

Attracting Tourists: Architecture for Tourism during the Period of Korean Empire, 1897-1910

Authors : Lina Shinhwa Koo

Abstract : The Korean Empire, or Daehanjeguk, was proclaimed by King Gojong (1852-1919) in 1897 with the aim of promoting its sovereignty as a nation-state amid the political situation with threats from neighbouring countries, such as Japan and Russia. The Korean Empire period (1897-1910), which lasted until 1910, when Japan annexed Korea, is a pivotal time in the modern history of Korea. It was also during the period when many infrastructures for tourism, including transportation and lodging systems, were established. Throughout the Korean Empire period, tourists from Japan and Euro-American countries popularly visited Korea after it opened its doors relatively recently. The government of the Korean Empire also actively engaged with foreign officials and professionals. Train stations were built to connect Busan, where foreigners first arrived through the port of Jemulpo, with Seoul, the capital of Korea. In addition, hotels were built to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. Shedding new light on the modern architectural history of Korea, this paper discusses buildings that were made for tourism during the Korean Empire period to examine the historical background behind the tourism development in Korea and the concept of travelling related to architecture history. Foreigners came to Korea for varying reasons, from ethnographic research and diplomacy to business and missionary. They also played a key role in the transportation and hotel businesses. For instance, American entrepreneur James R. Morse received a concession to construct a railway between Busan and Seoul in 1896, which was later granted to a Japanese firm. Japanese entrepreneurs came to Korea and built hotels, such as Daebul Hotel in Incheon and Paseongwan in Seoul. Sontag Hotel, Station Hotel and Hotel du Palais, all located in central areas of Seoul, were owned by German, British and French entrepreneurs, respectively. Each building showed distinctive architectural elements. For example, Sontag Hotel was built in Russian architectural style, whereas Paseongwan was created with a combination of Japanese and European styles. Such various architectural designs indicated the multicultural urban scenes of the Korean Empire at the time. The existing scholarship has paid more attention to the royal buildings built during the Korean Empire period, such as Seokjojeon of the Duksu Palace. However, it is important to study the tourism-related architecture that reflected the societal situation of the Korean Empire when contrasting ideologies, landscapes, historical narratives and political tensions intertwined and co-existed. Examining both textual and visual resources, such as news articles and photographs, this paper surveys architectural styles and the trajectories of selective examples of hotels and train stations within the discussion of temporality and spatiality in the discipline of social science. In doing so, one can re-assess the history of the Korean Empire as the intersection of modern and traditional, intrinsic and extrinsic and national and international.

Keywords : Korean empire, modern Korean architecture, tourism, hotel, train station

Conference Title : ICKAA 2023 : International Conference on Korean Art and Architecture

Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain

Conference Dates : October 23-24, 2023