

## **Design Politics: Consumerization of Post-Industrial South Korea**

Ryan Hyun-Joung Lee

### ***Abstract***

*In recent years, design has become the main theme in administration of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Under this theme of design, many projects have taken place, including a number of public constructions. While the purpose behind supporting “design” as the symbol of Korea is to promote a new national image of post-developed nation, some of Seoul government’s design projects yielded unintended side effects. This paper analyzes the discrepancy between the professed rationale of these projects and the actual consequences through the case of Gwanghwamun and Dongdaemun, and suggests a possible direction for the future of design in Korean politics.*

**Key Words:** Design; Post-development; Public Construction; Democracy; National image

### **Introduction: Design and the City of Seoul**

In 2005, International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) announced an initiative called World Design Capital (WDC) at the convention held in Copenhagen. According to the initiative’s architects, WDC was to be an opportunity for

cities to present their accomplishments in innovative design, as well to celebrate their successes in urban revitalization. The focus would be on the broader essence of design's impact on urban spaces, economies, and citizens. While recognizing design's role in making a place more habitable and efficient for its local residents, WDC also emphasized design as "an economic development tool" in a global sense, something that should foster a partnership between "developed countries and emerging economies."<sup>1</sup> This statement revealed ICSID's understanding of the status of design in the global time line of development. Moving on from twentieth century developmental paradigm, now the soft power represented in design is what builds economic power.

A nation that had for some years sought global recognition of its status as a developed country rather than an emerging economy<sup>2</sup>, Korea pounced on the opportunity offered by the WDC initiative. After the announcement in 2005, the metropolitan government of Seoul hurriedly put together a bid to be selected as WDC. Their efforts paid off in 2007 and Seoul was selected as the WDC of 2010. To launch Seoul as the 2010 WDC, the city sponsored several international events, including Seoul Design Fair 2010 with the theme of "Design For All," Seoul International Design Workshop 2010 under the slogan "Universal Design With It-Unit", and Children's Design Creativity Camp. The government also created and funded many institutions specialized in design in

---

<sup>1</sup> "World Design Capital | Vision and Mission." *World Design Capital*. www.icsid.org, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> In seeking the status of developed economy Kim Young-Sam regime hurriedly joined OECD for the image of developed economy. However, in Lim and Jang's words, "the country did not have enough time to be prepared for sudden and profound changes in the rules of the game required for gaining OECD membership until 1996." On the other hand, Korea in recent years has advanced enough to host G20 summit, and the political scientist Victor Cha calls it "an example of a recipient-turned-donor nation; one that has transitioned over the past 60 years since the Korean War from a developing nation to one of the world's major economies." See Lim Hyun-chin and Jang Jin-ho, "Between Neoliberalism and Democracy: The transformation of the developmental state in South Korea," *Development and Society* 35:1 (2006): 1-28; Cha, Victor. "'America's First Pacific President' Attends the Seoul G-20 Summit." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. N.p., 27 Oct. 2010. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

order to help implement various design-related projects in an effort to advance Seoul as the WDC. One of these groups was Seoul Design Center, which was established in 2006 with the purpose of supporting creation and management of Korea as a design nation.<sup>3</sup> Another umbrella organization created to oversee several WDC initiatives was Seoul Design Foundation. Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) went so far as to pass a special ordinance in order to establish this foundation in the first place, and launched the Seoul Design Foundation in December 2008. It was founded to direct the construction of one of the landmarks, which was to become a great example of Seoul's effort to become a city represented by design.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps on account of the city's active sponsorship of design-related events and initiatives, Seoul became designated as the "City of Design" in 2010 under the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, in addition to its earlier selection as WDC 2010.<sup>5</sup>

Taking advantage of the publicity generated both at home and abroad by the recognition the city received from two well-known international organizations, Seoul's government actively promoted the image of Seoul as a sophisticated, cosmopolitan center with ambitions to become "the hub of global design."<sup>6</sup> As the promotion of such image started gathering more and more attention, Oh Se-Hoon, the mayor of Seoul at that time, adopted "Design Seoul" as the new slogan for his administration. A savvy politician, Oh saw that design could be the marker of distinction for his administration, just as "Green Growth" (*nokssaek seongjang*) had been for his predecessor, Lee Myung-Bak. The

---

<sup>3</sup> "History of Design Policy Studies." *디자인연구원 (Design Policy Studies)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2013.

<sup>4</sup> History of Seoul Design Foundation." (*Seoul Design Foundation*). N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Feb. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Further information can be found at:

[http://design.seoul.go.kr/n\\_dscontent/designseoul.php?MenuID=529&pgID=624](http://design.seoul.go.kr/n_dscontent/designseoul.php?MenuID=529&pgID=624)

<sup>6</sup> Further information can be found at:

[http://design.seoul.go.kr/n\\_dscontent/designseoul.php?MenuID=529&pgID=624](http://design.seoul.go.kr/n_dscontent/designseoul.php?MenuID=529&pgID=624)

metropolitan government then launched two large-scale public construction projects that would become the dual hallmarks of the new Seoul: Gwanghwamun Plaza and Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

One of the most historically rich sites in all of Korea, the Gwanghwamun area of Seoul has long been considered a spatial symbol of political power, from the time of Joseon Dynasty through the years of Japanese colonial rule and American military occupation, to authoritarian and post-authoritarian eras. In turning this politically contested site into a symbol of “Design Seoul,” however, Seoul Metropolitan Government sought to create a space explicitly dedicated to cultural events and leisure activities. At the same time, the government revised the existing ordinance to prohibit political gatherings of the citizenry in the area. In response, civic organizations criticized the government’s vision of the new Gwanghwamun Plaza as an attempt to disempower politically-minded citizens and discourage them from mobilizing around contemporary issues. The process leading up to the building of the Gwanghwamun Plaza and the responses that the construction occasioned thus raised an important question about the nature of citizens’ accessibility to public space in the heart of Seoul. While the metropolitan government defined accessibility as the openness and availability of more leisure and cultural spaces to citizens, the citizens foregrounded political participation as an integral part of what it means to have access to public space. The tension between these two visions shaped the debate surrounding how to evaluate the success of the metropolitan government’s urban renewal campaign.

If the question of citizens’ access became a point of contestation in the building of Gwanghwamun Plaza, the question of history emerged as the lightning rod for concerns

about the relationship between local specificity and globality in the building of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP). SMG launched DDP as an ambitious global landmark that was to symbolize Korea's status as an advanced, post-industrial nation, with its national achievement reflected in the sophisticated and cosmopolitan design of the plaza. The landmark would also serve as a tourist attraction and further contribute to the shift away from manufacturing industries toward creative industries in South Korea. A couple of years into the planning, however, historical remains from Joseon Dynasty were found at the site. The discovery resulted in the addition of a "historical park" to the original design, as the city declared that the purpose of the DDP was also to serve as a memorial to the richness of Korean history and culture. To achieve the professed goals of DDP as a global landmark as well as a memorial to Korean history, the blueprint of the DDP had to be modified considerably. The resulting layout placed a couple of small history museums in the shadows of the main structure designed by a world-renowned architect Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi-British architect famed for her abstract, futuristic designs. The resulting debate surrounding DDP thus became the occasion for interrogating the relationship between local history and global design.

By examining these two projects undertaken by the "Design Administration" of Oh Se-Hoon, this thesis explores the efforts of Seoul to become a city represented by the theme of design. What were the objectives laid out in the state rationale for each project? What contestations and negotiations took place in the process of their construction, especially as articulated by the state as well as various citizens' interest groups? What were the consequences of their construction? In answering these questions, the thesis pays particular attention to the political implications of the active governmental

promotion of “design” as a tool for creating a new national, post-industrial image of South Korea. I have coined the term “Design Politics” to encapsulate the dynamics of this interplay. In addition to consulting political scientific and architectural literature, I will be incorporating interviews and contemporary media coverage of the construction projects in order to capture the voices of people, both from producer and user ends.

The thesis will then conclude with a brief, preliminary discussion about a possible alternative to the coupling of design and the national image of post-industrial Korea found in “Design Seoul” initiatives. Described as “Social Design,” this alternative places the emphasis on the agency of people within urban design. If “Design Politics” focuses on the role of design in representing national advancement for both domestic and global consumption—paradoxically by making design the banner for depoliticizing the public and reconfiguring them as passive consumers as we will see in the section on Gwanghwamun Plaza—the concept of “Social Design” requires design to serve the local needs of people by increasing the habitability of the given space and the quality of life that it warrants.

