

The Beauty of Traditional Korean Architecture

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Abstract

This paper explores the beauty of Korean traditional architecture from a contemporary viewpoint. Because the practice of modern architecture in Korea is based on the Western model, this paper discusses the topic in relation to the Western perspective of architectural beauty. Also, because the beauty of architecture is very closely related to cultural views of architecture, this paper also discusses the beauty of Korean architecture in relation to the general views of architecture. The issues addressed in the paper are as follows: 1) the object of the beauty of Korean architecture, 2) the beauty of architectural form, 3) the beauty of architectural space, 4) the experience of beauty, and 5) the purpose of beauty. In short, the beauty of traditional Korean architecture is not necessarily expressed in buildings as independent units, but in the totality of the architectural site. The form and space of Korean architecture are not the goal of architectural expression but simply form the backdrop of everyday life. Thus, the beauty of form and space should also be observed according to inherent cultural view of them. The way to experience the beauty of Korean architecture is not necessarily through the visual experience of a spatial setting, but the continuous, temporal experience of responsive bodily feeling. The purpose of beauty is not to achieve a transcendental ideal through rational approach, but to vitalize lively quality of energy and to harmonize with the existing order of nature.

Keywords: architectural beauty, Korean architecture, traditional architecture, object, form, space, experience, purpose, views of architecture

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Introduction

What constitutes beauty in the Korean architectural tradition? If one were to ask how to win wars, one would have to consider not only general military strategy universally applicable to every war, but also specific situations of a battle field. In the same vein, in order to define the beauty of Korean architectural culture and what constitutes that beauty, it is necessary to take a specific approach that considers the architectural context of today, as well as a general approach toward architectural aesthetics. This paper is not biased towards any one of the two approaches. In fact, it cannot be said that the beauty of Korean architecture has not been fully discussed at an aesthetic, theoretical level, but this does not allow us to disregard the current Korean architectural context. That said, one cannot chase after two hares at the same time. Instead, it is better to catch them by driving them both into a single net. In other words, not only is broad insight required to understand the general characteristics of Korean architectural aesthetics, but the question should also be asked of how to define and explain the meaning and nature of these aesthetics, which is demanded by the present situation.

Unfortunately, the beauty of Korean architecture has not yet been discussed in a systematic way.¹ In this regard, this paper as well is just a preliminary foray into Korean architectural beauty. What is most needed in this situation is not the addition of another single voice to the mix regarding this subject, but the laying of a foundation for further discussion. Toward that purpose, this paper will focus on a basic and objective analysis of those characteristics of Korean architectural aesthetic. Understanding of the characteristics requires in-depth knowledge of Korean architectural beauty, which is quite different from information about the concrete elements of traditional

1. Such books include Yim S. (2005a, 2005b) and Kim B. (1999). These books contain some descriptions of Korean architectural aesthetics. Since the purpose and motivation behind the writing is different, this article does not deal with any discussion in relation with these books.

Korean architecture, such as patterns, colors, and textures of wooden surfaces. In fact, contemporary Korean architects have not yet displayed a thorough understanding of Korean architectural beauty to the extent that they can make their own arguments. This might be a situation unique to Korean architecture, unlike other areas of Korean arts such as painting or sculpture. Korean architects in the twenty-first century do not encounter traditional Korean architecture at a daily basis, and moreover, are not at all familiar with its cultural background and spiritual structure. This implies that contemporary Koreans, including experts in the field of architecture, are not knowledgeable enough about Korean architecture to be able to discuss its beauty in much depth.

Thus, in order to discuss the beauty of Korean architecture, it is above all necessary to define the characteristics of Korean architecture, because the beauty of Korean architecture cannot be discussed without the consideration of them, whether tangible or intangible, which is why any discussion on the beauty of Korean architecture should be based on an understanding of Korean architecture itself. Hence, this paper will attempt to establish a framework of understanding with which to discuss the Korean architectural beauty, so that such discussion will not be lost in empty rhetoric devoid of substance with little understanding of the object itself.

Before discussing the aesthetic characteristics of Korean architecture, let me make three important points. The first is the relations between Korean architecture or architectural beauty and its Western counterpart. Presently, it is impossible to discuss the beauty of Korean architecture without any reference to Western architecture or the beauty of Western architecture, which ordinarily makes one seek to explain Korean architecture from the perspective of Western architecture. In other words, it is inevitable that we examine Korean architecture with reference to Western architecture. Given this circumstance, it would be most effective to examine Korean architecture in comparison with Western architecture so that the aesthetic nature of Korean architecture, which is distinct from Western architecture, can stand out. Otherwise, discussion of the beauty of Korean architecture

would be unavoidably colored by Western architectural views.

The second point concerns the relation between architectural beauty and the view of architecture. As mentioned briefly above, architectural beauty is closely related to the view of architecture. No discussion of architecture is possible without presupposing a certain architectural viewpoint. For example, the beauty of Western architecture can be discussed only when an architectural point of view that is proper to Western architecture is operated as theoretical background. Why we do not feel unfamiliarity with any comments on the beauty of Western architecture is because we are already sharing the Western architectural view. However, in discussing the beauty of Korean architecture, not as familiar with the concept of Korean architecture as we are with its Western counterpart. That is why, when discussing the beauty of Korean architecture, we should define the concept of Korean architecture and then discuss the issue in relation to that definition. It should therefore be kept in mind that the beauty of an architectural structure cannot be pursued separately from an architectural view that makes an architectural structure as it is. Similarly, the beauty of Korean architecture, in particular, can hardly be discussed without reference to the architectural concept that forms the basis of architectural creation.

The third one concerns how to discuss the beauty of Korean architecture. Since, after all, Korean architectural beauty cannot be completely examined in this paper alone, this paper only aims to lay a foundation for further research. To the end, this paper should begin with concretely outlining the abstract concept of the beauty of Korean architecture, and for this purpose, this paper asks the following four questions: first, “what is beautiful in Korean architecture?” considering the question of the “aesthetic object”; second, “what comprises the beauty of Korean architecture?” concerning the content of the Korean architectural beauty; third, “how is this beauty experienced?”; and fourth, “What can be accomplished through such beauty?” These four questions, concerning object, content, experience, and purpose, are required for any discussion of Korean architectural beauty.

This paper will consider those questions while taking into the three points mentioned above. As in any discussion, “how to view” is no less important than “what to discuss.” If a viewpoint is valid, regardless of its defects, it will be carried on by other scholars. At the present time, when there is no alternative to the Western perspective on the aesthetics of architecture, a new aesthetic perspective is needed for a more desirable environment that is more fit for human life. In order to do so, it is vital to discuss, from a different perspective than Western views on architecture, how the beauty of architecture has been perceived, pursued, and experienced in the tradition of Korean architecture and what has been ultimately pursued through such beauty. That is, a new framework different from the Western view of the beauty of architecture needs to be formed. Such a changed perception of architectural beauty is what this paper aims to bring about. The aesthetic beauty of Korean architecture has been created from a mindset totally different from the Western perspective which we have been familiar with.

Object

The “object” here refers to a thing that conveys a sense of beauty, that is, an aesthetic object. In all fields of art, it is works of art that become the aesthetic objects themselves: for example, the beauty of painting is found in paintings, while the beauty of sculpture is found in sculptures. The object of beauty is so evident in these fields of art that it is unnecessary to discuss about what the object is. In general, the aesthetic objects of architecture are buildings. Therefore, buildings are assumed to be architectural artworks, wherein the beauty of architecture is to be found. This view that regards buildings as basic units of architecture represents a very Western perspective and has been accepted by us as natural. According to that perspective, architecture is the act of constructing buildings.² Every single building is

2. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines “architecture” as the “art of building.” Thus, architecture is first defined as an “art.” Once architecture is defined as an art, a

an independent unit as well as a piece of artwork, as is the case with the Parthenon temple, medieval cathedrals, and modern architectural structures. Given this, the history of Western architecture is marked by a series of “construction of buildings.”³ Just as buildings are considered to be artworks, like paintings or sculptures, so architecture is integrated into the field of art, and accordingly, the beauty of architecture is only pursued and expressed in the buildings themselves. It is a Western architectural tradition that persisted up to the present day, and the tradition of Western architecture has influenced Korean architects, who try to design new buildings based on Western architectural concepts.

