Introduction

This book traces the transformation of architecture and urban space over the course of the last one hundred tumultuous years of Korea's history, a time when the built environment changed so fundamentally that it is difficult to grasp completely its transfigurations. Judging from pictures taken by an Australian photographer in 1904, Korea at that time was a land of seclusion and isolation, remote from modern civilization. The urban population was barely 3 percent of the total; the population of Seoul, Korea's bustling urban capital, was less than 200,000. The majority of the land was blanketed with rice paddies and farm fields, sparsely dotted with thatched roof houses. Within a mere one hundred years, Korea transformed itself into a completely modern society. Today's population has increased fivefold, with more than 80 percent of it living in its urban centers. Much of the pastoral landscape has been converted into large, monolithic buildings and labyrinthine networks of streets. Obviously, the process was not easy. Buildings and cities were repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt due to a succession of vehement sociopolitical disturbances. Indeed, the changes were so dramatic that few buildings constructed one hundred or more years ago remain. The legacy of the twentieth century in Korea must be regarded as one equally made up of destruction and construction.

Ruptures and Continuities

Although modernization began more than a century later in Korea than it did in the West, it has been the predominant ideology throughout the past century, bringing about radical changes in Korea's architecture and cities. The nature of modernity, which continuously negates what existed in the past, brought with it the complete uprooting of the traditional lifestyle. As a result, the history of Korean architecture and urbanism over the last century has been characterized by discontinuities, ruptures, and transformations. Two thick fault lines are particularly significant: the first sandwiched between liberation (1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953), and the second, between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the second fault line, marking a transition in the South from a military regime to a democratic society, was perhaps not as dramatic as the events surrounding the first, it was still the case that architectural and urban discourse changed remarkably in both.

With these ruptures as boundaries, Korean architecture of the twentieth century falls into three distinct periods, with modernity taking on a different meaning in each. The first, coinciding with the period of Japanese occupation, was a time of colonial modernism. A particular strand of modern civilization, including some Western technologies, was transplanted to Korea via Japan, and a modern way of life started to take shape for the first time, albeit in a distorted way. The second period, extending from 1961 to 1988, was a time of developmental dictatorship when the Korean government presided over a large-scale construction boom, and architects sought to establish a modern identity through traditional means. The last period, which began to take shape in the mid-1990s, may be defined as a time when Korea's modernization was not only achieved, but also subsumed in the globalizing trend of the present era.

Because the modernization of Korea was belated, it condensed into a very short time period changes that had taken place over more than two centuries in the West. But while the rapid and radical changes that have occurred are undeniable, of greater significance for this study is the identification of elements that have remained unchanged. In Korea, long-standing relationships between humans and their built environment have formed continuities that are still deeply rooted in the way of life of the Korean people.

For this reason, regionalism exerted a powerful influence on Korean architects in the twentieth century, inspiring them to discover formal ideals in the method of organizing outdoor space which they found in old temples; the topological singularities in traditional gardens; the multilayered arrangement of walls in old palaces; and the different types of courtyards in traditional houses, all with a view to projecting them in a modern fashion. It is evident that the practices of Korean architects are deeply associated with the places where they grew up, and by exploring those places, Korean architects have pursued and found a modern identity that can be called their own. For that reason, identifying the elements of continuity and the process of their transformation through the last century is of great importance in this study.

Practicing in a Structured Field

Because it is impossible to consider all of the events related to architecture and urbanism in twentieth-century Korea, we need to be selective in our approach. The key task in this book is to identify the practical rules that were applied by architects in the spatial reconfiguration of modern Korea. To this end, our discussion starts with lines that are drawn up on a plan. When a line is drawn for the first time to conceive a building or a city in an empty place, it already contains an extremely complicated signifying system. The subjective ideas of the individual architect and the objective structure of society are integrated by the act of drawing a single line, through which theory and practice work together to produce a unique built environment. By clearly understanding the process in which complex built environments are generated, starting from a single line, this book tries to present a comprehensive overview of architectural and urban development in modern Korea. Here both architecture and cities belong to the same discursive plane and are closely interrelated, rather than work as elements with an independent existence.

To develop these ideas effectively, we must look at the aforementioned periods as structured fields. They constituted the fields of possibility in which architects had to act, and the architects' design activities were a form of practice conditioned by those structured fields. When one visits a university campus, where buildings built in different periods are gathered together, one can verify how structured fields permeate everything—from the overall design to the individual details of the buildings. The majority of buildings built within the same structured field make common use of materials, construction methods, building codes, and design concepts. The same is true for urban spaces. Cityscapes, street networks, and even city boundaries change in accordance with the periods when they were planned. The urban spaces of the 1930s, 1970s, and 2000s were all conceived in distinctive ways and are endowed with the signifying systems of the practices and structured fields they at once embody.

One might well ask in what way a structured field affects an architect or planner's practice. A structured field acts in two ways. First, it acts as an existential horizon. All architects work within an objective social reality, and their designs also take place within a given set of constraints. It is extremely difficult to escape those constraints until they are considered inappropriate by most practitioners. To do so, one must accept the burdens of economic inefficiency and waste, and ultimately the risk of losing one's customary relationship with the outside world. In this sense, a structured field is composed of the limitations and constraints that are innate in an architect's practice. But it can also be productive, giving rise to new forms of activity, rather than simply censoring certain forms of activity. It provides a structure, like the rules of a game, and architects must understand their modus operandi intuitively or logically, and negotiate their course using those procedures. The more skillfully they do so, the higher the probability they will successfully compete with other architects, with the commissioning of better projects as the reward for success. But it is also possible for architects to point out the unreasonableness of certain rules rather than simply submitting to them, and in this way the ideas of architects interact with the social structure, affecting the process by which a structured field becomes internalized in an architect's practice.

There are many ways that preestablished structures become internalized, since structured fields are dependent on natural conditions, laws and institutions, representational methods, production methods, and existent spatial systems. In most cases, they have been formed before an architect starts to work, having been naturally acquired at home or at school. In Korea, residential spaces, in particular, seem to form at an early age as the "proto-scenes" in an architect's spatial consciousness. Because they were acquired unconsciously, these spatial concepts have appeared repeatedly in the work of Korean architects. When we compare the projects designed by two Korean architects, Hyo-Sang Seung and Kyu Sung Woo, we can see that while their architectural activities stem from completely different professional backgrounds, their design attitude relies on the same spatial consciousness derived from early experience of a form of traditional Korean housing called the urban *hanok*. This experience functions like a latent diagram in the architect's consciousness, and it repeatedly emerges whenever they come up with an image. This process is the reason this book focuses specifically on the formation of urban and residential space.

Structured fields are dynamic and ever changing, since they can be affected by internal as well as external forces. But what makes a structured field disappear, to be replaced in turn by a new one? There may be several factors, but large-scale changes in urban discourse, technological orientation, and regional identity can all play a role. Generational change occurs when architects and planners have to work in conditions completely different from those encountered by the previous generation and, as a result, need to restructure the rules of the game. It is the dynamic interplay between architects and structured fields that has consistently served as the driving force changing the practice of designing architecture and cities in Korea.