### **Design Politics: Post-Industrialism and the National Image**

Similar to their counterparts in developed economies, Korean consumers started valuing design as a deciding factor in purchases they make, and the importance of design in what people seek in a consumer product has been trending up. Reflecting this change in consumption patterns, Oh Se-Hoon, the mayor of Seoul from 2006 to 2011, proclaimed the twenty first century as the century of design. Now that Korea is no longer the

impoverished country that it once was and that most Koreans have their basic needs met, argued Oh, it was time for Korea to join the global trend and apply the new paradigm of design not only to individual products or businesses but also to government policy.<sup>7</sup> In his acceptance speech to Seoul's appointment as the World Design Capital, Oh declared, "Design is a growth driver of the Seoul economy. We have surprised the world with the Miracle of the Han River and advancements in the IT sector. Now we would like to bring global attention to Seoul with strong design."<sup>8</sup>

Mayor Oh's speech reveals several conflicting associations with the concept of design. On the one hand, design is taken as an indicator of how far Korea has advanced since the days of the "Miracle of the Han," the era of developmental dictatorship under Presidents Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan. At the same time, it is also understood as the next step in the developmental continuum that proceeds from manufacturing to information technology, and now to design. Design is also presented as a new way of "surprising the world" and of bringing "global attention to Seoul." Far from being antithetical to the developmental paradigm, design thus inherits the Miracle of the Han River, especially in the way it can generate positive economic outcome reinforced by a new national image.

To understand why design came to be seen as the twenty-first century heir to the twentieth century economic development in Korea, we would need to place it in the context of Korea's economic history in the modern era. Korea during the colonial era underwent extractive industrialization, as Japanese colonial government drained natural resources. As Korea entered the 1960s, aggressive economic development policies

---

<sup>7</sup> "Mayor Oh Se-Hoon." Interview by Eun-Jae Lee. *Polinews.co.kr*. N.p., 5 Oct. 2010. Web. 2 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.polinews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=63219>>.

pushed the nation into consumer goods and light manufacturing, such as textiles and sneakers, which required relatively low technological investment and skilled labor. The focus of Korean industrialization then moved onto the heavy and chemical industrialization in the 70s.<sup>9</sup> Though the economy suffered in the latter half of the 90s due to the economic crisis often called “IMF Crisis” in Korea, progress was made through pursuing systematic information and communications technology policies which resulted in the growth of IT industry during the 2000s.<sup>10</sup> Now Korea is rubbing shoulders with the most developed economies in the world. The pace of this change has been one of the most rapid witnessed in world history. The per capita GDP of Korea, which was \$2,432 in 1970, dramatically rose to \$10,910 in 1990, then to \$18,730 in 2000 and again to \$27,540 in 2011.<sup>11</sup> While manufacturing continues as an important sector of Korean economy, Korea is moving rapidly moving toward service industry, and is increasing its investment in industries with high added value as well as a high threshold in terms of cultural and intellectual property. Design has the potential to be such an industry. Just as the meaning of food consumption has changed from mere sustenance to culinary art in wealthier societies, and spending on entertainment and leisure activities has increased in developed economies that do not depend on extractive and labor-intensive industries for revenue generation, design belongs to the realm of intellectual property with maximum added value. This may be the reason why the term “design” has become a buzzword for post-industrial societies of the twenty-first century.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ihm, Chon-Sun. “South Korea’s Economic Development.” *Social Studies* 79.4 (1988): 165. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Refer to figures in: Ryu, Young U, Jae Kyeong Kim, and Il Young Choi. “The Role of IT in Korea’s Economic Development.” *Information Technology and Management* 14.1 (2013): 3. Print.

<sup>11</sup> "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) MetaData : GDP per Head, US \$, Constant Prices, Constant PPPs, Reference Year 2005." (n.d.): n. pag. *OECD Stat Extracts*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Web. 2 Apr. 2013.



With such message embedded, what mayor Oh and the city government sought to achieve through the promotion of Seoul as a city representing “design” is the new image of Korea. The new image of Korea is a nation whose capital is a globally-renowned city of design could represent a trophy of the level of development Korea has achieved thus far. However, the level of development is not the only part of the image that is being promoted through design. About the developmental era of 70s and 80s, while some people applaud Park Chung-Hee’s leadership for laying the foundation for economic development, many others criticize Park Chung-Hee and also Chun Doo-Hwan’s authoritarian rule “characterized by the brutal repression of political dissidents and labor activists, as well as the exclusion of the populace from politics,” in sociologist Seung-Sook Moon’s words.<sup>12</sup> Hence, breaking out from the old era of developmentalism to open the doors to post-developmentalism also means to put an end to such a political atmosphere. The “brutal repression’ and ‘exclusion of the populace” of authoritarian regimes had the effect of heightening dissidence, largely in the form of street protests, and making them militant. This link between protests and the legacy of 70s and 80s developmental authoritarianism led SMG to demarcate the new image of developed Korea away from protests and militant public. The vision of citizenry and civil society portrayed in SMG’s model of developed country does not foresee the necessity of dissidence, and moves away from the negative characteristics of the old developmental paradigm. With determination to disallow protests for the reasons stated above, SMG even filed a lawsuit against several protesters in 2010, claiming that one of the events hosted by SMG was severely interrupted by the gathering of these protesters and thus

---

<sup>12</sup> Moon, Seungsook. "The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. Vol. 19-5-09, 9 May 2009. Web. 21 Feb. 2013.

caused dissipation of more than 0.6 million USD worth of tax spent on the event.<sup>13</sup> By selecting only a few of the protesters and holding them responsible for the collective action of a large mass of people, Seoul government strategically created sentiment of fear among the public that anyone who participated in the rally could find himself the same position. The strategy helped discourage protests or various political assemblies.

Given this context, I argue that the deployment of design as the defining characteristic of Oh Se-Hoon's metropolitan administration was political in two major ways. While the most immediate reason given for committing much of the city's resources to large-scale construction projects that many worried would turn out to be more monumental than practical—opponents, for example, pointed out the city's great reluctance to expand spending on welfare<sup>14</sup>—was that these projects would improve Seoul citizens' quality of living, it was clear that design was tied to the desire to create an idealized image of Seoul to project onto the global arena, which would then help create new revenue streams. Thus, the image, though seeming to move beyond the developmental paradigm of earlier administrations, actually continued that paradigm in a different guise. Secondly, design became political during Oh's mayorship in that it led to depoliticization of public action. Because industrialization occurred in South Korea within the political context of authoritarianism, post-industrialization meant that the political practices associated with the earlier era, including the culture of mass protests

---

<sup>13</sup> Hong, Hyun-Jin. "'촛불집회에 3 천만원 내라니... 파산지경'" *Oh My News*. 8 Feb. 2011. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

<sup>14</sup> One instance is the conflict over government-subsidized public school lunch. Before, students had to pay for their own lunch, and students who did not pay the due on time were often called out in public, and so the system was accused of promoting classification of economic status among young children. To prevent this, the idea of providing free lunch at public school regardless of socio-economic status was proposed, and mayor Oh opposed the idea, bringing up budgetary issue as the main reason. The conflict deepened and Mayor Oh declared referendum over this issue. With condition of resignation at turn out lower than 33.3%, he encouraged people to vote against the subsidy on school lunch, while the opposition pleaded not to vote at all. The turn out was 25.7%, and mayor Oh resigned.

against the government, would be seen as backward. In turning a place within the city which was traditionally known as the center of such mass politics into a plaza that permits no political assembly, “Design Seoul” reconfigured citizens primarily as consumers rather than active participants in the political process.

But what did the implementation of design politics mean for the ordinary citizens of Seoul? Did they embrace the new image of their city and the reconfiguration of their relationship to public space? The answers to these questions can be found in the case of Gwanghwamun Plaza construction.