In the case of painting and sculpture, the East and the West are not different, since both consider artistic pieces to be aesthetic objects. But that is not the case with architecture. In the tradition of Korean architecture, architecture has not been identified with buildings. In traditional Korean houses, which usually consist of a main gate, walls, *sarangchae* (outer quarters), *anchae* (inner quarters) and *haengnangchae* (servant’s quarters), which are horizontally linked and include open courtyards, one cannot tell which is a building and which is not. If *sarangchae* and *anchae* are buildings, then are not the main gate and walls also buildings? Though we can hardly lump them all under the category of buildings, empty courtyards cannot truly be categorized as buildings. This way of arranging space, inherent to Korean architecture, is applied not only to houses, but also to almost all Korean architectural structures, such as palaces, temples, local Confucian schools (鄉校 *hyanggyo*), and private academies (書院 *seowon*). In all of these structures, the courtyards created by surrounding structures and walls are not buildings, but they are an essential element of Korean architecture: Therefore, the overall space including individual buildings and even yards is the object of architecture. In this case, architecture cannot be considered a definable

building becomes an artwork. Thus, relation between architecture and buildings become that of art and artworks.

3. Kim S. (1993).

object by itself, i.e. a building. From the start, a building as an independent unit is recognized neither as the object nor as the purpose of architecture. Instead, the overall spatial arrangement is considered a unit of architecture. Though not disregarding the structural system of each building, traditional Korean architecture used each building as a means of completing the overall arrangement, and thus organized the appearance, scale, and space of each building to fit into the whole architectural structure.

Given this, the aesthetic beauty of architecture should first be found in the overall spatial arrangement. The individual beauty of each building is meaningful only when considered within the beauty of overall spatial arrangement, which is entirely different from the former. The beauty of overall structure goes beyond the outer appearance and inner space of a building. This testifies to the fact that architectural beauty was defined differently in traditional Korean architecture and Western architecture. Above all, there is no doubt that views of architecture were also different between the two. Unlike the Western view of architecture, which defines art through the act of constructing buildings, the traditional Korean view of architecture does not consider the beauty of architecture to be fully conveyed through individual units of buildings. In the tradition of Korean architecture, architecture has not been perceived as the art of expression through the construction of buildings. Strictly speaking, architecture as the construction of buildings, as defined in the Western tradition of architecture, has not existed in the tradition of Korean architecture.

Many Westerners who visit Korea wonder why traditional architectural structures in Korea all look alike, unlike Western buildings that are built in diverse styles. The difference is due to the fact that Korean architecture and architectural aesthetic are based on a different view of architecture from that of the West. Unlike the beauty that is independently realized in each individual building, the beauty of traditional Korean architecture is pursued and embodied in such a way that each structure, including walls and houses, is in harmony with the accompanying courtyards, creating a balance of *yin* and *yang* (陰陽). Thus, the mixed and harmonized structures and spaces

give rise to change and disparity. It is also found where architecture meets nature: the moon is framed by the window at nights, the sound of leaves rustling in the wind is echoed by walls, and raindrops are allowed to fall into the courtyard. Put another way, while being reduced to a part of the whole, each building in a Korean architectural work, unlike in Western architecture, is used to create the aesthetic effect of the harmonized whole, which is formed by the reciprocal relationship between buildings and yards, between artificial structures and the natural environment, or between spatial units. The value of each building does not depend on how it is engaged in its own self-expression, but rather on how it contributes to the establishment of the order and atmosphere of the whole.

What, then, can be called the aesthetic object in Korean architecture? This is a difficult question because the object in which the beauty of Korean architecture is expressed is not an individual unit that can be clearly separated from others like a building in Western architecture. In Western architecture, a building is a physical object as well as an artistic product of architecture, while in Korean architecture, there is no singular object that is physically delimited as an independent building. The buildings as physical entities and the yards as nonphysical spaces are intertwined with each other, neither of them being more important than the other. Those intertwined units are not separated into individual, independent units, but are linked to each other organically to form another larger structure. Thus, the total structure cannot be separated into independent artificial entities, but can blend perfectly with the natural environment surrounding it, forming a single, indivisible entity. These structuring processes are also experienced by human beings. The phases of structuring and the processes of experience all aim at an aesthetic expression that is of fundamentally different kind and nature from the visual aesthetic expression of a building. This kind of architectural attitude refuses to establish a fixed and concrete entity, like a building, as the object of aesthetic expression. That is, any such object need not be set up as an independent physical unit. In sum, according to this view, architecture is not about objects that can be

separated and independently defined.

As examined so far, the aesthetic object in Korean architecture does not take a specific form. Accordingly, it should be noted that the aesthetics of Korean architecture are characterized by its ambiguity, uncertainty, and indefinableness, because the aesthetic object is not a physical thing but a mixture of the physical and the nonphysical, not as an individual unit but rather as an interrelation of multiple units. Moreover, it is also defined as the unity of the artificial and the natural, and as an atmosphere created in the course of interactive process. When all these can be considered the aesthetic objects of Korean architecture, it is simultaneously true that all things can be aesthetic objects at the same time that there is no aesthetic object in Korean architecture.

Likewise, the aesthetic object of Korean architecture reveals itself to be ambiguous. It is disconcerting to accept such ambiguity as a feature of an aesthetic object, but Korean architecture demonstrates that the pursuit of beauty at the level of each building, as done in Western architecture, should be moderated, because too much emphasis on the visual aesthetics of each building as units of architecture can impair the relations between buildings and external spaces, between buildings and their neighboring buildings, and between buildings and the total structure to which they belong. Given that the beauty of architecture can be realized only when architectural totality and overall atmosphere are fulfilled, traditional Korean architects believed that it was improper to overemphasize the visual expression of beauty at the level of each building.

The architectural plan, which fully considers the harmony of its surroundings, forms a "horizontal field" in which people can subjectively experience horizontally organized internal space. Within this structure, just as a specific physical object can hardly be singled out as an aesthetic object, architectural beauty itself cannot be defined in such a way that "this specific part among many is beautiful." The aesthetic beauty of architecture permeates all physical and nonphysical elements, diverse human experiences, and the long history of human life. In the horizontal field mentioned above, both the physi-

cal state and experience should be accepted as the object and substance of aesthetic expression, without dividing them into specific units. Although seemingly insufficient and ambiguous, Korean architecture teaches us that architecture and its beauty are originally as such and should be so.

Form

Architectural beauty can be expressed only when an architectural structure has within itself something that conveys beauty. Here, this does not refer to an aesthetic object but that which makes the object beautiful. In the tradition of Western architecture, the most notable aspect of architecture is that of form, which first and foremost means the exterior form of buildings. Interior form may also be discussed, but it is more related to space than to form. Next to form, space, which is mainly used to define "interior space," is most important for the expression of architectural beauty. To sum up, in the tradition of Western architecture, form and space have been the main constituents of the expression of beauty. Some may insist that the elements that constitute aesthetic beauty, as we learned in school, such as proportion, combination, balance, and contrast, also reveal or define beauty. However, those elements are the means of expression that can be included within the larger categories of form and space. For this reason, this paper will discuss the issue of what constitutes the architectural aesthetic with focus on two pillars of form and space.

In the Western architectural tradition, form is a culturally specific concept that represents something unique to Western architecture. Although every architectural tradition, whether old or new and whether Eastern or Western, undoubtedly has some type of form, the intellectual and cultural backgrounds that produce specific architectural forms differ according to cultural zones. Western architectural tradition has invented a very unique and specific concept of architectural form, which has served as a guide to architectural activity. In

comparison with Eastern architecture, historically significant buildings in the history of Western architecture were mostly made of stone from pyramids to medieval cathedrals, constituting the main current of the Western architectural tradition. In stone architecture, walls and pillars built by piling stones from the bottom up are supposed to support the vertical load while the interior and exterior of the stones are left exposed. How well the exposed surfaces of the stones were trimmed and polished, therefore, was the key to embellishing the structure, and in particular, efforts were made to sculpture the exterior walls. Thus, stylistic differences in architecture over the ages depended on the differing styles of the exterior walls. In this way, forms and formal aesthetics in Western architecture are closely related to the aesthetic representation of the exterior walls.

