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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A study on courtyard apartment types in South Korea from the 1960s to 1970s

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Abstract

In the 1960s, when apartments were being introduced in South Korea and were not yet standardized, diverse attempts at construction were made. However, due to factors such as the preference for houses that face south, apartment planning principles were unified. The present study intended to find out characteristics that can be applied to the current demands by studying cases of experimental plans among apartments, understanding the plans of courtyard apartments and classifying the cases into different types. The types of 29 courtyard apartments constructed in 1960-1970s in Seoul were analyzed. The apartments were classified into complex types that refer to cases where many buildings form a courtyard, block types, and open types. © 2017 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Approximately 50 years after the 1962 construction of Mapo Apartments, which can be regarded as the first fully fledged apartment complex in South Korea, apartments have been established as a representative housing type in the country. In Korea, collective housing units are called apartments, whether they are rented or owned by the occupants. Apartments compose 59% (Korea Statistics, 2015) of houses

in South Korea, regardless of region, family type, or social status. A housing culture is created by the will of a society and is formed by social, economic, and natural factors; materials, technology, and institutional and regulatory acts also shape the housing culture (Son, 1993). Owing to the uniform development to maximize economic efficiency, apartments have been fixed into large-scale, high-rise, flat-type, or tower-type complexes that face south (Park, 2004).

As alternatives to the uniform apartment complexes, courtyard apartment types, such as Eunpyeong New Town, have been attempted. In South Korea, however, courtyard apartments almost disappeared after being experimentally constructed in the 1960-1970s when apartment houses were

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introduced. Since the area of apartments facing south in courtyard-type structures is much smaller compared to linear types, such as the I-form and T-form, courtyard apartment types ran counter to the tendency of preferring houses that face south. Courtyard apartments began to disappear thereafter.

The recent demand for courtyards, despite the aforementioned shortcoming, are attributable to consumers' desire for differentiation from existing housing types and for the diversification of choices. This condition stems from their desire for communities in cities that have been lost due to the standardization of linear apartment complexes and from the improvement of their quality of life. Therefore, the present study intends to discover characteristics that are applicable to current demands by understanding the principles and plans in the 1960-1970s, classifying the characteristics, and examining how those characteristics can be reflected in urban plans and designs.

The research method consists of classification and qualitative analysis through a literature survey and field survey. The field survey is conducted in parallel with the literature survey. Non-existent cases collect data through the literature. Sixteen courtyard apartments constructed in the 1960s and 1970s were identified by previous studies, and 13 cases were inferred to be courtyard apartments through maps. Seven cases were studied in detail by the field survey. The present study is composed as follows. In [Section 2](#), theories of modern collective housing are discussed. In [Section 3](#), comprehensive analyses of the types of courtyard apartments are conducted. In [Section 4](#), the examined case of a courtyard apartment is explained. Finally, in [Section 5](#), the meaning of the present study is examined in the conclusion.

2. Theory of modern collective housing

Investigating the logic of collective housing under modernism, which was derived from Europe, is necessary to examine the principles of planning and the influx of collective housing to South Korea. In this way, we can deduce the logical influence and background of how the linear type apartment became the dominant type of collective housing in Korea. Although apartments have existed as collective housing in many parts of the world for a long time, apartments have been constructed mainly as collective housing in densely populated cities in the West. The Industrial Revolution in the early 19th century brought massive demographic changes to Europe. As a result, apartment construction also underwent major changes ([Jang, 1994](#)). [Le Corbusier \(2003\)](#) claimed that housing is a "machine for living" and regards collective housing as a mass-produced and standardized product. Instead of interpreting the organization and type of the existing city, Le Corbusier's logic focuses on creating the ideal type of housing in a modern context after industrialization. Therefore, he was interested in the buildings themselves and in the city that they are building rather than the relationship of new buildings with the existing city. The logic of his high-rise apartments can be summarized as a high-rise concept on a green space. Building a low-rise housing in a limited area of the city means that the area that covers the ground is much larger, so less land is available for the residents.

When a building is constructed on a high-rise area, the area covering the ground is reduced so that the building can be greened to receive clean air and sunlight. This argument was a groundbreaking idea for the housing situation at that time, which had poor environmental conditions. It can be seen as a suggestion that all residents can enjoy the green space by establishing a wide public land as Le Corbusier claimed. This logic then served as a strong basis for the adoption of high-rise apartments ([Collective Housing Research Society, 1997](#)).

In addition to the logic of the high-rise apartments by Le Corbusier, the process of generalization of a linear type of apartment will be considered in the present study. Since 1920, the new type of collective housing that has emerged in Europe has been the linear middle-rise apartment. This type, which started in Germany, began in a small town residential complex around the big city, which was mainly funded by the government. At that time, most of the housing types in Europe were courtyards. The width of the courtyard was so small that ventilation and light were not good. In this situation, a linear type of apartment appeared to provide sufficient light and ventilation to all the units. It was the most reasonable type of housing to the architects who led the modern architectural movement. In addition to the positive evaluation of this type of housing, which was the most appropriate form of the "rationalization and standardization" of the International Conference on Modern Architecture, the residential apartment complex structure based on the repetitive arrangement of a linear type of apartment was continuously proposed and implemented. These architectural principles persisted, and they spread all over the world, including throughout Europe and the United States ([Son, 1993](#)).

3. Types and characteristics of apartments constructed in the 1960-1970s

In the 1960s, the entire Korean population increased, and the rural population began leaving for the city due to economic development and industrialization. Consequently, urbanization progressed rapidly, leading to problems such as housing shortages, increase of unlicensed shantytowns, and deterioration of the quality of housing environments. Following the construction of the Mapo Apartments in 1962, Hangang Public Official Apartments (1966) and Citizens' Apartments (1967-1970) were constructed, and the development of apartment-centered, multi-family housing complexes began. To support the construction of apartments, the Building Act (1962) and the Public Housing Act (1963) were established, and the Korea Housing Corporation was founded. Mapo Apartments were the first complex-type apartments in South Korea, and they are meaningful in that they propagated apartment culture by having the general public recognize the concept of the apartment complex. They played the role of changing the existing traditional housing lifestyles into Western housing lifestyles; the apartments were equipped with the first individual briquette boilers in South Korea, room-heating systems, and flush toilets. They introduced the concept of Western-style sedentary housing life ([Jeon et al., 2008](#)).

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