### **Gwanghwamun: The Meaning of Mass Politics**

Gwanghwamun is the central gate of Gyeongbokgung, the main palace of Joseon Dynasty. Because of its significance as the entrance to the seat of royal authority, Gwanghwamun became a symbol of political power. Every regime that has come to power in Korea since the end of Joseon Dynasty has sought to appropriate this symbol in some way, either through destruction, relocation, or augmentation. In order to undermine “Koreanness,” for example, the Japanese colonial government physically tore down the gate to the house of the King, the symbol of Korean sovereignty, and repositioned it to make it the entrance to the Government-General Building. The gate burned down during the Korean War, but in 1968, the dictator Park Chung-Hee commissioned its reconstruction as a metaphor of the rise of Korea that he planned to achieve through economic development. Later, during Roh Moo-Hyun’s presidency, the sign of Gwanghwamun, written by Park Chung-Hee in vernacular Korean script, was removed

and restored to a version of the Chinese original. The act was deeply symbolic. Not only did it remove the mark of an earlier dictator from a public monument, it also suggested that the authoritarian era when one person could wield the power to imprint history was over.<sup>15</sup> The newly constructed Gwanghwamun Plaza also established a political message for Oh Se-Hoon and Lee Myung-Bak, who shared the same conservative political base. For these neoliberal conservatives, the Gwanghwamun Plaza would become a symbol of post-developed nation where design represents the level of economic advancement and citizenry do not engage in militant protests.

Furthermore, SMG attempted to redefine the political nature of the space. In addition to the political symbolism of the space, the Gwanghwamun area was an important political center in terms of civic participation. A major assembly point during the days of pro-democracy demonstrations in the 1980s, the area regained significance in terms of mass politics in the early days of Lee Myung-Bak's presidency. When the Oh administration set out on the reconstruction plan in 2008, for example, Seoul was in chaos with protesters pouring out onto the streets with candles in hand to appeal the government that had ignored the public opinion. Sparked by widespread dissatisfaction over the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., especially as it concerned the importation of beef from cows older than 30 months, the so-called "candlelight protests" lasted over one hundred days and involved an estimated million frustrated citizens. The Gwanghwamun area was a focal point of these protests. Even though most citizens respected the rule of peaceful assembly, seeing a large number of discontented citizens alarmed the conservatives including President Lee Myung-Bak and Mayor Oh Se-Hoon.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ha, Sang-Bok. "광화문의 정치학 예술과 권력의 재현." *한국정치학회보* 제 43 집 제 3 호 Sep. 2009: 77-98 한국정치학회. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

Meanwhile, Gwanghwamun Plaza had been included as one of the two centerpieces for On Se-Hoon's "Design Seoul." The city government explained that the construction was intended to enhance citizens' leisure and recreational life by increasing their access to public space. "One of the goals we are pursuing through public construction projects as part of our 'design policies' is to respond to the public opinion that there are not enough public spaces where people can go to relax or to which they can bring visitors from foreign countries," commented Mayor Oh during a 2009 interview.<sup>16</sup> But how exactly did the metropolitan government go about expanding citizens' access to public space and how did this seemingly rational effort dovetail with the conservatives' political agenda of putting an end to the candlelight protests?

Before the renewal project was undertaken, as the story of candlelight protesters reveals, the Gwanghwamun area was one of the most popular areas for mass rallies in Seoul. The gatherings were not always political in nature; for example, during the 2002, 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cup Tournaments, citizens came out to and cheered the Korean team on and enjoyed the festivities in the company of many other citizens. During the game against Spain in 2002, for example, 165,000 people covered the streets connecting City Hall area and Gwanghwamun area.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Gwanghwamun functioned as a site of both civil activism and carnivalesque popular cultural expression. The renewal plan, however, divided Gwanghwamun into a "plaza" (*Gwanghwamun Gwangjang*) and the "Citizens' Open Ground" (*Shimin Yölin Madang*). Gwanghwamun Plaza was a new creation. The site where the plaza stands now used to be a sixteen lane thoroughfare leading to Gwanghwamun, the main gate of Gyeongbokgung. The only

<sup>16</sup> Kim, Sang-Chul. '문화도시 서울, 어디로 가고 있나?' 서울시당 토론회. 27 Oct. 2009. 3 Apr. 2013

<sup>17</sup> Lim, Hyun-Ju. "월드컵팬 165 만명→'촛불'팬 5 만명 이상한 '경찰 섹법'." *News.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 6 July 2008. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

additional monument in the area was the statue of General Yi Sun-shin rising above the busy traffic. The new plaza took over six middle lanes of the original sixteen lanes. Open to pedestrians, the plaza is divided into four different zones, each with a different theme of “Urban,” “Culture,” “Representation of History,” and “Restoration of History.” Urban Zone, which is the furthest one from the Gwanghwamun, has the General Yi Sun-Shin Fountain. Artificial streams called “History Wave,” lined with stones engraved with the names of major historical milestones since Joseon Dynasty, connect the first and second zones. Culture Zone has a square open for recreational activities or exhibitions, and houses the newly erected statue of King Sejong. The next zone is covered with a carpet of flowers,<sup>18</sup> and the final zone, the closest one to Gwanghwamun has the statue of Haetae, an imaginary animal with the ability to distinguish good and evil.<sup>19</sup> Having five lanes to the left and five lanes to the right on a busy road at the city center, this space created in the middle of the road has the appearance of a stranded island.

While the plaza was being created from scratch, the other site, the Citizens’ Open Ground, was changed in nature. It had once been the hub of mass protests, together with Seoul Square and Cheonggye Square. The renewal, however, placed emphasis on “culture.” Asked about the meaning of the creation of the Gwanghwamun Plaza, Shin Hyun-Don, the Landscape Architect in charge of the project answered, “Until now Seoul lacked open spaces in the center of the city. Gwanghwamun Plaza will bring about the renaissance of Seoul’s downtown. In addition to the “hardware” part of the plaza,

---

<sup>18</sup> The flower carpet was installed to symbolize *Dancheong*, or Korean traditional multi colored patchwork, but died soon from cold weather, wasting more than \$1,100,000 in US dollars. As much as people are sensitive about being taxed, they are very sensitive about how tax is being used. Where are you getting the figure from? Give support.

<sup>19</sup> "Facilities - Gwanghwamun Plaza." *서울시설공단*. Seoul Metropolitan Government, n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

“software” is very important. Gwanghwamun Plaza will be where this “software,” that is to say, culture is created.”<sup>20</sup> For Shin, however, the creation of a space where “culture” can blossom in the city meant restricting the political use of the same space. Accordingly, the Gwanghwamun renewal project was accompanied by a change in the city government’s ordinance regarding the use of public squares or open spaces that had the effect of limiting mass gatherings for purposes other than “culture.”

The revised ordinance curtailed citizens’ access to Citizens’ Open Ground. Prior to the change in the ordinance, public usage of Citizens’ Open Ground followed a reporting system that did not require the permission of the government. However, the new ordinance begins with language that specifically excludes political rallies from the type of activities considered appropriate for the space: “This ordinance intends to define the rules regarding usage and management of Gwanghwamun Plaza for recreational activities and cultural events of citizens.” It then instituted a review process subject to the mayor’s approval: “Application for the permission to use the Plaza will be reviewed by mayor of Seoul in consideration of the following: 1) Whether the event violates the purpose of the plaza; 2) whether the proposed use is restricted by other laws. If necessary, mayor can enforce additional regulations in order to secure public order.” This means that any application that runs counter to the stated purpose of the Gwanghwamun Plaza—leisure and culture—will be denied. The vagueness of the last section further adds to the problem and amplifies the executive and discretionary power of the mayor, who can now decide single-handedly what threatens public security. Even a peaceful assembly within the boundaries of the law, as was the case during the candlelight protests when citizens of

---

<sup>20</sup> Lee, Kyong-Eun. “광화문은 광화문 거리의 잠재력을 다시 살려낼것.” *SPACE Magazine*. N.p., 13 Sept. 2009. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.

all ages—secondary school students in their uniforms, moms with their babies in strollers, senior citizens, white collar workers in their business suits—gathered in the Gwanghwamun area with candles in hand, would no longer be allowed to take place if deemed “political” in any way. Moreover, the revised ordinance entitles the government to cancel the granted approval with a simple notification if the already approved event is considered to pose a threat to the safety of citizens or the public order for any reason, or deemed to be in violation of “other regulations,” broadly defined. In addition, the eighth clause of the ordinance states, “The mayor can change the status of permission even after the permission is granted if the metropolitan government of Seoul needs the space in the interest of the public, or if the change of status is required to ensure public security and social order.”<sup>21</sup> Again the ordinance remains unclear about what kinds of situations would qualify as being in “public interest.” To repeat, the ordinance grants broad powers to the Seoul Metropolitan Government such that it can turn a legal assembly into an illegal one at will.<sup>22</sup>

In response to dissatisfaction expressed concerning the restricted usage of Gwanghwamun Plaza, the government brought up many reasons to support their decision to revise the ordinance. The main reason was that Gwanghwamun is surrounded by the Blue House, the US embassy, and other national landmarks, making security an absolute imperative. Another reason presented was the protection of citizens’ security and unrestricted flow of traffic from possible danger and chaos arising from protests and political assemblies. The argument regarding traffic, however, appears invalid since

---

<sup>21</sup> 서울특별시 광화문광장의 사용 및 관리에 관한 조례. Korea Ministry of Government Legislation. *Ordinance number 4800*. 28 May 2009. Web.