In addition to building materials, the Western architectural tradition has been influenced by an intellectual background, which is intertwined with a philosophical inquiry into the intrinsic substance of all things. According to this philosophy, all things in the phenomenal world are not themselves substances, but originate from a more fundamental substance that exists beyond the phenomenal world. This philosophical inquiry finds its origin in the ancient Greek. Plato called this intrinsic substance *idea*, and Aristotle critically inherited the ideas of Plato and worked out a theory of "form" (*eidos*) and "matter" (*hyle*).⁴ Aristotle did not agree with Plato who placed the world of *idea* outside the phenomenal world, and attempted to include it within individual things, and thus to explain the value and

4. The concept of "form" (*eidos*) and "matter" (*hyle*) is introduced in Aristotle's book *Metaphysica*. Jonathan Barnes (1984, 1552-1728). *Eidos* and *hyle*, translated as "form" and "matter," are Greek. The corresponding Latin words are *forma* and *materia*, respectively. In Chinese characters, "form" can be described as 形相, 形狀, or 形象 (homophones, pronounced *hyeongsang*, in Korean), which are all used the same way. Among them, 形狀 and 形相 are synonyms, meaning "the form and shape of an object." 形象 also means "the shape of an object that occurs to one through the mind-heart and senses, and its manifested form." Meanwhile, Aristotle's "form" is also translated as "original image" (原像). In this article, we use "form" in the sense of 形象 to include its relevance to architecture and philosophical implication.

meaning of an object by relocating its aspects of “form” and *idea* within itself. That is, Aristotle argued that an individual thing made of natural “matter” comes into existence while striving after “form” which corresponds to Plato's *idea*. Just as Plato placed the concept of *idea* above that of phenomenal objects, Aristotle prioritized “form” over “matter.” “Form” comes into being through “matter,” which is nothing more than a means to such an end, with no value in and of itself. “Form” is the pure and ideal substance, but becomes material because it cannot take shape without “matter.” Therefore, although “form” and “matter” of an object are distinguished from each other, the higher the proportion of “form” an object has, the higher position it has in an existential hierarchy. That is why all objects are oriented toward higher proportion of “form,” and as a corollary, their position in the “chain of being” is also determined according to what proportion of them consists of “form”.⁵

In general, the concept of form⁶ in Western architecture is deeply related to Aristotle's “form.” Aristotle referred to a spatial entity as manifestation of “form,”⁷ but the stones used in architecture are just “matter,” while the resulting forms are the outcome of the pursuit of “form” (*eidos*). The etymological root of the English word form is the Greek *eidos*, which means “something seen” or “the form something takes,” and both *eidos* and *idea* are metamorphoses of the verb “to look.”⁸ That is, what we call form is rooted in the religious belief in the allegedly essential substance of the universe, and thus is not just a shape but a realization of essential substance. In addition, Western architectural emphasis on form is related to the pursuit of substance

5. Russell (1997, 251-254).

6. Form (形態 *hyeongtae*) here means shape to directly describe the outline of an object, differently from “form” (形象 *hyeongsang*, *eidos*). In English, both meanings tend to be used under the term form, but form has a broader and deeper etymological meaning than shape.

7. Russell (1997, 259).

8. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (7th edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). Here, *idea* refers to “the look of a thing,” and *eidos* “that which is seen.”

through visual experience. This view of form is unique to Western culture, and therefore, has exerted great influence on the tendency of Western architecture to emphasize form. To wit, Western architecture is “form”-oriented, with stone as the raw material for buildings, ranging from the construction of the Parthenon temple to modern concrete buildings.

How has form been conceived in the tradition of Korean architecture? Korean architecture also takes a physical form. In particular, wood has been the main building material used in Korean architecture. Stone architectural structures are heavy, whereas wooden architectural structures are relatively light. Stone buildings are long-lasting, whereas wooden buildings are less durable. Stone architecture is good for making sculptural shapes, whereas wooden architecture is suitable for assembling furniture. Stone architecture tends to separate interior from exterior spaces, whereas wooden architecture ensures the interpenetration of the two. Stone architecture is suitable for vertical arrangements, whereas wooden architecture is suitable for horizontal arrangements. Stone architecture generates separate and independent interior spaces, whereas wooden architecture produces inter-related interior spaces. Stone architecture considers buildings as units of architecture, whereas wooden architecture focuses on the interactions between buildings and the environment. Stone architecture tends to be closed, whereas wooden architecture tends to be open.

Given this comparison, it is obvious that Korean architecture creates buildings that are well-suited to the characteristics of wooden architecture, not to those of stone architecture. The stone architecture is close to rectangular vertical structures, whereas Korean architecture is characterized by loose horizontal connections, the modification of hexahedral units, and roofs that are heavier than the walls. The problem of filling the space between wooden frames is a basic issue in the constitution of the walls. The eaves are projected and covered with roofing tiles in order to block sunshine, as well as to channel rainwater. Wooden architecture does not allow much room for variation of exterior form while stone architecture takes different shapes according to the methods of sculptural decoration and vertical

construction of the exterior. In Korean architecture, the different types of woodcarving and wooden board structures are found in every building, but the difference is not so considerable as to engender stylistic difference, as seen in Western architecture.

Is it possible to identify a certain kind of intellectual background for form-centrism in Korean architecture, as defined in Western architecture? Above all, in the tradition of Korean architecture, there is no philosophical framework comparable to the Western concept of “form” and “matter,” to say nothing of the distinction between the two, nor of the priority “form” takes over “matter.” In identifying *hyeong* (形 form), not only in architecture but in the Korean cultural context in general, there is a tendency to discuss *hyeong* in relation to the concept of *gi* (氣 vital energy, *qi*).⁹ Korean architecture views *hyeong* as originating from *gi*. That is, *hyeong* is created in the process of the self-transformation of *gi*.¹⁰ However, these concepts of *hyeong* and *gi* completely differ from the Western concepts of “form” and “matter.” Although the concept of *gi* as the cause of *hyeong* may seem similar to the Aristotelian notion of “form” as the cause of “matter,” *gi* is not the goal of *hyeong*, whereas “form” is considered the goal of “matter” in the tradition of Western philosophy. *Hyeong* pursues *gi* not as a value superior to itself. Also, *hyeong* does not seek to actualize *gi* as its counterpart. *Hyeong* originating from *gi* does not attribute its significance to physical shapes as “form” does. *Hyeong* is the revelation of *gi* as part of the whole process, whereas “form” creates shape as the intended result. That is why less atten-

9. In most documents that address *gi*, form can be defined as the result of the movement of *gi*. There are too many different definitions to list all of them here. Refer to Zhang D. (1998, chap. 4, 136-154).

10. There are many writings that say shape stems from *gi*. A good example is “Perfect Happiness” 至樂 in *Zhuangzi* 莊子, which states “A dim and dark state transforms into *gi*, which in turn converts into shape.” 雜乎芴芴之間有氣，氣變而有形。Wang Chong, who was a leader in *gi*-philosophy during the Han dynasty of China, writes in *Lunheng* 論衡 (Critical Essays) that “Human beings receive energy from heaven, and each one of them is given life and thus takes on various appearances. . . . The *gi* of the human body is mutually dependent on appearance. . . .” Wang Chong (1987, 97).

tion is paid to the image of *hyeong*. The image visible in the eye of an observer does not necessarily define the realization of a certain absolute value, but rather signifies a kind of procedural revelation, which involves both accidentalness and improvisation. After all, shapes are only transient things in traditional Korean architecture, just as they are in the natural world.

From the perspective of *gi*, both “form” and “matter” as in the Western thought are equivalent to *gi*. However, although both being *hyeong* from *gi*, *hyeong* from “matter” is a natural shape, whereas *hyeong* from “form” is an artificial one. There is no reason here why natural *hyeong* should be considered inferior to artificial *hyeong*. On the contrary, *hyeong* from “matter” is respected in that artificial *hyeong* takes after natural *hyeong*. The *gi-hyeong* (氣形 energy-form) model is based on the value of *gi* and *hyeong* as they are prevalent in nature, rather than on artificial values. According to this view, human beings are also the result of the actualization of *gi* into *hyeong*, and, likewise, their act of creation involves the process in which things are created into *hyeong*, according to the *gi-hyeong* model. In other words, *hyeong*, including *hyeong* of architecture, refers to the process itself through which the world of *gi* evolves, and humans’ act of creation is one example of such evolution. In the whole process, *hyeong* is not the end goals, nor does it complete the process in terms of time. *Gi* becomes *hyeong* when it is gathered, whereas *hyeong* disappears when *gi* is dissipated.¹¹ *Hyeong* is the only part of the process in which *gi* is gathered and dissipated. That is, *hyeong* is not physically fixed: it only represents a certain aspect in the process of changes. That is why it can be said that *hyeong* exists in the cycle of birth and death, or appearance and disappearance. This character of *hyeong* is also reflected in architecture. In

11. Many examples that explain form as a gathering and scattering of *gi* can be found in *gi*-related records. For example, Zhuangzi, in his “Waipian” 外篇, says, “Amassed *gi* is life, but when it is scattered, it is death” (聚則為生 散則為死). In *Tianwen* 天文訓 (Patterns of Heaven), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Masters of Huainan) says, “Clear and bright things spread out thin to create the sky, while heavy and murky things condense to become the earth” (清陽者薄靡而為天 重濁者凝滯而為地).

