hanoks in the North Village in order to regenerate them according to the traditional aesthetic guidelines. At the same time, many existing construction limitations, albeit somewhat relaxed to give more room for interior repair, continue to be effective. For instance, a limit on the maximum height of the structures allowed in the area regulates the scale of a residential complex. By implementing such a double strategy of promoting hanoks and discouraging large-scale constructions, it is hoped that the proliferation of extraordinary and exotic architecture will be curtailed to a certain extent.

Notwithstanding the earnest concern for the disappearance of vernacular spatial forms and the need to incorporate residents' voices, the North Village Hanok Regeneration Project included the marketing of the neighborhood as a desirable tourist destination for experiencing "Korean culture." Contrary to the hanoks in earlier times, defined by their agrarian socioeconomic structure, remodeled hanoks serve multiple functions in an ever-fragmenting South Korean society. While the hanok was primarily considered as a residence, the remodeled hanok village is imagined as a tool to achieve more specific goals than a residential purpose. For one thing, an increase in global tourism means that the city government can regard remodeled hanoks as a possible source of tourism. Although a single remodeled hanok does not amount to much, a group or a town made up of hanoks certainly becomes a new urban spectacle in the forest of buildings and other familiar forms of consumerism.

The state's effort to promote Bukchon Village as a repository of Korean history and cultural traditions can be detected in various official documents, including *Bukchon Gakugi Gibon Gyehoek* (the *Basic Plan to Tend Bukchon*). The plan states that the two components of the

⁶⁰ So-young Lee, "Maul Mandulgi ehso Simindanche ui Yokhal" ["The Role of Civil Society Organization in Place-making: A Case Study of North Village in Seoul"], *Gonggan gwa Sahui* [Space and Society] 25 (2006): 99-130.

⁶¹ Suk Jeong, *Basic Directions for the Village-Level City Plan: A Case Study of North Village*, (Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 2000), 96.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Suk Jeong, *Maul Danwi Dosi Gaehoek Silhyun Gibon Banghyang II: Bukchon Gakugi Saryeh Yongu* [Basic Directions for the Village-Level City Plan II: A Casestudy of Bukchon] Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 2000.

project are residents-driven “community building” and the state-driven “model undertaking/project” to conserve Seoul’s historic districts.⁶⁴ In a study conducted by the Seoul Development Institute in 2001, Bukchon was acknowledged as a place of cultural tourism where foreign visitors during the 2002 World Cup could be directed to get in touch with the local customs.⁶⁵ It is emphasized that the “cultural tourism” promoted in Bukchon is unlike an existing large-scale tour, in the sense that it encourages intimate cultural contacts and cultivation of “a sense of place.”⁶⁶

The “regeneration” part of the project includes not only the preservation and remodeling of older hanoks but also the development of various programs associated with Korean customs. Policy documents point out that simple “restoration” or “preservation” is not enough to guarantee increased tourism. Rather, policy planners argue that it is important for the government to develop many new cultural contents that fit the historical ambience generated by the presence of the hanok village.⁶⁷ To achieve this effect, many hanoks that the city purchased were converted into guest houses and museums, where foreign and domestic travelers can stay and participate in various cultural activities, such as calligraphy and tea-drinking. Multiple brochures published by the Seoul metropolitan government contain not only travel journals of foreign travelers with explanations of each place of interest, but also detailed maps showing “cultural exploratory routes” around the neighborhood. Promotion of the place starts at the two tourist information centers, where one can not only obtain information booklets in English and Japanese but can also rent bicycles and Korean costumes to take photos in. For domestic visitors living within Seoul, many classes teaching Korean arts and crafts are provided at the Bukchon Culture Center. Designation of several “open-type hanoks” within Bukchon, private residences of artisans and craftsmen open to the public during certain hours, reflects the attempt to integrate the concept of residence and tourism. However, many of these residences remain closed to outsiders or uninhabited.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding that 53.2% of the domestic tourists in Bukchon described the purpose of their visit as “to take a look at traditional houses,” their experience is often confined to the exterior of the hanoks.⁶⁹

Full-scale initiation of the project was soon followed by the opening of many cafes, boutiques, art galleries, and restaurants in the village. The media were quick to note the changing characteristics of the village. One news magazine noted that “[Bukchon] provides a one-stop place for cultural experiences” and that the presence of museums, hanok villages, restaurants, boutiques, and craft shops has the potential to make the place “Korea’s Montmartre.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Seoul Metropolitan City, *Bukchon Gakugi Gibon Gyehoek* [The Basic Plan for Tending Bukchon], 2 vols., (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, 2001)

⁶⁵ Seoul Development Institute, (2002 World Cup Gaegi) *Bukchon Jangso Maketing Bang-an Yongu* [For 2002 World Cup: Bukchon Place Marketing Study: The Vitalization of Traditional Districts through the Establishment of the Hanok Lodge System], Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 2001.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁷ Sonhye Baek, *Bukchon Jiyuk e Jokhaphan Munhwa Gwangwang* [A Culture and Tourism Program Suitable For Bukchon], (Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 2007.)

⁶⁸ During the fieldwork conducted in 2009, most of them were inaccessible during the weekdays and weekends. Certain places only displayed phone numbers at which the owner could be reached.

⁶⁹ Sunhye Baek, *Bukchon Jiyuk e Jokhaphan Munhwa Gwangwang The Cultural Tourism Appropriate for Bukchon Area*.

⁷⁰ Shin Cho. “Jontong ui Munhwa Gonggan Bukchon: Seoul ui Uhje wa Ohnul Gurigo Hanguk ui Miga Yigot eh” [“The Cultural Space of Tradition: ‘Bukchon’ of Seoul Yesterday and Today,— the Beauty of Korea is all here. . .”], *Weekly Hankook* 2077 (2005): 6-25.

Geographers have also commented that while the older generation associates the place with the house of the prime minister and Korean noodle shops, youngsters associate the place with “trendy wine bars, contemporary art galleries, and fashionable shops.”⁷¹ The rapid pace of commercial expansion continues to be a source of concern for residents who worry that the serenity of the residential area will be compromised by excessive place-marketing.

In this new policy phase of Bukchon’s urban development, it seems inevitable that some of the remodeled hanoks would contain eclectic architectural elements. Not only wine bars, art galleries, and museums, but also other highly specialized services such as dentists’ offices use hanok motifs as a way of differentiating their establishments (fig 2.5). Whereas certain shops have recycled existing hanok fabrics while adding contemporary materials, other shops have constructed new hanoks from scratch. Several art galleries, entertaining a more adventurous design, have integrated the features of the hanok with elements of pop art to draw the attention of pedestrians. To borrow Elizabeth Outka’s words, the appeal of the place is based on “[the] contradictory move, to recognize the value of continuity while foregrounding the constructed and commodified nature of this continuity.”⁷² It may be argued that the commodification of tradition is not always a negative phenomenon. Some scholars, such as Michel Picard, argue that tourism is not always inimical to the “authenticity” or traditional character of a place.⁷³ In fact, he argues that increased international tourism in Bali functioned to encourage protection of the various forms of local cultural traditions.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Hakhee Kim, “Munhwa Sobi Gonggan Urosoh Samchungdong ui Busang” [“The Rise of Samcheong-dong as a Cultural Consumption Space: Critical Reflections on the Art Gallery Boom and the Urban Regeneration Strategy of Seoul”], *Hanguk Doshi Jirihakhoeji* 10(2) (2007): 127-144, 129.

⁷² Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic*, (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 19.

⁷³ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, (Singapore: Archipelago, 1996)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*



Figures 2.5: Remodeled Urban Hanoks From top, clockwise: an Italian restaurant, an art gallery, and a café with a “coffee take out” sign all either use hanok forms or allude to hanoks.

The premise that touristic culture and local culture can mutually reinforce each other is a very attractive notion for the Seoul city government, aiming to achieve the status of a “soft city” by boosting the tourist industry. The policy documents prepared by the Seoul Development Institute on the Bukchon Regeneration Project quote Picard’s research on Balinese tourism to argue that the promotion of cultural tourism is not antithetical to the preservation of the neighborhood’s historical ambience.⁷⁵ However, not all local customs are regarded as worthy of “preservation” in the sphere of touristic interests. More importantly, the argument that tourism can encourage the protection of cultural traditions ignores the opportunity cost of the regeneration project. In other words, the current emphasis on a synergistic relationship between preservation and tourism begs the question of “at what cost?” The regeneration project first initiated by the neighborhood association has brought deepening internal divisions within the organization as the result of rising prices of land and remodeled hanoks in the area. At the same time, the establishment of other NGOs designed to protect urban hanoks in the area has highlighted growing conflicts between local residents and outside residents interested in purchasing older hanoks to convert them into modern residences. Although such conflicts and debates have revolved around the definition of “preservation” and also the proper ways to remodel older hanoks, they are in fact rooted in economic reasons.

⁷⁵ Sonhye Baek. *Bukchon Jiyuk e Jekhaphan Munhwa Gwangwang*, 24.

From the real estate developer's point of view, hanoks in Bukchon are considered hot commodities, which, when combined with the rising price of land, become a source of profit. Lee Ju-yeon, the director of the Bukchon Culture Forum, has commented that after the initiation of the city's project, the average price of land per *pyung* (approximately 3.3 square meters) rose from five million won (about \$4400) to more than ten or twenty million won.⁷⁶ While Minja Jung noted in her book that land cost about 6 million won per *pyung* in 2001, my field research conducted in 2009 revealed that it costs about 20 to 40 million won per *pyung*. Kum-Ock Choi, a longtime resident of Bukchon, has argued that certain NGOs have participated in real-estate speculation rather than focusing on preservation.⁷⁷ The change in the city government's regeneration policy, which increased the amount of financial aid to new hanok construction from 30 million Korean won (KW) to 60 million KW, contributed to inflation. With the rising prices of urban hanoks and the land they occupy, many previous residents in the Samchung-dong part of the village sold their houses to rich outsiders after the sharp rise in land prices.⁷⁸ In an interview with *Weekly Kyunghyang*, one real-estate agent observed that many of the hanoks in the 31st district of Gahoe-dong are empty because they are second homes and used primarily during weekends. Compared to land prices in other parts of Seoul, such a sharp rise in land prices illustrates that the regeneration project has contributed to the gentrification of the neighborhood.

Even for those residents who decided to remain in the neighborhood, problems arising from new construction have contributed to mounting frictions within the community. The repair standard stipulated by the Seoul city government only specified design guidelines for tiled-roof hanoks, with even more specific guidelines for the treatment of outside walls adjacent to streets. According to the guidelines, outside walls are to be divided into three parts, with the upper part consisting of paper screen windows and plasters, the middle part being either red brick or cobblestone, and the lower part consisting of larger granite stone (fig 2.6).⁷⁹ Hanoks depicted in the repair guidelines show a wall with moderate height, with the lower part of the rusticated foundation occupying a small portion. It is recommended that the height of the outside wall be about the middle height of the neighboring wall, with the main structure of the hanok appearing over the wall.

⁷⁶ Jaejin Lee, "Bojongwa Gaebal Sayi Hundulrinun Bukchon: Bujadol ui Second House?" ["Bukchon Shakes between Preservation and Development: The Rich Person's Second House?"] *Maal* 266, (2008): 82-85.

⁷⁷ Won-Sik Jung, "Bukchon Hanok Maul 'Ilguroh-jin' Bojon" ["North Village's Distorted Preservation"], *Weekly Kyunghyang*, November 24, 2009.

⁷⁸ Jaejin Lee, "Bukchon Shakes between Preservation and Development," 82-85.

⁷⁹ Seoul Metropolitan City. *Hanok Suson Gijun*. [Standard Guidelines for Repairs of Hanoks], (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2001).

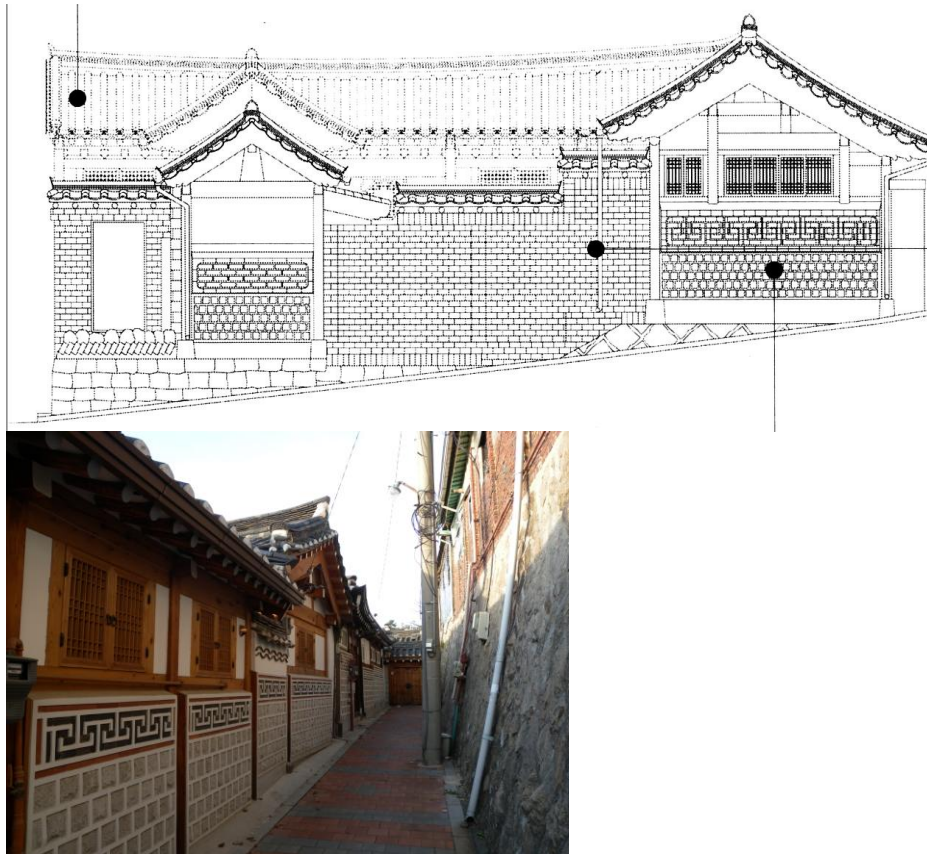


Figure 2.6: Repair guidelines showing the elevation drawing of a remodeled hanok were prepared by the Seoul metropolitan government to promote safety and contextual conformity. Many hanoks in Bukchon follow these guidelines.

While this was stipulated to encourage residents to take context into consideration, it has been manipulated in several cases to raise the embankment in advance and enlarge the foundation disproportionately. Since architectural guidelines put forward by the city government are not compulsory, residents can make structural changes according to their tastes. Insuk Cho, the vice-chair of the Seoul Hanok Preservation Committee, noted that attempts to remodel hanoks face a double bind—while there is a general lack of expertise in traditional wooden constructions, most hanok experts only know the preservation techniques suitable for cultural artifacts rather than for ordinary houses.⁸⁰ An absence of clear guidelines for remodeling, when combined with the reckless pace of redevelopment, has resulted in the appearance of a new hanok archetype. The location of several residential hanoks on a sloped hill allowed the construction of huge walls as well as parking garages underneath (Fig 2.7.)

⁸⁰ Insuk Cho, “The Current State of North Village’s Preservation: Bukchon, 2001-2008 — Hanok Residences and Beautification,” (paper presented at Monthly Seminar of The Korean Association of Architectural History, Seoul, Korea. October 2008).



Figures 2.7 from left to right: Although contemporary hanoks in Bukchon maintain the tripartite wall composition described in the design guidelines, they are far from the imagined lifestyle of restraint and simplicity.

The unconventional construction method produced friction between the existing residents, who suffered from the high level of noise coming from the construction sites. Kum Ock Choi and David Kilburn, residents of Bukchon for more than twenty years, have argued that new construction by their neighbor caused not only a high level of noise but also damage to their house due to an “unauthorized use of fork lifts.”⁸¹ By participating in various interviews with media as well as in public debates about hanok preservation policy, Kilburn repeatedly criticized the current city government’s project, which subsidizes the rich while ignoring the rights of local residents. The dispute between Choi and her neighbor remains unsettled, as the case has been elevated to a series of legal battles. It is difficult to conclude that the city government’s policy is the sole cause of frictions. However, some neighborhood organizations, such as Hanok Jikimi, established after the beginning of the government’s regeneration project, have been accused by local residents of failing to take care of the hanoks they had purchased.⁸² While certain groups continue to function as models of civil society, others opportunistically pursue various members’ private interests under the mantle of community activism.

Despite the Seoul city government’s ambition to utilize hanok preservation in Bukchon as a “model undertaking” to restore the historic character of Seoul, such a process of tourist-oriented development cannot guarantee consensus on what counts as “historic” or “traditional” and what does not. At the same time, idealization of the hanoks as “virtuous living” shifts attention away from structural problems in the current real-estate market of Seoul. Apartment houses’ popularity among South Koreans was primarily due to socioeconomic considerations rather than aesthetic ones. Simply changing the policy orientation to promote residence in remodeled hanoks without considering who is benefitting does not help to safeguard endangered forms of “Korean-style houses.” Rather, a fusion of preservation and redevelopment interests threatens to undermine other values such as community solidarity and socioeconomic diversity. Similar to Harvey’s

⁸¹ Junmo Moon. “Hanok Jikiryoda... Kilburn-Ssi Gajok ui Biguk.” “The Tragedy of Kilburn Family” *Hankook Ilbo*. October 30, 2009.

⁸² So-young Lee. “The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Place-making: A Case Study of Bukchon in Seoul” *Space and Society* 25 (2006): 99-130.

notion of a spatial-temporal fix, the state's project of manufacturing a hanok village becomes a quick "spatial fix," on a large scale, to existing socioeconomic problems.⁸³

Conclusion: The Future of the Hanoks in the Era of Globalization

The future of the hanoks remains uncertain. Despite the state's appropriation of the public interest in Korean folk houses, the minjung movement triggered various efforts to conserve cultural items which might have been forgotten in the heightened pace of the modernization drive. Within the architectural profession, many individuals outside the government continue in their efforts to protect local construction methods and craftsmanship. Various NGOs and historical societies, including the Contemporary Hanok Society, are conducting research about lowering the construction costs of hanoks and making them accessible to greater numbers of people. Admittedly, the recent surge of interest in hanoks reflects a social phenomenon beyond the simple longing for a bygone era. Desire to recover a lost historical agency and to relieve doubts about an unstable Korean identity do play a part in the current boom of remodeled hanoks.

However, the current idealization and the essentialized notion of the "Korean house" can bring negative results. Some cases of remodeled hanoks are far from generating idyllic village life, with shared values and communitarian attitudes, because of the high environmental impacts some hanoks have made. The strong association of hanoks with "the nobler lifestyles of the literati" has made discourse regarding hanoks dominantly positive without reflecting upon historical realities or assessing real-life consequences. At the same time, the romanticization of hanoks goes hand in hand with the romanticization of the Korean past, which obscures traces of class conflicts and cross-cultural hybridizations. Architectural representations of different classes as well as of different regions become representations of the "others," who are excluded from the scope of Korean cultural heritage. Just as there is no *a priori* "Chinese house," so there is no single Korean house. Rather, architectural forms of hanoks are diverse and flexible just as Korean identities are. Current discussions of mass-producing hanoks, therefore, raise concern regarding which types of hanoks will be preserved and which will be forgotten.

On another level, the idealization of "Korean traditions" without critical analysis can contribute to preservation becoming a pretext for large-scale urban redevelopments. The Bukchon Hanok Regeneration Project is closely related to the marketing of cultural heritage in order to boost the local economy in the context of increasing competition in the global tourist industry. As a part of a bigger scheme to elevate the status of Seoul from an industrial city to a postindustrial global hub, the aesthetics of the hanok become a tool to attract more tourists and more capital investment. While the hanok is imagined as the physical manifestation of a common cultural heritage by invoking the concept of Korean ethnicity, not everyone enjoys the same level of benefits generated by the remodeled hanoks. Under the strong aura of sacred "tradition", the gentrification resulting from the project has received little attention. The current regeneration project is heavily benefiting moneyed middle-aged Koreans at the expense of public funds, and this is obscured by the notion that hanoks are part of a Korean tradition that needs to be "rescued." Despite positive reactions to the project, the increasing level of socioeconomic polarization makes the hanok's continuous functioning as a social adhesive in the community very unlikely.

Notwithstanding the strong influence the notion of hanoks as "rediscoveries" has in obscuring structural problems, not every urban project and architectural representation is

⁸³ David Harvey, "Globalization and 'Spatial Fix'," *Geographische Revue* 2 (2001): 23-30.

constructed without encountering challenges. In many cases, the very definition of tradition is challenged when the livelihood of people is affected by an abstract concept. In the next chapter, I turn to the case of Insadong, where the conflicting interests with regard to the direction of urban transformation have rendered the discussion of cultural heritage more convoluted. Although nicknamed “the most Korean place in Seoul,” current urban developments in Insadong have generated various criticisms and concerns regarding “the loss of identity.” Despite the efforts to market the area as the representative of “authentic Korean culture,” the everyday spatial practices of occupants continue to challenge the established notion of “being Korean.”

CHAPTER 3

From Mary's Alley to a Culture Street: Contested Traditions in Insadong

To be honest, attempts to find tradition are ridiculous. We are doing this since it is our job. We can only make a living if we search for tradition. So we follow that path. There isn't any person who consciously tries to maintain a tradition. We only keep it since it is profitable to mention tradition. What is the tradition of Insadong? As long as people use *hanji* (Korean rice paper), it will be a tradition and as long as people look for antiques there will be those trying to make money by selling antiques. That's the way it is.¹

—Interview with a shopkeeper in Insadong

Although the above comments by a shopkeeper in Insadong, published in *Discovery of Life in Seoul*, are hardly new philosophical revelations, they contrast sharply with travel brochures and tourist guide books that promote the idea of “timeless Korean tradition” in Insadong. Commonly accepted as one of the historical places of Seoul, Insadong is a commercial district with many Korean restaurants, crafts shops, and art galleries (fig 3.1). Insadong refers to the area south of the North Village (Bukchon) and surrounded by two palace complexes and Jongmyo, the royal ancestral shrine during the Chosun Dynasty from the fourteenth to the late nineteenth century. The area was adjacent to the administration office that oversaw artworks and paintings, and the concentration of artists in the area resulted in a large number of shops specializing in brushes, paints, and other supplies. Nicknamed “Mary's Alley” by foreign residents due to its many curvy and dead-end alleyways, Insadong has long been synonymous with Korean art and culture, and, since 1987, it has increasingly served as a stage for numerous festivals and exhibitions. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of Insadong as a tourist destination has prompted the city government to designate the district as a Global Cultural Zone and as the site of one of Seoul's Culture Streets.

¹Sumi Kang et al., *Seoul Senghwal ŭi Balgyŏn* [Discovery of Life in Seoul], (Seoul: Hyŏnshil Munhwa Yŏngu, 2003), 260.

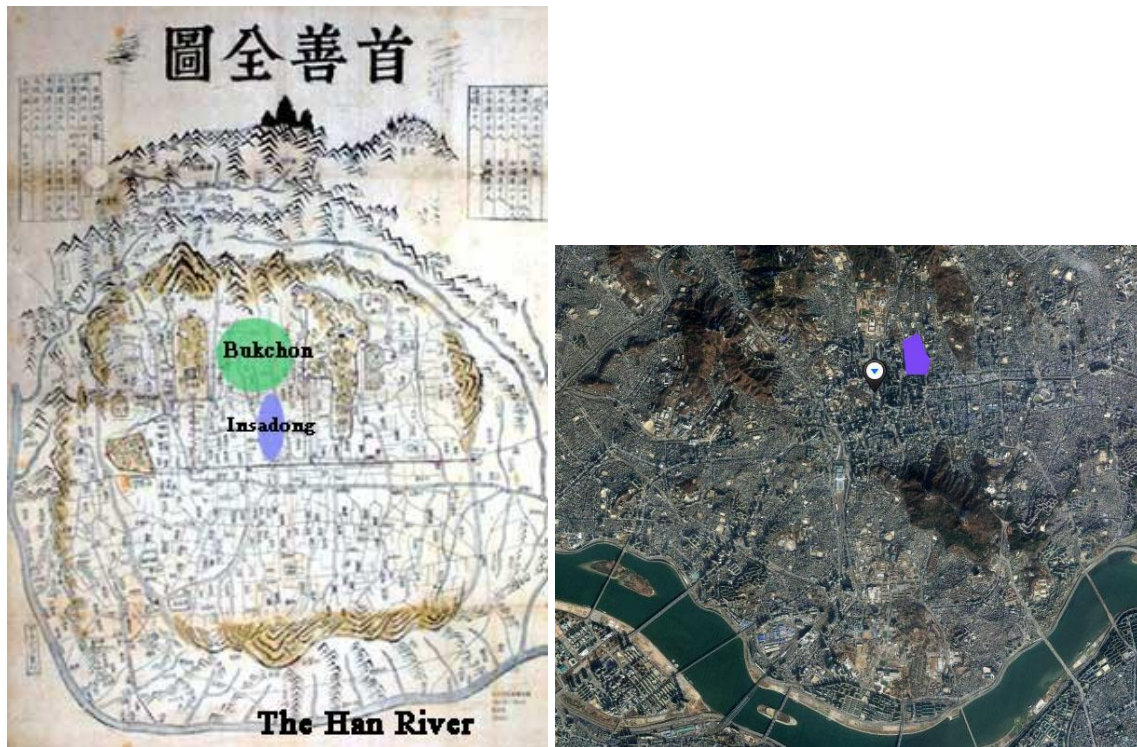


Figure 3.1: On the left is *Susŏnjŏndo*, the historical map drawn by Jŏngho Kim in the mid-nineteenth century showing the location of Insadong (blue) and Bukchon (green) within historical Seoul. On the right is a contemporary map of Seoul showing the Insadong area in blue. Color and English text added by the author.