<sup>22</sup> Hankuk daily. “광화문광장을 ‘평화의 마당’ 이 되게.” *Hankuk Daily* 24 Jun. 2009. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.



government had reduced the number of traffic lanes from sixteen to ten lanes in order to create the Gwanghwamun Plaza in the first place, leading to a perennial bottleneck in the area. In 2009, moreover, the city council gave permission for a soap opera to be filmed in the area for twelve hours from 7am to 7pm, the busiest hours of the day, even though this led to serious congestion in the area. These examples suggest that the city council's justification of its decision to ban political rallies in the area on account of traffic is specious at best.

The revision in the ordinance can thus be seen as an indirect commentary on the legacy of mass politics in South Korea. At critical junctures during the era of developmental dictatorship, protesters poured out onto the streets, often risking their lives, to voice their demands. The people's struggle to gain the power to express their voice and participate in the political process has been an integral part of modern Korean history. By proclaiming the new definition of a citizen as a consumer, Design Administration is also suggesting that Korean society has moved beyond the stage of development when mass politics needed to check state power. The emphasis on citizenry also shifts from political citizenship to economic citizenship. According to political scientist Stuart White, "the concept of economic citizenship has aspired to the universalism, embodying the rights to work (to be employed) and have the means to consume, to invest and be entrepreneurial, and the obligation to be taxed... The concept of economic citizenship has developed and solidified into an agenda for entrepreneurship, wealth creation, and adaptability to economic and technological change"<sup>23</sup> According to this definition, the concept of economic citizenship developed with the economic changes of a society. Applying this

---

<sup>23</sup> White, Stuart Gordon. *The Civic Minimum: On the Rights and Obligations of Economic Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.

concept to Korea, we can argue that along with the change of society from developmental dictatorship to post-industrial neoliberalism, there is also a shift in the definition of citizenship, from political citizenship in the form of dissidence to economic citizenship in the form of consumption. Mayor Oh focuses on this notion of citizens as consumers when he defines accessibility to public space as the ability to have more choices to consume leisure activities. The message is that now that the developmental era when the authoritarian government curtailed civil liberties in the name of rapid industrialization is long gone, and since South Korea in the twenty first century has both a flourishing economy and secure democracy, there is no longer need for citizens to struggle to bring about changes to the political process. Now their role as citizens lies in their economic activity, primarily as consumers. In this model of government-citizenry relationship, having more rights as citizens means having more rights to consume, and more access means more choices to consume.

A viewpoint opposed to Mayor Oh's definition of the citizen in terms of his relationship to the government has been articulated by civic groups. Korean geographer Hee-Sun Chung interprets Harvey's theory of heritageisation<sup>24</sup> with respect to the case of Gwanghwamun, calling it "a case where the state gets rid of remains of the negative past, sorts out glorious elements, and uses them to reinforce its group identity."<sup>25</sup> Government deliberately erased the remnants of authoritarian regime by prohibiting protests and at the same time pointed out the glory of development Korea has achieved. And this political manipulation generated the new group identity of citizenry whose role is to consume

---

<sup>24</sup> Harvey, David C. "Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7.4 (2001): 319-38. Print.

<sup>25</sup> Chung, Heesun. "Producing Heritage as a Processed Product of History: An Examination of Meanings of the Reconstruction of Gwanghwamun in Seoul." *The Geographical Journal of Korea* 43.4 (2009): 515-29. Print.

leisure and leave the space of politics in the hands of trusted political leaders. However some of the civic groups, consisting mostly of left-leaning progressive organizations but also including many Seoul citizens who share their beliefs, disagree with such normative model suggested by the design politics. One of these groups is “People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy.” They are so concerned about the issue of Gwanghwamun Plaza that they are leading a campaign to reverse the revision of the ordinance. The group has launched an internet forum dedicated solely to this campaign and worked to raise awareness and facilitate information-sharing. A part of their argument is that the revision of the ordinance constitutes an infringement on people’s right of public assembly that is guaranteed by the constitution.<sup>26</sup> Their dissatisfaction with the current situation also stems from the government’s control of the public space. In an article titled “You just want us to watch *Iris*<sup>27</sup> and snowboarding competitions?” civil activist Shin Mi-Ji criticizes the government’s hosting of snowboarding competition and sponsorship of the filming of TV dramas while closing it to freedom of speech and civic assembly.<sup>28</sup> The city, in other words, guaranteed commercial and monied interests rather than public interests. For the civic group, citizens mean active participants of a political process, not merely spectators watching the political scenes unfold and consuming what is ready-made for them to use. Participating in the political process entails playing a role in forming the choices themselves, not simply choosing between already determined options. This means that citizens must make demands of their government when political decisions go against the public opinion; they cannot make these demands if the

---

<sup>26</sup> "광화문광장은 시민들이 자유롭게 이용할 수 있어야." *참여연대 (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy)*. N.p., 31 July 2009. Web. 11 Apr. 2013

<sup>27</sup> Iris is the name of a soap opera. Some scenes of this soap opera were filmed on the Gwanghwamun Plaza.

<sup>28</sup> Shin, Mi-Ji. "아이리스·스노보드 대회, 구경만 하라고요?" *오마이뉴스 (Oh My News)*. N.p., 12 Sept. 2010. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.

opportunity to voice them in a public way is taken away from them. And this is where the definition of accessibility as articulated by the civic group diverges from that given by the SMG

When citizens are merely consumers of leisure space, the government fulfills its duty to serve public interest when it increases the accessibility of and expands the availability of such leisure spaces. But if citizens are seen not simply as consumers but as co-producers, accessibility becomes something more than individual enjoyment of a given space. In his examination of the discourse and practice of citizenship, political sociologist James Manor has argued that what makes a citizen is whether he or she possesses “sufficient ‘political capacity’—a term that implies political awareness, confidence, skills, and connections—to be able to operate effectively enough in the public sphere to qualify as a citizen rather than a mere resident or subject.”<sup>29</sup> With respect to this idea of “operating in the public sphere,” citizens assume their rights to make modifications to the political outcome; therefore, their accessibility is accessibility to the process of producing these spaces in the first place, not simply consuming them as citizens once they have come into being. Citizens who feel that they cannot “operate in the public sphere” because their voice is not heard or accepted by policy-makers, can turn to collective action to make their voices heard. It is precisely this dimension of collective civic action that the ordinance targets by removing this outlet of call for changes. Civil activism has been displaced by the ambitious and forceful implementation of the post-industrial image. The contradiction, however, is that Mayor Oh’s ideal post-developmental society reflected in “Design Seoul” assumes no contention between the

---

<sup>29</sup> Manor, James. "Who Is a Citizen? A Multidimensional Question." *Citizenship As Cultural Flow Structure, Agency and Power*. N.p.: Springer Verlag, 2013. 107-20. Print.

citizenry and the government, a place where the public does not feel the need to appeal to have its voice heard through protests. But if citizens indeed felt no need to continue their political struggle through a visible, physical, and contestatory insistence, such as street protests, why did the Seoul Metropolitan Government revise the ordinance to prevent protests? If Korean society is truly post-industrial and post-developmental, as claimed in the government's rationale for design politics, why would people feel the need to protest in the first place?