Korean architecture, form is not what has been achieved as a goal unto itself, but what shifts and changes with time.

Thus, Korean architecture can be regarded as the “architecture of *gi-hyeong*”¹² created as a result of the actualization of *gi*, which is differentiated from the “architecture of form (*eidos*).” In the architecture of *gi-hyeong*, “matter” is not neglected and its characteristics are encouraged to be revealed in a natural manner. This architecture highlights the process in which *hyeong* is created, rather than its resulting images. The seemingly accidental or impromptu expressions and the irregular or inconsistent arrangements observed in Korean architecture need to be understood as part of the *hyeonghwa* (形化 becoming form) process, because the architecture of *gi-hyeong* respects the natural or spontaneous actualization of *gi* which has not yet been colored by human artificial intervention. Therefore, the architecture of *gi-hyeong* is natural rather than artificial, and is dynamic rather than static. From this perspective, architectural design is something that follows the *gi*'s *hyeonghwa* process, rather than just the making of shapes. Korean architecture has not tried to create new forms entirely different from those of the past, and has never questioned why the same architectural form has lasted for thousands of years. The fact that the same architectural form has lasted for such a long period of time signifies that the tradition of Korean architecture has never possessed the concept of “form” as defined in Western culture. Therefore, Korean architecture can be defined as “formless” architecture since Korean architecture does not have any such “form” that contains aesthetic substance.

Korean architectural form is a manifestation of the process in which “matter” creates a certain form according to its characteristics, or *hyeonghwa*. Architectural expression does not entirely rely on difference of form in each building. External differences should be moderated, rather than emphasized, and therefore, formal variation is not

12. The term *gihyeong* (氣形) is not frequently used in the ancient documents of the East. In this article, this particular term is used arbitrarily to mean “form of *gi*,” and as an antithesis to the word “form” (形象 *hyeongsang*).

a major way of expressing the beauty of architecture. The beauty of architecture does not depend on stylistic expression, but lies in the spatial atmosphere created by the aesthetic experience and overall structure. The architectural elaboration of the exterior is not encouraged because traditional Korean architects believed that without moderation in the individual expression of each form, the harmony and balance of the whole would be impaired. The aesthetic experience in Korean architecture depends on the harmony and balance of the whole, rather than on the expression of forms of architecture. Form is transitory, and like clothing, is to be worn for some time and then discarded.¹³ Excessive display or decoration of exterior forms is considered low and vulgar. This philosophy of architecture seems to be in line with Mengzi's emphasis on *gi* of morality over the pursuit of external beauty or with Zhuangzi's attempt to obliterate form and self by listening to the sounds of the inner mind.¹⁴

What significance does form have, as a means of aesthetic expression, in the tradition of Korean architecture? It should be noted that form is meaningful not in itself, but when it contributes to the creation of the general atmosphere or the total structure beyond itself. In Korean architecture, each building tends to be formally homogeneous rather than prominent, and thus tries to be absorbed into the general atmosphere of the surroundings, rather than expressing themselves in a showy way. Hence, the restraint of individual expression is compensated for by the accomplishment of overall aesthetic order and harmony. Forms of architecture thus achieved are beautiful and meaningful in their own way, and such beauty felt from the architecture is not individuality-oriented but totality-oriented, focusing on relational harmony rather than on individual prominence. It might appear that the Korean architectural concept of form is ambiguous, relative, and comprehensive, rather than clear, as com-

13. In Eastern architecture, shape is like clothing that can be put on and changed. I have heard this kind of opinions from Han Baode, who was then the director of the National Museum of Taiwan, when he visited Korea.

14. Zhang (1994, 291).

pared to Western architecture. Nonetheless, such ambiguity and relativism should be understood as a characteristic of Korean architectural view of form.

Space

In the history of Western architecture, interest in exterior forms has been consistently maintained, but the attention and importance given to interior space differed according to each period. Exterior forms were directly affected by the method in which interior space was structured. Spanning several centuries in the history of Western architecture, from ancient Greek, Roman, early Christian and medieval to Renaissance architecture, Western society was a witness to the expansion of interior space and development of technical and aesthetical skills for its structuring. While Western architecture focused on "form"-centered architecture, in terms of the exterior, it pursued the aesthetic beauty of "space" in terms of the interior. This was achieved by a sophisticated consideration of scale and shape, the illumination of space, as well as the construction of inner walls. When we visit such great cathedrals as the Hagia Sophia,¹⁵ which was built in Istanbul in the sixth century, and Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome, we can observe the vast, high space and the mysterious changes of light filtered through stained-glass windows. There, we find ourselves strongly moved and seized with a kind of aesthetic feeling, which truly helps us to expand our aesthetic experience regarding architecture.

In Western architecture, space refers to the empty interior of the building, which has not yet been filled with objects. That is why, in

15. The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul was constructed in the early 6th century (532-537). The dome at the center is 31 meters in diameter and 55 meters in height. This is more than three times longer than the 10 meter-long inner span between columns of Hwangnyongsa temple, where a Buddhist statue is enshrined, built in the 6th century during the Three Kingdoms period of Korea.

terms of architecture, Western people tend to take interest in the "substance of being," rather than in the "emptiness of nothing."¹⁶ They consider space opposite to matter or "being." Therefore, space and objects are handled separately, rather than being treated as a harmonious whole.¹⁷ Furthermore, space and objects are not defined as interacting with or affecting one another, but only as distinct and different from each other. This concept of space is fundamentally based on the idea that space is primarily man-made, that is, something that is shaped by human hands and intellect and thus distinct from the natural space outside the building. Therefore, it is considered proper that such parts within the architectural structure be referred to as "space." Composed of a floor, ceiling, and walls, interior space found in Western architecture is defined as "cubic space." This space is defensive, closed, and self-centered against the empty space of the universe. It is also a closed, artificial world with a human-centered and inner-oriented mechanism.

What has architecture pursued in terms of space, when Western architecture has tried to express the aesthetic beauty of architecture by way of form and space? The Hagia Sophia was constructed in the sixth century, almost the same time that the Hwangnyongsa (皇龍寺) temple was built during the Three Kingdoms period in Korea. The golden hall (金堂 *geumdang*) of the temple, where the main statue of Buddha was kept, had ten-meter long beams, whereas the Hagia Sophia was constructed without beams, even though the span of the central hall was three times larger than the golden hall in Hwangnyongsa temple. What did Korean architects seek to accomplish while constructing the interior space of Hwangnyongsa temple? And what aesthetic function did the interior space have, which was created in that way? Since it was built of timbers, there was a limit to the length that could be supported by wales. This limit was not overcome in the

16. See Zhang (1994, 42). The author writes, "What Western people attach importance to in seeking the inherent value of the universe is 'being,' not 'nothing,' nor 'substance,' nor 'the void.'"

17. See Zhang (1994, 42). Zhang Fa writes, "Substance and void are divided, and these two do not have any internal linkage."

history of Korean architecture until modern times. As a result, it was impossible to construct such a large structure as Geunjeongjeon (勤政殿) hall, the main hall of Gyeongbokgung (景福宮) palace, without beams. In addition, the buildings constructed with timbers were naturally limited in height and length due to the nature of the wood. Then, what ideal and aesthetic goals did Korean architecture, with all those structural limits, pursue in the construction of interior spaces?

We now call space in traditional Korean architecture as “space” (空間 *gonggan*), but the concept is only familiar to us today. It was not conceived as such by the people who dwelled on it in the past. Korean architectural structures were built without any consideration of space that is familiar to Western culture, and therefore, it can be said that there was no space in Korean architecture in the strict sense.¹⁸ We might think that the word space refers to something existent, but it is a concept invented by human. When we revisit the notion of space in Korean architecture, we should try to think about it from the perspective of the people in the past who built the structures, rather than explain it from a perspective familiar to us today. To do so, we need to put aside the Western concept of space as is established in our mind. In the traditional society of Korea, the word *gonggan* (space) was not used in such a way as is used now,¹⁹ and this means the concept of space was not needed in that society. However, for us today, it is almost impossible to talk about an entity that corresponds to space in Korean architecture without using the word “space.” Given this, what did people in the past think about what we call now “space”?

