Swoo-Geun Kim, Arko Theater, Liver Research Institute of Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. © Inha Jung, 2014

The Correlativity of Building Form and Urban Space: Swoo-Geun Kim's Daehangno Projects in Seoul

BY INHA JUNG

Swoo-Geun Kim's building projects in the Daehangno area of Seoul provide a remarkable example of how architects can respond to high-density environments. They also illustrate both the theoretical and the practical dimensions of the concept of correlativity, still having the potential to show us a way forward. Inspired by the urban equivalent of a traditional village structure, Kim sublimated into modern building types the fluid indeterminate spaces created by its alleyways and courtyard. This legacy is what has enabled these buildings to survive handsomely for some thirty years amid the omnipresent threat of high-density development in Seoul.

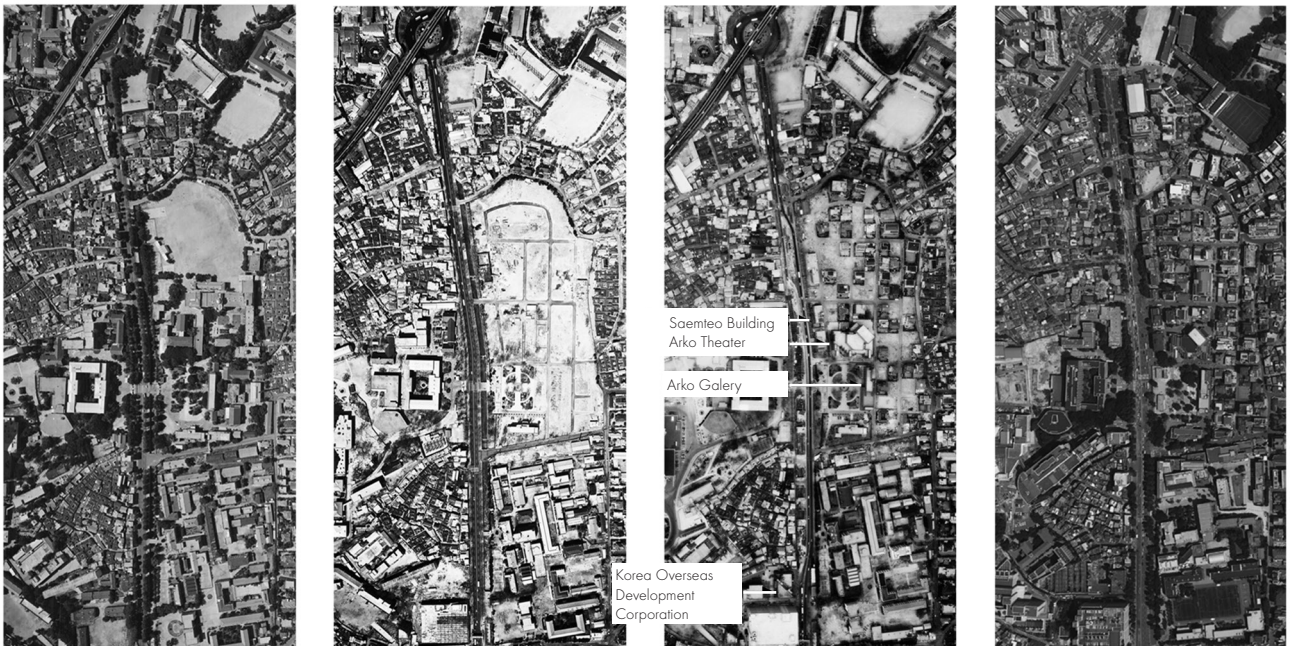
Introduction

Swoo-Geun Kim's building projects in the Daehangno area of Seoul provide an illuminating example of how architects can respond to high-density environments, and they still have the potential to show us a way forward. Indeed, a close look at Kim's approach to these projects will reveal how one architect, in particular, was able to mount a creative intervention to regenerate the old town and give it a new urban identity. The American scholar Kevin Lynch has identified four distinct roles that planners and architects can play in the decision process of urban planning: they can act as advocates, informers, project designers, or public planners, depending on the situation[1]. Among the four, the role of the project designer or the project planner predominated in East Asian cities because its practitioners were able "to pursue highly centralized top-down procedures in planning and building regulation"[2]. Not only did they work for a specific client, such as a corporation or government agency, but they were only charged with "preparing a solution to some limited, well-defined problem, according to an explicit set of purposes"[3]. In the 1960s, Swoo-Geun Kim had played this role in the development of large-scale plans for Yeouido Island and the Sewoon Commercial Complex. But in the 1970s, when he turned his attention to the Daehangno area of Seoul, he began to search for new options. The choices were limited. The role of the informer who seeks to educate the public with accurate information about planning issues is predicated on traditions of citizenship and grass-roots self-governing that simply did not exist in East Asia at the time. The role of a planning advocate who seeks to be persuasive on behalf of an interest group was also problematic, because most of the urban concepts then in use had been abstracted from the experience of Western cities. How then could one respond adequately to the reality of East Asian cities?