The situation surrounding the renewal of the Gwanghwamun area and the ordinance regarding its public use may be seen as an example of failed mediation between the government's goal of fostering a post-industrial national image, and the civic groups' demand which does not align with the pace of "progress" that the government suggests. Schot and de la Bruheze characterize mediation as "a process of mutual articulation and alignment of product characteristics and user requirements. In the process of mutual articulation and alignment (or mediation), product characteristics, the use, the user, and the user's demands become defined, constructed, and linked."<sup>30</sup> Producers and users have different sets of needs, and mediation is an important process to find a middle ground between two dissimilar, possibly conflicting interests. While it may be problematic to draw an analogy between producer-consumer relationship within a consumer product market and government-civic groups relationship in politics, the narrow focus on the use of public space allows us to see the producer-user dynamic emerge in the debate over Gwanghwamun. According to Schot and de la Bruheze, a successful mediation is reached when there is a balance between differing opinions. If

---

<sup>30</sup> Schot, Johan, and Adri A. De La Bruheze. "The Mediated Design of Products, Consumption, and Consumers in the Twentieth Century." *How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technologies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003. N. pag. Print.

one side's interests are given more weight, a bias is created, and such a bias ends up furthering the divide rather than closing it. While the initial goal of creating a better public leisure space for citizens to enjoy has been achieved, the government failed to take into consideration the voice of opposition. The opinion that welcomed Gwanghwamun area's transformation into leisure place was well reflected. On the other hand, the public voice that asked for a public space where freedom of speech and freedom of assembly could be exercised was also a significant opinion yet neglected. Because citizens' interests were not considered to have the same weight as the ruling party's interests, mediation failed. And even in the process of designing the plaza, only the opinions of those experts and politicians aligned with the government came to matter.

### **Dongdaemun: History and Culture in a Global World**

Dongdaemun has a long and rich history that goes back to the dynastic period. Also known as Heunginjimun, Dongdaemun literally means East Gate in Korean and was one of the four gates surrounding Hanyang, the capital of Joseon Dynasty, which is modern-day Seoul. Near this gate, there were many historically important sites, including one of the capital's main sluices and the training ground of Hadogam, the fortress guards of Hanyang. The area also served as the base for the Qing army brought into the country to suppress the Imo Mutiny of 1882. The mutiny was one of the many violent episodes that occurred as traditional Korea encountered the modern world; the grievances of the traditional military who suffered discrimination relative to the new modern army at the

end of the Joseon Dynasty was one of the rebellion's root causes.<sup>31</sup>

During the Japanese colonial period, the Dongdaemun area emerged as a site of national humiliation when it became the ground for a stadium built to celebrate the Japanese prince's wedding.<sup>32</sup> During the Park Chung-Hee era, the Dongdaemun area, which includes Pyeonghwa Market, witnessed the self-immolation of an uneducated and impoverished garment cutter named Jeon Tae-Il who set himself on fire to protest the unjust treatment of workers. Dongdaemun Stadium also evokes nostalgic memory of high school baseball league that played there throughout the 1980s to the delight of Seoul's many students and baseball fans.<sup>33</sup> In the hands of dictators from the 1970s to the 80s, namely Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, baseball became an instrument for deflecting people's attention away from pro-democracy protests. Today, the name Dongdaemun indicates the shopping district near the actual Dongdaemun or one of Seoul's twenty-five administrative precincts.

In 2007, Mayor Oh unveiled his grand plan of demolishing the old stadium and constructing a "Design Plaza" on the site. His justification for the demolition was that the dilapidated facilities, combined with street vendors crowding the area, were hindering the Dongdaemun area from growing bigger as a global shopping mecca.<sup>34</sup> Many civic groups opposed the proposed demolition. Heo Jeong-Hun, Secretary-General of Citizens United for Sports (*Chaeyuk Shimin Yeondae*) said, "As the first modern sports facility in Korea and a structure built by imperial Japan in 1925, Dongdaemun Stadium is a symbolic

---

<sup>31</sup> "임오군란 (Imo Coup)." *한국근현대사사전 (Korea Modern History Dictionary)*. 한국사사전편찬회, n.d. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Kim, Young-Chul. "'동양 최대'의 경성운동장 개장." *ChosunJoseon Daily* 17 Oct. 2012. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Kim, Eun-Shik. and Park, Jun-Su. *Dongdaemun Stadium*. Seoul: Brain Store, 2012. Print.

<sup>34</sup> Kim, Kyong-Eun. "동대문운동장은 재개발 논란 경기장." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 18 Sept. 2007. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.

cultural asset.” Hwang Pyeong-U, the chair of Cultural Action, echoed the sentiment: “Dongdaemun Stadium is worth registering as an official cultural asset. It should be managed at the national level.”<sup>35</sup> Despite its dilapidated exterior, many people recognized the value of Dongdaemun Stadium as a site rich in historical memory not only for the residents of Seoul but for Korean citizens at large. In spite of these voices of resistance that recognized the value of Dongdaemun Stadium as a historical artifact, if not as the site of livelihood for the flea market vendors, Mayor Oh was very excited to redevelop the site as a different kind of landmark. He made his ambition explicit when he said that he planned to “make a number of landmarks during his term, with the Dongdaemun Design Plaza as the representative landmark out of all the landmarks to be built in Seoul.”<sup>36</sup> This statement conforms precisely to the idea design politics—promoting a national image of highly developed society with sophisticated landmarks that would become known worldwide and lead to tourists from all over the world.

As the building of Dongdaemun Design Park got underway in 2010, it faced some unavoidable changes when a substantial number of Joseon Dynasty historical artifacts was found during the initial stage of construction. In an interview with *The Korea Herald*, Mayor Oh explained the change of plan in the following terms: “Shifting from the original plan of design facilities and green areas, the design park is now going to be a place where history and culture of Korea co-exist.”<sup>37</sup> The statement highlights a new emphasis on commemoration of Korean history and culture, while keeping the initial goal of creating a global landmark.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Kim, Su-Han. "오세훈 시장 “동대문 DDP 디자인 역사문화공원으로 조성.” [Http://news.heraldcorp.com/](http://news.heraldcorp.com/). Herald Economy, 1 Apr. 2010. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.



The final blueprint settled upon by the Oh administration thus added “History and Culture Park” to the Design Plaza that was the original focus of the project. In this blueprint, half of the Dongdaemun Design Park is dedicated to a large main structure, and the other half of the site is dedicated to be the “History and Culture Park.” History and Culture Park itself has three main features: Dongdaemun Stadium Memorial, devoted to the demolished stadium and heyday of high school baseball; History Museum that presents the long history of Dongdaemun and its surrounding vicinities during the Joseon Dynasty; and a couple of exhibition galleries that display the historical artifacts unearthed on the site. According to Seoul Design Foundation, History and Culture Park is intended to serve as a “living place of history education.”<sup>38</sup>

These facilities of History and Culture Park, however, are dwarfed by the giant structure that is to be the home of Dongdaemun Design Plaza. Designed by Zaha Hadid, a renowned Iraqi-British architect and the first female winner of Pritzker Architecture Prize, the structure looks like a giant metallic wave with some grass on top of it.<sup>39</sup> The structure shows almost no straight line, curvy shape and metal silver look combined with its unusual size remind viewers of a gigantic UFO. Calling it “Metonymic Landscape,” Zaha Hadid tried to symbolize historical, cultural, urban, societal and economic elements of Korea all united metonymically in a landscape.<sup>40</sup> But the question of scale and visibility makes readily obvious the nature of the relationship between the Design Plaza and History and Culture Park. “Metonymic Landscape” is so large that it can be seen in its entirety only from high above. The museums are much smaller in scale and arranged to

---

<sup>38</sup> "Main Facilities - Parks." *Seoul Design Foundation* 서울디자인재단. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

<sup>39</sup> "Biography: Zaha Hadid." *The Pritzker Architecture Prize*. The Hyatt Foundation, n.d. Web. 5 Oct. 2012.

<sup>40</sup> "Main Facilities – Dongdaemun Design Plaza Construction Concept." *Seoul Design Foundation* 서울디자인재단. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

one side of “Metonymic Landscape,” and would be completely invisible from the side where most tall buildings from which people can look down on the park are located. Despite Seoul Metropolitan Government’s repeated insistence that the entire project is supposed to celebrate the past, the present and the future, the blueprint of Design Plaza area celebrates only the future as it pushes the History Museum and Dongdaemun Stadium Memorial to one side and into the shadow of the “Metonymic Landscape.”

