PLACE IDENTITY IN 21ST CENTURY ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract
Changes to the built environment brought about by economic and cultural globalization have resulted in a blurring of national identities worldwide. Consequently, place identity has emerged as a central concern for setting the 21st century urban development agenda. This paper examines the ways in which specific aspects of urban typology relate with cultural engagements and meanings within old and new, in terms of the transferable values of place identity, particularly within South East and Far East Asian countries. Firstly, the theoretical and practical key concepts for design ideology are described in relation to the value of place identity within contemporary urban forms. These key concepts are then operationalized in order to identify the implementation of the role of place identity, not only within architectural typology, but also through a cultural sense of space and time; a hybrid typological language. The focus of this paper is to explore how the role of place identity in physical built form relates with design qualities and cultural engagement, and how the needs of local culture can be incorporated, sustained and developed alongside contemporary architecture and rapid urban development. The paper provides a critical reflection and discussion of 21st Century architecture in South Korea, particularly how the locally situated and informed might be reconciled with the global aspirations of the contemporary city.

Keywords
Place identity; contemporary architecture; cultural sustainability

Introduction
The aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of how place identity can be incorporated into contemporary modern architecture, particularly in South Korea. Emerging states, like South Korea, have a desire to gain international respect, recognition and parity. The challenge is for this to be achieved whilst local culture is both sustained and developed. As such, the role of place identity is valuable not only within the context of local or regional urban development, but also within global urban transformation (Lefaivre, 2003). The paper concentrates in particular on the formulation of place identity as an aspect of architectural typology, based on the theory of critical regionalism by Frampton (1985).

The focus of this paper is to explore how these two views of design – the globally aspirational, and the locally situated and informed– might be reconciled in the context of architectural

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building typology. The example of Seoul, South Korea is used to present and test a number of key concepts relating to the value of local resources, and the promotion of place identity.

The importance of place identity in preventing the type of uncontrolled amorphous growth and erosion of the quality of urban spaces that has occurred, in the late 20th Century and within the early 21st Century, has been considered by a number of commentators (King, 2008; Kim, 2008). There is a need for theory that incorporates both an understanding of appropriate mechanisms to promote place identity in contemporary urban development, and can reconcile the views and interests of decision makers and local communities, so that an expression of local cultural practices can be included within built form.

Concepts of place identity are complex and always dependent on context. The multi-dimensional aspects of place identity include historical, geographical and cultural experiences over different time periods. Also important, are current trends and patterns within urban design. Many cities are increasingly reacting to the influence of globalization with changes to their social and spatial structure. Since the 1990s global urban trends and patterns of homogenization in design and planning have resulted in counter-trends led by certain academics, focused on ideas of locality and place (Kearns and Philo, 1993; McDowell, 1997; Jacobs and Fincher, 1998). Many planners, sociologists and geographers have also been working towards the development of evolved contemporary theory regarding these issues in the built environment (Relph, 1976; Sack, 1997; Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007).

Place identity can be defined through experience, memories and people's activity, and the structure of place identity can be formulized through detailed consideration of these social structures. This definition of place has been developed and interpreted with reference to key sociological, anthropological, and environmental theories (Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007; King, 2004; Lee, 2002; Knox, 2000; Healey, 1998; Abel, 1997; Hough, 1990; Frampton, 1985; Proshansky, et al, 1983; Rapoport, 1982; Whyte, 1980; Lynch, 1960) It is worth noting that any identity changes continuously in different situations and environments, through people, events, ideologies and urban development, whereas place is based on feelings that are less susceptible to change, such as memory and experience (Lynch, 1960).

In addition, the value of place identity in the development of a city's social structure and physical form is highlighted by recent town design ideology, as seen in the continued development of Milton Keynes and Hemel Hempstead in the UK (Butina Watson, 2006). These examples highlight how the perspective of different key actors' involvement in the process of form-production can be considered.

Places may also be viewed as constructs of unique geographic, physical and environmental characteristics, combined with unique cultural circumstance and human interventions (Clifford and King, 1993). Users' experience place through social activities and cultural engagement, generating distinctive experimental characteristics, and place identity is established when these characteristics complement the physical elements of built form within an urban development. Butina Watson

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and Bentley (2007: 6) described this as 'the multi-sensory process of inhabiting a place's structure and open spaces' – those landscapes modified by human intervention which geographers call "cultural landscapes".