The shopkeeper's observations about "Korean tradition" are partly a response to recent discussions regarding a lost "sense of place" in Insadong. Although older Seoulites interested in calligraphy and pottery have frequented Insadong in the past, the implementation of several new policies, such as prohibiting cars on the weekend, has changed the neighborhood's demographic composition. The decreasing average age of visitors and the changing commercial ambience—partly brought about by implementation of the Car-free Zone—have led members of the older generation to lament that "the end of Insadong is near" and that "merciless redevelopment and commercialization will erase the smiles of the streets."² Hong Sung-tae highlights the widespread concerns about the "loss of urban identity." He observes that "the fast rate of change in Insadong, which began in 1999, has wounded Insadong's identity significantly."³ Some are worried that the current rate of increasing crowds in Insadong may permanently eliminate the area's quiet ambience while others lament the invasion of foreign commercial interests. The "authentic identity" of Insadong is threatened not only by a proliferation of contemporary art galleries but also by cheap souvenir shops and an overload of restaurants. Another study notes that the decreasing number of antique shops and reputable galleries, along with the corollary

²Sang-oh Yu, "Sarajiryŏnŭn Yŏksa Munhwa Gŏrirŭl Wihayŏh"[For the History and Culture Street About to Disappear], *Munhwa Doshi/Munhwa Bockji* [Cultural City/Cultural Welfare], (Hanguk Munhwa Jungchek Gaehalwon: Seoul, 2001).

³Sung-tae Hong, *Seoul eh Sŏh Seoul ŭl Chatnŭnda* [Finding Seoul in Seoul], (Seoul: KungRee, 2004).

increase in souvenir retailers and liquor shops, is “destroying Insadong’s intrinsic physical environment.”⁴

This chapter continues to discuss the theme of “tradition as rediscovery” by analyzing the narrative of loss that has emerged in conjunction with Insadong’s recent transformation. In the previous chapter about the “hanok renaissance,” I argued that remodeled *hanoks*, despite being constructed as “rediscoveries,” were part of a broader development project to reconfirm the modernity of Seoul. In Insadong, the combined efforts of the city government and an NGO to promote “rediscoveries” have backfired, producing instead a narrative of loss. While worries regarding Insadong’s fading urban identity reveal a conflict between the desire to preserve the area and the economic imperative to promote it, these concerns also entail deep-seated assumptions about what comprises “Korean culture.” This chapter argues that nostalgia-fueled resistance to change can be detrimental to cultural diversity, although nostalgia was in part generated by past forms of urban redevelopment that threatened such diversity. While indignant attitudes toward the current transformation are partly the result of a “culture policy” perceived as a tool for global place-marketing, placing the blame on “poor cultural taste” may inadvertently marginalize the burgeoning spatial practices associated with *boheng-gwǒn*, or the right to walkable streets. Despite the close association between increased pedestrians and global cultural homogenization, this viewpoint fails to consider diverse manifestations of global cultural flows. At the same time, it takes a narrow definition of Korean tradition and culture, and neglects the inherent fluidity within these terms.

Controversy surrounding the implementation of the Car-free Zone policy in Insadong during weekends highlights the interlocking relationship between the state and civil society. The alignment between the government project of promoting Insadong as one of the Culture Streets and the mobilization of the NGO Dosi-yǒndae (Urban Action Network) for the idea of walkable streets has broadened the area’s accessibility to new urban crowds by prohibiting automobile traffic. However, their primary focus differed tremendously. Although Dosi-yǒndae was more interested in preventing large-scale developments, the city government’s focus was on improving the physical environment to attract more visitors and promote the economic growth of the area. When the implementation of the Car-free Zone started to introduce unconventional commercial establishments and rising land prices, the policy triggered concerns about lost urban identity, or what I call a narrative of loss. Paradoxically, attempts to provide a safer and more pleasant walking experience have been pointed out as contributing to negative changes in the urban environment. However, the changing commercial ambience and rising land prices have formed part of larger processes in accordance with the urban redevelopment plan put forward in the late 1970s. Pegging the Car-free Zone as the sole cause of the urban transformation of Insadong fails to take various factors, such as the Gongpyong Redevelopment Plan, into consideration.

In addition, I argue that the narrative of loss, which places the blame on the “lowered cultural taste,” takes a narrow interpretation of Insadong’s “urban identity,” and poses the danger of using the word “culture” as a means to conceal class divisions and underlying economic interests. The current disputes regarding the “identity” of Insadong assume that it possesses a fixed identity, a normative image that privileges certain cultural forms while excluding others.

⁴Jong-Sook Cho and Namjo Kim, *Insadong ūi Mulijok Simlijok image ūi pyongga* [An Evaluation of the Physical and Psychological Image of Insadong], *Hanguk Jokyung Hakhoeji* [Journal of the Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture] 91 (2002): 12-22, 20.

These assumptions about fixed identity are in part based on the construction of a dichotomy between “high culture” and “mass culture.” Recent rediscoveries of tradition and discussions of a “loss of authenticity” should be interpreted as aspects of the tension between different class and demographic interests. At the same time, such narratives of loss fail to acknowledge the various spatial practices that have the potential to constitute new identities for the place. Notwithstanding the stereotypical interpretation of “kitsch” products in Insadong, this chapter shows that the heterogeneous urban aesthetics of Insadong is evidence of global connectedness, including larger political and human rights issues affecting the world. I argue that the current “messy” appearance of Insadong does not represent a “loss of identity” since it reflects the ongoing processes of local negotiations regarding what constitutes “Culture Streets.” The recent urban transformation of Insadong has been a mixed blessing, in the sense that although the area experienced some level of gentrification, it was followed by the introduction of cultural diversity.

In order to analyze the recent urban transformation of Insadong, this chapter first examines the changes in the South Korean political economy that stimulated the conceptual and practical discussions of Culture Streets and of the right to walkable streets. Then, the chapter moves on to discuss the historical background and the recent urban transformation of Insadong that triggered the narrative of loss. The urban redevelopment of the area since the 1970s and Dosi-yŏndae’s recent activities suggest that implementation of the Car-free Zone was an anomaly, rather than a continuation of the larger gentrification process. Finally, the booming interest in tea houses and Korean cuisine is discussed along with the heterogeneous urban aesthetics which contributed to Insadong’s contemporary cultural milieu.

Insadong as a “Culture Street” and “Car-free Zone”

The designation of Insadong as one of Seoul’s Culture Streets is a part of larger government project to promote the concept of the “soft city” and its software, such as tourist resources. The project was first proposed by the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation (KCAF, currently the Art Council Korea), a government-affiliated organization, in the 1992 study conducted to find ways to improve urban environments.⁵ According to the definition given by KCAF, Culture Streets (fig 3.2.) are “street territory which can utilize independent cultural resources and develop into a place with a distinct cultural identity, with its value perceived and shared by many people.”⁶ Cultural resources are defined broadly as potentially containing “natural landscapes, built structures, monuments, histories, folk stories, folk cultures, historical incidents, historical places, continuous actions, events, well-known local products, and foods.”⁷ After describing several foreign examples, such as New York’s Soho and Paris’ Montmartre, as examples of neighborhoods with “Culture Streets,” the study mentions Insadong as possessing a distinct physical quality due to the presence of many hanoks.⁸ Just like Shamble Street in the city of York in UK, Insadong is considered a historical urban fabric, with its history going back to the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897).

⁵The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation is a government organization established in 1973 in accordance with the Culture and Arts Promotion Act. Its name changed in 2005 to Art Council Korea.

⁶The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, *Dosi Munhwa Hwan-gyŏng Gaesŏn Bang-an Yŏngu* [A Study of Methods to Improve the Urban Cultural Environment], (Seoul: The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1992), 77.

⁷*Ibid.*, 83.

⁸*Ibid.*, 94.

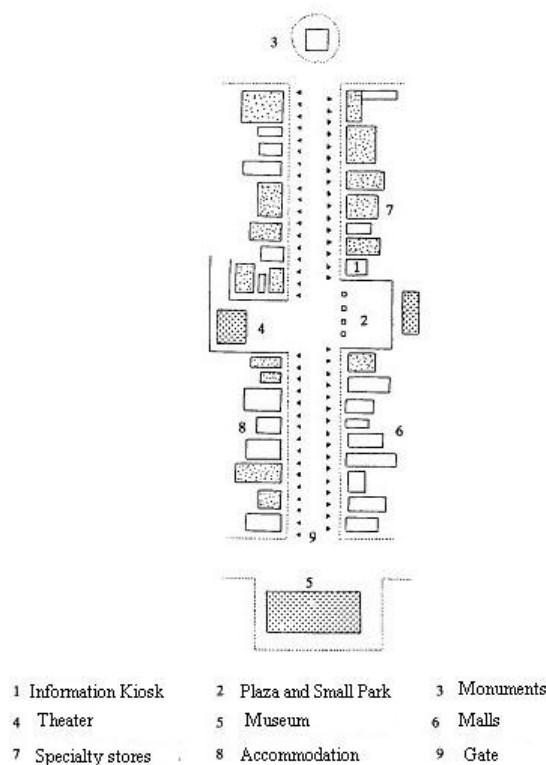


Figure 3.2: The conceptual map of a sample Culture Street, in *Dosi Munhwa Hwan-gyŏng Gaesŏn Bang-an Yŏngu* [A Study of Methods to Improve the Urban Cultural Environment], Written by the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation. Seoul: The Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, 1992, 90.

The effort to construct Culture Streets should be situated within the larger policy changes planned to usher in a transformation of the economy from industrial production to the information and service industries. The concept of Culture Streets originated shortly after the Seoul Olympic Games, which triggered various discussions of how to promote international tourism. Although the successful hosting of the Olympic Games resulted in an increased number of foreign tourists in South Korea, the lack of amenities and poor management of heritage sites have been pointed out by the media and policy makers as major obstacles to the further growth of the global tourist industry.⁹ Another study observed that developing specialized tour programs that include “circulation courses which connect various cultural festivals by timing them flexibly” would greatly improve the current city package tours.¹⁰ In such a context, the government embarked on different projects to sustain the increased tourism, including the designation of Culture Streets. In Insadong, residents and merchants formed an Association for the Preservation of Insa Traditional Village in 1987 and started to hold yearly festivals in the

⁹Bae-heng Cho, *88 Seoul Olympic ui Gwangwang-e Daehan Yonghyang Yongu* [A Study of the Influence of '88 Seoul Olympics on Tourism], (Seoul: Korea Tourism Development Institute, 1999).

¹⁰Chul-hyun Suh, “Woeraegeck ūl Wihan Sudo-gwŏn Gwan-gwang course gaebal eh Gwan-han Sogo” [A Study of the Metropolitan Area Tour Course Development for Foreign Tourists], *Hanguk Gwan-gwang Hakhoe Gwan-gwanghak Yongu* 11 (1987): 77-89, 86.

middle of October.¹¹ With the passage of the Local Governance Act in 1995, local governments were encouraged to discover and develop various cultural districts in order to promote the local economy.

At the same time, the designation of Insadong as a Car-free Zone reflected increasing demands of South Koreans for improved standards of living as well as soaring interest in folk cultural items that goes back to the beginning of the *minjung* movement. Increasing political voices from civil society included demands for walkable streets, which had been suggested by NGOs such as the Green Traffic Movement.¹² This movement was in part influenced by Western debates on walkable streets, resulting in, for example, the Pedestrian Bill of Rights declared in New York during the 1970s and the European Charter of Pedestrian Rights in 1988.¹³ The successful lobbying of such organizations brought the issue of urban accessibility to the attention of policy makers and political representatives, culminating in the establishment of ordinances designed to promote *boheng-gwon*, or “the right to walk.”¹⁴ Although the concept was new in South Korea, it has started lively discussions of the problematic tendency to prioritize car traffic above pedestrian traffic. The concept also contributed to the establishment of Dosi-yŏndae in 1996. With the changes in political culture brought about by the democratic movement of the late 1980s, state and city governments exhibited a more open stance toward citizens’ demands. In the 2000s, many policy discussions regarding the right to walkable streets were held among national assembly representatives and members of NGOs.

Given such changes in government policies and political dynamics, the annual festival held in Insadong changed to the weekly Car-free Zone on Sundays. Although Dosi-yŏndae expressed some criticism over the project of Culture Streets, the weekly car-free day was received with support. For instance, Dosi-yŏndae criticized some aspects of Culture Street projects by pointing out examples of “indistinguishable programs/designs as well as destruction of physical environments.”¹⁵ However, Dosi-yŏndae supported the idea of the Car-free Zone when its study in 1997 concluded that small alleyways in Insadong are “more appropriate for pedestrians rather than car traffic” and that it is recommendable to “maintain the continuity of pedestrian space.”¹⁶ The Jongro District Office and the city government responded to the

¹¹Ju-in Song, “*Insadong ui Jangso Sangpumhwa eh Daeyunghan Jungchesung Undong eh Gwanhan Yongu*” [“A Study of the Identity Movement in Response to the Commodification of Place: A Case Study of Insadong in Seoul”], (master’s thesis, Seoul National University, 2000), 48.

¹²*Ibid.*, 46.

¹³Simon Breines and William J. Dean, *The Pedestrian Revolution: Streets without Cars* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

¹⁴According to Jangwon Jin, a professor of urban engineering in Chungju University, the word *boheng-gwon* was first used by the NGO Green Traffic Movement in 1993. Jangwon Jin, “Bohenggwon Hwakbo wa Yi-myon-doro Jongbi Bang-an” [The Procurement of the Right to Walk and the Methods to Modify Side Streets], *Dosi Munje* 397 (2001): 45-62, 45.

¹⁵Dosi-yŏndae, *Munhwa ūi Gŏri Josŏng ūi Munjejŏm gwa Baljŏnbanghyang eh Daehayŏh* [Regarding the Issue of the Problems and Future Direction of Culture Street Projects] (Seoul: Dosi-yŏndae, 1999.)

¹⁶Citizen’s Transportation Culture Center of Dosi-yŏndae, *Insadong Gŏri Hwalsŏnghwa Banghyang gwa Gwaje e daehan Josa Yŏngu*, [The Research Regarding the Direction to Vitalize Insadong’s Streets and Future Assignments] (Seoul: Citizen’s Transportation Culture Center of Dosi-yŏndae, 1997), 37.

Association's decision favorably, by announcing a plan to expand the implementation of the policy to Saturday afternoons in addition to Sundays.¹⁷

There are many reasons for the designation of Insadong as a Culture Street and Car-free Zone. According to Choi Hong-yol, a professor of Korean Studies, the historical quality of Insadong stems from the continuous production of older art forms such as calligraphy and *soo-mook-hwa* (ink-and-wash paintings) since the Chosun dynasty.¹⁸ Although forms of contemporary arts—both Korean and non-Korean—have become more prominent since the 1970s, older forms of handicrafts and ceramics have also become widespread. At the same time, restaurants specializing in *Hanjöngsik* (Korean traditional table d'hôte) and tea houses serving a variety of Korean teas have become popular ways of experiencing “traditional Korean” cuisine. Some of these restaurants use the hanok's form to advertise their Korean cuisine. Despite changes in trade structures and the introduction of modernization projects, the area, unlike the rest of Seoul, has retained its antiquated urban layout, reminding pedestrians of forgotten street patterns that were once a dominant feature of pre-industrial Seoul (fig. 3.3).



Figure 3.3: The street pattern of Insadong shows dense and narrow alleyways dating from the late Chosun Dynasty. Drawing and photo by the author.

More importantly, the independent cultural resources of Insadong include its history as a place for expressing political resistance through direct and indirect means. Maze-like alleyways in Insadong were called *Pimatgol*, literally meaning “alley of avoiding horses,” and they date back to the late Chosun dynasty when commoners and low officials were obligated to kowtow whenever high officials passed by on horses or in carriages.¹⁹ By frequenting allyways, the

¹⁷Hong-Yol Choi. “Insadong ‘Cha Upnun Gori’ Toyo-yil Oh-hu Kaji Hwak-dae” [Expanding the Car-free Zone to Saturday Afternoons], *Chosun Ilbo*, June 12, 2003, A12.

¹⁸Junsik Choi. *Seoul Munhwa Sulrae* [A Pilgrimage to Seoul's Cultural Sites], (Seoul: Sonamu, 2009.)

¹⁹Jong-han Jeon, “Dosi Twitgolmok üi ‘Jangso Giöök’: Jongno Pimatgol üi Sarye” [Place Memories of Urban Back Lanes: The Case of the *Pimat-gol* of Jongno, Seoul], *Daehan Jirihakhoeji* [Journal of the Korean Geographical Society] 135 (2009): 779-796.

commoners did not have to express respect and obedience to government officials. In addition, the marketplaces of Insadong provided a prime site to express more direct protest against the state's abuse of power. Historically, market places have functioned as the stage for the state to express its power as well as the place where the masses show their ability to resist and subvert such attempts.²⁰ The history of uses of the marketplace in Korea is filled with records of the monarchy ordering gruesome executions to showcase its ability to control and subdue possible threats to the regime.²¹ However, marketplaces were not simple tools for conveying the disciplinary power of the monarchy since commoners also used them to criticize the corruption of local officials. For instance, one resident of Jeju Island posted an anonymous letter in the marketplace as early as 1323, complaining about the re-appointment of a corrupt and exploitative official.²² During the Japanese colonial regime, political activists recruited supporters in the marketplace, where crowded streets functioned as protective cover.²³ Anti-colonial feelings also festered in the marketplace as a result of the frequent conflicts between Korean and Japanese merchants.

Insadong played a role similar to the earlier markets as the extremely exploitive economic structure of the colonial regime initiated a period of political turmoil. In addition to the presence of shops and galleries, Insadong was where anti-colonial sentiments were transformed into a political movement against the Japanese colonial regime. On March 1, 1919, the so-called March 1st Movement began as a popular uprising in Tapgol Park (also called Pagoda Park), located in the southeast corner of Insadong (fig. 3.4). While the thirty-three representatives of the movement changed the meeting place to nearby Taehwagwan, those who congregated in the park were mostly students who had learned about the impending demonstration. Though the demonstration was peaceful, the Japanese police force responded with brutal violence. Shortly after the initial demonstration on March 1, the movement quickly spread to other towns. In many places, demonstrations were launched at the local marketplace. These venues were naturally conducive to large congregations and they helped maximize the visibility of these events.²⁴ Insadong's strategic location between two palace complexes and the steady flow of pedestrians within this district were key factors in its role as the starting point of the independence movement.

²⁰Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

²¹The City History Compilation Committee of Seoul, *Seoul ui Sichang* [Seoul's Markets.] (Seoul: The City History Compilation Committee, 2007).

²²*Ibid.*, 46.

²³For instance, the Declaration of Independence was posted in the Jongro night marketplace to encourage public participation.

²⁴In Chŏn-An, demonstrations began in Ah-Woo-Nae, in Byŏngchŏn Market (Sichang). In the Gang-Sŏh district of Pyŏng-An province, Hap-Chŏn Gangyang-Myŏn, Namwon, and Yik-San, demonstrations started in the marketplace as well.



Figure 3.4. A stone carving indicating the site of the March 1st Movement commemorates the historic event.

Although the March 1st Movement did not lead to the overthrow of the Japanese colonial regime, it triggered a new campaign for independence and had a significant impact that was felt in many different spheres. The incident brought Japanese colonial policy under far greater international scrutiny. For instance, George W. Norris, a senator from Nebraska, denounced the colonial regime, describing a case of “Japanese persecution” in which Christian Koreans were burned.²⁵ The criticism by international powers put considerable pressure on Japanese officials although no further actions were immediately taken. While the colonial administration continued its repressive policies, it also recognized that it needed to seriously reconsider its strategy in order to maintain its control over the Korean population. Introduced under the new Governor General Saito Makoto, a subsequent pacification policy known as “culture rule” (*bunka seiji*) provided more educational opportunities as well as freedom of the press. The change in colonial policy, however, was nothing but a thinly veiled form of continued domination that actually tightened the control over the Korean population through an expanded police force. Nevertheless, it enabled some Korean intellectuals and artists to engage in cultural activities relatively more freely than under the previous policy.

During this period, various Korean literary styles and artistic innovations began to flourish. The Joseon(Chosun) Theater (fig. 3.5), established in Insadong in 1922, was a popular venue where artists experimented with various forms of modern theater. It was a place where many literary groups, such as Towŏlhoe and Kŭkyesulyŏnguhoe, performed regularly, introducing Western realist dramas such as works written by Henrik Ibsen and Nikolai Gogol. Members of what was referred to as the New Drama Movement (*Singŭk Undong*) sought to incorporate Western realism into theatrical productions in colonial Korea. According to Ahn Suk-hyeon, the popularity of several Russian plays—such as Tolstoy’s—was due to the similarity between Russian peasants under the Tsar and Koreans under Japanese rule.²⁶ Although the exact nature of the New Drama Movement’s contribution to nationalist sentiments or the independence

²⁵Mark Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea: 1910-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 113.

²⁶Suk-Hyeon Ahn, “Hanguk Gungaeguk eh Michin Rusia Munhak gwa Yonguk ui Yonghyang eh Gwanhan Yongu” [“A Study of Korean Modern Drama Influenced by Russian Literature and Drama”] (master’s thesis, Dankook University, 1994), 24.

movement is unclear, it nevertheless helped to diversify the available range of artistic influences. Experiments with foreign movements and different ideologies, which were possible during the 1920s, were a vital component in the moderate branch of the nationalist movement called *Shilryŏk Baeyang Undong* (the Growing Capacity Movement).



Figure 3.5: This poster advertisement for the Joseon Theater in the early 1930s shows portrait photos of silent-film narrators.

Joseon Theater was where many of the Western plays were performed and where many popular movies were screened. Located next to Insadong's busiest thoroughfare, the theater occupied a very prominent position within the district. During the 1920s, entertainment businesses were very profitable thanks to a booming economy and the changing lifestyle brought by Japan's emphasis on modernization. Along with a few other theaters such as Dansŏngsa in Myŏngdong, Joseon Theater was where high- and middlebrow forms of entertainment mingled. This mixture produced a rich cultural milieu, which in turn contributed to the area's reputation as the home of avant-garde artists and self-fashioned "modern boys" and "modern girls." As an amalgam of progressive politics and entertainment, Insadong was considered to be a dangerous influence for some portions of the population. According to the "dual cities" structure of colonial segregation, Insadong, as a part of *Jongro*, was considered native Korean territory while other parts of Seoul—such as Myŏngdong and Chungmuroh—were where Japanese comfortably resided.²⁷ With its history of political speeches, anti-colonial demonstrations, and commercial

²⁷Baekyong Kim, "Politics of Urban Space in Colonial Seoul, 1904-1945," (PhD diss., Seoul National University, 2008)

vibrancy, Insadong was correctly regarded as harboring dangerous sentiments that could be unleashed at any moment.

Thus, the combination of overt demonstrations against the colonial regime, as well as the more indirect strategies of the artistic movement, are an integral part of Insadong's history. Calling Insadong a Culture Street without understanding the traditions of resistance in the marketplace, therefore misses an important ingredient of its "cultural resources." Although material conditions—such as the presence of hanoks and small winding alleys—contributed to the historical appearance of the area, they are not the sole evidence of "Korean tradition" that is present in Insadong. The history of Insadong during colonial times includes experiments with new media forms and artistic devices, often including Western art forms and ideas. The current discussions surrounding Insadong's physical transformation should be situated in such historical context, as the area was not simply the container of Korean arts and crafts but also the central stage of political turmoil and experimental art movements aimed at social change.

The Transformation of Insadong



Figure 3.6: Historical photos of Insadong in the period immediately before the Korean War.

During Japan's rule, Insadong prospered as a marketplace for antiques and ceramics as well as paintings and old manuscripts. Pressed by declining economic conditions, descendants of the old literati class began to sell their heirlooms to antique dealers in Insadong who, in turn, sold the items to those who could afford them, either foreigners or Koreans. At this time, the Korean middle- and upper-classes were contracting and, as a result, a significant number of these items ended up in the hands of the Japanese colonists or US military personnel following the Korean War. Cases of illegally smuggling cultural assets out of the country were rampant throughout the colonial period and in the period following the Korean War. In one case, a 48-pelt leopard rug, once used by the assassinated Queen Min, the last queen in the Chosun Dynasty, was reportedly

purchased for \$25 by a US soldier.²⁸ Even in the 2000s, attempts to trade stolen cultural properties in Insadong were mentioned in the pages of major newspapers.²⁹



Figure 3.7: A photo of the main street in Insadong, 1988. The placard reads “June 18, the Day of Insadong’s Traditional Cultural Festival.”

However, as art objects designated as national treasures became rarer and the trade regulations stricter, it became more difficult to purchase historical artworks in Insadong. Galleries and old bookshops changed their merchandise to include less valuable artifacts as well as reproductions of famous paintings. Contemporary gilt-framed oil paintings began to appear in Insadong alongside traditional ink and wash paintings. More spacious art galleries began to appear next to older *hwa-rang* where Korean-style scrolled ink and wash paintings were stored in relatively small areas. With the infusion of new art forms and the industries associated with them, Insadong continued to function as the center of painting and other artist’s activities throughout the 1980s (Fig. 3.7).

