

Traditionalism and Modernity in Seoul's Urban Planning for the Disabled

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Abstract : For the last three decades, Seoul has experienced an exponential increase in population and concomitant rapid urbanization. With such development, Korea adopted a predominantly Western style of architecture but still based the structures on Korea's traditionalism and Confucian precepts of pung su (feng shui). While Korean urban planning is focusing on balancing out the modernism and traditionalism in its city architecture, particularly in and landmark sites like The Seoul N Tower and Gyeongbok Palace, the accessibility and convenience concerns of minorities in social groups like the disabled are habitually disregarded. With the implementations of ramps and elevators, the welfare of all citizens seemed to improve. According to the dictates of traditional Korean culture, it was crucial for those construed as "disabled" or "underprivileged" to feel natural in the city of Seoul, which is planned and built with the background aesthetic theory of being harmonized with nature. It was interesting and also alarming to see the extent to which Korean landmarks were lacking facilities for the disabled throughout the city. Standards set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Seoul Metropolitan City insist that buildings accommodate the needs of the disabled as well as the non-disabled equally, but it was hard to find buildings in Seoul - old or new - that fulfilled all the requirements. If fulfilled, some of the facilities were hard to find or not well maintained. There is thus a serious concern for planning reform in connection with Seoul's 2030 Urban Plan. This paper argues that alternative planning could better integrate Korea's traditionalist architecture and concepts of pung su rather than insist on the necessity of Western-style modernism as the sole modality for achieving accessibility for the disabled in Korea.

Keywords : accessibility, architecture of Seoul , Pung Su (Feng Shui), traditionalism, modernism in Seoul

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