Moreover, it is important to recognize that physical built form is continuously evolving with historical urban development and changes in the concept of place identity, together with the impact of dynamic social and economic influences (Whitehand, 1981). In parallel, Lynch (1981) argued that place identity is deeply related to the social, economic and political pressures that influence the power and control decision makers have in urban development and urban settings. At a micro level, place identity is an interwoven pattern of form, space and usage. At a macro level, Hall (1998) noted that the creation of a positive city image constitutes an extremely important part of economic regeneration. His theories link place identity with city image. In addition, the approach to place identity in the urban policy that a government pursues can also be used to represent the identity of a nation or a state (Giles, 1999). For example, Brasilia in Brazil and Putrajaya in Malaysia are both results of such policies geared towards a particular new national identity. When studying place identity, this range of scales and influences requires a study of the links between the meanings of cultural engagement on the one hand, and human identities on the other.

Concurrent with this increasing focus on place identity, rapid urban transformations have taken place in South East and Far East Asia. The majority of these transformations do not seem to acknowledge the issues of local and regional identity. In general, within the development of these Asian cities there is often a focus on fast growth by any means necessary, with a lack of consideration for the significance of place identity (Kim, 2008; King, 2005; Choi, 2005). Most new South East and East Asian urban developments can be characterized by market-driven development and homogeneity of built form. As a result, locality in terms of sense of place, and vernacular culture with local resources is not maintained. In China, an acceptance of political and economic globalization has resulted in rapid development (Choi, 2005). The redevelopment of Shanghai that commenced in the 1990s has been central to this, and gives a useful insight into both the local identity and national identity in China, and the emerging issue of place identity.

A further indication of the importance and relevance of contemporary place identity within Asia is the ambition, developed since the mid 1990s, to create an Asian Economic Union (Kim, 2008; Gresser, 2004), similar to the European Union. These plans include the development of key cross-country transportation links, as can be seen in Europe. Japan, China and Korea all plan to build special public transportation districts and Asian highways to foster the competitiveness and growth of cities that transcend national borders. These include routes from Japan - Pusan - Seoul - Pyongyang - Shineuju - China - Vietnam and from Pusan - Kangnung - Wonsan - Russia. A new design ideology influenced by cultural-pluralism and social transformation will develop together alongside these new transportation links. Through this urban transformation new local identities are also likely to emerge.

In addition to these infrastructural projects, in

certain developing Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, there is an emerging architectural form of regionalism, that references a contemporary local identity rooted in vernacular and traditional styles. This regionalism, within former colonized countries includes a new architectural built form and cultural modernization, based on a mixed social history and strongly influenced by their colonial past (Knox, 2000). The resultant urban transformations have provided a springboard for the trends of 21stcentury contemporary urban development, with post-colonial experiences showing the tension between global civilization and local culture (King, 2004).

These urban changes and new design ideologies in South East and East Asia have been analyzed by Abel (1997). His analysis indicates that the historical and geographical dimensions of local identity have changed. Abel's theory states that due to the changeability and shifts between different times, places and people, local identity is a highly complex concept and its meaning and value are difficult to define. The importance of local identity within these urban transformations has been emphasized, not just at a local level, but also at a national and global level (Frampton, 2007; Butina Watson, 2006; King, 2005; Abel, 1997).

New place making, characterized by a self-regulating infrastructure and the interconnection of the local community via networks and global resources, is a crucial motivation in terms of establishing local identity in South East and East Asia. Abel (1997:201) explains that this tension between globalism and locality is a fitting vision for the new design ideology agenda, in which the local informs the global and vice versa.

The development of South East Asian regional architecture represents a significant shift away from Western domination towards cultural emancipation. Abel (1997) explained that regional architecture requires both ecologically sensitive development policies and appropriate technologies, in order to turn an exemplary movement into a normative building pattern. Taken together, Abel uses these movements to emphasize the drawbacks of modernized homogeneous Western form, and categorizes these emergent alternative forms of development under the name 'eco-culture'. Eco-culture, together with what Abel termed 'traditional culture' and 'colonial culture', are all in contrast to the culture of global homogeneity and marketing led by the West. His argument presents different typologies in relation to different forms of economic and cultural development. This evolution in typological characteristics is based on multi-layered cultural diversity and represents a significant change that can provide a new definition to place identity, including both rootedness and evolution in urban form.