Despite the historic ambience of the pre-industrial period that Insadong retained, many redevelopment projects put forward by the Gongpyung Redevelopment Plan resulted in the introduction of large high-rises in the area. The Gongpyung Urban Environmental District was officially designated in 1978 in Notification No.285 of the Ministry of Construction as a part of the larger metropolitan redevelopment plan.³⁰ Although the first urban redevelopment plan of Seoul was established in 1962, it was in the 1970s that the redevelopment projects began to be actively implemented.³¹ While the initial redevelopment plans in the early 1960s were targeted

²⁸“The Sergeant’s Souvenir,” *Life*, August 20, 1951, 48.

²⁹Hyewun Lee and Songwon Lee, “Bok-jang Yumul Yi Mwō-gi-eh, Munhwajae Jōldobōm Dūlyi...” [What are the Hidden Treasures (inside the Stomach of Buddha’s Statue) that the Thieves Stole?], *Chosun Ilbo*, March 24, 2011, A13.

³⁰Yon-gyu Jon, “Yigosi Dosihwangyung Jongbi Sayop Ida” [These are the Urban Redevelopment Projects], *Urban Development Press*, January 16, 2008.

³¹Housing Architecture Urban Design (HAUD), *Paradigm Change for an Old Section of an Urban Improvement*. (Seoul: HAUD Co., 2010), 15.

for illegal squatter settlements, the new plans increasingly focused on changing the urban image of Seoul by replacing smaller and low-rise buildings with high rises of “at least twenty stories, and preferably forty to fifty stories high.”³² This change in the direction of urban planning reflected changing political dynamics and economic conditions. According to Son Jung-mok, the director of the Seoul City Planning Bureau in the 1970s, the catalysts for redevelopment projects included US President Johnson’s visit to South Korea in 1966, holding the South-North Red Cross conference, and President Park’s interest in the matter.³³ Increasing visits by foreign dignitaries and the rival North Koreans made many government officials conscious of the backwardness of Seoul’s cityscape, which was televised in many different countries. Combined with the ambitions of a modernization project, urban redevelopment became one of the major tasks for the South Korean government.

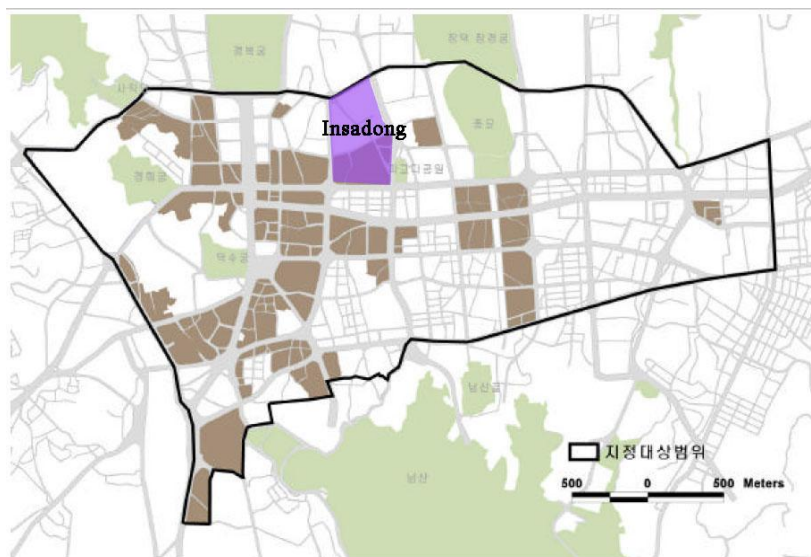
Although the policy changes of the central government encouraged urban redevelopments, most of the projects were carried out by large corporations which possessed the capital to construct such high rises. Local merchants and owners of buildings initially resisted urban redevelopment plans, but they had limited means in doing so given the authoritarian political regime at the time. In addition, the city planning bureau employed various methods such as sending local land owners to an “overseas urban redevelopment tour (including Philadelphia’s Penn Center and New York’s Rockefeller Center),” which “showed them that middle/small businesses do not take part in redevelopment projects.”³⁴ In the early 1980s, the pressure to redevelop the urban center only increased with the impending hosting of the Olympic Games. In Insadong, the urban redevelopment drive led to the construction of corporate-owned buildings such as the SK Construction office building in 1986. In another instance, the Taiwha and Hanaro Buildings were built by the Methodist Foundation. According to the study by Dosi-yondae, the Gongpyung Redevelopment Plan (fig.3.8) resulted in rising land prices and the subsequent relocation of older art galleries and antique shops to the Gangnam area.³⁵

³²Jung-mok Son. *Seoul Dosi Gyehoek Iyagi II [The Story of Seoul’s Urban Planning II]*, (Seoul: Hanwul, 2003), 168.

³³*Ibid.*, 159-160.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 168.

³⁵Citizen’s Transportation Culture Center of Dosi-yondae, *Insadong Göri Hwalsöngghwa Banghyang gwa Gwaje e daehan Josa Yöngu*, 33.



The Boundary of Urban Area Designated for Redevelopment

Figure 3.8. The redevelopment plan of 2004 shows the area designated for redevelopment in the urban center of Seoul. The black line indicates the boundary of the redevelopment area.

The metropolitan redevelopment plan went through several phases of alterations in the 1990s and 2000s when the need to preserve and cultivate the historical character of Seoul was recognized by the government. The new policy, promulgated in 2000, recommended the conservation of historic buildings in some districts designated as redevelopment project sites.³⁶ However, despite increasing emphasis on preserving the historical ambience of Seoul, the tendency to encourage high-rise redevelopments persisted. In 2004, the Seoul metropolitan government put forward the plan to relax regulations on building heights for residential developments.³⁷ While calling for the preservation of historical ambience, urban planning policy reasserted the primacy of growth by allowing large-scale developments. This simultaneous pursuit of economic efficiency and historical preservation resulted in a juxtaposition of buildings of contrasting scales and ages. The construction of skyscrapers such as Jongro Tower (fig.3.9) near Insadong and the increasing presence of conglomerate investment throughout the area in the 1990s brought changes within the commercial districts dominated by small shops. Also known as Samsung Millennium Tower, Jongro tower—designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects and Samoo Architects & Engineers—rises to a height of 131 meters. Built to celebrate the approaching millennium, the project, completed in 1999, received a gold award from Seoul Metropolitan City in the year 2000. Similarly, the construction of Fraser Suites, the 24-story-high serviced apartment complex owned by the Singaporean firm Frasers, began to reshape the skyline of the area. The construction of the residential structure was consistent with the Gongpyung

³⁶HAUD, *Paradigm Change*, 18.

³⁷Seoul Metropolitan City, *Seoulsi Dosi Mit Jugohwangyung Jungbi Gibon Goehoek* [The Basic Plan for the Maintenance of Seoul's Residential Environments], (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, 2004), 2.

Redevelopment Plan, which designated the area for office and residential uses.³⁸ Therefore, the gentrification process of Insadong should be traced back to the urban redevelopment policy, which consistently encouraged the construction of high-rise office towers and residential structures.



Figure 3.9. Samsung's Jongro Tower was built to celebrate the new millennium.

The government's urban redevelopment plans put forward in 2004 were criticized by civil society organizations such as the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ, or Gyöng-sil-ryön). CCEJ announced a petition, signed by a hundred experts, which asked for the withdrawal of the plan at a press conference held on May 25, 2004.³⁹ Given that most commercial buildings in Insadong are only three to four stories high, such large-scale development initiated debates regarding what kind of impact it would have on Insadong's distinct physical characteristics. For instance, Koo Youngmin, a professor of architecture, noted that the "abnormal composition introduced by the skyscraper contributed to contextual disparity."⁴⁰ Other scholars echoed this

³⁸Ji Bae, "Seoul Gongpyong Guyok Dosim Jaegaebal Daehyong Gonchukmul ui Ttuksong eh Gwanhan Yongu" ["A Study of Large Scale Commercial Buildings in Gongpyong Urban Redevelopment in Downtown Seoul"], (master's thesis, University of Seoul, 2007), 64.

³⁹Gyöng-sil-ryön, *Seoulsi Dosim Jaebaebal Gibon Gyehoek Byon-gyong Cholhoe Chokgu rul Wihan Jonmunga 100-yin Sonon mit Gija Hoegyong Jin-heng*, [The Declaration and Press Conference by 100 Experts for the Withdrawal of the Seoul Metropolitan Basic Urban Plan] Seoul: Gyöng-sil-ryön, 2004.

⁴⁰Youngmin Koo, "Dosi ui Tum, Tum-sok ui Dosi" [The Gaps of Cities, Cities in Gaps], *Dangdaebipyong* 22, (2003): 265-276, 273.

opinion by commenting that construction of Jongro Tower at the former site of the Hwashin Department Store showed a lack of understanding of modern architecture.⁴¹

When the Ssamzi Corporation purchased land in Insadong, the sense of crisis felt by store owners started what became a community-wide movement to preserve the physical integrity of the neighborhood and to limit outside commercializing forces. The success of the movement led to a series of ordinances that “fundamentally prohibit[ed]” the construction of buildings higher than four stories.⁴² It also initiated the construction of smaller-scale art galleries that showed more respect for the pedestrian-friendly urban contexts of Insadong. A recently constructed shopping mall consists of a series of small shops selling various objects. Ssamzigil, a commercial development in the heart of Insadong, became the testing ground to measure the prowess of the grassroots movement against the forces of gentrification.

The Saving Small Stores Campaign and Insadong’s Ssamzigil



Figure 3.10: Insadong’s Ssamzigil was constructed with the plan to incorporate the original twelve shops that were initially planned to be demolished.

One of the most prominent structures in Insadong is Ssamzigil (fig. 3.10), a four-story commercial structure in which all units are linked together by a multi-level ramp. The 2005 project sparked intense debates as the community raised questions about the twelve shops that occupied the planned site for the Ssamzigil building and that had been acquired by the Ssamzi Corporation. The sense of crisis felt not only by the owners of the twelve shops but by patrons of

⁴¹Joong-Jin Shin et al., “Chogocheng Gonchukmul ui Gongongsong Jungjinul Wihan Gaehoek Banghyang eh Gwanhan Yongu” “A Study on the Planning Strategy of Super Tall Buildings for Increasing Public Sharing of Urban Space,” *Daehangunchukhakhoe Nonmunjip* 192 (2004): 33-42, 38.

⁴²Young-ha Kim. “Yöksamunhwa Tambangro Josöngsayöp Yihu üi Garogyönggwan Bunsök Yöngu: Insadong ül Jungsim ũro” [A Study of Street Landscapes after the Construction of History and Culture Routes: With a Focus on Insadong], *Tehangöñchukhakhoe Nonmunjip: Gyehoekgye* 184 (2004): 153-160, 160.

Insadong more generally led to a “Saving Small Stores Campaign.”⁴³ The main fear was that corporate plans for mega-structures would eliminate the area’s small alleys and the existing mom-and-pop businesses, and, as a result, would fundamentally impair Insadong’s unique character. To support local merchants, members of Dosi-yöndae worked to politicize the event, depicting it as an infiltration by big corporations designed to destroy Insadong’s local identity. Unlike the struggles typically associated with urban renewal projects, this effort focused primarily “on signature-seeking campaigns involving broad participation by city residents and renowned persons.”⁴⁴ A consensus was reached between the small shop camp and Ssamzi whereby the twelve shops would be able to continue their businesses in the newly constructed Ssamzigil structure.

In addition, the Ssamzigil building was designed to respect the existing urban context and to reflect the intimate scale of Insadong’s streets. As a result, Ssamzigil stands in sharp contrast to more typical shopping centers. Although the building itself is a new construction, it avoids being overly conspicuous by maintaining the scale of the neighboring alleys. Walking along the multi-level ramp is reminiscent of walking down nearby alleyways, especially given the fact that the structure is lined with small shops and features activities in its central courtyard. Less intent on making a prominent visual statement, the building was described by architects and critics as “more than just eye-candy,” and an example of how architecture can help fabricate “pleasurable walking experiences.”⁴⁵ A representative of Janghak Construction Company, which undertook the project, noted that they used “only three materials—brick, concrete, and wood—which accentuate the architect’s intent to make the structure merely a backdrop.”⁴⁶ The completion of the project won Mun-gyu Choi and Gabriel Kroiz, the architects, several awards including the 2005 Korean Architecture Award and the AIA Maryland Design Award in 2005.

Despite the successful negotiations between the company and the store owners, the outcome of the campaign was a mixture of success and failure. Although the NGO’s campaign defended merchants and their rights, it nevertheless could not prevent the demolition of the existing structures. At the same time, the NGOs inevitably rely on a cultural logic in which “tradition” and “modern” are conceived as binary opposites. A study conducted by Dosi-yöndae observed that as “older hanoks/antique shops/galleries and newer structures mingle together,” the result is an “encroachment on the existing urban characteristic.”⁴⁷ As such, new developments were perceived as contributing to an “incongruous image” of the neighborhood.⁴⁸ The success of the NGOs’ campaign was partly due to its emphasis on preserving “traditional cultures” as a key factor in protecting small businesses. While this strategy proved to be beneficial in drawing in a wider support base that included upper-class patrons, it also contributed to the mixed reactions to the designation of Insadong as a Car-free Zone.

⁴³Ung-Kyu Bae and Jong-dae Jöng, “Jiyok Jungchesong Ganghwarul Wihan Insadong Jakun Gagye Salrigi Undong ui Jongae Gwajong Yongu” [“A Study of the Process of the ‘Small Shop Restoration Campaign at Insadong’ to Reinforce its Unique Identity”], *Jiyök Sahoe Baljön Yöngu* 29(2), (2004): 37-60.

⁴⁴Ju-in Song, *A Study of the Identity Movement*, 71-72.

⁴⁵Jin-Aeh Kim, *Saram, Gonggan, and Jeongchi* [People, Space, and Politics], <http://jkspacenet/21> Accessed on July 13th, 2010.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Citizen’s Transportation Culture Center of Dosi Yöndae, *Insadong Guri Hwalsonghwa Banghyang gwa Gwaje e daehan Josa Yongu*, 24.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

The Narrative of Loss: What was lost?



Figure 3.11: The products sold in Insadong include a Hello Kitty doll wearing a Korean costume.

The combined effort of the local government and Dosi-yondae to promote Insadong's streets was met by criticism that argued that the plan to prohibit car traffic brought negative consequences. The measure to remove cars aimed to increase pedestrian safety, and while it in fact led to an overall increase in the number of visitors to the area, there were mixed reactions to some of the unanticipated consequences of this strategy. According to Ungkyu Bae, a professor of urban engineering at JungAng University, one of the changes brought by the implementation of the Car-free Zone was the lowered average age of the visitors.⁴⁹ Other changes included an increasing percentage of foreigners among visitors and a decreasing number of older shops and galleries.⁵⁰ As consumers, these visitors were limited in their purchasing power and, as a result, unable to buy luxury items such as original artwork and antiques.⁵¹ This led to an increase in cheaper souvenirs and products manufactured outside South Korea.

Many South Koreans expressed concern and fear about these changes in Insadong. Shopowners took issue with the excessively designed street markers used to separate pedestrian walkways and the street. An American shopper, who had been living in Korea for twenty years, repeated similar sentiments by noting that "this place has become very crowded and commercialized."⁵² Many urban studies and environmental reports of Insadong observe that the streets of Insadong are filled with vendors selling cheap souvenirs and eclectic products (fig. 3.11). The fact that many of the products are not produced in South Korea—that they are of "unknown nationality"—is another source of frequent concern.⁵³ A study conducted by the

⁴⁹Ung-kyu Bae, "Cha Upnun Gori Sa-up Yihu Insadong Gyongwan Byonghwa" ["The Change in Urban Scenes of Insadong after the Implement of Car Free Zone"] *Insadong 10 Nyon(1998-2007): Pyongga wa Jongmang [Ten Years of Insadong (1998-2007): Evaluation and Prospects]*, (paper presented at Hanguk Gyongggwan Hyopuihoe Symposium, Seoul, Korea, May 13, 2008.)

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Se-yong Kim. "The Changes Resulting From the Car-free Zone: The Case of Insadong, Seoul," *Daejin Ronjip*, 1999.

⁵²In an interview conducted on October 14, 2009 by the author.

⁵³Jaeyun Yu, Younghyo Jin, and Hyungkuk Kim, *Doshi Munhwa ui Yuksung Bangan [Strategies for the Culture Industry of a City]*, (Anyang: Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements, 2000).

Korean Culture Policy Institute (which in 2002 merged with the Korea Tourism Institute to become the Korea Culture and Tourism Institute) observed that the “urban problems” in Insadong included the “high pressure for redevelopment, conflicts between old forms of culture and new forms, a deepening crisis of traditional cultural identity, and recessions.”⁵⁴ Although the study acknowledged that “changes in commercial ambience cannot be judged entirely as vulgar or bad,” it nevertheless concluded that “indigenous cultures cannot function properly in cultural chaos due to [the] absence of [an] autonomous mediator.”⁵⁵

Such statements conveying a nostalgic feeling of loss were echoed from academic fields as well. Lee Song-wuk, a researcher at the Korean Research Institute of Human Settlements, criticized the deleterious effect of labeling Insadong as “traditional streets” when “rampant forms of pseudo-traditions fill up the streets of Insadong.”⁵⁶ He concluded that so-called “traditions” in Insadong are fake for two reasons—the dominance of cheap “kitsch” products on the commercial scene and disappearing spontaneity as staging the area as a “traditional street” took over.⁵⁷ Similarly, a scholarly article published in 2004 in the Journal of Architectural Institute of Korea noted that “the quality of street landscapes is going down due to shops with a strong commercial character, most of them having opened after the implementation of the Car-free Zone.”⁵⁸ Similarly, another scholarly article published in the Journal of the Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture lamented the phenomenon of “the decreasing number of traditional cultural elements such as *hwa-rang* art galleries/antique shops on the one hand and the increasing number of commercial establishments such as souvenir shops and bars on the other.”⁵⁹ Such statements assume that some stores are more commercial than others although there is no indication that *hwa-rang* art galleries are less profit-seeking than souvenir shops. At the same time, it also illustrates that the critique of modernization overlaps with the impulse to blame “vulgar” or “low-brow” forms of cultures. It is unclear what exactly are the characteristics that distinguish between “real traditions” and “pseudo-traditions.” While critique of the snowballing effect of government-led constructions is valid, it is questionable whether constructing a dichotomy between different kinds of traditions and between “staged” and “spontaneous” activities is an appropriate way to address urban problems.

It is interesting that the main complaints against “excessive commercialization” focus on the increase of cheaper (and assumed therefore to be of lower quality) goods. The growing tension between long-time shop owners and temporary street stall owners shows that “urban identity” comprises some very murky terrain. The proliferation of street stalls and the sale of non-Korean-made products have generated concerns among professionals and members of various NGOs. For instance, a study conducted by the Dosi-yondae indicated that 41.3% percent of

⁵⁴Haksun Lim, *Munhwa Jigu Josung Model Gaebal mit Jongchek Banghyang e gwanhan Yongu* [Developing the Cultural District Model to Revitalize a City through Cultural Resources: The case of Insadong District in Seoul Metropolitan City](Seoul: Korea Culture Policy Institute, 1999).

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁶Song-wuk Lee, “Insadong un Jontong ui Guri Inga” [Is Insadong a Street of Tradition?], *Gukto* 207, (1999): 77-81.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁵⁸Yöng-ha Kim, “Yöksamunhwa Tambangro Josöngsayöp Yihu üi Garogyönggwan Bunsök Yöngu: Insadong üi Jungsim üro,” 153.

⁵⁹Jong-Sook Cho and Namjo Kim, “Insadong ui Mullijok Simrijok Image ui Pyong-ga” [An Evaluation of the Physical and Psychological Image of Insadong], *Journal of the Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture* 30(2) (2002), 20.

merchants associated the introduction of the Car-free policy with the sale of “products Insadong stores did not carry before [the policy] that damage Insadong’s image.”⁶⁰ The proliferation of street stalls has almost led to the abandonment of the Car-free policy, though it resumed after the Jongro District Office promised to strictly regulate illegal commercial activities. The shift in ambience and the loss of cultural authenticity is often blamed on street vendors who started selling mass-produced products in the area.

In fact, criticism regarding changes in Insadong combines “cultural” qualities with economic concerns. Just as there are many factors that determine the speed of continuous urban redevelopments, so there are various desires implicit in the drive to preserve the “authenticity” or “identity” of a particular place. It is unclear whether it is the non-Korean origin or the cheap quality of these items that is to blame for the changed ambience of the area. Nor it is clear which kinds of products “damage” the image of Insadong and which do not. The distinction between “souvenirs” and “antiques” itself is ambiguous when most “antique shops” in Insadong sell cheap products in addition to their more valuable merchandise. In their defence against the city government’s policy of driving them out, some street vendors observed that since “there is no difference between the products they [antique shopkeepers] sell and those we sell,” vendors should not be considered detrimental to the traditional ambience of the neighborhood.⁶¹

The argument that the sales of mass-produced non-Korean-made products harm the image of Insadong assumes that the area has a fixed identity, one that is associated with “Korean high culture.” Although the decreased sales of handcrafts and the changing commercial ambience in Insadong can be attributed to economic stagnation and changing consumption patterns, it is more often blamed on “poor cultural tastes.” Labeling one form of culture as “inferior” to another, however, poses the danger of concealing bigger structural problems such as the increased number of the homeless or recently unemployed, many of whom became street vendors following the Asian financial crisis. Arguably, misgivings about the changing ambience of Insadong stem from genuine concerns about the possibility of gentrification that often follow large-scale urban developments.

However, the fixation on the authenticity of urban environments has served to overlook a deeper dimension of *segyehwa* and the diverse ways the processes of globalization are expressed. On one hand, the distinction between what are considered “traditional cultural elements” and what is considered “modern” has become harder to detect. Rituals or artifacts considered by many South Koreans as “authentic” or “timeless” forms of culture are often a byproduct of cultural hybridization and recent social developments. On the other hand, it is notable that increasing signs of foreign cultural influences and increasing emphasis on Korean customs occur simultaneously. In the next section, this chapter discusses the development of “tradition”-related industries in Insadong and how they were “rediscovered” amidst an increasing need to reconfirm Korea’s modernity. This phenomenon culminated in a proliferation of tea drinking and *hanjungsik* restaurants in Insadong. Contrary to the notion that such rituals represent “timeless traditions,” temporarily lost during the period of rapid economic development, these developments are better understood in the context of diversifying dining patterns and burgeoning connoisseurship among the middle-class population. In order to understand the continuous

⁶⁰Citizen’s Transportation Culture Center of Dosi Yondae, *Insadong Guri Hwalsonghwa Banghyang gwa Gwaje e daehan Josa Yongu*, 52-53.

⁶¹Interview conducted in October 21, 2009.

popularity of Insadong as a repository of “Korean cultures,” it is necessary to examine how rediscoveries of Korean cuisine fit into the urban environments.

The Construction of Traditions in Insadong: Tea Houses and Korean Cuisine as Rediscoveries



Figure 3.12: An example of a tea house which uses decorative elements of the hanok’s post-and-beam structure.

While most of the products and services available in Insadong seem to be based on deep-seated cultural practices, enterprises such as tea houses and *hanjongsik* (Korean course meal) are very contemporary phenomena. For instance, many people believe that tea drinking is an integral part of Korean culture. However, despite the increasing popularity of tea houses in Insadong (fig. 3.12) and Korean tea in general, scholars argue that there is a discrepancy between the historical evidence and what people believe. According to a study by Yu Ae-ryung, “tea drinking did not occupy a significant portion of Korean culture, unlike China and Japan.”⁶² Instead, only a small portion of the educated literati class consumed it occasionally.⁶³ Similarly, the practice of *hanjongsik* was an exclusive feature of royal cuisine far removed from the everyday meal most of Koreans enjoyed. Tea drinking and consuming *hanjongsik*-style meals were also very private activities that took place at private residences instead of in public view.

Other scholars such as Park Sang-mi argue that tea drinking and consuming Korean-style cuisine should be considered elements of “distinction” since they are often associated with the possession of cultural capital.⁶⁴ In contrast to typical Korean barbecue restaurants, which focus on the consumption of large amount of meat, *hanjongsik* emphasizes “skills” and elaborate

⁶²Ae-ryung Yu, *Shikmunhwa ui Puri rul Chajasuh* [Searching for the Roots of Food Cultures], Seoul: Kyobo, 1997.

⁶³Those who enjoyed drinking tea were limited to the royal family, a small portion of the literati class, and Buddhist monks, for whom tea-drinking was important part of meditation.

⁶⁴Sang-mi Park, “Juntong Gwonryuk Gurigo Mat” [“Tradition, Power, and Taste: The Formation of Identity in Insadong through Food Culture”], *Whedae Sahak* 13 (2000): 247-282, 267.

preparations involved in the cooking of each dish.⁶⁵ Thus, the consumption of hanjongsik implies a more distinguished lifestyle, an appreciation of sophisticated cuisine rather than the simple satiation of hunger. Whereas these rituals were once required as a standard part of court etiquette, they now indicate a conscious choice designed to signify one's socioeconomic status. As Insadong became known as the place to enjoy "Korean cuisine," it witnessed a sharp increase in both hanjongsik and foreign restaurants. During this time Korean-style restaurants also diversified as well to include simpler hanjongsik and cheaper specialty food chains. The simultaneous increase in Korean tea houses and foreign cuisine in Insadong illustrate that "rediscovered traditions" are part of diversifying consumption patterns rather than a genuine return to "tradition" for its own sake. Contrary to the concern of urban scholars that such diversification of shops and restaurants represents "fake traditions" or "staged authenticity," they should be regarded as the result of social revolutions that involve amalgamation of new and old practices.⁶⁶ At the same time, they are the result of the vernacularization of "highbrow" cultural practices that reflect the desire to be incorporated into a higher social status. Denying them the status of "spontaneous tradition" or "urban identity" just because of the government project to promote a Culture Street is to deny the agency of the larger population, including those who initiated the implementation of the Car-free Zone policy. At the same time, disowning the current urban identities of Insadong inadvertently ossifies the concept of "Korean tradition."