In the beginning, there were only *cheonji* (天地 heaven and earth) and they alone would exist forever in the natural world. When

18. Related to this theme, see Kim S. (1986a, 1986b).

19. If you insist upon finding examples of “space” (空間 *gonggan*) used in the East, there is one in “Qing Zhong 輕重甲” by Guanzi, who used the word to mean “in between heaven and earth.” Refer to Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次, *Dai kan-wa jiten* 大漢和辭典 (Comprehensive Chinese-Japanese Dictionary), vol. 8, *Kuukan* 空間 (Space). China’s *Da hanhe cidian* does not include the word “空間.” Needless to say, the example of Guanzi is used differently than “space” in English.

viewed this way, space belongs to the sky (heaven), and accordingly, the interior space within a building also belongs to the sky. The sky within the interior space of a building is no different from the sky outside it. The only difference is that one is inside the building and the other is outside. Thus, space is the sky, must be the sky, and cannot possibly be anything but the sky. Even if we call the sky inside the building “space,” it is still the sky and could not be turned into something other than the sky. Architecture was a method for managing the rendezvous between sky and earth, and architectural structures were extensions of the earth while interior spaces were extensions of the sky. Architecture had to handle the sky and earth as one entity, not separately. This perspective was also true for human beings. Just as architecture is meant to build houses with parts of the earth while simultaneously containing the sky within houses, human bodies are also supposed to maintain life and generate energy as a result of the union of the sky and earth, because they are created with parts of the earth while embracing the sky within them. Seen this way, architecture was originally meant to be the “architecture of the sky and earth.” In this context, phrases such as “form and space” or “architecture of space” are considered to have developed only to highlight the artificial and human-centered aspects of the “architecture of the sky and earth”

If space is the sky, it should follow the principle of the sky. Given this discussion about space in this paper should lead to discussion about the sky, and the principle of the sky should again lead to the principle of *cheonji*. Likewise, human bodies and the structures of architecture created by humans have meaning only when they exist in the same way that the sky and earth are linked with each other to form a single whole. Just as humans have no other means of survival, architecture has no other ground for existence than *cheonji*. We have so far been taught to believe that space is a separate concept from the sky, but this may not be necessarily true and only possible in the human imagination. Western architecture had a desire for such space that could be sustained and expanded as far as possible without pillars, and could also evoke dramatic emotions with the visual

power. In contrast, Korean architecture dreamed of such as the “space of the sky” or “the sky itself.” In Western architecture, space is important in that it expresses aesthetic beauty, whereas, in Korean architecture, the important thing is how space can be like the sky, in terms of nature, order, and condition. That is why Korean architecture adopts a manner of aesthetic expression different from that of Western architecture.

For Koreans, space is not void. Since *cheonji* is *gi*, space is also *gi*, rather than the size and shape of the vacant parts. *Gong* (空 emptiness)²⁰ is not *gan* (間 interval) but *gi*.²¹ This *gi* is the same as that of the sky and of life. Korean architecture tried to deal with *gi* of *gong*, which is not a “mathematically vacant space” but an “organic substance full of life.” While Western architecture approaches space from a geometrical perspective, Korean architecture views it from a biological one. While in Western architecture, space concerns the issue of form, Korean architecture relates space to the matter of life. According to Korean architects, space is the substance that sustains life. That is why space is not considered “vacancy” but “fullness” in Korean architecture.²² Therefore, Korean architects have focused on understanding the nature of “*gonggi*” (空氣 energy of emptiness)²³

20. In place of *gonggan* (空間 literally, “void in between”), I used *gong* (空) to mean “Eastern space.” However, in some cases, I had to use *gonggan* when I should have used *gong* to mean “Eastern space” for reasons related to grammar and context. Also, *gonggan* is sometimes used for “space in the general sense” whether it be for the East or the West. I just hope that readers distinguish between the words.

21. “Taihe” 太和 in *Zhengmeng* 正蒙 contains phrases such as “the empty air is the true *gi*” (虛空即氣), and “Formlessness is the true entity of *gi*” (太虛無形 氣之本體). According to these writings, *gi* was originally without form, and the energy of heaven is closest to *gi*.

22. Some examples of this are: “There is no such thing as truly empty space. Space is replete with eternal energy. . . .” *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Classified Conversations of Master Zhu Xi), vol. 1; “When it is full of *gi*, how can you say it is empty? There is nothing in the world that is fuller than this.” *Erchengji* 二程集 1, *Yishu* 遺書, vol. 3.

23. *Gonggi* (空氣) used here is conceptually similar to “air,” but it is not exactly the same. In our daily lives, *gonggi* is used to mean “air.” In this article, however, *gonggi* is used in a new way, with *gong* (空 void) meaning *gi* (氣), not *gan* (間 interval).” We have used *gonggan* to mean “space” too frequently, but it is necessary to use a new term *gonggi*. In Chinese sentences, *gonggi* was used in “metal-

and on making it work for human life. For this reason, Korean houses were built in places Korean architects believed to be replete with *gi*, so that one can sense and control the flow of *gonggi* in a way that best suited human life. For them, mathematical volume and spatial distance were considered secondary and accessory to their architecture.

Korean architecture focused on keeping space alive and full of energy, or vitality effect, which is also related to the aesthetic expression of space. When we talk about the aesthetic expression of space, we usually think about the expression of beauty, which aims to create a visual effect. In terms of space in Korean architecture, beauty and fullness of life cannot be discussed separately. It teaches us that beauty is inseparable from the vitality: everything can be most beautiful when it is most full of life. This point of view challenges us to rethink our common notions about what beauty is. For instance, the courtyard of a Korean house, seen as a blank surface where there is nothing particular to see from the common perspective, would be considered a beautiful container of air: the opening and shutting of windows and doors to control the flow of *gong-gi* across the courtyard, *daecheong maru* (wooden-floored living room), and back room would be considered beautiful architectural features; and, when one is lying on the wooden floor watching the moon rise above the wall, the spatial positioning between the sky and earth would also seem quite beautiful. This kind of beauty is quite different from the beauty that results from the creation of space in Western architecture. In terms of space, Western architecture has focused on “the visual beauty of space itself,” whereas Korean architecture focused on how space serves as the “place of life”²⁴ where people reside, and wherein

lurgy” to mean “air between solid matter” (周禮 *Zhouli*, metallurgy), but was not so commonly used. I used the word *gonggi* in the hope that *gong* would be seen as *gi* instead of as “empty space.”

24. *Jari* (a pure Korean word that means place, space or room) ought to be defined anew elsewhere, and should replace the word “space.” I believe that what we call “space” should be in effect *jari*. *Jari* refuses to be “space” as ideology. Human space is in all aspects *jari*, but not space in the geometric sense. This way of thinking was reflected in the word “place” in the West, and also translated as such in Korean. See Relph (2005).

the matter of “a feeling of vitality” is considered the most important and essential. Therefore, space in Korean architecture exists as a “space of life,” where people lead everyday lives, rather than as a “mathematical, cubic space.”

Consequently, the beauty of Korean architecture is related to not only the visual beauty of space itself, but non-physical and spiritual conditions such as the atmosphere of life, healthy living, circumstances suitable for self-cultivation, and an emotionally rich mood and sentiment. From this view of space, it can be said that Korean architecture as a whole was not confined to the realms of visual appreciation and emotion, but concerned itself with the vitality of life, comfortability in dwelling, and environmental harmony, which are closely related to a person’s subjective set of life values. Likewise, Korean architecture stresses the relationship between built structures and human beings, as well as the former’s continued impact on the latter, rather than only embellishes the form and interior space of the structure. This perspective requires us to change our views of how to define the beauty of architecture, which is closely connected to how we experience it.

Experience

In the West, architecture has been treated as a visual art, which includes painting and sculpture: Accordingly, the aesthetics of architecture has been pursued in the context of the aesthetics of visual arts. This is taken for granted by us today, but this can be justified only in the context of Western architectural culture, to be precise. Western culture, compared to other cultures, has attached more importance to the visual senses than other human senses. Such ocular-centrism originated from ancient Greek culture, where visual sense was prioritized in the hierarchy of human senses, the visual and auditory senses were believed to represent the spirit, visual proportion given the greater importance.²⁵ As mentioned earlier, Plato’s *idea* and Aristotle’s *eidos* presupposed that ultimate “reality” or

“truth” were something that could be visually identified, since both are etymological variations of the verb “to look.” In the history of Western architectural theory from Vitruvius²⁶ of Rome to L. Alberti²⁷ of the Renaissance to modern architecture, the most central and recurrent subject of discussion was that of proportion. Proportion referred to here is something that can be only identified visually. We should not overlook the fact that Western architecture, from its origins up until now, has traditionally treated the visual experience as a pivotal point. Thus, Western architecture is an “architecture of the eyes,” and the aesthetic in Western architecture is defined as one experienced through the eyes.