Following this argument, the concept of place identity involves the identity of users, their feelings and experiences. Psychologists define the structure of place identity to include human identity, feelings, memories, perceptions and cognition as expressed and revealed through specific social structures. Geographers present an alternative structure of place identity, including landscapes modified by human intervention, thus producing cultural landscapes (Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007) with human identity.

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Within South Korea, there are only a small number of significant modern buildings rooted in culture and history. Where it has been implemented, this small scale of architectural built form is vital for assessing the emerging value of place identity. Korean architect Kim Swoo Geun (born 1931; died 1986), and the design practice that he founded, Space, have been one of the key Korean practices engaged with 'critical regionalism', to use Frampton's term (1985).

Kim Swoo Geun reproduced Korean identity in the hard tissue of architecture, but also incorporated the softer emotional and aesthetic sense of Korean culture through metaphor. The aim of this section is to describe within the context of 21st Century architecture in South Korea the architectural devices Kim Swoo Geun employed that arouse spatial and emotional effects, and inspire a sense of cultural connectivity.

The cultural and sensory approach of Kim Swoo Geun's architecture, within the context of the urban development of Seoul, South Korea.

The historical development of Seoul is recognizable in the characteristic building typologies from each period of Korean history. There are the traditional buildings that pre-date

Figure 1: Bosingak, originally constructed in 1396 (source: Price, 2010).

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the Japanese colonization (see figure 1), the key buildings from the colonial period that have been retained (see figure 2), and the modern architecture that has grown up since Korean independence (see figure 3).

As described in Seon's Seoul Urban Development (2003), after liberation and independence from Japan in 1945, Seoul experienced rapid urban construction that broke away from the traditional concepts of geomancy and embraced modern designs and international influences. However, urban design guidelines that enabled integration and balance between traditional Korean and modern architectural designs were lacking. Private owners constructed most buildings without review from design specialists, and

the responsible government offices that were supposed to oversee the development process did not provide any leadership in design control.

Until the mid-1980s, new buildings housing multi-national corporations' representative of modern architecture were a dominant force in shaping and rearranging the urban fabric of Seoul. These building types demonstrate some monotonous modern characteristics that typify standard built form production influenced by capitalism, globalization and 'positivistic technocentric rationality" (Harvey, 1990).

As a result Seoul has become a rather complex city, characterized by the juxtaposition in time and space of both the illegible and legible, the disordered and the ordered. Streets ten lanes

Figure 2: Bank of Korea, built in 1909 (source: Kernbeisser, 2010).

Figure 3: Jongro Tower, built in 1999 (source: Fernandez, 2010).

wide, framed by towering office buildings, are typical elements in most modern cities. Seoul adds its own dimension to the mix. Only a few meters behind these facades lies a dense network of small streets and alleys with a completely different network of functions, relations and codes, with numbered district names such as Jongro 1, 2, and 3.

Within this complex urban mix, the traditional neighborhood of Bukchon sits to the north of Jongro, adjacent to Seoul's modern Central Business District (see figure 4). Over a development period of six hundred years, Bukchon has maintained a residential character. However, there is now an increasing trend to convert a number of the traditional houses for commercial or other functions, and consequently some of the character and identity of the area is starting to fade. Given that Seoul is evolving into an international commercial hub, this small traditional area within the CBD offers an insight into how place-identity is valued within an urban development that needs to function across the range of international, national, and regional levels.

Together with the transformation of Jongro and other urban districts, another important step in the post-colonial growth of Seoul is the creation of new forms of eco-cultural urban development, as an evolving built form that aims to be rooted within the local culture.