Marginalization of historical memory can also be seen in partial restoration of the remains of the fortress and training ground of Hadogam, the special fortress guards during the Joseon Dynasty, and Igan Sluice Gate, a crucial part of the capital city’s infrastructure remaining from its days as Hanyang. But even when 31,000 square meters out of 61,585 square meters of the site designated for the construction was further excavated for precious remains underneath, the recovered sluice gate was sandwiched right in the middle of the whole park. When the whole park was viewed from the side where shopping mall buildings are concentrated, the recovered remains are mostly hidden behind the “Metonymic Landscape.”<sup>41</sup> Looking at the effort that was put in to help this park somehow serve the function of “living place of history education,” it seems apparent that the objective of commemoration would be achieved only minimally at best. One might even conclude that the “History and Culture Park” side of the construction was built for the sake of being able to *claim* that the new Design Park is also serving the role of a memorial, when in actuality, that role has been subjugated to the goal of erecting a globally recognizable landmark. English cultural geographer David Harvey also supports the idea that history is more than merely a consumable entity, saying, “heritage must be

---

<sup>41</sup> Take a look at the map <http://ddp.seoul.go.kr/intro/park.php> 주요시설

allowed a wider scope than simply being portrayed as something that people do to fill their free time, or as a hostage to the whims of leisure fashion.”<sup>42</sup> Too concerned with the park’s ability to be consumed, Mayor Oh and the city government sacrificed the centuries of history and culture.

In the process, what has been killed off is “living history.” According to Na-Hyun Hwang, an architect in NHDM, Dongdaemun area is a “historically charged site.”<sup>43</sup> And the word ‘charged’ suggests that the history is active and alive. What this means is that the nature of history portrayed at the Dongdaemun Design Park is dead. According to Tessa Morris-Suzuki, memorials are the bridges between history and the visitors both at personal and national level.<sup>44</sup> History and people can convene when people come to the history through the bridge, but also when history approaches the people through the bridge as well. So the movement is mutual, and this means that not only the people, but also the history within the memorial has to be alive and moving. At Dongdaemun site, only the Joseon Dynasty part of the history is chosen and displayed, despite the value of Dongdaemun Stadium as a cultural asset that survived the history of colonization by Imperial Japan. On the site of demolished stadium, the city government dug up even older history, Seoul Fortress and Hadogam from Joseon Dynasty, both of which date well before the construction of the stadium.

The decision reveals SMG’s reluctance to confront any history that has the potential to be politicized, as there still are many ongoing political issues regarding the

---

<sup>42</sup> Harvey, David C. "Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7.4 (2001): 319-38. Print.

<sup>43</sup> Hwang, Na-Hyun. "At the Q&A session of *Talking Architect*." Screening of *Talking Architect*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. 5 Oct. 2012. Speech.

<sup>44</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Remembering the Unfinished Conflict: Museums and the Contested Memory of the Korean War," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 29-4-09, July 27, 2009.

legacies of the colonial era. Joseon Dynasty, on the other hand, is safe from contestations of this kind. Why was there this shift in focus away from the still present colonial history? I argue that depoliticization of history was a step toward molding the past into a consumable product.

On the other hand, the very process by which Zaha Hadid was selected as the architect of the Design Plaza reveals the global aspirations of the Oh administration. In seeking to commission a structure that can both serve as a symbol of the level of development Korea has achieved and spur on further development by attracting tourism and creative industries. SMG held ‘International Invitational Design Competition’ in 2007, inviting eight internationally acclaimed architects to compete for the design of Dongdaemun Design Plaza.<sup>45</sup> The winner was Zaha Hadid, “the elements of whose design were appropriate to highlight the design center as a core function of the city.”<sup>46</sup>

In response to the selection of Hadid’s “Metonymic Landscape,” several South Korean architects deplored as misguided the government’s insistence on a global landmark. Well-known for prioritizing her own distinctive design style over local specificity or architectural context, Zaha Hadid is unapologetically abstractionist.<sup>47</sup> Despite the attempt by the Seoul Design Foundation to argue for a degree of local context in her commissioned work—“What Ms. Hadid intended was to create a landscape by metonymically integrating the various historical, cultural, urban, societal, and economic

---

<sup>45</sup> Jo Sung-Ryong, Choi Mun-Gyu, Seung Hyo-Sang, Yoo Gul, Zaha Hadid, Steven Hall and FOA

<sup>46</sup> Jeon, Gi-Hyun, and Jin-Bae Park. "DDP in [Metonymic Landscape] ‘Why Zaha Hadid?’." *서울디자인웹진 (Seoul Design Webzine)*. 서울디자인재단 (Seoul Design Foundation), Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.

<sup>47</sup>Yang, Sang-Hyun. "디자인, 모자라거나 혹은 넘치거나." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.

features as exhibited by the Dongdaemun Design Plaza”<sup>48</sup>—architect Yang Sang-Hyun called Hadid’s work “an extreme of morphological experiment” and claimed that “the annelid-looking structure has no relation to the memories we have about this site (Dongdaemun).”<sup>49</sup> In Hadid’s structure, “various historical, cultural, urban, societal, and economic features” that are local to Korean history and to the site itself appear only “metonymically”; the nebulous word “metonymy” in this case is synonymous with the absence of local specificity. But where exactly in her structure do “various features” of Korea reside? Both global and domestic audiences would have time identifying what they are. If any effort was made at all to bring the architectural structure in conversation with Korean culture and history, this effort yielded a representation of a culture too abstract that even Korean experts could not locate it. “Metonymic Landscape” can probably be built anywhere on earth and still remain the same, since the specificity of Korean culture and of the site of Dongdaemun itself is very lightly, perhaps even negligibly represented.

In another set of commentaries about DDP, Seoul Design Foundation actually seems to negate its earlier claim about the embeddedness of Korean history and culture in Hadid’s futuristic design. According to these comments, the curvy DDP buildings and their arrangement in the park is meant to resemble the wave of water, representing flexibility of the space. Embodied in “Metonymic Landscape” is the philosophy of using architecture to enable people to think about something that was not imaginable in the

---

<sup>48</sup> "Design Infrastructure: Facilities - Metonymic Landscape." *Seoul Design Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Yang, Sang-Hyun. "디자인, 모자라거나 혹은 넘치거나." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.

past.<sup>50</sup> In such a characterization of DDP, the emphasis is on the future rather than on history as a lived reality in the present, despite the governmental rationale of creating a “living place of history education.” While it may be possible to “metonymically” see the wavelike appearance of the buildings as a reference, however indirect, to Igan Sluice Gate, or to link, again metonymically, the horizontal and vertical curves of “Metonymic Landscape,” to the mountainous terrain of Korea, it is clear that the structure makes no recognition of the lived and living history of the Dongdaemun area specifically.

This is precisely the problem singled out by Korean architects. Yu Gul and Seung Hyo-Sang, who participated in the “International Invitational Design Competition” that resulted in Hadid’s selection, have expressed their disappointment in the lack of cultural consideration evident in Dongdaemun Design Park.<sup>51</sup> Seung Hyo-Sang points out that Zaha Hadid claims herself that her style of architecture is independent from the site of construction. Seung laments that an architect who has no intention of reflecting the significance specific to a locality is designing a structure of a historically charged site. In fact, Seung’s entry for DDP followed a direction opposite from that of Hadid’s. Seeking to fully engage the historicity of Dongdaemun, Seung’s design recovered the submerged fortress walls completely rather than only partially, left the stands of Dongdaemun Stadium intact as an integral part of the park, and symbolically recreated the mountain that used to exist at the site.<sup>52</sup> Because SMG valued the attractiveness of a showy design, something more suitable for a landmark, Seung’s design did not win. However, considering the long-lasting effects of the environment on the residents, history

---

<sup>50</sup> "Design Infrastructure: Facilities - Metonymic Landscape." *Seoul Design Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.

<sup>51</sup> *Talking Architect*. Dir. Jae-Eun Chung. Feat. Chung Ki-Yong, Seung Hyo-Sang, Yu Gul. Dutayeon, 2011. Screening.

<sup>52</sup> "건축가 승효상." Interview by Seok-Hee Son. *손석희의 시선집중*. MBC. 19 Nov. 2011. Radio.

unrepresented may eventually lead to history in oblivion. Global recognition may be achieved through the splendidity of the current design of DDP, but only at the expense of remembrance of history. Moreover, from the perspective of the national interest as well, it would be more meaningful to spread the fame of Korean history attached to the DDP than to spread the fame of the DDP building itself as a brainchild of the designer Zaha Hadid.