The remaining option of a public planner — a planner, that is, who works in the public interest — was the role that Swoo-Geun Kim began to assume as he executed a series of projects in the Daehangno area. Implicit in this approach was the concept of *correlativity,* a term derived from the *correlative thinking* that some scholars have placed at the core of Chinese thought[4]. With a long history in East Asian architecture, the concept has dual meanings in the context of urban design: first, it means that architecture is seen as an integral part of the whole city. In fact, architecture is a microcosm of the city, with building form analogous to urban structure. Second, it means that a close linkage is maintained between buildings and the urban tissue through the complementarities of the void and the solid — in other words, through a continuous flow between interior and outer space. These mutual relationships, as Swoo-Geun Kim saw, become more compelling when an architect is able to uphold the public interest as the top priority of his design. Unlike the large-scale projects he pursued in the 1960s, when he sought to insert radical new mega structures into the tissue of old Seoul, the Daehangno projects revealed his subsequent awareness that heroic mega structures destroyed the historic identity of Seoul, producing an urban chaos that could only be resolved with an entirely different approach.

Three Layers of History

The name Daehangno literally means "university street" and refers specifically to the 1,55 km long and 25,00–40,00 m wide main road leading from Jongno 5-Ga to the Hyehwa rotary. When Koreans say Daehangno, however, they also mean the larger area spreading from the main road to Mt. Naksan, and from Korea National Open University to Dongsung High School. In 1985, the city government designated this area as Seoul's Art and Culture District,



01 Urban transformation of Daehangno: the aerial photographs of 1974 showing the buildings of Seoul National University in the Daehangno area, of 1977 showing its empty campus, of 1981 showing Kim's completed buildings, and of the current Daehangno, Seoul, South Korea. © Seoul Metropolitan Government.

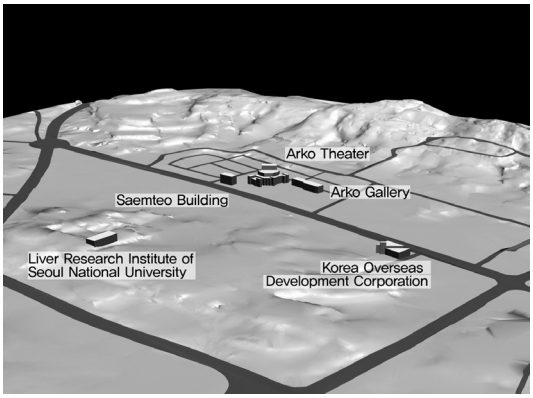
and Daehangno soon became the center for youth culture. With a concentration of schools, theaters, and other cultural facilities, the area also features stylish stores, restaurants and galleries, making it one of Seoul's major tourist attractions.