The notion that there is a fixed category of Korean tradition is unfounded. As discussed, many activities considered "traditional," such as tea drinking, also fulfill the desire to be modern. What is more important is how certain activities and built environments are incorporated into the category of tradition and how they simultaneously indicate new possibilities for the future. Although changing urban aesthetics and building styles have generated concerns, these changes do not amount to fundamental shifts in how streets are used. While the diminishing number of older art galleries and antiques shops has been lamented by many, they have been replaced by other forms of cultural activities that have sprung up in their wake.



⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁶Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (3) (1973), 589-603.

Figure 3.13: On weekends, the streets of Insadong become the place to promote different political causes and draw attention to social issues.

Despite the worries about Insadong's changing urban environment, there are signs of a continuation of spatial practices that can be traced back to the pre-industrial historical period. Demonstrations and political statements continue to be visible in the streets of Insadong despite complaints that the place has become too commercialized. In addition to reminding pedestrians of Seoul's pre-industrial past, Insadong is still able to accommodate public gatherings and political rallies. The rising number of visitors and pedestrians as well as the absence of car traffic on major thoroughfares has also attracted street performers, promoters of various political issues, and organizers of NGOs. Events sponsored by the city government, such as performances of Korean-style dance, take place in the designated plazas at the end of the main streets. Other, more informal activities take place in the middle of main thoroughfares. Alongside the commercial bustle, there are political presentations on human rights issues in North Korea and China (fig. 3.13). At other times, gay men join the global "Free Hug Movement" in a bold political and personal statement. While the increased amount of pedestrian traffic has attracted street vendors selling cheap snacks and mementos, it has also provided ample opportunities for chance encounters with various activities.

Human rights issues concerning North Korean defectors have had popular appeal, and a related exhibition held in Gana Art Center in Insadong drew an unexpectedly large number of visitors. Yim-sook Ha, the curator of the art center, noted that "the reason why this exhibition is so successful [drawing more than a thousand people] was because of Insadong's Culture Streets."⁶⁷ A sixty-three year old visitor expressed surprise at the fact that "so many of the younger generation came to see the exhibition."⁶⁸ This phenomenon was regarded as surprising since, unlike older South Koreans, many in the younger generation are less interested in North Korea or the issue of unification. In other instances, Insadong's streets have become the prime site for hosting various demonstrations such as street speeches by the minority Democratic Labor Party which drew "more than a thousand people in less than ten minutes."⁶⁹ Similarly, demonstrations against the Korea-US free trade agreement in 2008 that started in front of the city hall have continued into Insadong where the implementation of the Car-free Zone facilitated the gathering of people by preventing car traffic.⁷⁰

It is important to acknowledge that crowds bring diversity and the opportunity to disseminate different ideas. Similarly, an increasing number of generic "made-in-China" products was followed by increased interest in global political issues. The processes of segyehwa involve the circulation not only of products, but ideas as well. At the same time, the processes of segyehwa are varied, some encouraging emphasis on one's own cultural practices while others

⁶⁷Hwan-yong Kim, "Bukhan Jongchibum Suyongso Jonsihoe Song-hwang" ["The Successful Exhibition of North Korea's Political Dissident Prison Camp"], *Voice of America*, February 4, 2011.

<http://www.voanews.com/korean/news/nk-camp-115281189.html>. Accessed on June 9, 2011.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Gyoung-he Byon. "Min-no, Insadong Gōriyōnsōl 1-chōn-myōng Mol-ryōh" [A Thousand People Gathered for the DLP's Insadong Street Speech], August 27, 2008. <http://www.redian.org/news/articleView.html?idxno=10798> Accessed on June 11, 2011.

⁷⁰Chul-gwan Kim, "Misuda Paulina-do, Yebigun gwa Hamkehan Gōri-hengjin" [With Paulina in Misuda, a Street March with Reserve Forces], *OhmyNews*, June 1, 2008.

trigger interests in foreign cultural elements. As the colonial history of Insadong illustrates, the process of globalization and cultural mixing stretches beyond the current era of the segyehwa drive. Amalgamations of foreign and Korean cultures should be understood in terms of what they achieve, rather than in terms of what they look like. The peaceful co-existence of heterogeneous cultural practices and products should be accepted as a condition of contemporary Korean society rather than criticized as “kitsch.” The question of place identity in Insadong remains open, just as the meaning of a “Culture Street” remain unresolved.

Conclusion

So far this dissertation has examined how the notion of tradition as rediscovery has shaped the hanok renaissance in Bukchon and the discussions of “the loss of urban identity” in Insadong. Whereas the “rediscovery” of remodeled hanoks became a sign of sophistication and cultural modernity, the absence of such “rediscoveries” in Insadong has become a source of concern. Although the movement to implement a Car-Free Zone and save small stores was started as a means to prevent further large-scale developments, these efforts have ironically sparked a narrative of loss rooted in a rigid construction of Insadong’s urban identity and a dichotomy between “high” and “low” culture. Increased numbers of pedestrians, many of them young adults in their 20s and 30s, have been associated with an increasing number of mass-produced products, perceived by scholars as a threat to Insadong’s urban identity.

Admittedly, some of the concerns about the urban transformation of Insadong stem from the gentrification the governmental redevelopment plan introduced to the area. While the small store owners in Ssamzigil were able to stay and continue their businesses, others left the area in search of cheaper rents. However, the current narrative of loss focuses on cultural representations as the principle source of urban problems rather than placing blame on the socioeconomic aspect of the area’s development. At the same time, targeting the Car-free Zone as the main contributor to the “loss of authenticity” endangers a hard-won right to walkable streets. Rather than concentrating on the question of whether something is “traditional” or “authentic,” it is more important to raise questions as to what is being sacrificed in the name of tradition or culture. As the case of Bukchon shows, faithfully keeping with the representational form of “high culture” does not guarantee retaining classical virtues or being somehow less commercial. Nor is it possible to preserve “traditional form” without modifications to suit contemporary needs. In the cases of both Bukchon and Insadong, aestheticizing the South Korean past has worked to obscure the increasing socioeconomic divisions and discourage certain uses of urban spaces.

Contrary to the popular notion that the “urban identity” of Insadong is threatened by the homogenizing forces of globalization, changes in Insadong are complemented by the diversification of cultural practices and street activities. This chapter has shown that the processes of segyehwa encourage interests not only in foreign things but also in local cultural practices, including what have previously been considered exclusive ones. At the same time, the presence of “kitsch” products should be regarded as the consequence of global connectedness which promotes not only consumption but also attention to larger political issues affecting the world. Rather than being unidirectional, the processes of segyehwa are multidirectional, encouraging the simultaneous presences of heterogenous cultural elements and practices.

In the next chapter, this dissertation turns to two other Global Cultural Zones—Dongdaemun and Itaewon—to examine how the processes of segyehwa are aligned into the

government project to promote the status of Seoul. The cases of urban development in Dongdaemun and Itaewon illustrate different paths of urban transformations in the age of globalization. In contrast to Insadong's smaller-scale urban developments, the design of Dongdaemun Market deliberately opts for the continuation of large developmental projects by redesigning and enlarging existing shopping malls in order to enhance its status as a design capital. In contrast to the urban discourse surrounding Insadong, cultural heterogeneity is celebrated as "the urban identity" of Itaewon. Continuing with the theme of "culture" and the changing role of political actors in South Korea, the next chapter moves on to the patterns of migration and formations of different ethnic groups reflected in processes of urban transformation. At the same time, it shows how seemingly marginalized groups can generate a new urban aesthetic to counter Seoul's imagined status as a design capital.

CHAPTER 4

Rediscoveries and Redesigns: Dongdaemun History and Culture Park

The World Design Market will become a design business hub: where design related projects and transactions will be conducted, business partnership will be pursued, new designs will be introduced. Libraries and data will be available both on- and off-line. From 2010, the Design Market will be the key business sector of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park that leads the design industry of Seoul.¹

– Seoul Metropolitan Government

The ambition to promote design-related businesses through the construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (DDPP) is expressed quite clearly in the statements of the Seoul metropolitan government. The Dongdaemun Stadium Station of the Seoul Metro was renamed Dongdaemun History and Culture Park Station in December 2009, when the sports stadium, which first opened in 1926, was demolished to make way for DDPP. Designed by Zaha Hadid, the plaza and park complex is planned to be completed by December 2011. The site is located on the eastern edge of historic Seoul, near the landmark of Dongdaemun (Eastern Gate) and Dongdaemun Market (fig. 4.1). Occupying the total site area of 65,232 square meters (16 acres), it is considered a new landmark not only for the Dongdaemun Market but also for the city of Seoul. DDPP is promoted not only as a public park which adds amenities to the existing fashion industry in the area but also as a potential world-famous landmark, like the Sydney Opera House and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.² Although the overall cost of demolition and construction is 375,500 million KRW (about 313 million USD), the presence of DDPP in Dongdaemun market is expected to generate an even bigger influence on tourist activities in Seoul to offset the cost.³ The construction of DDPP, which started in 2010 when Seoul was selected as the World Design Capital by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), is part of the local government's Design Seoul campaign to elevate Seoul to the hub of the world design industry.

¹ Seoul Metropolitan Government, *World Design Capital: Seoul 2010* (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2009).

² Seoul Design Foundation, *Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Dongdaemun History & Culture Park: Introduction*. (Seoul: Seoul Design Foundation, 2009.)

³ Soyoung Lee. "Dongdaemun Design Plaza & Park Siwon hage Chotsap Ttutdda" ["The Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park"], *Seoul Culture Today*, April 28, 2009.

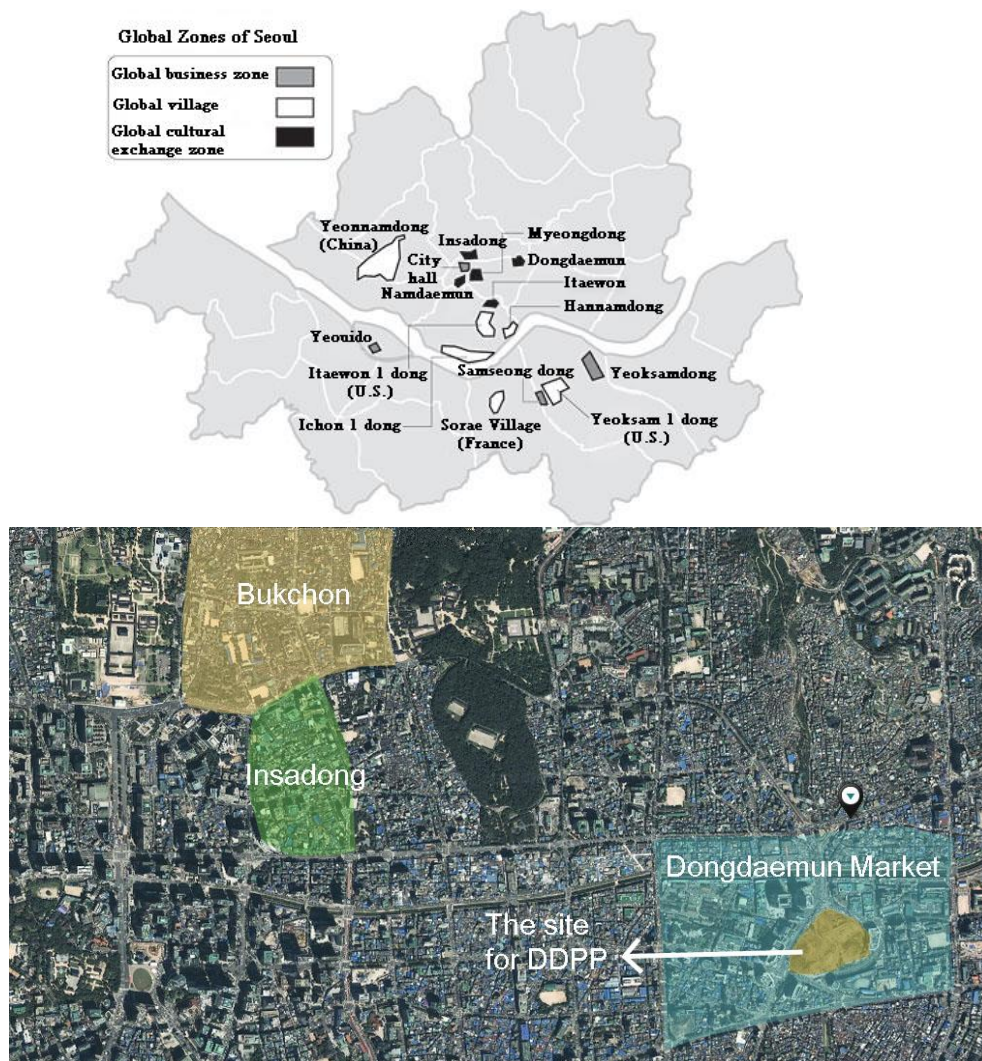


Figure 4.1: from the top, a diagram showing the locations of Global Cultural Zones and an aerial map of Dongdaemun Market showing the construction site of DDPP.

The construction of DDPP is an example of a series of new developments that have characterized the transformation of the urban landscapes of Dongdaemun Market. Since the late 1990s, the construction of high-rise shopping malls has started to add a new ambience to the marketplace, which contains many smaller-sized retail shops and wholesale markets. Although sales of goods in general plummeted during the Asian financial crisis, sales in newly constructed mega-shopping malls such as Doota and Migliore have boasted a phenomenal growth, coining the phrase “the myth of Dongdaemun.” The presence of many tourists and foreign buyers ordering products are reported as signs of the “global fashion town” which maintains the momentum of the recent Hallyu phenomenon, the popularity of Korean movie and dramas overseas. As the result of the continuous construction of high-rise shopping malls, the area exudes the youthful atmosphere of hip and fashionable lifestyles. In addition to high-rise shopping malls with trendy shops, the construction of DDPP, funded by the Seoul city government, is expected to generate more profit by rebranding Seoul from an industrial city to a post-industrial “culture city.”

This chapter investigates the impact of segyehwa policy and transnational migration of labor on the functioning of Dongdaemun Market. I analyze how the structural changes in the South Korean political economy since the 1980s have affected production networks and how these changes are reflected in the physical landscapes of Dongdaemun Market. In particular, the transformation of the market from cramped factory floors to the ultramodern shopping mall is the result of changing labor market conditions. The relocation of production elsewhere, including to other parts of Seoul and China, has ushered in an enlargement of shopping malls and a steadily increasing presence of conglomerates. The changing commercial ambience in Dongdaemun is promoted as a sign of endless adaptability, one of the necessary factors to become “winners” in the ever-changing economic conditions. High-rises and mega-scale shopping malls simply become catalysts for further development rather than targets for a fundamental reexamination of the developmentalist economic framework. The government’s usage of terms such as “world design capital” illustrates how the word “design” can be used as a catch-all phrase which justifies and facilitates the process of urban redevelopment. This chapter questions the thesis that design-oriented spaces bring further economic growth, let alone produce “cultural space.” Although the industrial scene of Korean workers bent over sewing machines is gone, it has been replaced with foreign migrant workers and higher risks faced by small and medium businesses.

At the same time, this chapter explores how the city government’s approach of treating citizens as clients in the Design Seoul campaign is opposed by local residents’ counter-narratives. Continuing on the theme of “tradition as rediscovery” discussed in previous chapters, this chapter illustrates how the integration of the rediscovered city walls dating back to the fourteenth century has become a part of the rationale for the city government to assess Hadid’s metonymic architecture as “respecting Korean tradition.”⁴ Urban planners and city officials view the Design Seoul project as benefiting residents by providing a resting space which shows consideration for the non-economic and emotional well-being of citizens. However, such a clientelist approach has been challenged by sports fans, student artists, and street vendors who have encouraged discussions of the role of design as well as what defines the status of a “global city.” In this chapter, I argue that the process of globalization involves an interpenetration of local concerns and global ambitions rather than a simple top-down process. Processes of globalization involve constantly shifting and negotiated local articulations of what “being global” means. Despite the trend of globalizing the production and consumption of architectural practices, the act of conferring meanings as well as making use of that physical space remains on the local level.

⁴ Oh Se-hoon, the mayor of Seoul, has made the comment that DDPP is a gesture toward respecting Korean tradition. See Soyoung Lee, “Dongdaemun Design Plaza & Park Siwon hage Chotsap Ttutdda.”

A History of Dongdaemun Market



Figure 4.2: This historical photo of the Dongdaemun Market in the late nineteenth century shows crowded streets filled with pedestrians, horse carriages, and various goods including dried vegetables.

A brief examination of the contested history of Dongdaemun Market reveals not only the complicated place-marketing practices but also how commercial activities have always been shaped by larger political forces. The predecessor of the current Dongdaemun Market was Yee Hyun Market (fig.4.2), which was one of the three biggest markets of the late Chosun Dynasty.⁵ Dongdaemun Market was established in 1905 when Korean merchants formed Gwangjang Corporation to mitigate the financial loss caused by the Currency Readjustment Project. The currency readjustment replaced the Beakdonghwa, the currency of the late Chosun state, with the Japanese one, bringing a change which was highly inflationary. At the same time, the expanding businesses of Japanese merchants began to threaten the economic status of Chosun merchants in areas such as Namdaemun Market and Yongsan. To counter increasing Japanese commercial influence, Chosun merchants with enough capital started Gwangjang Market near Dongdaemun.⁶ The continued prosperity of Dongdaemun Market represented the remaining strength of Korean merchants against the colonizers.

⁵ The City History Compilation Committee of Seoul (Seoul Tuickbyeol Sisa Pyunchan Wewonhui), *Seoul ui Sichang*. [*Seoul's Markets*] (Seoul: The City History Compilation Committee, 2007).

⁶ Among the merchants was Park Seung-jik, the founder of Seungjik Store in Dongdaemun, which later became the Doosan Group.



Figure 4.3: The Pyunghwa Market in the 1960s was the center of manufacturing. The growth of light industries was possible due to urbanization and the increasing numbers in the labor force.

After the brief cessation of commercial activities during the Korean War, Dongdaemun Market expanded to incorporate refugees and rural migrants who opened unlicensed markets. The construction of Dongdaemun General Market on the garage sites of outdated streetcars in 1970 signaled the stabilization of commercial activities. Under the developmental regime of President Park, industrialized manufacturing enabled the faster production of goods, which was met by an explosive demand from war-deprived consumers in the late 1950s and 1960s. Before the 1970s, the state's economic policy emphasized the growth of light industries, such as the manufacture of clothes and shoes. In this context, proximity to the Pyunghwa (Peace) Market (fig. 3), containing many sewing factories and laborers, was conducive to the further commercial success of Dongdaemun Market.⁷ The rise of Dongdaemun was in large part due to the long hours of labor provided by young women who migrated to Seoul from the rural countryside. Most of them worked fifteen hours a day in a very cramped environment—often illegally subdivided into two floors with a height of about four feet each—getting minimal wages.⁸ By the late 1970s, Dongdaemun Market had become the biggest clothing market in Seoul. With the abolition of curfew, commercial activities continued during the night, making Dongdaemun Market a haven for nighttime shopping.

⁷ Pyunghwa Market not only contained wholesale stores but many sewing factories, where production for domestic products as well as of textile goods for export took place.

⁸ American Friends Service Committee, *The Peace Market* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1970), quoted in Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

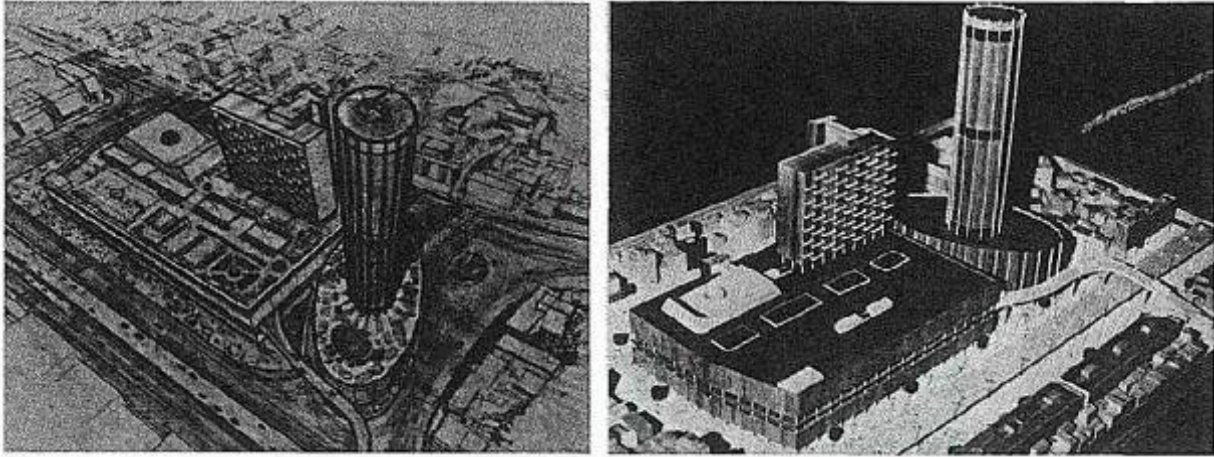


Figure 4.4. The model of Dongdaemun General Market in the 1970 proposal shows rectangular buildings and a high-rise tower. However, the plan was later modified to exclude the tower.

Although individual shoppers could purchase items in Dongdaemun, most of the commercial activities were centered on wholesale products.⁹ The clustering of manufacturing functions and economies of scale enabled the production of cheaper goods in Dongdaemun Market. Small business owners leased lots in a larger market structure called *sang-ga*; Dongdaemun market currently consists of about 30,000 shops and thirty *sang-ga*.¹⁰ By 1970 when the Dongdaemun General Market [fig. 4.4] was established, Dongdaemun Market was responsible for 70% of the domestic production and distribution of clothing items.¹¹ In addition to the abolition of the nighttime curfew, the construction of highways around the country facilitated the movement of local merchants to and from Seoul. Beginning in the early 1980s, it became common for groups of local merchants to travel in reserved buses on overnight trips to Dongdaemun.¹² Due to the dominance of wholesale activity, the economy of the market relied more on the production and sales network than on the visual attraction of the shopping mall or the comfort level experienced by shoppers. As such, Dongdaemun Market was different from department stores, which emphasized leisurely shopping experiences.

However, the economic conditions that allowed the spectacular growth of light industry began to change in the mid-1980s. Labor organizations began to gain strength as a result of the democratic movement. When the military dictatorship ended in 1987, the suppressed labor movements brought issues of worker's rights to the forefront of the democratization process. For instance, the labor movement earned collective bargaining rights and increased the percentage of union membership from 13.6 percent in 1987 to 18.6 percent in 1989.¹³ Although a series of

⁹ Yanghee Kim and Yongnam Shin, "The Resurrection of the Old Market and Its Implications," in *Dongdaemun: Wigi ui Jaerae Sichang esoh Fashion Munhwa Myongsoro* [Dongdaemun: From the Old Market in Crisis to Fashionable Cultural Space]. (Seoul:Dongdaemun Forum, 2001).

¹⁰ Official website of the Special Tourist District in Dongdaemun Fashion Town, <http://www.dft.co.kr/ko/index.htm>.

¹¹ Yongnam Shin, *Dongdaemun Becksuh 2005 Dongdaemun Sichang ui Byonhwa wa Baljongwajong*. [Dongdaemun Whitepaper 2005: The Change and Development Process of the Dongdaemun Market] (Seoul: Dongdaemun Fashiontown Special Tourism District Committee, 2005).

¹² Buses were convenient since they not only provided safe storage of purchased goods but also could function as a place to sleep. See Publication Committee of Seoul Metropolitan History, *Seoul ui Sichang*.

¹³ Hyo-Rae Cho. "The Change of Labor Regime after 1987 in South Korea" *Visiting Fellow Working Papers* 19, Cornell University ILR School, 2005, 11-12.

negotiations led to an increase in the minimum wage and the formal recognition of collective bargaining rights, the labor movement had limited success since the negotiations simultaneously brought the liberalization of the labor market.¹⁴ In return for recognizing collective bargaining, conglomerates now had increased labor flexibility. At the same time, the improvement of labor conditions was limited since enforcing standards for smaller businesses presented massive challenges for the state. According to Chung and Kirkby, South Korean workers in *chaebol* (conglomerates) companies experienced significant wage increases while the state was “incapable of extending such improvements to small and medium firms.”¹⁵ When confronted with labor disputes and strikes, many small and medium-sized businesses simply took the option of temporarily closing down their businesses.¹⁶ As a result, those employed in small and medium-sized sewing factories in Dongdaemun experienced a high level of job insecurity.

In addition to institutional changes, the outbreak of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s resulted in a disruption of the existing production and distribution networks of small businesses. The overall sales of small and medium businesses decreased rapidly due to the recession. Unlike big corporations, small and medium-sized businesses could expect much less monetary support from financial institutions. At the same time, the governmental policies during the IMF crisis were focused on restoring foreign exchange liquidity and financial restructuring rather than seeking a comprehensive plan to solve the problems faced by small and medium-sized businesses.¹⁷ Thus, the most adversely affected by the changed labor conditions were small business owners and manufacturing industries. Despite the reported successes of Migliore, which earned the nickname of “the myth of Dongdaemun,” many smaller shops and factories closed down due to financial difficulties.