For architect Moon Hoon, “Metonymic Landscape” is simply “Zaha’s Crap.” With this name, he mocks the structure’s lack of local specificity and sarcastically describes the actual look of the building from a bird’s eye view. In fact many architects have expressed growing worries over the trend in creative façade design free from the composition of interior space: “Façade designs that represent the purpose of the architecture and composition of the interior are losing popularity despite the praise given to the ‘honesty’ of the design.”<sup>53</sup> This trend, they fear, challenges and reverses the principle of “form follows function,” famously articulated by the American architect Louis Sullivian.<sup>54</sup> Public space has increasingly become exhibitionist, but upon the shiny silver exterior of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and inside its glittering surface, living history and local culture are nowhere to be found. The aspiration toward a global landmark may remain an empty dream when it fails to capture what makes the site locally specific and meaningful in the first place.

---

<sup>53</sup> Yang, Sang-Hyun. "디자인, 모자라거나 혹은 넘치거나." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Baek, Young-Ok. "백영옥이 만난 ‘색다른 아저씨’ 건축가 문훈." *news.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 1 Mar. 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2013.

## **Conclusion: The Future of Design Politics**

So far we have looked into the cases of public construction projects carried out in Seoul by the Design Administration of Oh Se-Hoon. Built to promote the new national image of Korea as a post-industrial country, the projects highlighted design as a symbol of Korea's advancement but also revealed major contradictions. For Gwanghwamun Plaza, the metropolitan administration and civic groups collided on the question of what it means to increase citizens' accessibility to public space. While the government viewed citizens as consumers of leisure spaces, civic groups demanded that they be recognized as active participants in the political process. For Dongdaemun Design Park, a site rich in living history and local culture was decontextualized and depoliticized in the process of creating a global landmark.

Under the grand ambition of fostering a new national image, these design projects together yielded consumerization of Korea—its people, as well as its culture and history. At the heart of the debates surrounding their construction may be the question of agency and the status of human lives that unfold within these spaces. Taking pride in what Korea has achieved differs from the phenomenon of consumerization in the way it positions people and what they mean in the society. If the national pride is the focus, people are the subject of achievement, the driving force that made things happen. But when the nation becomes a consumable product, people are the objects of consumption. Is there any possibility that the theme of design could change such dynamics of subjectivity?

Ironically enough, a partial answer may be found in a close examination of the vision statement of "Design Seoul." This vision is divided into "design strategy" and



“design principle.” Design strategy is “citizen-first design,” and design principle is “emptying, merging, cooperating, sustainable design.” Along with these mottos, Design Seoul Administration also suggests its ambition of bringing about “Designomics,” by linking public design and design industry together to promote Seoul’s competitiveness as a global city.<sup>55</sup> If citizens’ satisfaction is one of the foci in this vision, economic advancement is the other; in the middle lies the principle of “emptying, merging, cooperating and sustainable design,” even though that seems far from what was actually done. There appears to have been some confusion within the ranks of the city government about the exact direction that Design Administration should pursue.

As ideas, the vision statement contains many that appear promising. Had they been developed creatively with deep and equal consideration for every element that makes up the whole, “Design Administration” may not have garnered a far less attractive nickname, “Exhibitionist Administration.” But without the process of careful refinement of goals, and with the chaos resulting from conflicting visions, an environment was created where the slogan of “design” became a way of creating a façade around the hollow core.

Bringing the idea of design into the political scene was a brilliant start of a creative and flexible, the so-called twenty first century politics, but the politicians who initiated this process are still seem to sport a tunnel vision. In order for design politics to be a genuine innovation, it cannot simply borrow something already established and force it into a new framework. Applying design to politics needs to be different from applying it to the commercial industry or architecture. Creating a prettier public space is not the role of design in politics. A public construction is a public possession that serves the

---

<sup>55</sup> "Design Seoul: Vision." *Design Seoul*. Seoul Metropolitan Government, n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

citizens' needs, considered in a multi-faceted and holistic way, before it is an architectural project run by the government.

In order for this custom-made adaptation of design to politics to succeed, the very possibility of what design can mean must undergo expansion as well. What I mean by this is that “design,” rather than representing a static, pre-established concept, should be explored for all its creative potential in all kinds of new directions in order to find the right shape for its use in politics. In Oh Se-Hoon’s “Design Seoul,” design simply meant aesthetics. The projects undertaken with the slogan of design were limited only to the visual medium, such as public construction, or a design fair. The term “design,” however, means much more. Though the Korean loanword “design” refers mainly to the action of sketching or planning a product’s look or form, the general meaning of design includes the action of crafting a purpose, which refers to the planning or intention behind an action or a fact.<sup>56</sup> Within this broader definition, appearance is only a part of what constitutes “design,” not the whole. Illuminated in this light, the idea of ‘social design’ can be an alternative framework of design politics capable of achieving the government’s initial vision of putting “citizens-first.”

In exploring the concept of “Social Design,” we can take inspiration from the work of New Urbanists. According to architect Ellen Dunham-Jones, New Urbanists see the current post-industrial landscape to be regressive, promoting diverse, mixed-use, mixed-income communities instead.<sup>57</sup> Succeeding Oh Se-Hoon, Seoul’s current mayor Park Won-Soon has embraced “Social Design” in the New Urbanist sense as the design that changes life, society and people, a smart design that can reflect the thoughts, habits,

---

<sup>56</sup> "Design Seoul: Vision." *Design Seoul*. Seoul Metropolitan Government, n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Dunham-Jones, Ellen. "New Urbanism as a Counter-Project to Post-Industrialism." *Places [at] Design Observers* 13.2 (2000): 26-31. Print.

and culture of humans in a comprehensive way and upgrade their quality of life as a whole.<sup>58</sup> At the core of this design philosophy lie people. The philosophy is simple and modest: Things around people should be transformed to meet the needs of people, rather than transforming people to fit the government-dictated changes.

One step toward achieving this goal of people-centered politics is simply to open ears to listen. The new administration of Seoul under Mayor Park has hosted regular workshops called “Cheongchaek Workshop” to gather public opinion. “Cheong” is a Chinese character that means “to hear or listen” and “chaek” signifies “policy”; a neologism, “Cheongchaek” is just one letter different from “Jeongchaek,” the Korean word for policy.<sup>59</sup> The name of the workshop suggests the new administration’s determination to bring public opinion into the policymaking process.

An important facet of social design and people-centered politics is the question of welfare. The underlying philosophy behind social design is collective wellbeing of the society. The notion is to create a city or a nation where citizens of all different backgrounds to be happy together by providing more welfare benefits to support citizens of lower socio-economic strata. To Mayor Park and the supporters of social design, closing the gap of socio-economic status by strong welfare is the way to achieve “Sangsaeng,” or “co-prosperity.”<sup>60,61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Kim, Je-Dong. "변호사 박원순 (Lawyer Park Won-Sun)." *김제동이 만나러 갑니다*. Goyang: Wisdom House, 2011. 58+. Print.

<sup>59</sup> “서경이 만난사람 – 박원순 서울시장.” Interview by Doo-Hwan Chung. *서울경제 (Economy.Hankooki.com)* [Seoul] 11 Mar. 2013: n. pag. Web. 4 Apr. 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “새 정부에 바란다 – 광역단체장 인터뷰 박원순 서울시장 “상생 위해 대통령이 먼저 손 내밀었으면....” Interview by Bum-Taek Hong. *Naeil.com* [Seoul] 28 Jan. 2013: n. pag. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

To be sure, there are concerns about the philosophy of social design. Because the value of social design lies in meeting people's needs and wants, it may lead to populism, fiscally irresponsible promises made to the voting public in order to buy their political support. Even though fear of populism is most often voiced by people of higher socioeconomic status whose lives are less affected by welfare, they also comprise a segment of the citizenry and their voices should not be neglected. Taking the fear of populism to an extreme, the right-wing media have called Park's social design "dictatorship through populism"<sup>62</sup>.

Another criticism of social design is that such attention paid to meeting the current needs and wants of the people mortgages Seoul's future competitiveness. Kim Myung-Soo, the head of Seoul City Council, has charged that building landmarks and promoting tourism are important investments in growing the economic pie for the city of Seoul, and that this is a part of the equation that social design neglects.<sup>63</sup> Even though civil engineering and construction are not the only way to increase the city's competitiveness, they do indeed contribute to the growth of competitiveness of a city of a nation, if pursued in a balanced way.