During the Joseon dynasty, Daehangno was located on the periphery, a small distance from the city center, but it was subsequently engulfed by the rapidly expanding downtown area of Seoul in the years following the Japanese colonial occupation. The history of Daehangno can be seen in the rich layering that characterizes its urban texture. There are three major layers superimposed. The first was laid down after King Taejo, the founder of the Joseon dynasty, designated Seoul as his new capital in 1392. After selecting its location in accordance with traditional *fengshui* precepts, he placed major public buildings within the great city wall linking the inner four mountains of the region[5]. The Daehangno area is located just below Mt. Naksan, one of the four mountains and the eastern boundary of the city wall.

The second layer was created amid the modernization that took place during the turbulent twentieth century. In 1907, the Gyeongmogung palace, which had served as a shrine dedicated to Crown Prince Sado, was turned into Seoul's first modern hospital, Daehan Hospital, whose main building and various wards were located near Daehangno. In addition, Western-style buildings were built for the capital's Industrial Laboratory at the foot of Mt. Naksan in 1916. The changes continued when the decree for the creation of Gyeongseong Imperial University was promulgated in 1924. Many university buildings lined up on both sides of the main street in Daehangno. After liberation from Japanese occupation, the Imperial University was reorganized as Seoul National University, and major academic buildings including the university's headquarters took their place here. Daehangno became the center of college life and remained its hub until the university moved to its Gwanak campus in 1975.

The third layer consists of what was created on the newly empty campus. While the buildings of the medical college still remained to the east, the rest of the academic buildings, except for the headquarters, were demolished. The university's land was sold to the Korea National Housing Corporation, which initially planned to construct a luxury apartment complex on the former campus. But when this plan met with fierce public opposition, the corporation altered course and decided to subdivide the area into small lots (each about 400 m^2) and offer them for sale to the public. This abandonment of top-down planning and openness to the market is what allowed a new urban form and identity to emerge. Swoo-Geun Kim, who was among those who had objected to the creation of a luxury apartment complex on Daehangno, became directly involved when he acquired one of the three parcels intended for the new Arko Gallery of the Arts Council Korea. He wanted to use his lot to build staff housing for Arko and promoted the idea of developing the entire area as a cultural center for Seoul. As influential figures in the cultural and political arenas got on board, the idea reached fruition when Chang-Bong Choi, deputy director of Arts Council Korea, endorsed the full-scale development of Marronnier Park as a cultural centerpiece on the former campus.

02–03 Traditional hanok village of Bukchon in 1954 and its spatial diagram, Seoul, South Korea. © In-Sik Lim, 1954, In In-Sik Lim; Chung-Eui Lim, *Geuttae Geu Moseup*, Seoul, Baleon, 1993, p. 17.



