

Foreword

During the twentieth century, one of the most dramatic rises to modern prominence in Asia, if not elsewhere in the world, occurred in South Korea. From a scant three percent of the total population living in urban circumstances less than one hundred years ago, the urban proportion is now over eighty percent. The wealth of the nation's citizenry has risen considerably, from literally dirt poor after the calamitous civil war in the early 1950s to respectable middle-income status today. Industrialization, one of modernization's hallmarks, has also evolved prodigiously, producing technological world-class companies such as Samsung and Hyundai. Despite this prominence, however, anything like a comprehensive English-language account of Korean modern architecture and urbanism, as this volume attempts to be, has been non-existent. Much of what has been available is sandwiched into more general discussions of Korea's modernization or into accounts of its capital, Seoul, primarily after World War II. Other snippets are in articles dealing with particular buildings and related projects, as well as with their architects, in several serialized professional and trade magazines. Further glimpses can also be found through historical panoramas and other photographs in a few albums, usually thoughtfully published by government-supported institutions.

One of the challenges in structuring the contents of a first-of-a-kind book like *Architecture and Urbanism in Modern Korea* is how to frame the discussion and what to include and what not to share. Another challenge is how to discuss plans and projects appropriately for their time and place them in a broader and more accessible context. Development of underlying themes of historical and theoretical interest also requires consideration, along with sufficient supporting material, for the book to serve as a useful reference. Then, too, narrative style and the use of illustrations can enhance the book's readability and ultimate enjoyment.

On par, Inha Jung has written a fine volume, full of well-informed accounts of events, insightful analyses of projects, and nuanced ideas about the unique flow of architectural and urban modernization in Korea. He begins by dividing the presentation into three distinct periods of colonization, development and globalization, using what he calls two "thick fault lines." One is the transitional period between the liberation of 1945 and the Korean War of 1950–1953, and the other is the movement into democracy from the late 1980s into the early 1990s. Not only does this subdividing capture the essence of what appears to have happened, it also coincides with ideas of "turning moment" and "tipping points," now routinely used by other historians of modernization when encountering substantial disjunctions between one era and the next. Furthermore, he puts these distinctions to good use by defining the underlying possibilities, design activities, and practices pertaining to each by way of what he calls "structured fields." These, in turn, are akin to the Foucault-like idea of a "discourse," which more or less defines what can be "said" or in this case designed, planned, or otherwise made from what is excluded. Far from being entirely inevitable or mechanistic, however, these structured fields can be willfully altered and replaced through significant changes in technological orientation, attitudes to regional identity on the part of architects and planners, as well as other changes to the underlying urban and architectural discourse. Elaboration of this idea in each of the three periods is then pursued in a straightforward narrative description, analysis, and parsing of three principle aspects: the period's planning discourse; the provision of the component of urban modernization in shortest supply, namely, housing; and the character and thrust of architectural debates and prevailing orthodoxies.

What is included here in the form of plans, building projects, and related discussions cannot hope to be entirely inclusive, even in a relatively small setting like South Korea, which is somewhat the geographic size of the state of Indiana in the United States. Nevertheless, within the foregoing tripartite concentration of material and the confines of the prevailing discourse or structured field, what needs to be incorporated comes across as being reasonably apparent and is delivered in an even-handed manner, replete with useful illustrations and, at times, diagnostic diagrams. Numerous side references to plans and projects elsewhere in the world are also helpful. Along the way numerous local architects are introduced, many not well known outside of Korea, along with a repertoire of projects that span a spectrum from plans, to urban design proposals, to a broad array of building types. The requisite “survey” aspect of the book is well served and supplied; in short, the author is able to say quite a lot about a lot of projects and urban-architectural undertakings.

Keenly aware of the unusual and he would say unique trajectory of modern architectural and urban development in Korea, Inha Jung also challenges some of the so-called universal veracities of modernization. This, in turn, places the text clearly on the side of those who conceive of “modernities” rather than the all-encompassing “modernity” of contemporary phenomena. For one thing, Jung’s interest in what survives from earlier times and goes largely unchanged is of as much interest as the apparent wholesale commitment of Koreans to modernization. His use of and reflections on the persistence of the *madang*, or courtyard arrangement, in building is a case in point. Then, too, there is the introduction of Western technologies and other agencies of modernization, although via Japan with its own re-interpretations and implementation. Here Jung evenly balances relevant discussion between the two prominent views of Japan’s rule in Korea as one of exploitation, on the one hand, and of colonial modernization, on the other. Turning to the developmental period in the text, Korea’s modernization, as he puts it, “took place . . . largely removed from a Western liberal pluralist paradigm.” Nor, overall, can it be “accounted for by Western standards nor those pertaining to underdeveloped third-world countries.” Also, down among the details of architectural production, during the period of so-called globalization, there was an inversion in Korea away from theory, unlike what occurred in the West, toward pragmatism and the embrace of situational aspect of context. Disparities in the scale and morphology of superblock development—a fundamental spatial component of Korean urbanization—with block structures anywhere else in the world is yet another distinctive outcome of modernization. So too is Jung’s interpretation of what he terms “landscaped architecture” toward a blurring of distinctions between nature and building away from nature’s more prevalent objectification in other places.

Throughout, the presentation is well structured, inviting in its language, and engaging. Much of what I have said in the foregoing, although certainly there as a strong intellectual underpinning, may well remain less obvious, and to the good, for other readers. The scaffolding, so to speak, doesn’t get in the way of a very welcome addition to the literature on Korean modern architecture and urbanism as well as the “modernities” of architecture and urbanism more broadly construed.

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