Bukchon in particular represents these characteristics of eco-culture as defined by Abel (1997). The unique history and robust identity of Bukchon has accumulated over centuries through the local community's growth and usage. Although this has resulted in an irregular urban pattern that combines traditional and modern buildings and public space typologies (see figure 4), the character of the district has clearly developed from its topography: the shape of land and watercourses within the area. It has lowland in the south, and becomes higher and steeper to the north (see figure 5). The irregular urban structure, mixed usage and this distinctive rising topography of Bukchon is shown in the detailed drawings in figure 5, and reflected in the terraced and stepped roofing of the traditional and modern housing (see figure 6).
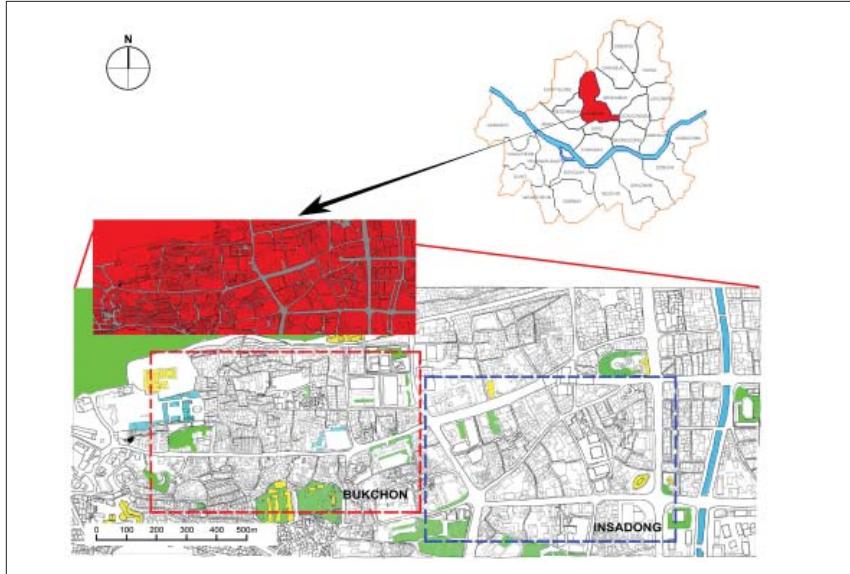
Figure 4: Local study area within the Jongro district of Seoul (source: Author, Google, 2009).
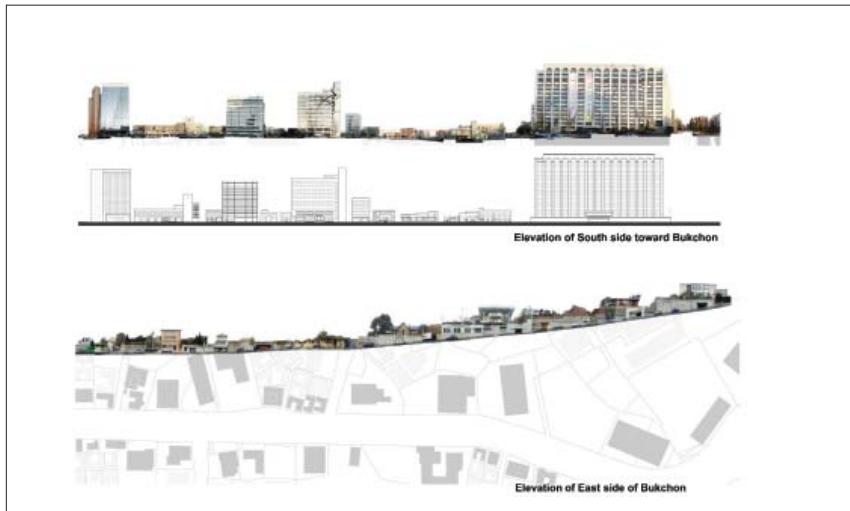

Figure 5: The typological and topographic characteristics of Bukchon (source: Seoul city government, 2009).

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Figure 6: Traditional housing with stepped roofs in Bukchon (source: Author, 2009).

Figure 7: Hanok building typology and structure (source: Author, 2009).