04 Swoo-Geun Kim's five Daehangno projects, Seoul, South Korea. © Jung-Hee Yoon, 2014.

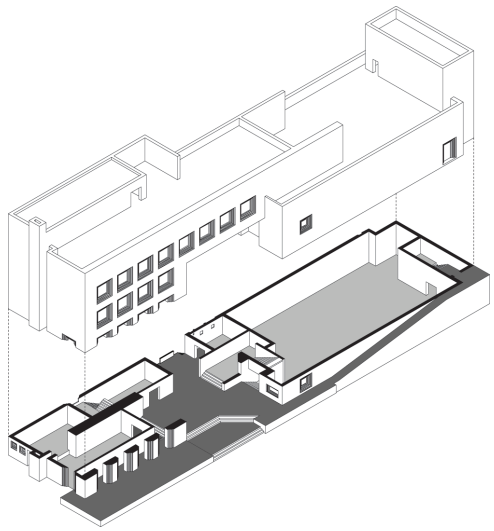
The Urban Spaces Between

Swoo-Geun Kim's inspiration for his projects in Daehangno was the distinctive urban space found in the Bukchon area of Seoul. Located between the Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung palaces, Bukchon has maintained its character as a traditional residential village since the Joseon dynasty. Its urban structure is unique because it was spontaneously formed. In other words, the topography of old Seoul, surrounded by its four inner mountains, spawned here an irregular, tree-like street system with many *cul-de-sacs.* As a result, the alleys of Bukchon are closer in character to the indeterminate spaces that lie between houses than to the throughways of modern cities. They serve as semi-private spaces for the use of neighbors. During the colonial period, these alleys were lined with traditional houses, or *hanok,* each with a courtyard, called the *madang.* The interpenetration of the alleyways and *madang* created the kind of fluid urban space that later Western architects have explored since the 1960s, dubbing it the "urban void"[6]. Swoo-Geun Kim's family settled in Bukchon when they left Cheongjin in 1938 to educate him in Seoul. When he returned to Korea after a long stay studying architecture in Tokyo, he settled in Bukchon again. Accordingly, he knew thoroughly every inch of the village, including its curious alleys and *madang.* He later said, "Urban roads consist of the space between houses. They are the living room and playground of the city, and a stage where different aspects of life unfold. As multifunctional places and the ever-changing core of the city, they are essential urban elements generating a unique lifestyle"[7].

The Arko Gallery was the first of Swoo-Geun Kim's projects in Daehangno. The architectural program for the building was based on spatial concepts explored in his Space Group Building (Gonggan Saok), completed in Bukchon a year earlier. The Space Group Building, which served as his office and residence, was the crucial achievement of Kim's long career. Through a series of experiments and revisions over a six-year period, he had arrived at the creation of an innovative building type that layered vertically overlapping spaces. In particular, a long sequence connecting separate places and the many intermediate spaces of the building recalled the alleys, stairs, and *madang* of Bukchon. For the Arko Gallery, Kim proposed to modify that format, placing more weight on the implications of the building's urban context. From the initial phase of design, he clearly intended to create a continuous flow from the park to the surrounding urban space. To this end, he opened up the central part of the building so as to link the small alleys on the Mt. Naksan side to Marronnier Park, promoting a direct communication. Even though buildings located on the edge of a park can act like a fence[8], the architect wanted his building to serve as the gateway for a continuous flow, not a last terminal. This vision was a profound interpretation of the site's potential, and it stemmed from the architect's emerging view of the public interest. He understood that cultural buildings should not be closed spaces separated from the outside, but intimate places where many people can easily take part in cultural events. To him, a museum wasn't simply a space for the exhibition of art works but a total system meant to provide an opportunity for ordinary

people to come into contact with potentially life-changing perceptions and events. In his view, "architecture ceases to be a backdrop for actions, becoming the action itself." In other words, "space and events affect each other"[9].

Swoo-Geun Kim's wish was that his buildings would catalyze a spurt of cultural activity in the city, and that those activities would enrich the urban experience of its citizens. But during the design deliberations, his view was opposed by city government officials who still believed that cultural facilities should have a monumental and authoritative character. According to their thinking, the gallery needed to be controlled, and it was imperative that permission be obtained whenever anyone wished to use the exhibition space. Faced with this opposition, Kim was forced to compromise, modifying his initial scheme. He retained his basic idea but installed a temporary fence to prevent the arbitrary passage of visitors through the site. Nowadays the passageway is open to the public.



05 Swoo-Geun Kim, Arko Gallery, Daehangno, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. © Mina Kim, 2014.

After completing the gallery, Kim immediately began the design of Arko Theater. Its form would be determined by the relationship between its inner function and its urban context. The building occupies one side of the park, and at the same time is located at a sort of node connecting newly developed urban spaces with the park. Kim hoped his building would draw visitors away from the street. Toward this end, its surface is characterized by unique brick wall compositions. The architect wanted it to reflect the changing views of the building as one accesses it from Marronnier Park. The two highest brick walls act as focal points when approaching the building from Daehangno street, and the gradually set backed walls usher the visitor's eyes into the building itself. Through these means, the massive brick wall of the theater has been articulated into segments on a human scale.