¹⁴ Yun-sik Chang. “Industrial Workers, Corporate Employers and the Government in South Korea,” in *Korea Confronts Globalization*. 95.

¹⁵ Jae-Yong Chung and Richard J. R. Kirkby, *The Political Economy of Development and Environment in Korea* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 83.

¹⁶ Yun-sik Chang. “Industrial Workers, Corporate Employers and the Government in South Korea,” *Korea Confronts Globalization*, 108.

¹⁷ Upgyo Song, “IMF Wa Jungso Gi-op Jongchek” [“The IMF and Policies regarding Small and Medium Businesses”], *Gukhoebo* [*The Newsletter of the National Assembly*] 392 (1999): 24-27.



Figure 4.5: This picture of the Doota Fashion Mall shows a tall building with the advertisement “Fashion is war.”

In the context of financial difficulty and the downsizing trend prevalent in the aftermath of the IMF crisis, the success of the new retail shopping mall named Migliore seemed miraculous. Economists and urban scholars have attributed the success of Migliore in the late 1990s to the entrepreneurial ability to detect the emergent consumption habits of teenagers.¹⁸ The merchants at Migliore undertook the novel marketing strategy of targeting teenagers who had limited budgets. The success of retail shopping malls in Dongdaemun led to the construction of department-store like shopping malls in Dongdaemun Market. Doota (fig. 4.5), Hello APM, and Good Morning City are examples of the retail shopping malls built in the 2000s following the strategy of catering to the casual fashion interests of the young. Notwithstanding the continuation of wholesale trade, retail trade has become the more prominent commercial activity of Dongdaemun Market.

The construction of such large commercial structures became the standard in Dongdaemun Market because of two conditions. First, more potential shoppers were filling the streets of Seoul during the weekends as the result of changing labor policy. In 2004, the introduction of the five-day work week in large companies and public institutions in South Korea meant that regular workers had more time during the weekends.¹⁹ This policy did not guarantee shortened work hours since it did not apply to smaller businesses and temporary workers in big businesses. However, it had the effect of bringing more people onto the streets during the weekends, making them potential consumers. According to research by the LG Economy Institute, household leisure expenses increased 3.4% from 2003 to 2005.²⁰ Leisure-related

¹⁸ Jaeyun Yu, “Seoul Dongdaemun Sichang ūi Byunhwa wa Jöngchekjök Sisajö̃m” [“The Change in Dongdaemun Market and Some Policy Suggestions”], *Dosi Munjae* [The Urban Question] 399 (2002): 63-71, 68.

¹⁹ The five-day, or forty hour, work week policy, was first introduced in large companies and governmental offices. It was applicable to businesses with 50 to 100 workers as of July 1, 2007. One year later, it was applicable to businesses with more than 20 workers. On July 1, 2011, it was spread to businesses with less than 20 workers as well.

²⁰ Sungho Yu, “Leisure Yoesik Tuksu Jonmang . . . Gajok Danwi Sobi Nuldut” [“Leisure, Eating Out Industry’s Boon”], *Hankook Gyongje*, June 14, 2011.

businesses, such as tourist companies, restaurants, and concert venues expected increased sales due to the implementation of the policy. Local governments began to embark on various projects to redesign the cityscape to suit the new production and consumption patterns. A study by the Seoul Local City Officials Training Institute recommended that the city government implement various programs, such as nature learning centers and cultural exploration courses, to “make good use of the leisure time” created by the five-day work week law.²¹

Secondly, the restoration in the area of Cheonggyecheon, a local river which once ran through the Northern part of Seoul, has ushered in a new era of urban redevelopment. The restoration plan differed from previous urban projects in the sense that it emphasized balanced growth by simultaneously seeking environmental protection and the preservation of history. Due to the proximity of Dongdaemun Market to the river, the urban development plan for Seoul in 2004 included a plan to realign and rearrange existing shopping malls (fig. 4.6). For instance, the city government and the Jongro district office invested 1.3 billion KRW (about eleven million USD) in remodeling the Dongdaemun General Market in 2003 as a way to “improve shopping environments in association with the river restoration.”²² Such governmental policies assured individual investors that increased sales would guarantee the profit necessary to recover the cost of construction. Ironically, the very success of Dongdaemun Market during the colonial period and the Asian financial crisis led many to believe that the combination of entrepreneurial instincts and business skills alone would result in individual prosperity. In a sense, the expansion of Dongdaemun Market represented the continuation of the developmentalist framework, which was based on belief in the possibility of continuous material growth. This belief resulted in the peculiar practice of leasing out the lots to the tenant merchants before purchasing the land and before getting a construction permit in Dongdaemun Market.²³ While it is customary in South Korea to sell or lease individual apartment units to prospective residents before construction is finished, it is extremely rare to parcel out commercial units given the high risk associated with managing individual shops.

²¹ Seoul Local City Officials Training Institute, *Problem Solving Working Papers: The Development of Leisure Programs such as Cultural and Tourist Activities According to the Implementation of the Five-Day Work Week* (Seoul: Seoul Local City Officials Training Institute, 2003).

²² Seoul Metropolitan City, *Dongdaemun D-dong Sang-ga Cheonggyecheon gwa Hamkke Seropge Danjang [The Malls at Dongdaemun D District Newly Designed together with Cheonggyecheon]* (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, 2006).

²³ Hyun Kim, “Dongdaemun E Hwangkum Al Eun Upda” [There is No Golden Egg in Dongdaemun], *Hankyoreh* 21, no. 469, 34-36.

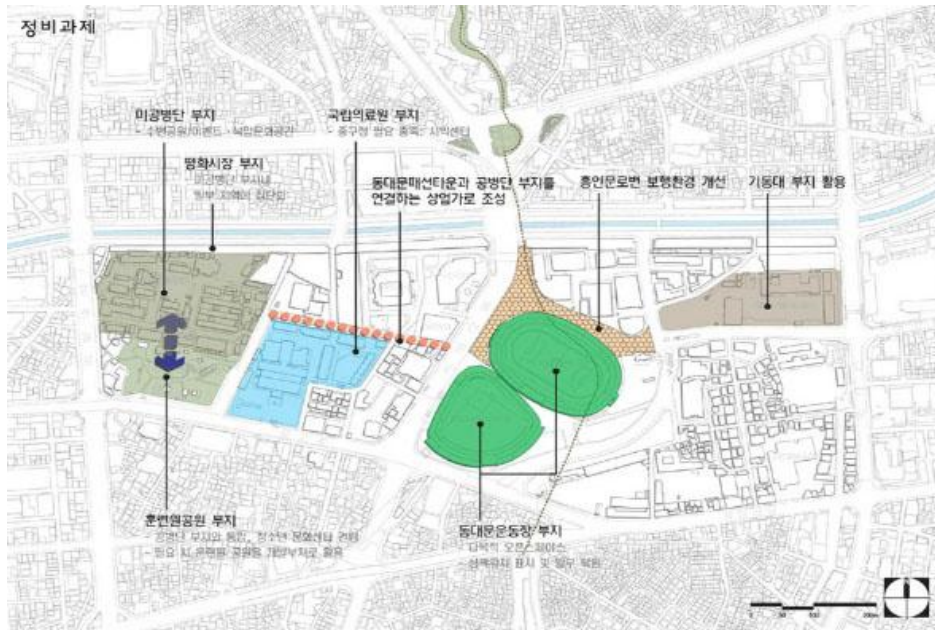


Figure 4.6. The 2004 Urban Development Plan of Dongdaemun Market mentions that Dongdaemun Stadium (painted green) is slated for multi-purpose open space while the area surrounding the stadium needs sidewalk improvement. The area painted blue is the National Medical Center, scheduled to relocate as the result of the development plan.

Around the time that mega shopping malls providing a more comfortable shopping environment were built, changing political and economic structures contributed to the emergence of “Little Russia” (Fig. 4.7) in Dongdaemun.²⁴ The concentration of accommodations and restaurants catering to Russian and Central Asian traders in Dongdaemun started to generate a community based on ethnic ties. Owners of many Central Asian restaurants and shops in Gwanghee-dong area, such as Край родной (Krai Roud-noi), are Korean-Russians.²⁵ Most of them were removed from Korea to work in the mines of Sakhalin under the Japanese regime. After WWII, they were quickly abandoned and forcibly relocated to Central Asia by Stalin after the defeat of the Japanese. Although the ensuing Cold War made it virtually impossible for Korean-Russians to come back to Korea, the opening of the Russian economy and South Korea’s *segyehwa* policy in the 1990s contributed to favorable conditions for them to settle and find businesses. Larisa Kim, a third generation Korean-Russian, was able to open a Central Asian restaurant in Dongdaemun after the passing of Foreign Investment Promotion Act in 1998 which allows permanent residence status for those who satisfy investment requirements.²⁶ At the same time, frequent trips of Russian wholesale buyers to Dongdaemun Market generated a demand for Russian and Central Asian businesses.

²⁴ Hye-gyong Nam. “Litul Rohsia Taun in Seoul” [“Little Russia Town in Seoul,”] October 7, 2003, <http://www.dongponews.net>, accessed on July 15, 2011.

²⁵ The owner of Край родной, meaning “hometown” in Russian, is Larisa Kim, a third-generation Korean-Russian.

²⁶ Namhee Lee, “Woegukin Jachiguyok: Hanguk sok Jakun Yigukdul,” [“The Territory of Foreigners: Little Foreign Nations in Korea”] *Shin Dongah* 544 (2005), 350-361.



Figure 4.7: In Little Russia, many Central Asian restaurants and shops cater to the needs of new migrant workers in Dongdaemun.

Although the number of Russian traders has decreased significantly in the new millennium, Little Russia continues to function as the social nucleus for migrant workers from Central Asia. The introduction of the Industrial Trainee System under President Kim Young Sam in 1993 encouraged the movement of unskilled labor from Third World countries. Although most manufacturing industries in Dongdaemun moved abroad to look for cheaper labor, small sewing shops continued to suffer from a labor shortage.²⁷ An increasing number of foreign migrants started to work in smaller garment workshops where South Korean workers are unwilling to work due to job instability and harsh work conditions. In the Changsin-dong and Gwanghee-dong areas adjacent to Dongdaemun Market, many migrant workers from Nepal have found employment at small garment shops. Although the establishment of Little Russia was due to Russian buyers who came in large numbers in the mid-1990s, the current patrons are those working in shop factories.²⁸ While the number of Russian patrons decreased significantly, migrant workers from Mongolia and Uzbekistan have increased steadily.²⁹ Social gatherings for Uzbek immigrants are often held in the Dongdaemun area in order to provide networking opportunities for Uzbeks and South Koreans. In an interview with *Hanguk Ilbo*, one migrant worker from Uzbekistan noted that he visits Little Russia once or twice a week “when he is tired of company dormitory food” or “when there is a farewell party for another worker going back to his country.”³⁰

²⁷ Ministry of Industry and Resources, *Yongse Bongjeup Jiwon Daechek: The Policies for Supporting Small Sewing Businesses* (Seoul: Ministry of Industry and Resources, 2005).

²⁸ Jong-jin Park, “Korean Dream Jjotnun Yibang-indul” [“Foreigners Following Korean Dream”], *Juganhanguk*, January 13, 2006.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Wang-gu Lee, “Gwanghee-dong JungAng Asia-chon Golmok,” [“The Central Asian Alley in Gwanghee-dong”] *Hanguk Ilbo*, December 2, 2004.

Thus, the segyehwa drive and related economic policies have been a mixed blessing with respect to the community development of Dongdaemun Market. While the liberalizing economic conditions have adversely affected small and medium businesses, they have contributed to the formation of a new ethnic community. The flow of capital and the relocation of manufacturing industries overseas have contributed to the simultaneous phenomena of job instability and a shortage of labor. However, foreign direct investment has also proved to be a channel for historically marginalized Korean-Russians to come back to their home country and function as the cultural bridge between Central Asian immigrants and South Korean society. Although the aim of the economic policies was to recover from the foreign exchange crisis in 1997, they also had the unanticipated effect of diversifying the ethnic makeup of Dongdaemun Market.

“Selling Feelings”: Rhetoric of the Design Seoul Project

It was in such a political and institutional context that Seoul was selected as the World Design Capital (WDC) by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) in 2007. Immediately after the selection of Seoul as the WDC, the Seoul city government embarked on the Design Seoul project, which included construction of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (DDPP), re-designing the national landscape of the Nam Mountain, and hosting the Seoul Design Olympics. The Seoul city government established an organization called Design Seoul Directing Headquarters in order to implement various projects. As part of the renovation efforts, Seoul Sports Stadium (also known as Dongdaemun Stadium), considered obsolete by some urban planners, was scheduled for demolition to make a way for the park. While Dongdaemun Stadium hosted many historically important sports activities in Seoul, its presence was no longer considered essential because of “traffic issues, low level of use, and weakening competitive edge.”³¹ Supporters of the construction of the park argued that Dongdaemun Market desperately needed a public space where pedestrians could take a rest. At the same time, the brochure promoting DDPP emphasized the fact that the old sports stadium was first constructed during the Japanese colonial period “to commemorate the marriage of the Japanese crown prince.”³² Amid much controversy surrounding the demolition of the stadium, design competitions for a new park began in 2007. Among many contestants, Hadid’s design (fig. 4.8) was selected as the winning project. The selection of Hadid’s design reflected the desire not only to provide appropriate urban amenities but also to promote Seoul as the center of the fashion industry by using the brand power of a star architect.

³¹ Dongdaemun Forum. *Dongdaemun – Wigi ui Jaerae Sichang e Soh Fashion Moonhwa Myungsoro Dongdaemun*, 82.

³² Seoul Metropolitan City, *Where We Meet the Vivid History of Seoul: Dongdaemun History and Culture Park* (Seoul: Seoul Design Foundation, 2010).



Figure 4.8. Architectural rendering of Zaha Hadid's design showing part of the historic city wall in the foreground.

The construction of DDPP in Dongdaemun Market is part of the larger rubric of encouraging the use of urban design to facilitate the transformation of Seoul. The Design Seoul campaign, which started in 2008, is an effort to re-situate South Korea within the global economic structure by transforming it from a “hard city” to a “soft city.”³³ Whereas Seoul represented an industrial “hard city” emphasizing speed and efficiency, the concept of a soft city emphasizes “soft” aspects of a city such as appreciation of “traditional cultures.” In this urban discourse, the contemporary South Korean society is imagined to have “lost touch” with emotional well-being and other values because of the emphasis on rapid economic growth. Planners have argued that it is time to reverse this tendency by “rediscovering” the cultural heritage of South Korea.³⁴ Consequently, the cultural heritage and historical relics need to be actively incorporated as elements of the new urban landscape. By doing so, it is hoped that pedestrians’ appreciation of “Korean culture” will improve.



³³ Jongtaek Oh, “Shi Goo Ui Hui Goochungjang 3Joongbuck e Makin Design Seoul,” [“DesignSeoul Got Stuck by 3 Layers of Walls Consisting of City, District Council, and District Director”], *Joongang Daily*, July 2, 2010.

³⁴ Giyoung Yang, “Dosi Munhwa Jongchek gwa Seoul Si Gohri Chukje” [“The Urban Cultural Policies and Seoul’s Street Festivals”] Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, 1995. 157-175.



Figure 4.9. Posters advertising the Design Seoul campaign became ubiquitous in Seoul in 2009. On the left a poster placed on the roof of a subway train car reads “It is worth living thanks to (good) designs.” On the right, a poster shows a businessman smiling with a bubble reading “Seoul is great!”

The official rhetoric of the Design Seoul campaign regarded residents as the clients and beneficiaries of the design campaign. The mission statement of Design Seoul includes five kinds of *considerations*—rather than policies—for the economy, the environment, everyday life, culture, and empathy.³⁵ The five considerations are designed to fulfill the ultimate objective of caring for citizens. Compared to government-led projects under the previous authoritarian regime, the language describing the project is much softer, emphasizing friendliness and sensibility rather than containing a top-down command. The main objective of caring for citizens is to be carried out by improving the quality of public space through design. As such, improving the appearance of public spaces such as sidewalks and streets is considered to contribute to the pleasant experience of everyday life. To promote the concept of Design Seoul, the city government has actively utilized friendly images in its posters and signs emphasizing the new aspect of the project of transforming Seoul’s urban landscape (Fig. 4.9). These images convey the message that unlike previous development projects, contemporary urban projects are designed to satisfy individual needs and comforts rather than fulfilling abstract national goals.

In the posters, people in Seoul are imagined as optimistic individuals who carry out their daily duties with faith in progress and technology. Although residents of Seoul are mainly the beneficiaries of services, they can also become participants in the campaign by making suggestions thanks to a variety of advanced communication technologies. For instance, citizens’ congratulatory messages sent from smartphones for the opening ceremony of the Seoul Design Festival in 2010 were displayed in real time on a big screen. Also, the websites of the Seoul Design Committee and the Seoul city government offer an online bulletin board for people’s opinions and suggestions regarding the specifics of the campaign. The city government also established the opportunity to engage in on-site conversations with the mayor that included the issue of Seoul’s design policy. However, most recorded messages and conversations stopped short at discussing the specifics of the programs rather than addressing the direction or the scope of the policy.³⁶

Urban planners imagine that it is possible to elicit a certain kind of emotion by engineering physical environments. The official statement of the Design Seoul Committee notes that “the twenty-first century is changing from a city selling functions to a city selling

³⁵ Official website of Design Seoul, <http://design.seoul.go.kr>, accessed on April 10, 2011.

³⁶ Although the official website of Design Seoul contains the online “Design Seoul Discussion Forum” open to everyone, all postings were confined to the topic of “the Appropriate Function and Program of DDPP.”

feelings/senses.”³⁷ In the book *Designing Seoul*, the director of the Design Seoul campaign has observed that Seoul needs to be in tune with global currents of using design to demonstrate competitiveness.³⁸ Such a fashion- and design-oriented view of the urban development is in tune with the city government’s policy of cultivating various programs and themed streets in order to “make good use of leisure time” in changed economic conditions.

In Design Seoul, adding a “sense of history” to the city involved the resurrection of certain artifacts at the expense of others. Supporters of DDPP argued that the rationale for demolishing the sports stadium was not only based on practical aspects—that the stadium was not used frequently—but also on the historical fact that the stadium was built to celebrate the matrimony of the Japanese crown prince during colonial times. Such facts have made the stadium appear as an obsolete artifact of colonialism rather than the center of recreational activities in the recent past. While acknowledging the role of Dongdaemun Stadium in modern Korean sport culture, the government brochure emphasizes the fact that older “castle walls were destroyed for the construction of the stadium.”³⁹ In comparison to the older historical forms associated with the Chosun Dynasty, the stadium is relatively new, with the stigma of colonial history. Furthermore, the discovery of old city walls during the demolition process and the architect’s decision to integrate them into DDPP have added a sense of urgency to removing the colonial relic and “rescuing” the older cultural heritage.

Notwithstanding the warm reception and favorable portrayal of DDPP in official sources, voices of dissension and criticism toward the project came from various camps. Sports fans who associated the Dongdaemun Stadium with cherished memories of urban sports activities and historically significant events opposed the demolition. Contrary to the assertion that the demolition of the stadium was necessary to eliminate the remnants of colonialism, sports authorities argued that the stadium has accumulated different meanings as layers of positive memories replaced faded histories of the colonial period. Baseball fans opposed the demolition by arguing that the stadium was the “Mecca of the amateur baseball games” and “the cradle of many sports stars.”⁴⁰ Others noted that the decision to demolish the eighty-year-old sports structure reflects that “more attention is given to development and profit rather than everyday memories associated with urban space.”⁴¹

Others who criticized the project viewed it primarily as the expression of the mayor’s personal political ambition. During the Citizen’s Open Forum Regarding Design Seoul in September 2010, many voiced dissent against using urban projects as a political means to generate public support. For instance, during the discussion, a member of Congress from the opposing party voiced her dissent towards current urban projects in Seoul as “putting excessive emphasis on visible accomplishments.”⁴² Another participant, a design critic, argued that

³⁷ Official Website of DesignSeoul <http://design.seoul.go.kr>, accessed on May 20, 2010.

³⁸ Young-göl Kwön. *Seoul ūl Design Handa [Designing Seoul: the 22 Principles]* Seoul: Design House, 2010.

³⁹ Seoul Design Foundation, *Where We Meet the Vivid History of Seoul*.

⁴⁰ Youngjin Choi, “Pungmul Sangin, Yagoo Fan Koom Ul Hohmulda” [“Tearing Down the Dreams of Baseball Fans and Pungmul Merchants”], *NyouSu Meyiker [Newsmaker]*, April 3, 2007.

⁴¹ Yoonhyung Kil. “2007nyun 9wol, Seoul Ui KiukSangshiljung” [“September, 2007: Seoul’s Amnesia”], *Hankyoreh* 21, September 8, 2007.

⁴² Hyo-soon Yoon. “Design Seoul, Ga Si Jok Sung Gwa e Chijoong Hat Da” [“Design Seoul Has Put Excessive Emphasis on Visual Accomplishments”], *Eun Pyung Si Min Shinmoon*, September 6, 2010.

“Seoul’s design policy has been utilized as the political propaganda of the mayor.”⁴³ Interestingly, the controversy surrounding DDPP failed to discuss the political and socio-economic dimensions of the project as the word “politics” carried primarily negative connotations. Instead, the discussions revolved around historical aspects of the site and the architectural aesthetics of the proposal.

More successful attack on the Design Seoul campaign came from those who politicized the urban projects to their advantage by drawing attention to socioeconomic issues. Young artists have started to use guerilla design tactics to question the legitimacy of the project by using humor directed at the preaching tone of the government campaign. The local government’s strategy of manufacturing consent through “selling feelings” backfired when exaggerated portrayals of residents as progressive and satisfied people were met by counter-images of disgruntled individuals. A significant portion of residents in Seoul do not share the rosy view of the Design Seoul campaign and do not hesitate to express their opposition. Some said that an excessive campaign which bombards the public space with posters and stickers is irritating, sometimes inducing “design nausea.”⁴⁴ More adventurous individuals have engaged in guerilla design strategies by designing parodies of the government posters and displaying them in strategic places.



Figure 4.10. “I Like Seoul” projects include placing stickers over the word bubbles of official posters to change the meanings.

For instance, an organization named FF Group, made up of freelance artists, has engaged in an “I Like Seoul” campaign by placing a sticker over the official Design Seoul posters that twists the original message (fig. 4.10). While the original word bubble said “design is good” and “Seoul is great,” the new bubbles in the stickers said “children skip meals because [the city government focuses on] design” and “only Gangnam (South of the Han River) is great.” Such acts pointed out that the portrayal of citizens as passive city dwellers benefiting from the Design Seoul campaign did not always match their actual lived experiences. One member of the FF Group explained that the group’s interest in Design Seoul began when the city of Seoul started to

⁴³ Dongyoung Lee, “Seoul Si Design Jung Chek ‘Design San Up Hwa’, ‘Jung Chi Jok Sun Jun Yong’” [“Seoul’s Design Policy: ‘Industrialization of Design’, ‘Political Propaganda’] *Dong-ah Newspaper*, September 3, 2010.

⁴⁴ Woojin Park, “Ham Gge Hanun Design Seoul Mandool Uh Yo.” [Let’s Participate in Design Seoul], *Weekly Hanguk*, June 9, 2010.

use the phrase “Seoul is the design capital of the world” in the advertisements of Design Seoul projects. He explained that group members questioned whether such a thing as a design capital could be defined. When asked what the group thought about the role of design in current urban developments, another member noted,

It is something like this... Imagine that your neighbor has an ugly tree which protrudes into your garden. You want to get rid of it. You use the word “design” as a pretext to cut down the neighbor’s tree. The word “design” is like a master key that can be used for anything.⁴⁵

The group was initially formed by four college students “concerned about the possibility of having to work on something they did not want to do in the future.”⁴⁶ However, the group’s involvement in media arts soon grew to include social issues, such as displacement and socioeconomic polarization. After graduating from college, members of FF Group questioned the way the Seoul city government used the term *design* to promote urban redevelopment. In another project, the group decided to test whether the rule of the law is respected in public spaces by displaying provocative political messages while not breaking any laws.⁴⁷

The contrast between smiling faces and dissatisfied comments in the bubble comes across as a comical spin on the original poster. However, it does not stop at being a simple prank commenting on the official campaign. With relatively little investment, such tactics have successfully subverted the image of contented citizens happily carrying out their routines in the city by delivering counter-narratives such as about the regional inequality between Gangbuk (North of the Han River) and Gangnam (South of the Han River). The Like Seoul campaign also questioned the current city government’s emphasis on design-oriented developments, arguing that public funds spent on the Design Seoul campaign could have been spent on more pressing issues such as the provision of free school meals for all children. In another instance, young artists have taken a more ambitious stance by actively imagining the future of a current project. In an art exhibition titled *There Is No Gold Medal in the Design Olympics*, one artwork depicted an image of DDPP being demolished in the year 2040. Aptly titled “Alzheimer City,” it raised the question whether the current project can be sustainable when the very impetus for its construction requires constant renewal.