In architectural terms, within Bukchon there are 600-year-old Hanok houses that have been maintained and updated, resulting in an evolving form and function, juxtaposed with modern and post-modern high-rise buildings. Within the context of the physical construction of these building typologies, a consideration of local and natural materials, use of natural light, wind, temperature, and topography is important (Frampton, 1985; Bentley, 1985;
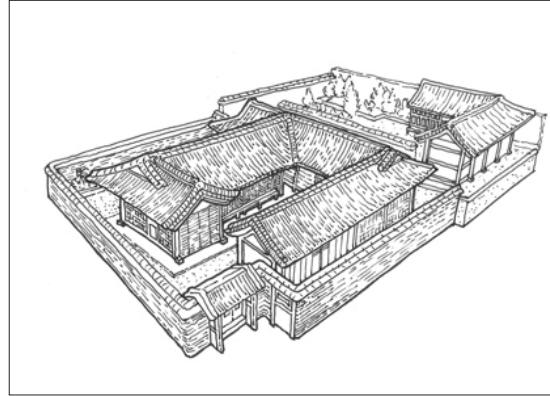
Carmona, 2001). In Bukchon, there are low fences and layered facades with open louvered doorways providing natural ventilation and light, overhanging roofs offering shade and protection from the rain and wind, and use of locally sourced timber and stones within a traditional vernacular building typology. This is a good example of resource efficiency forming part of a sustainable local identity.

Bukchon is filled with art galleries and other small enterprises, many of which are renovated from traditional Hanok courtyard housing (see figure 7). These developments are significant in their sustainable and progressive interaction with the historic building fabric, in a way that is both experimental and sensitive.

Note: this illustration describes the spatial arrangement of the Hanok house, with the courtyard orientation to suit climate, a room layout dictated by family hierarchy and gender

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Figure 8: Layout of Hanok courtyard house (source: Naver, 2010).

segmentation, and constructed using a natural palette of locally available materials.

The form and spatial arrangement of the Hanok house is an embodiment of the traditional Korean family hierarchy and structure. The main dwelling was originally intended for male family members and guests, and the smaller separate house to the rear, accessed through a separate gateway, was originally intended for female

family members. Living areas are often semi-open to the enclosed courtyards and walled garden (figure 8). The room layout, courtyard orientation and roof structure are all laid out in consideration of the sun and prevailing winds. The walls surrounding the property are often built low enough to allow residents easy interaction with neighbors. This housing layout reflects the spatial relationship of society and culture, and is considered an important symbol of the city's history.

Within the context of its location and the form and function of the traditional neighborhood of Hanok, the SPACE building by Kim Swoo Geun (see figure 9) acts as a cultural

Figure 9: SPACE building (source: doopedia.co.kr, 2011).

gateway between the traditional residential neighborhood of Bukchon, and the modern CBD within Insadong (see figures 4, 10). This geographical location, set between tradition and modernity, is also symbolized by the evolving types of architectural metaphor and design ideology Kim Swoo Geun utilized in the creation of a culturally sustaining future-oriented building typology. Frampton (1985) argued for the importance of presentational or metaphorical understanding of space, and this is a key aspect of the SPACE building.

In this building and others, Kim Swoo Geun advocated and pursued the notion of space based on emotion (Han, 1997). He saw architectural space as being symbolic and significant within society as something that can be connected with at a profound human, emotional and mental level. He advocated that such space should exist in a state which
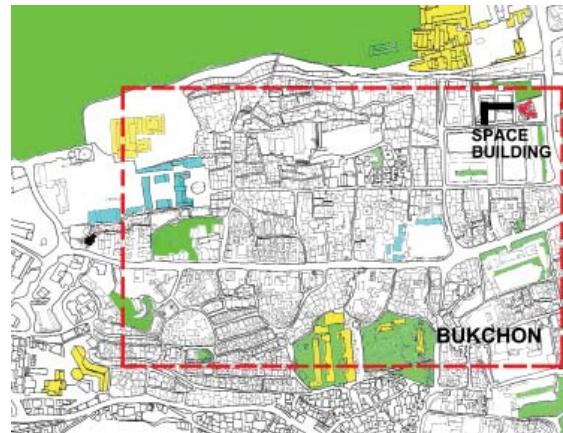

Figure 10: SPACE building in the CBD area in South of Seoul (source: Author, 2009).

is not fixed, so that the user can experience spatial transformations through changes of time and over the course of their daily life.