Despite these concerns, social design does seem to offer an important corrective to the design politics of the former administration by refusing to sacrifice the content for form, and paying greater attention to the lived reality inside rather than seeking to manufacture a national image for the consumption of the outside world. Currently, the manifestation of social design in Seoul administration under the new mayor has its own

---

<sup>62</sup> KangChulKunHwa, (Iron Military Walker). "역시 박원순, 포퓰리즘 독재 시작되었다." *뉴데일리* (*New Daily*). N.p., 28 Oct. 2011. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Hwang, Hye-Jin. "김명수 서울시의회 의장 "박원순, 미래 위해 랜드마크 조성 적극 나서야"." [Http://news.heraldcorp.com/](http://news.heraldcorp.com/). Herald Economy, 4 Mar. 2013. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

problems. But the essence of social design remains people. A balanced approach to put this fundamental insight into practice will bring the definition of design one step closer to becoming aligned with the ideal development of a healthy society. Politics is the governance of people. When people who make up the nation are adequately cared for, the desired national image will come along in time.

## References

- Baek, Young-Ok. "백영옥이 만난 '색다른 아저씨' 건축가 문훈." *news.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 1 Mar. 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2013.
- "Biography: Zaha Hadid." *The Pritzker Architecture Prize*. The Hyatt Foundation, n.d. Web. 5 Oct. 2012.
- Cha, Victor. "'America's First Pacific President' Attends the Seoul G-20 Summit." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. N.p., 27 Oct. 2010. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- Chung, Heesun. "Producing Heritage as a Processed Product of History: An Examination of Meanings of the Reconstruction of Gwanghwamun in Seoul." *The Geographical Journal of Korea* 43.4 (2009): 515-29. Print.
- "Design Infrastructure: Facilities - Metonymic Landscape." *Seoul Design Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Apr. 2013.
- "Design Seoul: Vision." *Design Seoul*. Seoul Metropolitan Government, n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- "Facilities - Gwanghwamun Plaza." *서울시설공단*. Seoul Metropolitan Government, n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) MetaData : GDP per Head, US \$, Constant Prices, Constant PPPs, Reference Year 2005." (n.d.): n. pag. *OECD Stat Extracts*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Web. 2 Apr. 2013.
- Ha, Sang-Bok. "광화문의 정치학 예술과 권력의 재현." *한국정치학회보* 제 43 집 제 3 호 Sep. 2009: 77-98 한국정치학회. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.
- Harvey, David C. "Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7.4 (2001): 319-38. Print.
- Hwang, Hye-Jin. "김명수 서울시의회 의장 "박원순, 미래 위해 랜드마크 조성 적극 나서야"." [Http://news.heraldcorp.com/](http://news.heraldcorp.com/). Herald Economy, 4 Mar. 2013. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.
- Hwang, Na-Hyun. "At the Q&A session of *Talking Architect*." Screening of *Talking Architect*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. 5 Oct. 2012. Speech.

- Ihm, Chon-Sun. "South Korea's Economic Development." *Social Studies* 79.4 (1988): 165. Print.
- Jeon, Gi-Hyun, and Jin-Bae Park. "DDP in [Metonymic Landscape] 'Why Zaha Hadid?'" *서울디자인웹진 (Seoul Design Webzine)*. 서울디자인재단 (Seoul Design Foundation), Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.
- KangChulKunHwa, (Iron Military Walker). "역시 박원순, 포폴리즘 독재 시작되었다." *뉴데일리 (New Daily)*. N.p., 28 Oct. 2011. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.
- Kim, Eun-Shik. and Park, Jun-Su. *Dongdaemun Stadium*. Seoul: Brain Store, 2012. Print.
- Kim, Je-Dong. "변호사 박원순 (Lawyer Park Won-Sun)." *김제동이 만나러 갑니다*. Goyang: Wisdom House, 2011. 58+. Print.
- Kim, Kyong-Eun. "동대문운동장은 재개발 논란 경기장." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 18 Sept. 2007. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.
- Kim, Sang-Chul. '문화도시 서울, 어디로 가고 있나?' 서울시당 토론회. 27 Oct. 2009. 3 Api. 2013
- Kim, Su-Han. "오세훈 시장 "동대문 DDP 디자인 역사문화공원으로 조성." [Http://news.heraldcorp.com/](http://news.heraldcorp.com/). Herald Economy, 1 Apr. 2010. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.
- Kim, Young-Chul. "'동양 최대'의 경성운동장 개장." *ChosunJoseon Daily* 17 Oct. 2012. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.
- Lee, Kyong-Eun. "광화문은 광화문 거리의 잠재력을 다시 살려낼것." *SPACE Magazine*. N.p., 13 Sept. 2009. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.
- Lim Hyun-chin and Jang Jin-ho, "Between Neoliberalism and Democracy: The transformation of the developmental state in South Korea," *Development and Society* 35:1 (2006): 1-28.
- Lim, Hyun-Ju. "월드컵뎨 165 만명→'촛불'뎨 5 만명 이상한 '경찰 켐법'." *News.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 6 July 2008. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- Manor, James. "Who Is a Citizen?' A Multidimensional Question." *Citizenship As Cultural Flow Structure, Agency and Power*. N.p.: Springer Verlag, 2013. 107-20. Print.
- "Main Facilities – Dongdaemun Design Plaza Construction Concept." *Seoul Design Foundation 서울디자인재단*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.

- "Main Facilities - Parks." *Seoul Design Foundation 서울디자인재단*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Apr. 2013.
- "Mayor Oh Se-Hoon." Interview by Eun-Jae Lee. *Polinews.co.kr*. N.p., 5 Oct. 2010. Web. 2 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.polinews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=63219>>.
- Moon, Seungsook. "The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*. Vol. 19-5-09, 9 May 2009. Web. 21 Feb. 2013.
- Ryu, Young U, Jae Kyeong Kim, and Il Young Choi. "The Role of IT in Korea's Economic Development." *Information Technology and Management* 14.1 (2013): 3. Print.
- Schot, Johan, and Adri A. De La Bruheze. "The Mediated Design of Products, Consumption, and Consumers in the Twentieth Century." *How Users Matter: The Co-construction of Users and Technologies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003. N. pag. Print.
- Shin, Mi-Ji. "아이리스·스노보드 대회, 구경만 하라고요?" *오마이뉴스 (Oh My News)*. N.p., 12 Sept. 2010. Web. 11 Apr. 2013.
- Talking Architect*. Dir. Jae-Eun Chung. Feat. Chung Ki-Yong, Seung Hyo-Sang, Yu Gul. Dutayeon, 2011. Screening.
- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Remembering the Unfinished Conflict: Museums and the Contested Memory of the Korean War," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 29-4-09, July 27, 2009.
- White, Stuart Gordon. *The Civic Minimum: On the Rights and Obligations of Economic Citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.
- "World Design Capital | Vision and Mission." *World Design Capital*. www.icsid.org, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2013.
- Yang, Sang-Hyun. "디자인, 모자라거나 혹은 넘치거나." *Newsmaker.khan.co.kr*. Kyunghyang, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2013.
- "건축가 승효상." Interview by Seok-Hee Son. *손석희의 시선집중*. MBC. 19 Nov. 2011. Radio.
- "광화문광장을 '평화의 마당' 이 되게." *Hankuk Daily* 24 Jun. 2009. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.



"광화문광장은 시민들이 자유롭게 이용할 수 있어야." *참여연대 (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy)*. N.p., 31 July 2009. Web. 11 Apr. 2013

"서경이 만난사람 – 박원순 서울시장." Interview by Doo-Hwan Chung. *서울경제 (Economy.Hankooki.com)* [Seoul] 11 Mar. 2013: n. pag. Web. 4 Apr. 2013.

서울특별시 광화문광장의 사용 및 관리에 관한 조례. Korea Ministry of Government Legislation. *Ordinance number 4800*. 28 May 2009. Web.

"새 정부에 바란다 – 광역단체장 인터뷰 박원순 서울시장 “상생 위해 대통령이 먼저 손 내밀었으면....” Interview by Bum-Taek Hong. *Naeil.com* [Seoul] 28 Jan. 2013: n. pag. Web. 12 Apr. 2013.

"임오군란 (Imo Coup)." *한국근현대사사전 (Korea Modern History Dictionary)*. 한국사사전편찬회, n.d. Web. 20 Mar. 2013.