Although the “Like Seoul” campaign by the FF Group was meant as a general criticism of the government projects by citizens, they were viewed suspiciously as the deliberate sabotage against the current mayor by the opposing political party. The main organizer of the campaign was asked to report to the police station where he was asked who the mastermind political power behind the campaign was.⁴⁸ Although he was not convicted after revealing his identity as a student and explained the purpose of the campaign, such episode highlights the heightened ambiguity about the role of NGO in the political context of a newly democratized society. According to Kim Ha-young, a Korean political scientist, many leaders and chairs of NGOs

⁴⁵ In an interview held on June 4, 2011.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ The group placed a large-scale helium balloon with messages criticizing the government project near the statue of Sejong the Great (a king during the Chosun Dynasty) on a busy thoroughfare of Seoul. This created the comical impression of the historical king scolding the current government. Their exhibition was met with a hasty warning by the police to remove it.

⁴⁸ Interview with the author on June 4, 2011.

“have not refused to take governmental seats with excuses of more effectively reflecting political opinions of civil society in government policies.”⁴⁹ Some NGOs have become a quasi-governmental organization by receiving financial supports from the government. Hee-yon Cho, a professor of Sociology at Sungkonghoe University, argues that South Korean democratic transition through “a [political] improvement of the regime” rather than its destruction has led to “the preservation of previous political initiatives, which contributed to the birth of anti-*minjung* or non-*minjung* NGOs.”⁵⁰ At the same time, many scholars observe that South Korea’s NGO protest movements are led by a small number of professional experts rather than the general public.⁵¹ In such a context, the general increase in the number of NGOs does not necessarily mean the presence of consensus regarding the scope of NGOs’ activities.

Another challenge to the image of Dongdaemun Market as a seamless collection of sleek shopping malls came from the street vendors. The demolition of the sports stadium became a big issue for them since it had been previously designated as the Pungmul Market, occupied by relocated street vendors who came from the Cheonggyecheon area. Since the vendors had already been relocated due to another urban redevelopment project in the early 2000s, the decision to demolish the stadium became a source of resentment.⁵² In addition, street vendors in Dongdaemun also lost their space as significant portions of the sidewalks were closed off during the construction. In response to the protests by vendors, the initial position of city government was that it was not necessary to provide an alternative since their businesses were illegal from the start. Although it later sought a more conciliatory approach by proposing an alternative site in Sinseoldong, street vendors remained indignant over the series of forced relocations.

Such counter-narratives demonstrate that the depiction of Seoul’s residents as contented beneficiaries of the urban park project is far from being the whole truth. Many protesters and artists refused to accept the claim that urban projects are designed to “care for citizens.” Rather, they awakened policymakers and planners to the fact that citizens are not mere followers but recalcitrant political constituents who might not give their consent to the project in the first place. At the same time, they redefined the geographical boundary of this sociopolitical issue from a global scale to a local one, by implicitly arguing that local problems—such as inequality between the South and North parts of Seoul—should be addressed before taking on the task of making Seoul a global design capital. The FF group’s strategy is more effective than accusing urban projects of being “too political,” since their strategy avoids constructing a self-imposed obstacle to political participation.

Despite the strength of the guerilla design tactics, the protesters did not question the underlying economic structure that made the promotion of the Design Seoul projects possible. Although many critics remain skeptical of the feasibility of the city government-led campaign to

⁴⁹ Ha-young Kim. *Hanguk NGO ui Sasang gwa Silchon: Marukusu Ju-ui-jok Bunsok*. [The Philosophy and Reality of Korean NGOs: A Marxist Analysis.] (Seoul: Chekgalpi, 2009), 98.

⁵⁰ Hee-yon Cho. “Jonghapjok Simin-undong ui Gujojok Song-gyok gwa Byonhwa Jonmang eh Daehan Yongu: Chamyoh Yondaerul Jongsim Uro” [“A Study about the Structural Characteristics of General Civil Movements and Prospect of Improvement: With a Focus on Chamyoh Yondae”] in *Simin Sahoe wa Simin Undong 2: Saero-un Jipyong ui Ttasek [The Civil Society and Civil Movement 2: The Search for New Horizon]*, ed. Pal-mu Yu and Kim Jonghun. (Seoul: Hanwul, 2001), 237.

⁵¹ Taehwan Kim. *A Study about the Limits of South Korean NGOs and Suggestions for Improvement*. (master’s thesis, Daejin University, 2008)

⁵² Soran Park and Dohyung Kim, “Gookjejuk Pungmul Sichang: Hanbun Sokju Dobun Soka?” [“International Pungmul Market: Can We be Deceived Twice?”] *Minjok* 21, March 2008.

elevate the Seoul as the “design capital,” larger institutional and policy changes which provided the necessary conditions to initiate such projects have not been closely associated with recent urban transformations. The government’s vision of “keeping up” with other cities by aggressively marketing newly designed urban environments is not only based on structural inequalities but also threatens to intensify the negative externalities associated with liberalizing labor conditions. Despite the reported successes of small business owners in Dongdaemun Market in the late 1990s, the “myth of Dongdaemun” did not hold against the changing economic conditions and policy initiatives encouraging self-employment.

The Hidden Cost of the Dongdaemun Myth and Design Capital

Not everyone who put faith in the possibility of continuous material growth was awarded entrepreneurial success. In 2003, the embezzlement of the lot distribution fund (paid by the prospective tenants) by a representative of a shopping mall named Good Morning City generated a crisis among 3,400 prospective tenants who invested capital for the right to manage a lot in the shopping mall. Since the costs of constructing the shopping mall had not been paid yet, it was declared bankrupt. Tenants formed a contractors’ council and borrowed money from banks to recover the construction cost. The shopping mall finally opened for business in November 2008. Located adjacent to DDPP, the building stands twenty stories tall, containing about 4,500 lots for shops. This case of embezzlement brought national attention to the problematic real estate transactions in Dongdaemun Market.



Figure 4.11: There are many empty lots in newly constructed high-rise shopping malls such as Good Morning City.

The high risk in doing businesses in Dongdaemun is not only a matter of the method of real estate transaction. Another risk shop owners face originates from the fact that the number of small business owners increased sharply due to changing economic conditions and policy directions. Starting in the mid-1990s, the South Korean government started to emphasize the need for investment in technological development and inventions with the upcoming opening of markets. The Small and Medium Business Administration (SMBA) was set up in 1996 to encourage the independent development of smaller yet more competitive businesses. Local business associations and local governments started to provide financial support for small businesses qualified as “venture businesses” which satisfy one of the four criteria established by

the 1997 Special Measures for the Promotion of Venture Businesses Act.⁵³ The initial policy was written with the model of Silicon Valley venture companies in mind. However, according to SMBA, the South Korean definition of “venture businesses” is different from the US case since venture businesses in Korea are “the targets of support which let businesses grow to [become] world class companies through governmental policies” rather than “the result of [independent] success.”⁵⁴

Although the policy initiatives contributed to promoting technology-driven businesses, they also ushered in a flood of other small businesses when the aftermath of the structural adjustment in the late 1990s left many people jobless. It is estimated that the number of street vendors alone more than doubled after the IMF crisis.⁵⁵ With the increased number of self-employed came the proliferation of books, magazines, and websites giving advice to starting small businesses, ranging from opening a café to online shopping malls. Many success stories and testimonials could be seen in various mass media. As the unemployment rate went up, local governments began to encourage start-ups by setting up job centers to provide resources. For instance, the Seoul city government proudly announced that its Iljari (Job) Plus Center, established in 2009, is helping the increasing cases of ChangOp [Startups].⁵⁶ Although many new small businesses were not technologically innovative, increasing the rate of the self-employed did contribute in lowering the unemployment rate. Many of those who started fashion-related businesses, such as online shopping malls, began to compete with shopping malls in Dongdaemun.

Unlike in the late 1990s, many shop lots in big shopping malls currently remain empty due to the oversupply of shops. According to Yil-san Kim, the representative of the Korean International Trade Association in Dongdaemun, there is a joke that “there are a greater number of shops than merchants” and that “agents (who sell lots) leave with big money while merchants have to engage in a repechage.”⁵⁷ Jung, a small business consultant, explained that there are many shopping malls that have closed down due to the oversupply of lots.⁵⁸ After three years, the shopping mall still contains many empty lots (fig. 4.11). Most of the newly self-employed are expected to demonstrate ingenious entrepreneurship and business skills in order to survive in the increasingly competitive market. Yet, it is becoming extremely difficult for new business owners to achieve the same level of financial success the previous owners enjoyed until the late 1990s. Jaehee Choi, the head of United Chang-Op Support Center, noted that “while there were many success stories thanks to explosive demand, such cases are becoming harder to find in the current

⁵³ Special Measures for the Promotion of Venture Businesses Act, 1997.

⁵⁴ Small and Medium Business Administration (SMBA), *Venture/Chang Op Gwanryon Juyojiwonjedo 100 Mun 100 Dap. 100 [Q and As on the Policies to Support Venture Businesses and Chang Op]*, 2000, 4.

⁵⁵ Seoul Development Institute, “No Jum-sang GwanLee Bangan Joongjanggi DeaCheck Moseck” [“Search for a Long-term Management Plan for Street Vendors”] (Seoul: Seoul Development Institute, August 2001.)

⁵⁶ Seoul Metropolitan City, *Seoul Si Jon Saup Iljari wa Yongye 3man 5 chon-ge Chuga Changchul: Iljari Plus Seoul Project Gadong Uro Olhae 26manyohge Iljari Changchul [In Relation to the Former Project to Create 35,000 Additional Jobs: By Operating Iljari Plus Seoul Project 260,000 jobs Are Expected to Come This Year]* (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, 2011).

⁵⁷ Yil-San Kim, *Dongdaemun Sichang Ul Bomyun Don Yi Boinda [If you see Dongdaemun Market, You Can See (the Ways to Make) Money]*, (Seoul: Dunam, 2002), 74.

⁵⁸ Seung Il Jung, *Fashion Valley: Nam, Dongdaemun Sichang [Fashion Valley: Nam/Dongdaemun Market]*, (Seoul: Gyungchoonsa, 2000).

era of rapid information exchange.”⁵⁹

Despite the tragic case of the Good Morning City shopping mall, many tenants invested capital, believing in the Dongdaemun myth of the late 1990s. In May 2007, a merchant in Dongdaemun remarked that “although sales in every shopping mall in Dongdaemun have decreased, merchants are holding out because of the expectation of further profit after the urban redevelopment project in Dongdaemun Stadium.”⁶⁰ Despite the currently fragmented ownership of Good Morning City, the Lotte Corporation has declared the plan to rent the entire building and introduce department-style stores.⁶¹ In fact, notwithstanding the reported surplus of shops, new shopping malls continue to be built near DDPP such as Hello APM and Maxtyle. The Maxtyle Management Company advertises its proximity to DDPP, which is expected to generate a “floating population of 750,000,” which will make business in the building profitable for many merchants.⁶²

In the meantime, long-term business prospects look bleak for most sewing businesses due to the shortage of labor. While sewing companies specializing in higher-end products or possessing special skills continue to thrive, the economic condition of the sewing industry in general is in decline. According to Byong-tae Rah, the president of Dongdaemun Garment Sewing Association, skilled South Korean workers in the sewing industry decreased at a rate of 10% a year.⁶³ Since young people no longer aspire to learn sewing skills, most of the youngest trained workers in the sewing industry are in their 50s.⁶⁴ Although migrant workers have replaced the Korean workers since the implementation of the industrial trainee system, their working conditions have not improved much since the 1970s. According to Sunhee Park, the director of Seoul Foreign Laborers’ Center, most workers in garment shops make 1.2 million to 1.5 million Korean Won (1100-1400 USD) per month while working 12 hours a day including Saturdays.⁶⁵ Furthermore, migrant workers’ visas expire when they are about to master the skills necessary to produce higher-end products.

Although migrant workers occupy a vital portion of the continually weakening sewing industry, they are frequently subjected to unannounced and often illegal arrests. During the New Year’s holiday in 2010, the police force from Gyonggi Province surrounded the Nepalese restaurant in Dongdaemun and arrested Nepalese immigrants without the consent of the restaurant owner. Although the police representative explained that the incident was a response to “tips that Nepalese workers engage in illegal gambling,” those without a proper registration or visa were promptly transferred to the immigration office for deportation, making the validity of

⁵⁹ Mk Chang Up, “Chang Up-ja ui Anmok Gaebal” [Developing Taste for Small Business Starters], June 10, 2004. <http://changup.mk.co.kr/>.

⁶⁰ Kyungmin Kim. “Reportage: Good Morning City Ga Boo Hwal Shicho Duilka?” [Reportage: Will Good Morning City be the Beginning of a Resurrection?] *Maekyung Economy*, May 23, 2007.

⁶¹ Taesung Kim. “Lotte, Dongdaemun Good Morning City Yipjom” [Lotte Comes Into Dongdaemun’s Good Morning City], *Seoul Economics*, February 7, 2011.

⁶² Se-hyuk Kim, “Dongdaemun Noryun Ja Wi Suh Jangsa Hashil Boon” [“Anyone Interested in Keeping a Shop in the Best Spot of Dongdaemun?”], *Focus Newspaper*, September 15, 2010.

⁶³ Byung-tae Rah, “Focus Dongdaemun: Another Multicultural Community 5,” October 6, 2008. In an interview with IBMK, http://saladtv.kr/?document_srl=81434, accessed on July 25, 2011.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Sunhee Park, “Focus Dongdaemun: Another Multicultural Community, IV,” April 15, 2009, http://saladtv.kr/?document_srl=81458, accessed on July 25, 2011.

such a claim questionable.⁶⁶ The precarious legal status of many migrant workers, in turn, makes migrants unwilling to participate in the labor movement. Although the new Employment Permit System, implemented in 2004, guarantees migrant workers a minimum wage and collective bargaining rights *in principle*, it “failed to make businesses assume legal liability in case of non-adherence.”⁶⁷ While the textile workers in the 1970s and 1980s engaged in lengthy labor negotiations, many migrant workers are hesitant to participate in any attempts to redress their labor conditions since joining a labor union may negatively affect the possibility of contract renewal.

The trend of increasing shopping malls and the construction of visual landmarks such as the DDPP have ushered in rising real estate values and an increasing separation between production and distribution. This latter trend is worrisome to many shop owners since one of the advantage of Dongdaemun Market was the organic connection between production and marketing processes. The success of retail shopping malls in the late 1990s was not simply due to cheap prices. Unlike department stores and other boutiques, there is a much bigger selection of new products in the malls, which enables young adults to stand out as persons with a unique style.⁶⁸ The clustering of production and distribution has contributed to the quick appearance of new fashion styles in Dongdaemun. In fact, it is not uncommon to see clothes displayed in one of the shopping malls in Dongdaemun which look surprising similar to those worn by a celebrity on a TV drama a few days ago. In other words, the competitiveness of the Dongdaemun Market stemmed from the intertwining of the production and distribution networks as much as from the improved shopping environment. However, this characteristic is threatened by impending demolitions even as the Design Seoul campaign promotes Dongdaemun as a global fashion district.

On the other hand, the invocation of anti-colonialism in the urban design campaign to demolish the old sports stadium has not been followed by the proper treatment of Korean-Russian and Central Asian migrant workers who are victims of colonial history. While those with enough capital to qualify as foreign investors enjoy relative socioeconomic stability, others who work in factories and on shop floors continue to suffer from discrimination and legal vulnerability. In July 2005, Nina Lee, a third-generation Korean-Russian migrant worker, committed suicide when she was unable to claim overdue wages before her visa expired.⁶⁹ Although the government rhetoric regarding Design Seoul involves a political discourse of improving the competitiveness of Seoul, it says little about the unequal enjoyment of changed labor conditions. Despite the improvement of streets and other public amenities, they are not accessible to the economically marginalized who do not enjoy the same level of benefits as corporate workers. The “competitiveness” generated by the look of urban crowds strolling through fashionable urban environments has become possible thanks to invisible economic toil

⁶⁶ Mingyung Kim, “Sol-ehdo Butjaphyogan Midungrok Yijumindul” [Unregistered Migrants Get Arrested on New Year’s Day], *Hankyoreh Newspaper*, February 16, 2010.

⁶⁷ National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea, *Yijugwanryon Guknaebop Hyonhwang mit Gukjegijun Yihae* [Understanding the Status of the Immigration-related Domestic Laws and International Standards] (Seoul: National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea, 2010), 47.

⁶⁸ Korean Publication Ethics Commission, *Chong Sonyon Onduh Munhwa Hyonjang Yongu: Munhwa Sengbija Rohsoh Chong Sonyon* [Study of Adolescents’ Underground Cultural Scenes: Adolescents as Cultural Prosumers], Seoul: Korean Publication Ethics Commission, 2000.

⁶⁹ Pyung-ho Yun, “Koryoin 3 Senun Woe Jobumo Ttang eh-soh Jasal Het-na” [“Why Did a Third Generation Korean-Russian Commit Suicide in her Grandparents’ Country?”], *Ohmynews*, August 14, 2005.

and the long working hours and job insecurity of temporary workers.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the strong association of Dongdaemun Market with entrepreneurial success has been appropriated to suit an agenda of urban redevelopment that privileges certain uses of public space over others. Associating the construction of DDPP with the preservation of “tradition” was based on the rediscovery of pre-colonial artifacts as a valid heritage and the abandonment of colonial traces. As the city government selectively removed older physical structures, the urban scenes of Dongdaemun Market lost the dynamic quality generated by the coexistence of diverse—old and new—constituents. While the provision of amenities and the preservation of history have been used as justifications for selecting iconic architecture, such factors become secondary to the possible economic impacts generated by the building’s presence. In the meantime, the imagined distinction between the recent past and the present of Seoul—as “hard” and “soft” cities—functions as the new developmental paradigm which enables the implementation of constant urban re-design in many areas, including Global Cultural Zones. However, the rhetoric of “caring for citizens” did not guarantee the acceptance of the new development projects in everyday practice. Defining the appropriate cultural representations of Dongdaemun became a hotly controversial issue as sports fans, young artists, and street vendors actively participated in the renegotiations. Resistance to official urban design strategies by guerilla design groups as well as street vendors demonstrate that an emphasis on constructing visual landmarks can be subverted by the production of counter-narratives and counter-aesthetics. The artist group’s questioning of the Seoul city government’s urban policies demonstrates that citizens are not simply beneficiaries of construction projects but also political agents capable of judging the legitimacy of the projects.

Within the process of using newly designed urban space as the engine of development, existing structural conditions that contribute to socioeconomic polarization become less noticeable under the phrase of “design capital.” The reorganization of economic policy has deepened the gap between big businesses and small business owners as well as the gap between official employees and temporary workers. Foreign migrant workers have provided labor in rapidly declining sewing industries. However, poor working conditions and the absence of job security continue to threaten the long-term viability of the design capital. Despite the continuity of unequal labor conditions and hasty construction transactions increasing the risk involved in running a private business, many choose to believe in the “myth of Dongdaemun” in the face of the economic recession. Yet the case study of embezzlement in one of the shopping malls and intensifying competition among the tenants make it difficult to predict that design-oriented development will bring expected economic growth for all.

It is difficult to predict what kind of economic benefits or misfortunes the construction of Dongdaemun Design Park and Plaza will bring to Dongdaemun Market. However, the challenges to the government’s vision of urban environments suggest that urban politics will never follow a meta-narrative of globalization theory. Despite the trend of globalizing production and consumption of architectural practices, the act of conferring meanings on a given structure as well as making use of the physical environments remains on the local level. In the next chapter, I continue with the theme of migration by discussing Itaewon’s “multicultural streets” and the emergence of ethnic and sexual minorities. A continuous flow of migrant workers has been incorporated into the urban environment of Itaewon, considered as the most exotic district in

Seoul. The next part of the dissertation questions whether the government-led effort to build a “multicultural society” in South Korea provides an adequate basis for housing policies by examining the political and economic contexts in which the discussion of a “multicultural society” emerged.

CHAPTER 5

A Foreign Country in Seoul: Itaewon's Multicultural Streets

[Itaewon] is a liberating district where the boundaries between sexes, races, and classes become mixed up.

—Hankyoreh 21. December 25, 2007.

During the night, the area transforms into a leading entertainment district of Seoul, filled with drinks, dance, and food. There are many commercial venues equipped with new facilities and services in kind, as well as a seductive ambience generated by attractive people.¹

—The World's Seoul

Itaewon (fig. 5.1) was designated as a Special Tourist Zone by the Seoul Metropolitan government in 1997 due to the development of diverse patterns of commercial establishments. The reputation of Itaewon as the center of the entertainment industry as well as of foreign cuisine has become a selling point in local and international tourism. A concentration of trendy nightclubs, bars, ethnic restaurants, and shops has led to the portrayal of the place as the “gateway to the world” as well as “a foreign country in Seoul.”² Media descriptions of the area as being a center of entertainment culture as well as a shopping paradise have encouraged the city government to promote Itaewon as the center of tourism and cultural exchanges. The presence of diverse ethnic populations and different customs has led to the designation of Itaewon as one of the Global Cultural Zones in Seoul. Although Itaewon first emerged in the urban landscape of Seoul as the site of a US military base, the place began to transform as the US presence in the area dwindled due to the decision to relocate the military installation elsewhere.³ At the same time, as the number of immigrants from non-Western countries (outside Europe and the US) increased, the town became a hip and cosmopolitan entertainment district where a visitor can enjoy various ethnic foods as well as nighttime activities. While vestiges of the Cold War still remain, the area has become imbued with multiple layers of cultural representations as increasing number of foreigners from Southeast Asia and Africa have begun to produce visual markers in a landscape previously dominated by the American influence.

¹Culture and Tourism Department, *The World's Seoul*, (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 1999), 82.

²Gwangrip Moon, *Itaewon ehsoh Segyerul Mannada. [Itaewon: Gateway to the World]*, (Seoul: Joongang Ilbo Books, 2009).

³Attempts to relocate the US army base in Yongsan elsewhere have been made several times. Relocation was first suggested by President Roh in an election campaign in 1987 and later became the official policy. The project was re-initiated in 2002 and an agreement was signed by the two governments in October 2004.



Figure 5.1. An aerial photo of Itaewon and environs. Naver Online Map Service, Color and English Text Added by the Author.

Examining the urban development of Itaewon is relevant in studying how the cultural city discourse is applied in a place characterized by a conspicuous mix of different cultural representations. In Itaewon, the processes of *segyehwa* produced intricate layers of cultural representations that reveal divergences as well as continuity in the construction of foreign and Korean identities. Itaewon is a place where the promiscuous mix of different cultural identities through consumption is highly visible. Although the initial rise of Itaewon as an entertainment sector was due to the military base, the area has unexpectedly become the repository of cultural changes and experimentations. The Design Seoul Street plan and Han-nam New Town Project in Itaewon exemplify the government's attempt to categorize various cultural representations into manageable compartments. In the context of celebrating difference, the presence of multicultural representations in Itaewon is welcomed as material evidence of Seoul's "global" status.

This chapter examines the historical development of Itaewon, including its beginning as a US army town, the rise of the entertainment district, and the current designation as a "global zone" with a proliferation of ethnic restaurants and shops. I argue that the emergence of cultural diversity in Itaewon is the result of coincidental historical events rather than consistent implementation of government policies. In contrast, the contemporary political rhetoric of building a "multicultural society" is not accompanied by concrete and consistent plans to provide material conditions for cultural diversity in Itaewon. The urban redevelopment plans, including the DesignSeoul Street schemes and Global Pavilion Park in the Han-nam New Town plan—designed with the expectation of the impending relocation of the US Army base elsewhere—fail to consider the negative effect of gentrification on cultural diversity. At the same time, they flatten the diverse cultural experiences, including those of gay activism and Muslim immigrants, and become a means to divert attention from the economic problems residents of low-income neighborhoods face in the era of globalization.

In order to historically and geographically situate the current multicultural campaign by the South Korean government, it is necessary to analyze the historical urban development of Itaewon ranging from the time of its rise as a US Army base town to the current urban scene of unpredictable exuberance. The current plan to redevelop the Yongsan area, including Itaewon,

can only be understood when its urban history as an army base town is analyzed. While the presence of the US military has resulted in various side effects, it inadvertently contributed to the reputation of the area as a “free zone” relatively unfettered by the censorship of the previous authoritarian government. In this chapter, I analyze the media portrayals of Itaewon as consisting of “multicultural streets” in relation to the South Korean government’s “multicultural policies.” Many scholars, including Kim Hyun-mi, have noted that the current “multicultural” policies are highly selective, focusing on “multicultural families,” which reproduces a patriarchal system since the majority of international marriages are between foreign brides and South Korean men.⁴ At the same time, situating “multicultural” policies only in terms of ethnicity poses a danger of dismissing diversity among ethnic Koreans. The last part of this chapter discusses the gentrifying effect of Yongsan Redevelopment Plan and Han-nam New Town projects, and how such design schemes threaten to dissolve the multicultural community.

A Recent History of Itaewon

Many historical accounts of Seoul explain the beginning of Itaewon as the area providing accommodations for governmental officials and travelers in the early Chosun dynasty (at the end of the fourteenth century).⁵ It was originally located north of its current location; the center of Itaewon changed as a result of the construction of a tunnel through the Nam Mountain. While the place was a large area of open field with many pear trees, Itaewon began to develop when the Japanese colonial administration established its military headquarters in the Yongsan area near Itaewon. After the Second World War, US military forces replaced the Japanese bases with the Yongsan Garrison, which now shelters nearly 17,000 US service members and civilians.⁶ The initial use of the area as a military base had to do with its proximity to the river dock, and the subsequent military presence continued military practices by reusing existing infrastructure. Thus, Yongsan became strongly associated with the foreign military presence and the unequal international power relation by South Koreans who experienced the oppression of the colonial period and subsequent Korean War. Although the administration of the military base changed from Japanese to American, the area was stigmatized as a symbol of Korea’s prolonged dependence on foreign power.