Another strong attribute of Western architecture, other than its visual-centrism, is its emphasis on space. Every culture has different ideas and ways of understanding space and time. Among others, Western culture has strived to avoid temporal changes, and instead has been more interested in space.²⁸ In the same vein, Western archi-

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25. Aristotle first classified the senses in a hierarchy. Greek culture basically put a visual sense before an auditory sense. Some say Hebraism played a role in the attaching of importance to an auditory sense. The importance of the visual was also already well introduced in Western architectural history. Refer to Jin (1994).
26. See Vitruvius (1985). This work, especially, volumes 3 & 4, on temple architecture, are largely devoted to the discussion of proportion, and volume 1 provides background information and the concept of proportion.
27. Leon Battista Alberti’s book (1404-1472) (1755, vols. 6-9) is devoted to the discussion of aesthetics, and at the heart of the discussion was, as expected, the theory of proportion.
28. Among the many books on this issue, one that makes its point with consideration of time is Soh Kwang-Hie (2001). In the conclusion of Part I, titled, “General Symbolism of Time,” Soh writes, “In Greek philosophy, movement, change, and creation had little existence and were considered low class. True being was an indisputable and immortal being with its own identity, and the aggregate of such beings was considered to be constant. Immortal and constant being, in other words, substance, was the most noble thing to the Greeks. Their philosophy is based on substantialism, which is why geometry is respected in Greece” (Soh 2001, 99). Regarding this issue, Soh Kwang-Hie comments (Soh 2001, 45), “Life bound to time is the same as a life of slavery. Therefore, liberation from that state translates into moving away from this world and reaching nirvana. Regarding the contrast of this world versus nirvana, O. Cullmann points out that Greek philosophy is more concerned with space than time.”

pects historically refrained from intervening in time, and focused instead on space-oriented architecture. Western architecture's emphasis on visual proportion or formal aesthetics cannot be imagined without consideration of space-centrism. Likewise, in aspiring for spatial experience, Western architecture was less committed to incorporating time into the architectural experience. When compared with Korean architecture, traditional Western architecture was completely space-centered, whether the buildings were large or small, and this does not change much with modern architecture. Although some argue that modern Western architecture newly embraced the concept of time, unlike in the past,²⁹ this is merely the result of extending the concept of time created in paintings to the arena of architecture, rather than active acceptance of the temporal experience itself.³⁰ As such, ocular-centrism and space-centrism are pivotal concepts for defining Western architectural experience.

In contrast, Korean architecture has not been centered on space. The East Asian cultures, including that of Korea, did not fear time. Rather, they loved it. They tended to see space and time as integrated, rather than sharply demarcate them, and tried to understand the universe as the flow of time and space. The Chinese characters for the universe consist of two characters that represent "space and time."³¹ In the West, the universe is called "space," but in the East,

29. In his book, *Space, Time, and Architecture*, Sigfried Giedion explained the changes in architecture up until the modern period as a process of evolution, and interpreted modern architecture as having resulted from the intervention of time. This is an effort to explain the simultaneous experience of space using the metaphor of the transparency of glass and an experience stemming from movement that is triggered by diverse mass, through the time expressed in modern paintings (chapter 6, "Concept of Space and Time in Arts, Architecture, and Engineering). Although it is true that there is more interest in time nowadays, it is more appropriate to argue that the modern architecture of the West still remains at the level of spatial composition. It becomes more evident when you observe Asian architecture in terms of the quality of time. See Giedion (2003).

30. One master's thesis that addresses the criticism of Sigfried Giedion's assertion is Yi Yeon-gyeong's paper (2004).

31. Before the use of the term universe (宇宙 *uju*), which consists of the Chinese characters for space (宇) and time (宙), a Chinese character 久 (pronounced as *gu* in

the universe is "space-time." From this, it can be conjectured that while Western architecture is still attached to the concept of absolute space, a concept shared by savants from Aristotle to Newton, the realm of relative space-time, which physics confirmed only in the twentieth century, was present in Eastern architecture for thousands of years. The concept of "change" (易) in Eastern thought was created to explain temporal changes and to relate human life to these changes.³² The doctrine of *yinyang wuxing* (陰陽五行 two primal forces and five basic agents) was also needed to explain philosophical principles that were related to temporal changes.³³ Korean people also tried to address architecture and other matters in the context of time, and did not acknowledge anything that existed beyond time.

Accustomed to space-centric Western architecture, we easily conclude that Korean architecture is also space-centric. Traditional Korean architecture, however small it may be, was designed to take into consideration people's temporal movement and subsequent temporal-spatial changes. When one enters a traditional Korean house, one first approaches the main gate, then passes through the gate and walks through the courtyard to *daecheong maru*, finally reaching the master bedroom. The structure is identical at the royal palace, where one first encounters the front gate and passes through it, then travels on to the second and third courtyards and gates before arriving at the central building. Also, at Buddhist temples, one walks through one pillar gate, guardians' gate, and pavilion, then reaches the main hall. This type of architectural design is concerned not only with space,

Korean) with the same time dimension was used instead of 宙. "Universe" first appears in Shi Zi (尸子), during the Age of Civil Wars, where it is written, "spaces high and low and in all four directions are referred to as space (宇), and past and present time are referred to as time (宙)." See Zhang Dainian, (1998, 73-74).

32. "Changes (易)" by definition means "to change" or "to undergo changes," but in Xici zhuan (繫辭傳) of "Yijing (易經)" or "The Book of Changes," said it is written, "Changes are all about creating and creating again." "The Book of Changes" is a part of *Zhouyi* 周易 (The Changes of the Zhou). The word describes the philosophical stance that all existing things change. Meanwhile, "周易" is also used as a shortened form of "易." Refer to the Korean Academy of Juyeok (1992).

33. Liang Qichao, et al. (1993).

but with changes in space-time, i.e. space that changes with the passage of time. The spaces experienced in each phase here should be understood as spatial characteristics that are linked together within the overall flow of time. Viewed this way, Korean architecture is characterized by each unit of space reflecting on temporal changes within a whole structure.

As one can see, it is impossible to discuss the aesthetic experience of Korean architecture without consideration of time. To understand architectural beauty, one should capture how parts of space are tied to temporal changes. If any one building tries to be more prominent, that would unavoidably undermine the overall temporal-spatial structure. In a Buddhist temple, a one pillar gate should be nothing more than a one pillar gate, and a guardians' gate should be nothing more than a guardians' gate. In order to make the changes in space-time, from the entrance gate to the main hall, meaningful and alive, no single gate can jut out and express itself prominently. The temporal-spatial experience as a whole should be understood as an art piece. Since this experience stresses time over space, it is entirely different from the experience of a space-centered physical object. The aesthetic cannot be fully experienced by physical appearance alone, such as the external form or spatial structure of a building. Needless to say, Korean architecture also takes into consideration the proportional structure of space, but such visibility itself is not pursued as a goal. Rather, it is treated as a small part needed to enhance the aesthetic effect of the overall process of temporal-spatial changes.

Traditional Korean architecture was not obsessed with giving a strong visual impression, compared to Western architecture. Therefore, it did not matter even if the buildings were all alike, and the external view of each building did not emphasize visual satisfaction. Then, did Korean architecture highlight any other sensory organ than the eyes? Korean architecture attached importance to the entire "bodily feeling" rather than just the "eyes." If one calls Western architecture an "architecture of the eyes," one may have to call Korean architecture "an architecture of the body." Korean architecture was interested in the overall physical experience, even if it came at

the expense of some visual experiences. It was believed that too much emphasis on the visual experience would undermine the overall physical experience. Human beings not only "understand architectural experience through the eyes, but feel it through the body."³⁴ In doing so, Korean architects believed that feeling through the body ought to be more important and essential in experiencing architecture than understanding with the eyes.

It would be appropriate to point out that the concept of *gameung* (感應 sense and response) well represents such overall physical experiences.³⁵ *Gam* (感 sense) refers to all the physical senses a person experiences concerning the external world, and *eung* (應 response) refers to the physical response to what is felt. Thus, *gameung* is not generated through the eyes alone, but through the entire body. In addition, it is not a one-time event, but is an experience accumulated over a long time. In all cases, the human body contains an acquired feeling, and the body responds in accordance with that feeling. This mutual *gameung* serves as the key to architectural experience.

While visual experience seeks "something to look at," the body searches for "somewhere to stay." Architecture of the eyes tries to yield something that looks beautiful, but architecture of the body pursues a place where one can find comfort. Korean architecture yearns for a place where the whole body can find comfort, rather than seeking out any visual attraction. That said, what Korean archi-

34. Although not exactly the same as the expression "attaining enlightenment by feeling with the body" (體悟), Zhang Fa uses the term "bodily enlightenment" (Zhang, 1994, 518-525). The book also points out the different approach to appreciating aesthetics in the East and West, and explains that the West does not rely on the method of "attaining enlightenment with the body" like China (Zhang, 1994, 525).