Experience of Volume within the SPACE building

In the SPACE building, the two masses formed in hard brickwork are the first things that greet the user. The entrance of the new building, which connects with the old building, is through a hollow penetration in the mass. This entrance corridor allows for entry into various parts of the building and as such becomes a mediation and transition space, similar to the organizational function of the yard in the traditional Korean house (see figures 11, 12). This entrance corridor is open to the rear courtyard, with a view of the tower positioned in the centre of the courtyard, designed to catch the eye (Spacetime, 2000:160). The entrance and yard are outer spaces that have an inner character, not blocked but surrounded and so providing intimacy, comfort and a sense of stability. Such spatial organization shares an emotional connection with the traditional Hanok residential architecture of Korea.

The SPACE building has created space by dividing the inner volume into two separate masses. Although the inner atrium of the office building is landlocked, the two building blocks open onto it and it opens up to the sky, giving continuity and connection in which the details and materiality are important elements, that help to incorporate an evolving yet rooted identity of place into the SPACE building.

The predominant material used in the later

architecture of Kim Swoo Geun is brick, ranging in color from warm red to dark grey to black. At the SPACE building, the dark grey brick (first phase) and black brick (second phase) have a material similarity to the traditional terracotta-tiled roofs nearby. This architecture is an evocative reinterpretation of local building techniques, materials and textures, providing a strong sense of place (Spacetime, 2000; 140). Through its efficient use of evolving local resources forms, the building forms part of a sustainable local identity.
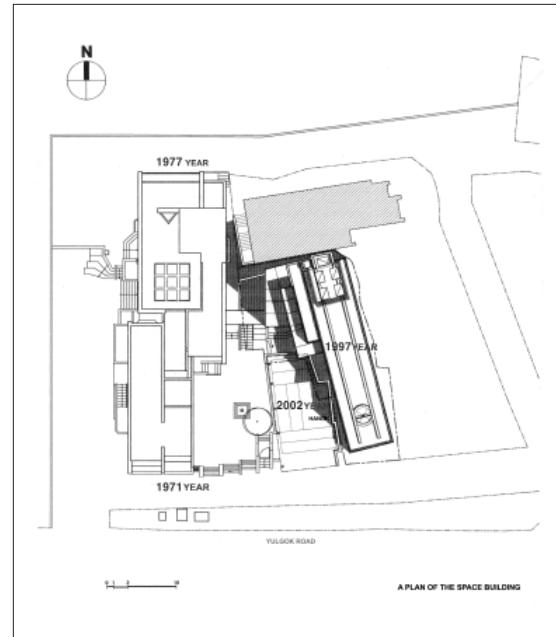

Figure 11: A plan of the SPACE building integrated with traditional Hanok building (source: SPACE group, 2009).

Figure 12: First phase of SPACE building integrated with traditional Hanok residential town (source: SPACE group, 2009).

Figure 13: SPACE building in the CBD area of Seoul (source: SPACE group, 2009).

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Experience from Metaphor

An understanding of the metaphor can help us to better appreciate the nature of architectural creativity, and might also inform us how to generate more positive forms of change than have been customary (Abel, 1997). Developments such as this deliver a strong message for how architectural built form can stimulate interpretations of place identity and generate new qualities in urban development, including both tradition and modernity, whilst satisfying its users' needs and desires.

The objects that sit within Kim Swoo Geun's architecture are mainly used to provide a traditional reference to the Korean consciousness. These objects include stonework, towers, furniture and ceramic works. Such objects can be seen in the rear yard, doorway and inner office building of the SPACE building. Kim Swoo Geun often positions these objects within empty space, utilizing their authenticity. For example, in the SPACE building, the size of the rear courtyard is similar to that of a traditional Korean house. A stone tower is positioned at the centre of the courtyard, an intimate space where the tower can become the subject of meditation, arousing images of Korean culture at an emotional level (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Traditional heritage exhibited within SPACE (source: SPACE group, 2009).

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Sense of place/ Human attachment

In addition to the symbolic importance of metaphor, the concept of synaesthesia is also central to the work of Kim Swoo Geun. Synaesthesia refers to the condition of one sense arousing another sense by stimulation of a sensory area (Oxford English Dictionary; Han, 1997).