The continuous military presence from 1910 to the present has also resulted in the development of commercial interests and trade industries associated with military personnel. The illegal circulation of army supplies as well as American radio broadcasts generated a new economic structure in a country devastated by war. The existence of a US military post generated a new base town in Itaewon, populated by the increasing number of migrants who settled in the area to benefit from trading with US soldiers. Korean souvenir shops with multiple English signs, groceries, and other convenience stores burgeoned in order to cater to the needs of the soldiers. The rising popularity of Korean singers performing at the base evidenced the quick spread of American pop culture in South Korean society.⁷ Aid from the US combined with state-led

⁴Hyun-mi Kim, “*Gongjonghan Tonghap?*”: *Gyolhon Yiju Yohsong gwa Hanguksik Damunhwa Ju-ui*, [“*The Fair Integration?*”: *The Marriage Immigrant Women and Korean Multiculturalism*”] (Seoul: Korea Institute for Future Strategies, 2008).

⁵City History Compilation Committee of Seoul, *Seoul ui Sichang*. [*Seoul’s Markets*.] (Seoul: The City History Compilation Committee, 2007).

⁶From the official website of US Army Garrison-Yongsan. <http://yongsan.korea.army.mil>

⁷Jong-il Choi, “A Study of Americanization in the Space of Itaewon,” (master’s thesis, Seoul National University, 2003).

industrialization focusing on exports meant that goods were relatively abundant in Itaewon, even in the war-deprived economy of South Korea at the time. A severe lack of food in Korea and the abundance of American commercial goods contrasted sharply and created a sense of yearning for American culture in general. Scholars argue that the existence of US military bases resulted in “South Korea’s Americanization through the generation of desire to consume US goods as well as various forms of American pop culture.”⁸

At the same time, however, the base town produced various side effects when an increasing number of jobless female migrants from rural areas found employment in bars, nightclubs, and other adult entertainment venues for US soldiers. Contrary to the popular notion that the prostitutes in base towns were “loose” women with expensive habits, most of them were driven to prostitution because of dire poverty. Katherine H.S. Moon noted that most of the prostitutes were migrant women who moved from job to job, such as bus clippie and kitchen maid for well-to-do families, before ending up in the area called “Hooker Hill.”⁹ While the South Korean government’s attitude in past decades ranged from turning a blind eye to active management, sex workers in the Hooker Hill were socially stigmatized and earned the derogatory nickname of “Western princess.” The image of Itaewon thus became a symbol of US military superiority as well as of adverse side effects in the form of commercial sex patronized by the GIs.

Ironically, the presence of a foreign army base and the association of Itaewon with morally loose characters have contributed to the reputation of the place as territory that could liberate South Korea from conventional social norms. Due to the proximity to the base and the presence of American GIs, there was less presence of Korean law enforcement.¹⁰ This tendency was even stronger in the entertainment district, where the government consciously refrained from pursuing prosecution of certain forms of adult industries. The reduced presence of state control made room for new kinds of social experimentation. Many disgruntled Korean youths oppressed by the authoritarian regime of the 1960s and 1970s frequented bars and cafes in Itaewon as a place to free themselves from the oppressiveness of their everyday experiences elsewhere.¹¹ While men donning long hair were prosecuted mercilessly by the military regime as signs of “Western vice,” they were relatively safer in Itaewon. Labeled as “hippies” and “a sign of threat to traditional customs” by the military dictatorship, young South Koreans became increasingly subjected to cultural censorship. However, the authoritarian regime’s prohibition of certain folk songs as well as an intensive crackdown on rock cafés for narcotics served to underscore the transformative potential of the foreign culture. Although donning a certain hairstyle or listening to a certain type of music does not necessarily indicate political dissent, hysterical reactions from the government were enough to mark participants as political resisters. Conceivably, the strong association of the so-called “hippie culture” with the American civil rights movement in the 1960s was part of the reason behind the prohibitory measures. As the South Korean military regime often put a strict limit on social norms and acceptable behaviors, including enjoyment of American culture such as rock music, this signified a thirst for political freedom for many young adults.

⁸*Ibid.*, 26.

⁹Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Eun-sil Kim, “Itaewon as an Alien Place Within the Nation-State and a Place in the Globalization Era” in *Byonghwa hanun Yosong Munhwa Umjick Yinun Jiguchon [Changing Women’s Culture, Mobilizing Global Village]* ed. Eun-sil Kim (Seoul: Purun Sasangsa, 2004).

The image of Itaewon as a liberating territory or “free zone” gradually began to change beginning in the 1990s when the end of Cold War was followed by a souring relationship between South Korea and the US. While the US remained a military ally of South Korea, it stopped playing the role of economic supporter when the South Korean economy began to grow at a fast rate. The existing negative reputation of Itaewon became even stronger in the post-Cold War era when the economic benefits of the American army base began to be offset by detrimental elements. Criminal activities by American GIs, which were less discussed in previous regimes, became a hotly debated social issue as the result of democratization and the subsequent desire to address the negative externalities associated with the military dictatorship. Meanwhile, the economy generated by the Hooker Hill prostitution began to decline as prostitution to American GIs was not as lucrative as that catering to wealthy South Korean men.¹² As many South Korean women stopped working in Hooker Hill, many establishments closed or substituted Korean sex workers with migrants from China and Southeast Asia.¹³ The popular media’s portrayal of Itaewon in the late 1990s was focused on an area supposedly filled with “binge parties with secret sex clubs and backstreet drug dealings.”¹⁴ Objections to the unequal nature of the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) coincided with the heightened media attention to misconduct of US soldiers. The tense relationship between the US military and the South Korean public meant that American cultural forms no longer presented a liberating potential. The portrayal of Itaewon as “Special Sex Zone”—a satirical twist on its official designation as a Special Tourist Zone—in an article accusing GIs of indecent behaviors, illustrates the souring relationship between Korea and the US.¹⁵ Reflecting the decreasing popularity of US military involvement in Korea both inside and outside the US, the Yongsan US army base near Itaewon was soon scheduled to be relocated in 2015.

Emergence of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Itaewon

¹²Moon, *Sex among Allies*.

¹³Mark L Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹⁴Jong-oh Jung, “Itaewon at Night Is “Special Sex and Drug Zone?” *Newspeople*, May 27, 1999.

¹⁵ Dongwook Shinyun, “Itaewon Un Nugu ui Ttang Inga?”[“Whose land is Itaewon?”], *Hankyoreh* 21, December 25, 2007.



Figure 5.2: Central Masjid in Itaewon, constructed in 1976, became a magnet that drew many Muslim immigrants to the area.

Beginning in the 1970s, Itaewon began its important transformation as the center of a minority religion in South Korea. Construction of the first mosque in Korea (Fig. 5.2) in the southern part of Itaewon Street, established in 1976 with the aid of Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia, was one of the catalysts for development of the new religious community. In the 1970s, many South Korea workers started going abroad to Middle Eastern countries to work in various construction projects. The importance of building amicable diplomatic relations with oil-producing countries was acknowledged when the South Korean regime donated the land in the 1970s for the construction of a mosque. In an interview with Hong, the imam of the Korean Muslim Federation noted that although there was only a small Muslim population in Korea before the opening of the mosque, many joined the religion when “people about to go to the middle east came [here] to get cultural training about Muslim way of life or even change their religion [to Islam].”¹⁶ In South Korea, the dominant religion is Buddhism, comprising about 48% of those affiliated with a religious group, with Christians comprising about 20%.¹⁷ Although many workers who returned to South Korea changed back to their original religious beliefs, the construction of the mosque would have a lasting effect in Itaewon when Muslim immigrants came in increasing numbers.

After the Middle East oil boom, new immigrants from Southeast Asia and Africa increased steadily. There is no official data about the exact size of the Muslim population. However, Ahn Jong-guk, a professor of Middle Eastern Studies, estimates that there are about 137,000 Muslims

¹⁶Seung-pyo Hong, “Jong-gyorul Maegaero Hyungsung doen Hannamdong Islam Goriwa Woegukin Muslim Community ui Munhwajok Pinanchoh Yokhal” [“Religion-based Hannam-dong Islamic Street and the Muslim Community as Cultural Refugees”], *Jirihaknonchong* 52 (2008): 99-128,111.

¹⁷Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2008 *Hanguk ui Jong-gyo Hyonhwang* [The Present Status of Religions in Korea, 2008], (Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, 2008.)

living in Korea.¹⁸ Due to the presence of a mosque and related businesses, many decided to settle in Itaewon. The presence of the mosque led to the opening of many related businesses such as Muslim bookstores and halal grocery stores.¹⁹ On Friday afternoons many Muslim residents in Itaewon as well as those who live elsewhere gather to participate in religious worship. In addition to the religious reason, relatively cheaper rents have enabled ethnic minorities and new migrants to settle in the area. Besides Southeast Asian immigrants, migrant workers from African countries, such as Nigeria and Ghana, became a significant minority population, comprising 16% of foreign residents of the total population living in Itaewon 1 dong and 2 dong.²⁰

The Muslim and African communities in the South Itaewon Street area have played a positive role in ameliorating the transition of migrants into South Korean society. For instance, in an interview with Yonhap News, one Nigerian male noted that it is much more convenient to buy goods in Itaewon, while the supermarkets in other cities “often says [it is] not available.”²¹ The presence of many shops, churches, and religious institutions provide African migrants with opportunities for networking. Similarly, Friday services provide Muslim migrants a chance to meet and communicate with other members of the same religious group. According to Hong, Itaewon’s Muslim community functions as a “cultural refuge” in a foreign country, where the sharing of religious services and prohibitions becomes a way of “reinforcing their cultural identity and emotional well being.”²² In fact, one South Korean female who joined the religion after marrying a man from the Middle East noted that it is “easier to discuss subjects like Ramadan and other religious taboos here than in other places since most South Koreans do not know about [them].”²³

On the other hand, the rise of “Gay Hill” adjacent to what used to be Hooker Hill has become associated with the image of Itaewon as a free zone. The presence of Gay Hill appears to celebrate gay rights, while dingy and run-down Hooker Hill represents South Korea’s embarrassing past. In the progressive South Korean media, gay bars are introduced together with other trendy bars and exotic restaurants, linking gay bars with the cosmopolitan tolerance of different lifestyles. While streets signs such as “Transgender Club” (Fig. 5.3) proudly advertise the sexual orientation of their business clientele, older bars and clubs in Hooker Hill appealing to heterosexual males exude a less glamorous presence.

¹⁸Su-chan Ahn, “Hanguk ui Muslim Ulmana Duina?” [“How Many Muslims are in Korea?”], *Hankyoreh Newspaper*. May 16, 2011.

¹⁹From the official website of the Korean Muslim Federation, <http://www.koreaislam.org>

²⁰Yongsan Gu Office, *Itaewon-dong Gohju Yoegukin Hyunghwang*. (Seoul: Yongsan Gu Office, 2010).

²¹Jonghyon Hwang, “Migun Ppajinun Itaewon eh Africa-town Senggyotta,” *Yonhap News*. April 13, 2010.

²²Seung-pyo Hong, “Religion-based Hannam-dong Islamic Street and the Muslim Community as Cultural Refugees,” *Journal of Korean Geography* 52.

²³Interview, May 19, 2009.



Figure 5.3: Nightclubs in Itaewon include “Transgender Club” as well as a more conventional night club named “Manhattan.”

The rise of Gay Hill, however, does not represent the triumph of the gay rights movement, as many government policies fail to consider gay rights. Although South Korean society went through a democratization process in the late 1980s that significantly improved individual political rights, discussion of gay rights was excluded. What is more, the rising awareness of HIV in the late 1980s led the South Korean media and government to designate the gay population as potential “disease carriers,” which stigmatized the sexual minority. One *Hanguk Ilbo* article written in August of 1994 noted that “homosexuality, unhygienic sex, and sexual promiscuity are the most apparent channels of distributing sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and amoebiasis.”²⁴ A government document titled *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*, published by Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in 1987, included a chapter written by a Catholic priest who argued that AIDS is the “punishment of God for abnormal sexual habits.”²⁵

Responding to such negative portrayals of gays, many Korean gay rights and support groups, such as Chodonghoe and Kirikiri, were formed around university campuses in the early 1990s. Later, in 1995, the Korean Sexual-Minority Culture and Rights Center (KSCRC) was formed to advance the cause of sexual minorities in South Korea. Despite changes in the media and government documents’ portrayal of the gay population influenced by the international and domestic gay right movements, subtler forms of stigmatization persist. For instance, one study concluded that the routine distribution of free condoms by ISHAP (Ivan Stop HIV/AIDS Project), financially supported by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, constitutes “reconfirmation of abnormality by the state” rather than a gesture to promote the health of the gay population.²⁶ In other cases, gay activists have observed that conditions in the Korean military, seemingly more tolerant with no cases of expulsion for revealing gay sexual identity, present bigger challenges. Unlike highly reported debates surrounding military policies in countries like UK and US, there is almost “no public discussion,” since “there is no acknowledgement of the presence of the gay

²⁴Ju-sok Yu, “Song gwa Sahoe” [“Sex and Society”], *Hanguk Ilbo*, August 13, 1994.

²⁵Dae-gun Kim, “Jayon ui Sunri-eh Ddara Sanun Jihyerul Baewuja” [Let’s Learn the Wisdom of Following the Natural Order], in *Huchonsong Myon-yok Gyolpipjung*[Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome], (ed.) Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (Seoul: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1987.)

²⁶So-young Kwak. “Hanguk AIDS Toechiwundong gwa Gay Sexuality” [“A Crusade against HIV/AIDS in Korea and Gay Sexuality, Focused on a Distribution of Free Condoms”], (master’s thesis, Seoul National University, 2009), 98.

population in the military.”²⁷ Article 92 of the Military Penal Code, which indiscriminately outlaws “sex between members of the same the sex and sexual harassment/assault/molestation,” is exemplary of an assumption that *any* sex between members of the same sex is not voluntary.²⁸ Although there have never actually been charges for consensual sex between gay soldiers, the law nevertheless presents gay soldiers as “abnormal” and belonging to “a special attention group,” which presents a higher chance of social isolation in military.²⁹

Some South Koreans observe that Gay Hill in Itaewon is often associated with the social stereotypes of “gays as excessive pleasure-seekers” in the minds of the heterosexual population.³⁰ However, considering that public policy or discussion regarding gay rights is virtually non-existent, perhaps some physical representation of gay culture is better than nothing at all. Gay activists at Chingusai, a gay support group, are aware that places like Itaewon and Jongro, where gay bars are visible, are among the only social spaces for gays although “their official activities require keeping certain a distance from bars to promote ‘wholesome gay culture.’”³¹ However, such self-policing practices ironically become another form of discrimination since heterosexual human rights activists do not feel the need to apply the same level of self-scrutiny as gay activists. At the same time, events like the Stonewall incident in New York showed that bars and other social places can become the birthplace for a gay liberation movement. In fact, despite the media portrayal of “unwholesome activities” in Itaewon, many gays regard Itaewon as a “safe haven” where their sexual identities are better protected than in other places. According to Eun-sil Kim, a professor of Women’s Studies, the proliferation of gay bars and nigh clubs in Itaewon was partly due to the area’s reputation as the place where “anything goes.”³² Despite the presence of a few gay bars in the Jongro area, many young gay men who disliked the exclusive and old-fashioned ambience of the old bars began to go to Itaewon instead.³³ Thus, Itaewon became the symbol of a liberating place not just for heterosexual South Koreans but also for the gay community.

To summarize, the rise of sexual, ethnic, and religious minority cultures in Itaewon was the unexpected side effect of the absence of government policies regarding ethnic and sexual minorities rather than presence of policies. Although the case of the Muslim community may be regarded as the example of active efforts on the government’s part, the state was primarily interested in its construction insofar as it functioned as a friendly gesture to oil producing Middle Eastern countries. The subsequent formation of a Muslim immigrant community was the result of various factors, including cheap rents, ease of transportation, and the presence of a mosque. In the case of the gay bars at Itaewon, the government did not attempt crackdowns because of its proximity to the US army base and the culture of silence that surrounds the discussion of gay rights. Inadvertently, the unwillingness of the South Korea government to cause friction over the

²⁷Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea and Chingusai, *The Comprehensive Sourcebook Regarding the Project to Promote Military-related Human Rights of Sexual Minorities*, Seoul: Author, 2008,63.

²⁸The Military Penal Code, Article 92.

²⁹Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea and Chingusai, *The Comprehensive Sourcebook*, 17.

³⁰Kwak, 85.

³¹Sun-uk Choi. “Analysis of the Discourse of a Korean Gay Movement”, (master’s thesis: Seoul National University, 1996), 21.

³²Eun-Sil Kim, *Itaewon as an Alien Place*.

³³Song-Pae Cho, *The Body Politics of Korean Gay Men in Gay Consumer Places*, (master’s thesis, Yonsei University, 2003)

US army's presence and over the issues of gay rights contributed to the formation of the gay entertainment district.

Han-nam New Town Plan and “Cultural Streets” in Itaewon



Figure 5.4. The wall of Yongsan Garrison appears formidable with “Trespassing Prohibited” sign and barbed wire.

The decision to relocate the US army base (Fig. 5.4) was the result of prolonged discussion going back to 1987 when Korea's growing economic strength and military prowess rendered the presence of the US army in the capital less desirable. The location of the army base and amount of land it occupies (about 632 acres) have been noted in the South Korean media as “the roadblock to urban development.”³⁴ This is exacerbated by the low-density development of the base, including “their own 18-hole golf course,” compared to the rest of the over-crowded city.³⁵ According to Mark L. Gillem, while the defensive periphery of the base can be attributed to fundamental security concerns, the layout of residential and recreational space shows a desire to replicate lifestyles at home.³⁶ Not surprisingly, recent discussions of the relocation of the US army presented an opportunity for the city government to envision what could be done with such a vast empty piece of land. For instance, an article in *Chosun Ilbo* noted that different government departments “came up with different suggestions according to their agenda, such as an international technology center and a cultural/art center.”³⁷ In addition to building new city offices there, the Seoul city government planned to construct Yongsan Minjok Park.³⁸ Although it is unclear exactly when the base will be relocated given the huge cost, there have been real estate speculations and heated talks about investing in urban infrastructure circles in Itaewon and Yongsan.

³⁴Yongwon Yu, “Migun-giji Hunryonjang 23 got Banhwan gwa Jonmang,” “The Prospect and Return of 23 Places of US Army Training Grounds” *Chosun Ilbo*, November 16, 2001, 29.

³⁵Moon, *Sex among Allies*, 31.

³⁶Mark L Gillem, *American Town: Building the Outposts of Empire*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007)

³⁷Wonsuk Choi, “Yongsan Migungiji Om-gin Jari-en Daegyumo Minjok-gongwon Josong 5manpyong en Sichungsa Dulohsoh.” “A Large Scale Minjok Park to be Constructed on the Site, City Offices will Occupy 50,000 pyong area” *Chosun Ilbo*, January 21, 2002. 3

³⁸Seoul Metropolitan City, *2020 nyon Seoul Doshigibon Gaehoek* [*The Basic City Plan of Seoul 2020*], (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan City, 2006)



Figure 5.5: The Han-nam Redevelopment Plan shows a color-coded area designated as project sites. The red area, South Itaewon, is the primary target for redevelopment.

Itaewon-dong, where the vibrant multiethnic community is located, has been designated as a project site of the New Town plan, put forward by the Seoul city government in 2003. The New Town project is an urban redevelopment project with a focus on promoting balanced growth among different regions of Seoul. According to a policy document published by the Ministry of Construction and Transportation, it is a comprehensive plan that includes not only residential quarters, but also infrastructures such as parks, schools, roads, and other urban amenities. Initially, the project included three model districts, and later it encompassed twelve more districts, such as Yongsan Han-nam district, which includes Itaewon (Fig. 5.5). To imbue the area with a physically distinctive quality, the city of Seoul plans to build Green Hill, which includes Global Pavilion Park (Fig. 5.6), with thematic spaces dedicated to the representation of different foreign cultures. In addition, another schematic design called Ground 2.0 shows a plan to construct streets with low-rise commercial buildings punctuated by high-rise residential towers.



Figure 5.6: The schematic plan and 3D rendering of Green Hill and Global Pavilion Park

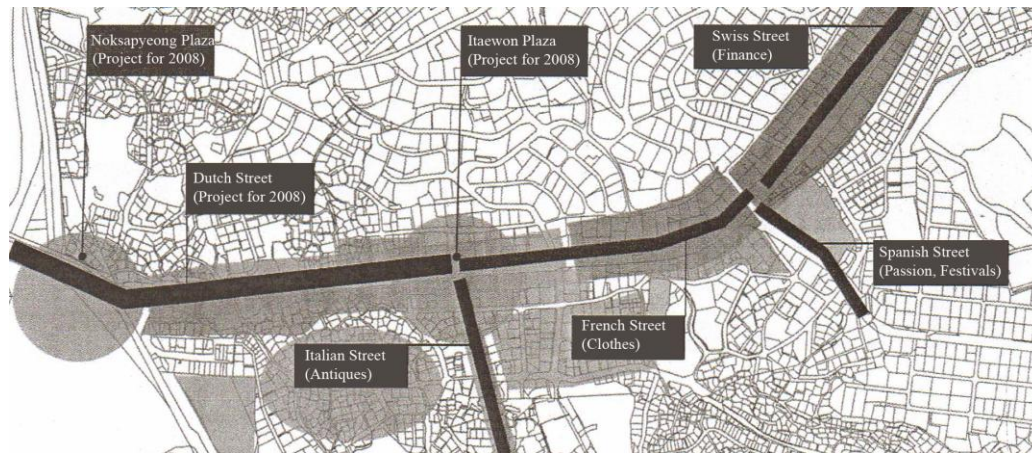
The appearance of diverse ethnic cuisine and stores did not go unnoticed in the popular media. In the case of Itaewon, a relatively high concentration of foreign residents and the presence of exotic cuisines have led many South Koreans to call the area “multicultural.” For instance, the weekly newspaper *Jugan Hanguk* has observed that Itaewon presents a “multicultural laboratory.”³⁹ In *Meeting the World in Itaewon*, a photojournalism book introducing various commercial venues and social organizations, Itaewon is portrayed as “the Mecca of the world cuisines.”⁴⁰ Jang-gyu Chang, the former head of the Yongsan district office, has mentioned Itaewon as the example of what multicultural policy is aiming for.⁴¹ Many multicultural festivals have been held in Itaewon, including the Itaewon World Village Festival in 2008. The media was quick to make the flippant observation that the place is the “address number one of multicultural [representations].”⁴² Media discussions of Itaewon recognized its history of embedded meanings and changing cultural signification through consumption. However, such discussions did not question the construction of Itaewon primarily as a popular entertainment destination. Despite the largely benign descriptions of the Muslim community, most descriptions of the minority population stop short of complimenting the stylistic elegance of the mosque in contrast to the banal rows of seedy bars and other ubiquitous urban venues.

³⁹Wu-jin Park. “Damunhwa Code-ro bon Itaewon: Damunhwa-song Silhomsil soh Seoul-daum ul Chatda,” “Viewing Itaewon with a Multicultural Code: Finding Seoul in Multicultural Laboratory” *Jugan Hanguk*, 2296, 2009. 56-59.

⁴⁰Kwangrip Moon, *Itaewon: Gateway to the World*, (Seoul: Joongang Books, 2009),197.

⁴¹Gyong-wung Jon. “Daehanminguk ui Sumun Jungsim Itaewon” [Itaewon, the Hidden Center of Korea], *Nyusu Dayilri News Daily*, August 27, 2010.

⁴²Wi-jae Lee. “Seoul sok Yoeguk Itaewon Beksoh,” *Chosun Ilbo*, February 22, 2011, A16.



Figures 5.7: from top to bottom, Itaewon Redevelopment Plan; plan for Itaewon Street, showing a bus stop in the Design Seoul Streets Plan

Urban planners have acknowledged the reputation of Itaewon for its “multicultural streets” in various street design schemes related to the Han-nam New Town plan. With the designation of the Itaewon area as a Special Tourist Zone and a Global Cultural Zone, administrative attention has been centered on how to realign the enticing yet incongruous development of various cultural elements. Many policymakers regard existing commercial establishments catering to the foreign population as cultural assets. For instance, Keum Ki-yong, a researcher at the Seoul Development Institute, observed that “Itaewon has the potential to become the most attractive tourist destination since there are diverse cultural forms introduced by foreigners.”⁴³ However, the remnants of adult industries developed in the Cold War era were identified as possible targets for elimination. According to a study conducted by the Seoul Development Institute, the weaknesses of the Special Tourist Zone include not only the concentration of “non-wholesome” activities but also “chaotic and sometimes unsanitary commercial structures as well as the lack of a well-organized shopping environment.”⁴⁴ Responses from architects and city planners to such perceived weaknesses included schemes to group sections of streets into themes, thus giving

⁴³Ki-yong Keum, interview, in *Itaewon ehsoh Segyerul Mannada. Itaewon: Gateway to the World*, Moon Gwangrip. (Seoul: JoongAng Ilbo Books, 2009), 312.