35. Among the documented records on "feelings" and "response," the basis for the meaning of "response" should be "gi-oriented sensation" that appears in volume 1 of *Jinnangjing* 錦囊經, a book on *fengshui*. See Choe Chang-jo (1993). The original text (p. 63) says that "feeling" is followed by "response," or "response" comes after "feeling," showing that "feeling" and "responding" correspond to and succeed each other. Meanwhile, Cheng Yi of the Northern Song dynasty writes, "There is only 'sensation' and 'response' between the heaven and the earth. What else?" 天地之間 只有一個感與應而已 更有甚事. See *Ercheng yishu* 二程遺書.

itecture seeks is not architecture that is beautiful to the eyes, but the level of mutual *gameung* between people and the environment. Form and space are visible, but *gameung* is not. For example, the front gate, which visitor first encounters in traditional Korean house, is there to help one “feel” beforehand the experiences that will unfold one by one beyond the gate, rather than making the visitor rely only on the visual senses. This is the initial stage in a series of *gameung*. The courtyard inside the gate is not an object to view with the eyes, but a place for people to feel and respond to architecture appropriately. When we stand in the courtyard of a traditional Korean house, we need to be more sensitive to the detailed differences and responses each courtyard produces. The outer courtyard (*sarang madang*) and inner courtyard (*an madang*) generate different feelings.

A courtyard in Korean architecture cannot be explained without referring to the bodily response. It is the same with every other parts of the Korean architecture. The main room is surrounded by four walls, which creates a sense of comfort, while *daecheong maru* is surrounded by three walls with one open side. Needless to say, bodily response should be accompanied by visual experience. However, it does not entirely depend on a visual response. Rather, visual experience is controlled and acts as an aid for the bodily response. Every Korean house offers a different level of feeling and response. Korean architecture strives to offer a higher level of such responses, and the level of aesthetic experience depends on whether it successfully generates that response. As far as Korean architecture is concerned, its aesthetics cannot be attained without consideration of the issue of response. However, in today’s world, we are not familiar with response-oriented aesthetics, and only rely on visual aesthetics even with architecture that is based on the aesthetics of response.

In discussing the issue of what constitutes Korean architectural aesthetics, I touched upon *gi* or vital energy. I have to point out that physical *gameung* involves *gi*-oriented *gameung*. In fact, the idea and concept of *gameung* itself was only possible in the *gi*-oriented worldview. This is a unique worldview found in East Asian cultures, including that of Korea. Since all creations including human beings

exist within the realm of *gi*-oriented reciprocal interaction, Korean architecture tried to realize *gi*-centered mutual *gameung* to the betterment of human life in the healthiest possible way. Given that the concept of *gi*-oriented *gameung* presupposes a worldview that allows it, it is only natural that it was pursued in architecture as well. Then, the beauty of architecture cannot be discussed without taking into consideration *gameung* and reciprocal interaction. As the *gi*-oriented *gameung* itself embraces everything, not aesthetic quality alone, it is true that complex and comprehensive *gameung* includes an aesthetic aspect as well. A comfortable, harmonious feeling between people and the environment incorporates an aesthetic feeling. Beauty without comfort is not beauty at all. The driving force behind this mutual *gameung* is not by a mathematical principle such as proportion, but the flow of vital energy that encourages *gi*-oriented emotional interaction. People respond to aesthetics as well within the *gi*-oriented interaction.

Architecture marked by aesthetics of *gameung* does not completely ignore visual architectural beauty, but visual beauty has to confine its role to that of adding to the overall aesthetics of *gameung*. In Korean architecture, aesthetics of *gameung* includes the category of visual beauty. In other words, the visual sense was part of that response and should not be used in ways that undermine the total *gameung*. The beauty we find in Korean architecture appears less provocative than in Western architecture. Excessive artistic expression had to be avoided so that the physical *gameung* and experience, flowing with temporal changes, would not be undermined. Anyone who sees Korean architecture can sense the comfort that is difficult to describe, although the level of visual attraction is lower than as is in Western architecture. Beauty in Korean architecture is not as prominent as in Western architecture. This is because Korean people held different views on the significance and purpose of building houses and residing in them, compared to their Western counterparts, whence the intrinsic value of Korean architecture is produced.

Purpose

The aesthetic goals people achieve through beauty differ according to cultural zones, which manifest deep-rooted human longings. Therefore, it is important to examine such aesthetic goals in architecture in order to understand the essential characteristics of architectural aesthetics. Although any discussion of the goals of architectural beauty can end up more or less abstract and subjective, in order to complete this discussion, it is inevitable to talk about the ultimate goal that the pursuit of beauty tries to achieve.

As is widely recognized, Western architecture assumes human beings to be its starting point, and in this way, Western architects have tried to realize a human-centered architecture. Put another way, Westerners believed that human beings were possessed of a subjective self with a life and soul, and saw themselves as masters of the world. Such a subjective self-consciousness objectifies nature. Western architects had a strong tendency to view architecture as realization of the self. That is, in a Western society characterized by the prevalence of subjectivism with which to see humans as independent being and to prioritize humans above anything else, it is natural that architecture fell in line with that trend. Viewed this way, what Western people pursued through Western architecture was the “self-realization.” Nature objectified as an architectural background was not allowed to become a subject that determined all aspects of architecture. Although architecture is built within nature, it originates from the self, before it is composed of materials found in nature. Human-centeredness is typical of Western architecture, which is an “architecture of the self” rather than an “architecture of nature.”

If the same is applied to Korean architecture, how would Korean architecture fare in terms of the human self and nature? Koreans do not seem to regard the self and nature separately as subject and object, instead recognizing them as integrated. The self and nature share the same life energy, but exist separately. They come from the same *gi*-oriented motive, but have different ways of manifesting themselves to the world. Viewed this way, it is difficult to place one

of human and nature above the other, and even more so to identify one as the master and the other as the guest. Thus, when people build houses, they do not need to become the subject and act as the master. Architecture exists in nature just as a natural object does, and people must cooperate and participate in allowing architecture to exist in accordance with the laws of nature. This way enables peaceful and harmonious co-existence between people and nature, since the subject/object dichotomy does not matter unlike in the West. What is significant here is to establish a balanced relationship among people, architecture, and nature. When architecture exists as “an architecture of the self,” discord can arise between this self and nature. However, Korean architecture does not create such a conflicting tension. In this sense, if Western architecture is an “architecture of the self,” Korean architecture is an “architecture of nature.” Yet, the expression “architecture of nature” means that Korean architecture ultimately aims to achieve a “balance” between the self and nature when it puts more emphasis on nature than Western architecture does. Additionally, it is important to note that *jayeon* (自然), the Korean word for “nature,” has the meaning of “as it is by itself,” rather than the “external world or environment.”³⁶ Just as humans and nature exist “as they are,” traditional Korean architects believed that architecture has to exist as it is.

Discussion of both Western and Korean architectural beauty cannot be removed from the consideration of more fundamental world-views. Western architecture focused on the individual building as a form of architecture where the subjective self was clearly manifested. Thus, resultant architectural products could not but reveal the individual identity of the self. Once aesthetic objects were confined to buildings, there was no way to express the aesthetic other than

36. “Nature” connotes both “external world in its entirety” and “as it is by itself.” Although the word “nature” is usually used to signify both meanings, they should be clearly differentiated from one another. For this reason, “nature” is employed in this paper to signify “external world in its entirety,” and *jayeon* means “as it is by itself.”

through exterior form and enclosed inner spaces. The subjective self, for more effective self-realization, had no choice but to pursue a broader inner space and visually conspicuous appearance. Meanwhile, not being obligated to express the subjective self, Korean architecture viewed human beings and nature as coexisting equally in the harmonious phenomenal world, and this idea was invariably actualized in Korean architecture as well. When the universe represents both time and space, so does architecture, and when the universe exists through mutual *gameung*, so does architecture. Beauty in architecture was something that was sought after and realized by respecting the intrinsic order of the universe. Within this notion of architecture, any attempt to realize the subjective self independently, as in the West, had to be contained. The beauty of Korean architecture ought to be understood against this backdrop, as well as in the context of the larger worldview.