The architectural space of Kim Swoo Geun arouses synaesthesia by binding together the sensory organs through physical perception. Such synaesthesia-oriented experience of space is mainly classified into two types, synaesthesia depending on senses, and synaesthesia stimulating memory or mental values (Oxford English Dictionary). The SPACE building contains these two sensory organs rooted in history and culture.

The experience of the study room and design studio of the SPACE building provides both a sense of place and human attachment. There is synaesthesia relating to sense of touch, hearing and visual perception, together with the stimulation of memory of the original form and a mental connection to Korean tradition, both past and present.

While understanding representation as an action of awareness to establish the world and object in a subjective way, the spatial experience can be referred to as an overall representation of one space based on individual emotion and awareness. This is the process of perceiving the space by responding intuitively from the individual memory and mental state of a person who has experienced the space over time.

Although metaphors are often utilized in postmodern architecture through the reproduction of historical and decorative elements, Kim Swoo Geun has incorporated metaphor and historical reference on a different mental level. He enjoyed using emotional, intuitive and irrational elements in architecture, rather than rational and logical perception. Coincidence, happening, lack-of-purpose, ambiguity, memory and emotion were his main architectural themes (Han, 1997). He has utilized the role of metaphor to reproduce the emotional and aesthetic sense of Korean culture and people in architecture.

In summary, the SPACE building - as the type of eco-culture that Abel identified - represents new cultures co-existing with colonial and traditional culture, without significant loss of character. This evolution in typological characteristics is based on multi-layered cultural diversity and represents a significant change that can provide a new definition to place identity, including both rootedness and evolution in urban form. The SPACE building as an evolving type of eco-cultural architectural building engages with and responds to its particular context, in order to revive the old and enrich the new (Frampton, 1985). As such, the SPACE building can be considered an evolved type of built form that can embody users' memories and sense of time and space, and can inform the creation of a particular kind of place identity.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the role of place identity in urban development, using the architectural typology and perspective of Kim Swoo Geun to discuss how a particular kind of place identity within physical built form can be created in relation to cultural context.

Kim Swoo Geun's SPACE building can be

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seen as an important model for defining the architectural aspects of place identity that are rooted, but not stuck, in the past (Butina Watson and Bentley, 2007). This research also stresses the importance of rethinking place identity through physical (architectural), social and cultural aspects, utilizing locally informed built form to create new sustainable environments, making use of significant local resources: topography, climate, light and tectonic form (Frampton, 1985).

Crucially, the SPACE building is a model for sustainable architectural built form with a new urban vision rooted in experience, feeling and memory. Lynch (1981:131) stated that 'congruence is the perceptual ground of a meaningful environment'. With this in mind, in the SPACE building, there is a greater resistance to change, resulting in a hybrid of ancient typologies filled with contemporary and ever-changing uses.

In light of that, the following question can be raised to conclude this paper: how does the SPACE building inform the characteristics and meaning of local identity in the 21st century, and the making of a better-loved place?

Identity in architectural built form is connected to the wider issues of society and the public realm, and on an intimate scale, materiality and human experience, and from these dualities architectural innovation can grow (Cook, 2009). The issue that has emerged from the paradigm shifts that have taken place in urban development in recent years is the internationalization of architectural practice, and how it may be understood both globally and locally. The SPACE building is a significant

model for the future-oriented architectural built form that is rooted in the past, whilst providing an indication for how Korean urban development could proceed in the 21st century modern city.

In addition, the discussion and findings from this paper offer the following suggestions regarding the theoretical and practical approaches in the creation of a particular type of place identity and architectural typology within South Korean urban development:

- Better understanding of cultural empowerment in relation to human attachment.
- Continuity in development, considering rootedness, culture, and history.
- Durable design qualities and values that span between rootedness and evolution in contemporary architecture.

This paper attempted to define the notion and value of place identity in urban transformation, related to aspects of cultural engagement and empowerment, via a shift of architectural building types within social and design ideology in the urban environment. Using the SPACE building as an example case, the analysis of the multi-facetted value of place identity helps to understand how contemporary architecture can contribute to the establishment of place identity in order to create a sustainable modern architectural vision for 21st century urban development in South Korea.

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