⁴⁴Seoul Development Institute, “Prospects for Itaewon STZ’s Change and Development Measures,” *Seoul Research Focus* 34 (2005): 1-11.

them a more coherent and unified appearance. One such scheme called for the construction of multinational streets such as French Street and Italian Street on Itaewon Street (Fig. 5.7). In another project called Design Seoul Street Plan, a part of the Design Seoul campaign, Itaewon Street is depicted as a place with rows of brick buildings reminiscent of houses in Amsterdam (Fig. 5.7). The design schemes also include plans to expand roads as well as construct new roads penetrating into the existing urban fabric to alleviate traffic congestion.

Both the Han-nam New Town Plan and the Design Seoul Street Plan illustrate the theme of providing and caring for the residents, the principle of “soft city” discourse. Phrases such as “welfare” and “well being” are used in project descriptions to emphasize the value of the emotional aspects of design. For instance, the official objective of the New Town Plan is described as ultimately constructing “high-quality welfare residential environments fit for the twenty-first century.”⁴⁵ Although the term “welfare” is a misnomer in the sense that the project does not involve free provisions of housing, the term is used in its literal meaning to indicate a general sense of well-being. Reflecting the changes in urban policy rhetoric, the four strategies of Design Seoul Street are described by the Seoul city government as “emptying, integration, participation, and sustainability.”⁴⁶ The use of the word “emptying” instead of “demolition” comes across as poetic rather than forceful. Instead of constructing complicated structures characteristic of chaotic urban life, the project seeks to impress residents in an attempt to restore a sense of visual order.

At the same time, the media descriptions of “multicultural streets” and design schemes to create themed streets were influenced by the “multicultural policies” put forward by the central government. South Korea’s demographic changes are partly a result of government policies taking place since in the late 1990s, such as promoting the increasing flexibility of the labor market and relaxing regulations on marriage immigrations. With the start of the industrial trainee system implemented during Kim Young Sam’s administration, an increasing number of unskilled workers from foreign countries were allowed into Korean workplaces.⁴⁷ International marriages between Southeast Asian women and Korean men became common in the mid-2000s.

⁴⁵Byung-Il Kim, *Newtown Sa-op Mit Gyunhyongbaljon Chokjin-jigu Saop ui Chujinbanghyang* [The Direction of New Town Project and Balanced Growth Area Projects] (Seoul: Ministry of Construction and Transportation, 2003), 65-66.

⁴⁶From the Official Blog of the Seoul City Government. <http://blog.seoul.go.kr/>

⁴⁷Hyun-Ho Seok, “Globalization of Labor and Corporate Enterprises in South Korea,” In *Korea Confronts Globalization*. (ed.) Yun-Shik Chang, Hyon-ho Seok and Donald L. Baker. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009)



Figure 5.8. Government multicultural campaign posters advertise the importance of diversity. The poster on the left reads “everyone’s different and precious.” The one on the right reads “our little minds come together to make Korea warm.”

Many policies supporting “multicultural families” were designed and implemented in the 2000s. Following the policy recommendation, local governments began developing language programs designed to facilitate foreign brides’ acculturation and learning the Korean language. The Ga-pyong and Yang-pyong local governments put forward plans to provide financial aid of up to 10,000,000 won (10,000 USD) for marriages between South Korean men and foreign brides.⁴⁸ At the same time, the Ministry of Law started recommending education programs for South Korean men seeking to marry foreign brides in order to ameliorate the high divorce rate.⁴⁹ Many multicultural streets and festivals were designated, such as Ansan’s Multicultural Street and Sorae Village. In Itaewon, Itaewon Global Village Festival was held in 2010. Although policy initiatives concentrated on education and job training, the presence of many urban neighborhoods with a high concentration of foreigners motivated studies of spatial strategies to help migrants integrate into Korean society. For instance, a series of studies titled *Reinventing Urban Policy in Response to Ethnic Diversity* were conducted by the Korean Research Institute for Human Settlement in 2009 and 2010.⁵⁰

However, celebratory remarks regarding “multicultural Itaewon” have not been followed with concrete urban plans to prevent the deterioration in South Itaewon. The Han-nam New Town Project, scheduled to be constructed in South Itaewon, threatens the long-term viability of Itaewon’s cultural and ethnic diversity by facilitating the gentrification process. It has already attracted many real estate investments, including by the Samsung group.⁵¹ Observations of Itaewon’s streets stop short at treating the presence of diverse ethnic cuisines and shops as mere

⁴⁸Gyong-eun Kim. “Gapyong/Yangpyong Gukje Gyol-hon Jiwon.” “Support for International Marriages in Cities of Gapyong and Yangpyong” *Chosun Ilbo*, June 12, 2009, A27.

⁴⁹Jin-sok Son. “Magujabi Gukjegyolhon Jongbuga Maknunda.” [The Government Steps in to Prevent Random Marriages], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 12, 2010, A10.

⁵⁰Se-hoon Park et al., *Reinventing Urban Policy in Response to Ethnic Diversity II: Localizing Immigrant Integration Policy*, (Seoul: Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements, 2010)

⁵¹Bo-yoon Choi and Song Hyun, “Samsung Dokbuneh Ttunun Itaewon Comme des Garçons Gil,” [“Itaewon’s Comme des Garçons Street Becomes Popular Thanks to Samsung”] *Chosun Ilbo*, September 1, 2010, B5.

façade for attracting tourists, rather than as vital social networking places for the community and a source of Itaewon's cultural diversity. The current discussions of Itaewon as a multicultural space overlook the past and present political and cultural struggles that sexual and religious minority groups face even in the era of a "multicultural society."

Han-nam New Town and Gentrification

The southern part of Itaewon represents one of the last remaining neighborhoods not affected by the numerous urban redevelopment projects of Seoul in the 1980s and onward. As such, it retains earlier subdivisions and old buildings that contribute to the run-down appearance of the district. The homes in the south part of the street are run-down row houses with steep and narrow stairways (Fig. 5.9). The availability of smaller apartments was another factor which contributed to the settlements of immigrants with small fortunes. In a TV interview, Kim Jaeyong, an immigrant from Bangladesh living in Itaewon, noted that the Korean system of *jeon-se* is too expensive for people with no significant savings.⁵² In addition to the already dilapidated conditions, the announcement of the New Town plan halted repairs or renovations on the existing houses in the expectation of demolition. The designation of the area as a New Town Plan site has generated speculative investments that have driven many local business and land owners to move out of the area. At the same time, the rapid flow of migrant workers in search of cheaper rents has initiated the transformation of the area's demographic. With the percentage of rental housing in the project area as high as 67%, many new immigrants easily found rental housing in this area while older South Korean residents moved out.⁵³ What is notable is that this demographic change was not initiated by racial or ethnic prejudices but by the anticipated government-led urban redevelopment project, which was first announced in the year 2004.

⁵²KBS2TV *Gamsong DaKyu Mijisu* [Documentary of the Unknown], broadcast February 27, 2010. Jeon-se is a kind of lease system unique in South Korea. Instead of monthly rents, a tenant pays a lump sum deposit for a year or two. After the end of the lease, the tenant receives the full deposit back. The landlord, in turn, can re-invest the money and recover the cost thanks to a high interest rate. The deposit amount varies from place to place. It can range from 20-30% of the market value of the property to 80%, depending on the availability of housing.

⁵³Jung Jo Kang, "A Study of the New Town Project of the Seoul Metropolitan Government: With a Focus on Yongsan Gu Han-nam New Town", (master's thesis, Kwangwoon University, 2004), 29.



Figure 5.9: Left: houses in the south of Itaewon Street with the minarets of the central masjid in the background; right: staircase connecting the different row houses

Ironically, the very condition that enabled the formation of the minority community is also threatening to drive the minority population out of the area. Unwillingness of Korean residents to open business has provided opportunities for migrants' businesses but impending demolition makes their presence fragile and temporal. The proposed project does not include a plan to incorporate existing low-income residents or retain the small businesses that makes the streets of Itaewon "multicultural." Insuk Yoon, a committee chair of an NGO named Dosi Yondae, has pointed out that the current New Town Project is focused on the place rather than the residents, and that it seeks to "replace the current residential area with middle class residences."⁵⁴ Despite the political rhetoric of "multiculturalism" and the need to develop "cultural streets," urban redevelopment projects contradict the principle of building a multicultural society. The most pervasive and problematic aspect remains token multi-cultural slogans that call for inclusive cultural attitudes while neglecting the practical needs of immigrants, such as the need for adequate housing and education. The implementation of the Han-nam New Town Redevelopment Plan would displace a vibrant multiethnic community while providing an artificial "global park." It is contradictory to pursue the place-marketing strategy with a "selling point" of cultural diversity while on the other hand the pre-conditions for the presence of such diversity are being destroyed.

Even for South Korean shop tenants who possess some capital to pay a security deposit and other fees, redevelopment projects have devastating effects. Although the foreign residents in Itaewon account for more than 10% of the population, South Korean nationals remain the majority.⁵⁵ According to Lee, a branch director of Sharing and Future, a social business group focusing on low-income housing, the compensation given to shop tenants in another site in

⁵⁴Insuk Yoon. "Seoul si Newtown-saup ui Munje," "The Problem of Seoul City's New Town Projects" *Doshi wa Bingon [City and Poverty]* 69 (2004): 119-138, 130.

⁵⁵According to the Korean Statistical Information Service, out of the 18,777 total resident population in Itaewon 1 and Itaewon 2 dong, about 1800 are foreign residents.

Yongsan District 4 was not enough for them open new businesses elsewhere in Seoul although the redevelopment is predicted to bring much profit overall.⁵⁶ The compensation given to tenants cannot cover the premium fee (*gwon-ri-gum*) customarily required for “good business spots” but not formally acknowledged in legal documents. Although the compensation given by the city government includes the security deposit, the premium (which can be much more than the deposit) is not included. Cases of conflicts between soon-to-be evicted shop tenants and the local city government have been widely covered by the South Korean media in incidents like the Yongsan Catastrophe. The scuffle between the demolition force and the residents of the building scheduled for bulldozing became intense and resulted in several deaths.⁵⁷ The incident highlighted the adverse effects arising from the city’s fast-track redevelopment process and the excessive use of police force.

Given the unlikelihood of recovering costs, the number of Korean tenants decreased sharply in the South Itaewon area designated for the Han-nam New Town project. However, foreign migrants continued to open businesses in Itaewon after leaseholders stopped requiring payment of the premium to foreigners.⁵⁸ Although such measures help migrant businesses settle in Itaewon without worries about recovery of the cost, they also pose the danger of driving them out more easily since the government can simply pay them compensation. Alternative locations the new immigrant businesses would likely be able to afford are very limited, since the occupation of “good business spots” required the payment of a premium which can very steep, sometimes as much as three to four times the deposit. At the same time, residents living in substandard rental units are required to either pay market rate or move out. In a current New Town scheme, there is no mention of preserving the current ethnic and cultural diversity, which unexpectedly burgeoned during the decades of urban development. Another news article about redevelopment observed that the huge scale of the current redevelopment plan—which involves the relocation of thousands of residents—makes it structurally impossible to reach an agreement or consensus.⁵⁹ In the impending demolition of a viable community, the design schemes to construct themed streets are viewed by residents and shop owners as typical “armchair arguments” without consideration of real life conditions.⁶⁰

The inequality that existed between American GIs and South Korean migrant women in the 1960s has disappeared with rapid urbanization and modernization. However, another set of inequalities continues to shape the contemporary experiences of migrant workers living in Itaewon. Despite celebratory media remarks about Muslim communities in Itaewon, the lack of a consistent urban policy directed at a “multicultural society” threatens to destroy the existing neighborhood. Given the absence of discussions regarding housing problems on the south side of Itaewon, the urban landscapes of Itaewon have become akin to what Mike Davis has called “fortress landscape” of LA.⁶¹ Massive walls of houses on the north side of Itaewon Street are

⁵⁶Ju-won Lee, “Yongsan Chamsa, Sokdoga Burun Jukum ui Janchi” [“Yongsan Catastrophe, the Party of Death Brought by Speeding”], *Bokji Donghyang*, March 2009, 22-28.

⁵⁷The Yongsan Catastrophe was the violent clash on January 20, 2009 between the tenants of a building in Yongsan and the police force and agents of the demolition company.

⁵⁸Seung-pyo Hong, “Religion-based Hannam-dong Islamic Street,” 114.

⁵⁹Wonsang Hong, “Joomin yigwon Datume Seoul Jaegaebal Golbyung” [“Residents’ Battle over Interests Causing Seoul’s Redevelopment Serious Health Problems”], *Chosun Ilbo*, June 29, 2009.

⁶⁰In *Itaewon ehsoh Segyerul Mannada* [Itaewon: Gateway to the World], Sukcheon Hong, a bar owner and well-known gay celebrity in South Korea, has noted that the approach of the city government is cursory at best.

⁶¹Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (London and New York: Verso, 1990)

reminiscent of the defensive design of the Yongsan garrison nearby. With extremely high walls and security posts, the neighborhood has become an island of the rich separated from the south side by the rows of shops on Itaewon Street. The redevelopment of existing commercial streets poses a further danger of facilitating the gentrification process already underway. Various “multicultural” festivals and street events become one-off, random shows of benevolence rather than generating significant a re-examination of structural inequalities.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how urban policies have shaped the development of communities of ethnic and sexual minorities in Itaewon. Although the past government policies were not directed at promoting cultural diversity, they inadvertently contributed to the formation of an immigrant community and a gay entertainment district. On the other hand, the current policy promoting a “multicultural society” fit for the global era fails to make an impact on the spatial level when urban redevelopment projects threaten to demolish low-income neighborhoods. Despite the celebration of “segyehwa” and “multicultural” street events, such efforts stop short at tokenism when bigger economic issues such as housing conditions are not addressed. In this process of remaking Itaewon’s streets, less well-off residents are silently eliminated from the larger picture. Although the process of gentrification is driven by economic forces, the end result follows the ethnic line since only migrants are settling in the area set out to be redeveloped. Ironically, the establishment of an ethnic minority community was predicated upon its eventual destruction. The case of Itaewon demonstrates the complex process where the conventional definition of “the other” is being remade in the economic logic of globalization.

So far this dissertation has examined four urban redevelopment sites in Seoul. In the first two chapters, the theme of rediscovering the Korean “tradition” was analyzed in relation to the city government’s efforts to transform Seoul from an industrial city to a postindustrial “soft city.” Continuing with the larger theme of the Korea’s segyehwa drive and the reactions to policy changes, the second two chapters focused on the theme of heterogeneity and changing Korean ethnic makeup in urban environments. Whether by emphasizing the rediscovery of the Korean heritages or newly formed multiethnic towns, all the sites designated as global zones reflect the urban transformations of the capital city in the era characterized by the successful democratic movement and the slowing rate of economic growth. The chapters of this dissertation have illustrated how the concept of constructing “soft city” through urban design has been received and challenged by residents and NGOs. In the next concluding chapter, I reflect on the implications of urban projects in the previously analyzed sites and how they cast light on the future studies of Asian cities aspiring to achieve the status of a “global city.”

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: Going Beyond the Cultural City

The government's effort to remake the South Korean landscape through a series of urban renewal projects involved strategic deployments of urban culture, or what I have called the Culture City discourse. After the rapid economic growth in South Korea, South Koreans' criticism against the previous modernization project, which placed economic efficiency above everything else, reached a critical level. In terms of urban environments, dissatisfaction regarding the dominance of high rise apartment buildings led to explorations of architectural styles other than the International Style. In such a socioeconomic context, the government has appropriated pre-industrial architectural forms such as hanoks as well as newly emergent suburban landscapes in an effort to propel Seoul's status as a global city. The state's rhetoric of development used to emphasize the idea of *hanminjok* and ethnic solidarity in the previously state-led economy, but is now diversifying to include openness to foreigners and appreciation of different customs. Whether through marketing "traditional Korean cultures" or through celebrating "multicultural society," the case studies examined in this dissertation illustrate that cultural representation has become a means of promoting urban redevelopment projects. In this dissertation, I have argued that diversification of the political rhetoric of the South Korean state is an extension of the growth-centered economic framework and serves as a tool for flexible accumulations.

Although diversification of the development rhetoric started out as a part of the political and social agenda associated with segyehwa, its reformative aspect has been utilized by the growth-alliance made up of urban entrepreneurs, upper-middle class South Koreans, and the local government. The appeal of the plans to build cultural districts, including Global Cultural Zones and History and Culture Routes, partly stems out from the desire to redress the ills of the developmentalist ideology. Ironically, the project of segyehwa and its strong association with reforms have not produced fundamental reevaluation of the growth-driven economic structure of South Korea. While the political aspect of globalization is emphasized in the mission statements of many projects, socioeconomic aspects have become less relevant as the discussions of urban redevelopment focused on abstract concepts such as urban culture and tradition. This dissertation has examined how the discourse of urban culture and tradition has been articulated and mediated by local actors.

In the context of contemporary South Korea, traditions have become targets of constant rediscoveries in order to reconfirm modernity of the present. As a byproduct of hyper urbanization and modernization drive, traditions have become a project with objective of reconstructing structures/objects/sites on a massive scale. The idea of a single Korean ethnicity has not weakened. Instead, the search for a stable identity in the context of seemingly chaotic processes of globalization has resulted in the entrenchment of national solidarity, giving rise to "rediscovered traditions," such as remodeled hanoks and tea houses. The political rhetoric of the state and the city governments to restore the "historic quality" of Seoul by conserving selected heritage sites illustrates the continued viability of the concept of single ethnicity and "national culture" in the political economy of South Korea. In Bukchon and Insadong, collective rediscoveries of Korean traditions by middle-aged Koreans through consumption of hanoks and classic artworks becomes the major driving force in the development of the Cultural Streets. The

previous public perception of hanoks as signs of unprogressive and inconvenient lifestyles has changed. Lifestyles have changed, and now hanoks are understood as containing progressive qualities such as patience and independence. Despite the close relationship between cultural values and hanoks collectively imagined by middle-aged Koreans, the processes of hanok remodeling in Bukchon does not involve restoration of corresponding idyllic lifestyles. Constructing hanoks in Bukchon and antique shops in Insadong as repositories of “Korean traditional cultures” does not address the structural problems of globalization since it results in gentrification and marginalization of certain groups. Instead, the city government’s effort to revive “cultural traditions” in Bukchon and Insadong has resulted in a sanitized version of the Korean past which erases traces of colonial history and class conflicts. In this process, remodeled hanoks have become examples of the blurring line between vernacular styles and modern architecture.

On the other hand, globalization processes in South Korea have resulted in increased transnational migrations and formation of many multiethnic towns. Various state-led policies encouraging transnational marriages and flow of migrant laborers appear to support the claim that South Korea is on its path to becoming a “multicultural society.” As the result of increasing numbers of immigrant workers and diversifying ethnicities, the discussion of “multiculturalism” and “multi-cultural family” has become more frequent in the South Korean political sphere. However, policy initiatives focusing on cultural assimilation of foreign population are not followed by housing or labor policies designed to sustain the existing multiethnic neighborhoods. This dissertation has shown that the emergence of multiethnic neighborhoods is the unanticipated side effects rather than the objective of past urban policies. While increasing number of foreign workers was due to changing economic structure and labor policies, the rise of ethnic neighborhoods in Itaewon and Dongdaemun was due to accumulation of historical developments and peculiar urban conditions. On the other hand, current urban redevelopment plans promoting “multicultural streets” and “new towns” threatens to construct compartmentalized landscapes based on socioeconomic status and represent deepening socio-economic polarization.

Transforming Seoul to a “global city” involve simultaneous processes of re-discovering the traditional and re-designing the modern. On one hand, rediscoveries of lost aesthetics, such as Bukchon’s hanoks, become the sign of sophistication and the cultural maturity. On the other hand, unsavory traces of “modern history” become targets of re-designing and subsumed under the theme of continuous project of economic growth and development. Despite seemingly powerful notion of tradition, not all forms of traditions are considered a project of preservation and protection. Rather, the process of defining “Korean tradition” is a highly political and selective process. For instance, the recent discovery of (and worried uproar against) Insadong’s colonization by international coffee chains and made-in-China souvenirs forgets the convoluted colonial history of the area, which included illegal sales of national artifacts and political demonstrations against the Japanese colonial administration. The demolition of the sports stadium and the “rediscovery” of old city wall in Dongdaemun Market illustrates that the imperative of historical preservation can be flexibly applied depending on urban contexts. At the same time, other forms of tradition, such as Dongdaemun Sports Stadium, are more easily abandoned due to the unsettled political tensions surrounding colonial history.

Throughout the case studies discussed in this dissertation, restoring a balance between tradition and modernity in urban environments has been subsumed under the rubric of creating “cultural spaces.” In Cultural City discourse, perceived forms of tradition become essential aspects of urban culture. The spectacular commercial success of shopping malls in the

Dongdaemun market during the Asian financial crisis has contributed to the belief that continuous material growth is possible, but only if urban developments take factors other than efficiency, such as “culture,” into consideration. Urban projects that promote Itaewon as a Special Tourism Zone involve re-designing the character of the space from national to global by tapping into the presence of ethnic shops and restaurants that sprang up as the result of increased transnational movement of labor. In Dongdaemun and Itaewon, urban planners and policy makers emphasize the need to build urban amenities necessary for the comfort and the room for emotional relaxation. In addition to promoting sales of commercial items, they argue that provision of “cultural spaces” such as museums and exhibition space is necessary for urban dwellers. Policy makers argue that currently barren and harsh urban environments, focused on the maximum return with minimal allocation of space, can only be reformed through supply of more breathing space.

Interestingly, the government’s appropriation of cultural practices to promote economic accumulation has inadvertently invited political discussions regarding what constitutes urban culture and “cultural space.” In the case of Dongdaemun and Insadong, appropriations of the government’s project by independent artists and the grass-roots community have given birth to new interpretations, showing that the clientelist approach of the state is questioned and challenged when more pressing local concerns are not addressed. As humorous twists of the *DesignSeoul* posters by the FF Group show, not all South Koreans agree with the definition of “cultural space” articulated in urban renaissance projects. Whereas urban planners and policy makers applaud the construction of Dongdaemun Culture and History Park as evidence of balanced growth, artists have depicted the structure as just another boring monument which will be demolished shortly. Street vendors selling souvenirs in Insadong have questioned the rigid dichotomy between “authentic stores” and “vendors selling fake souvenirs” by noting that even the established antique stores will sell products with made-in-china labels.

Less conspicuous yet meaningful articulations of Seoul’s cultural streets come from those who continue on the understated spatial traditions by using public space as the stage for different political and social issues. Despite the narrative of loss prevalent in the discussions of Insadong’s chaotic urban development, presence of political activism on the main street suggests that historical commonality exists despite the appearances of disorder and cacophony. By drawing a parallel between street activities of the present with the past forms of civic movements, this study has illustrated how the less prominent forms of tradition continues to shape the urban experiences. Admittedly, direct relationship between the historical anti-colonial movements and the current political movement focusing on human right issues is difficult to pinpoint. However, both spatial practices are the examples of resistance against normalizing tendency of defining urban cultures.

In the South Korean context of rapidly changing politico-economic structures, it is difficult to categorize the various factors as either predatory or benevolent. The state itself is composed of heterogeneous individuals and some remain critical of the eventual outcome of the urban projects. The division within the group of historical experts in Bukchon regarding what deserves to be preserved shows that there is no consensus even among those who participate in the urban renaissance projects. At the same time, members of NGOs seemingly promoting preservation of cultural traditions also take a part in flexible accumulation by reaping profits through land sales. Proliferation of quasi-governmental NGOs in South Korea raised questions regarding the distinction between the state and civil society. The intersections between cultural and economic aspects of developmental projects have made it extremely difficult to exactly pin point the

motives and desires behind actions of a given group. The police reactions to the guerilla projects of FF Group demonstrate that even the generic criticism toward urban redevelopment projects can become associated with deliberate sabotage by members of an opposing party. However, alternative forms of expressing political dissension continue, albeit generating much controversy. Rather than taking the overly simplistic view of globalization as either a top-down or a from-below process, I conclude that the dialectical and interlocking relationship between the state's global ambitions and local inhabitants' concerns has shaped the South Korean urban and suburban environments.

Continuous negotiations regarding what constitutes "cultural spaces" in contemporary South Korea show that the battle over who defines culture is far from over. Although political strategies of achieving accumulation have diversified, unconventional methods of countering them have emerged as the result of ever-changing socio-economic structures associated with globalization. What cultural representations are appropriate for urban spaces remains an open question. As indicated by President Lee's campaign speech, processes of globalization have indeed brought threats as well as opportunities for South Koreans. Small businesses and unskilled workers in South Korea face increased economic risks in the liberalized economic structure. Disagreements about whether designs of urban environments represent urban culture or not follow disagreements about abstract concepts such as tradition and modernity, and the role that they should play in redevelopment projects. However, what are considered threats for some are considered opportunities for others. The presence of Korean-Russian businesses in Dongdaemun and Muslim and gay communities in Itaewon is thanks to faster and increasing movement of labor and capital. The elusive nature of the processes of globalization can simultaneously make one group of people vulnerable as well as empowered.

Many of the conditions which have contributed to the urban transformation of Seoul are also affecting other Asian cities aspiring to take the title of a "global city." South Korean histories of political economy since the late 1980s illustrate what kind of new relations between the state and the civil society may emerge after the initial successes of the democratic movement and economic growth. There is no such thing as a complete success or a complete failure. Ironically, ambitious undertakings (of the state, the city government, or the residents themselves) spent towards the recognition as a "global city" can be taken as the evidence that they are not yet considered as such. Diverse manifestations of being global are what make up Seoul. It is the unpredictable course of urban transformations which makes the city simultaneously different and like the (rest of the) world.

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