Western people emphasized the human intellect in order to realize an architecture in which to manifest the self. Unlike in Korean architecture, where *jayeon* serves as the order of architecture, Western architects believed that rationality born out of the human intellect was of primary importance, and the most effective way to maximize rationality could be found in mathematical objectivity. Just as Western culture is rooted in geometry to a certain degree, Western architecture relied on mathematical rationality as a way to justify itself. This is vividly demonstrated in the fact that proportion, which was most highly regarded in Western architecture, is based on very detailed mathematical logic. In other words, Westerners did not leave architectural beauty in the realm of a simple, subjective feeling. Believing that subjective feeling was neither rational nor justifiable, Western architects relied on mathematical logic.

In contrast, Korean architecture did not need mathematical proportion at all in its pursuit of beauty. Instead of seeking out the visual aspects of beauty, it pursued a beauty that integrated all the feelings from architectural experience. Accordingly, Korean architecture pursued a beauty that incorporated wholly positive feelings, such as a sense of comfort, coziness, decency, and naturalness, rather than

pursuing a clearly identifiable aesthetic sweetness in terms of visual proportion. From the perspective of Western architectural aesthetics, this kind of beauty may be irrational and ambiguous, but from the perspective of Korean architecture, the beauty of architecture should be a comprehensive bodily feeling that is difficult to objectify. When beauty is understood as only in terms of specific categories such as visual proportion, according to Korean architects, it moves away from the original aesthetic that architecture pursues.

Western architecture tends to go beyond the phenomenal world. Western architecture set up a permanent and substantial world beyond the phenomenal world, and what Western architecture pursues there was the transcendental world. The soaring shape and extended inner space found in Western architecture would not have been imagined without consideration of its motivation to achieve such transcendental value. In this regard, it can be said that Western architecture has always had a religious aspect from its inception, and the religious aspect operated as a driving force not only for Western civilization, ranging from the pursuit of transcendental value found in Greek philosophy to the Christian view of God, but also for Western architecture itself. The aesthetic attitude of Western architecture should also be understood in the same context. In this respect, the beauty of architecture is a way to achieve a hidden intellectual goal, and thus Western architectural aesthetics cannot be understood without considering such a purpose.

However, Korean architecture was not ambitious about realizing transcendental value. Rather, Korean architecture wanted to remain vital in the phenomenal world. Based on the belief that the universe is no less than a movement of *gi*, and that human beings, nature, and architecture complement each other through reciprocal interaction, traditional Korean architects argued that by making this *gi*-centered world more vital, Korean architecture could achieve not only environmental health but also greater human happiness. They wanted to fill both nature and architecture with energy, thereby trying to recreate a comfortable, energetic life through architecture. The aesthetics of Korean architecture is related to this desire. Koreans' idea of archi-

tectural beauty is not confined to its visible effects, because visual qualities were not always necessary in rendering a fuller life, and too much emphasis on them rather hampered the creation of a healthy living environment. Thus, Korean architects created spaces like courtyards that elicit mutual *gameung* between *yin* and *yang*, and attempted to control the flow of air between the courtyard and the room, creating comfortability for the inhabitants, which translated into a Korean vision of architectural beauty.

Conclusion

This paper has so far examined the “aesthetics of Korean architecture” within the larger theme of “aesthetics in Korean culture.” The latter theme is intended to forge a more comprehensive view of Korean aesthetics by covering aesthetics in architecture as well as in the areas of music, painting, and crafts. None have objected to the inclusion of architecture as a research topic in the field of aesthetics in Korean culture. Most architects in this era also accept architecture as a visual art and consider architectural design a form of artwork. This attitude is understandable as architecture is also heavily involved in aesthetics. Bearing this in mind, I first examined how the aesthetics of Korean architecture can be compared with that of Western architecture and how it is related to architectural views. Then I explored the subject more concretely under the categories of object, content, experience, and purpose. However, discussing the aesthetics of Korean architecture along with music, painting, and crafts, not to mention treating architecture as an artistic object like a painting or craft object, represents a very Western approach. From the start, it is questionable whether it is possible to single out a building from its surroundings and scrutinize it for its beauty like one would a painting. It might be true that the aesthetics of music, paintings, and crafts can be discussed in ways that are closer to the Western perspective. However, it is not the case with the discussion of the aesthetics of Korean architecture.

Herein lies the difficulty of this paper, as the aesthetics of Korean architecture would otherwise never be free from the shadow of Western architectural aesthetics. At a minimum, it was necessary to clarify that, given today’s cultural conditions, the attempt to discuss Korean architectural aesthetics was made in a confusing setting that discourages such discussion. This paper can be criticized for attempting to discuss the characteristics of Korean architecture, rather than the aesthetics of Korean architecture, which was the purported subject of this paper. That, too, has to be permitted, since it would be difficult to discuss Korean architectural aesthetics without unveiling the identity of Korean architecture.

What is the aesthetic object in Korean architecture? It does not refer to a physical building, as in the case of Western architecture, but the total spatial arrangement. However, this unit of spatial arrangement itself cannot be conceived of separately from the natural and architectural environment around it, either. When the aesthetic object is not clearly defined, the search for beauty becomes somewhat uncertain. Then, Korean architectural aesthetics becomes something that is not present in a certain object. What is the content of aesthetics in Korean architecture? The content of aesthetics can be clearly separated out as form and space in Western architecture. In Korean architectural aesthetics, however, talking about the content is vague in the first place. Therefore, I could not help but talk about what it would be like if the content of Korean architectural aesthetics was discussed in terms of form and space as in the West. The result was that, as expected, it was difficult to talk about Korean architectural aesthetics in terms of form and space. Also, the attempt only confirmed that although Korean architectural aesthetics could be discussed in terms of form and space, it was not only insufficient but undesirable.

Then, what constitutes the beauty of Korean architecture? This is an even harder question to answer than discussing aesthetic objects. Hence, the answer to the question should be sought while discussing experience. When Western architectural aesthetics is experienced visually and spatially, how is Korean architecture experienced? To

answer this question, I pointed out that Korean architecture is experienced in terms of space-time, not space alone, and temporal changes played a more pivotal role in the architectural experience than in Western architecture. It was also pointed out that the architectural experience stressed overall physical feeling and *gameung*, rather than visual expression. Even so, the issue of experience in the context of Korean architecture was not fully addressed, only the difference between Korean and Western architecture being underscored, the latter of which places an emphasis on the visual and spatial experience. I also argued that the issues of object, content, and experience have already been molded within the viewpoints on architecture, and more fundamentally by the worldview that created such architectural viewpoints. If Western architecture attempted to realize transcendental value beyond the phenomenal world while relying on the self's reason, Korean architecture aspired to achieve a fuller life through *gi*-oriented *gameung* within the phenomenal world or through the order of *jayeon*, and Korean architectural aesthetics is defined by such an aspiration.

Throughout this paper, I was forced to confirm that, at least in the area of architecture, we have been ignorant of and indifferent to the theoretical frameworks under which we must discuss Korean architecture and its aesthetics. It would be better to put aside the Western way of describing architectural aesthetics if one is to fully shed light on the aesthetic value of Korean architecture. Korean architecture need not be addressed as a visual art only because Westerners do so. Architecture is not so much a work of art as a matter of human life. The aesthetics of something that is deeply connected to human life cannot be fully explored only in terms of proportion. It should be noted that Korean architectural beauty cannot be explained only through the logical framework found in the West, and this is all the more true when the Western architectural paradigm is spreading worldwide. It appears that any discussion of Korean architectural aesthetics is uncertain and vague compared to that of Western architecture, which is based on relatively clear and obvious logic. However, the Western view of architecture is excessively analytical and

oversimplifies something that is inherently vague and chaotic. Frankly speaking, this paper did not successfully present a fairly clear-cut opinion on Korean architectural beauty. We have no choice but to wait for all of humanity, including Korean descendants, to embody one day the aesthetic found in Korean architecture, especially when the world is standardizing itself based on Western architecture alone.

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GLOSSARY

<i>an madang</i>	안마당	<i>hyanggyo</i>	鄉校
<i>ancheae</i>	안채	<i>hyeong</i>	形
<i>daecheong maru</i>	大廳마루	<i>hyeonghwa</i>	形化
<i>gameung</i>	感應	Mengzi	孟子
<i>geumdang</i>	金堂	<i>qi</i> (Ch.) ▶ <i>gi</i>	
<i>gi</i>	氣	<i>sarang madang</i>	舍廊마당
<i>gihyeong</i>	氣形	<i>sarangchae</i>	舍廊채
<i>gonggan</i>	空間	<i>seowon</i>	書院
<i>gonggi</i>	空氣	<i>yin-yang</i> (Ch.)	陰陽
<i>haengnangchae</i>	行廊채	Zhuangzi	莊子

(Ch.: Chinese)