Within its urban setting, the building form of the theater has proved to be highly influential in the design of cultural spaces in Korea. Until its creation, the authoritative manner as represented by the high colonnade and grandiose hall of the National Theatre or Sejong Cultural Center was common to the design of cultural centers. Instead, Kim introduced the concept of an intimate theater space. Even though Arko Theater with 700 seats is classified as a large performance facility, the architect succeeded in creating a performance space that feels like a small theater but yet is capable of accommodating a wide range of dramatic performances. To do this, Kim treated the slope of the auditorium down to the stage more steeply than the existing design standard, with a height difference between the front seat and the top seat of more than 3.00 m[10]: the result was to transform the operation of the theater. Performance works that would seem ill suited for a large theater have been regularly staged, to the applause and approval of audiences and critics alike.

Continuous Spatial Flows

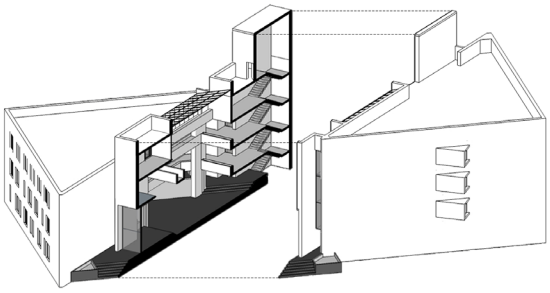
After completing his first two buildings in Marronnier Park, Swoo-Geun Kim added three more with a similar presence. Together, they lend consistency to the urban tissue of Daehangno. One of them is the Korea Overseas Development Corporation building, constructed on the site of the former College of Fine Arts of Seoul National University. This building was intended to incorporate offices previously scattered throughout several buildings into one. Its site, 50m away from Marronnier Park, is located on a corner where two roads meet at a right angle. A few willow trees adorn the eastern edge of the site.

The most impressive feature of this building is that a rectangular site has been divided into two triangular masses by a diagonal, all of them slightly slipped, with a band-shaped passage inserted between the two shifted triangular masses. Swoo-Geun Kim proposed this solution after fully considering the site requirements. The two issues he struggled with initially were how to secure adequate parking space while still connecting the new building to an existing one located at its rear. Because the site was confined, these were not easy issues to solve. He addressed the problem by creating a corridor and central courtyard that serve to connect the main entrance on the Daehangno side to a secondary entrance leading to the parking lot. In addition, positioning the main entrance on a corner can put undue emphasis on the frontality of a building. But with the front mass diagonally pulled back by the middle corridor, the building's rear mass now acts as a backdrop that grasps the visitor's eyes. Setting a brick tower between the two triangular masses accentuates the presence of the main entrance, and Kim added stairs in front of the entrance, preserving the willow tree.

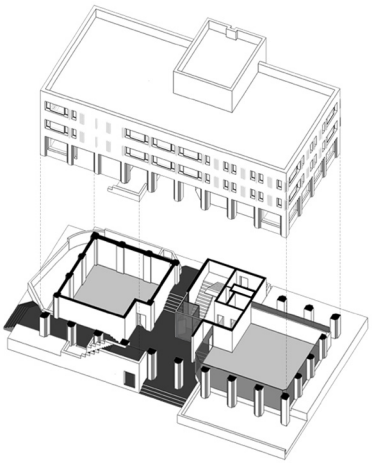
The interior space of the Korea Overseas Development Corporation building consists of a central courtyard formed between the two diagonally shifted masses, lit by a skylight. Bridges between the two masses overhang the courtyard, creating a variety of spatial effects. In spite of the alterna-

tion of opening and closing walls, the inner space is relatively stable thanks to the unity of the material and texture and the illumination from the skylight. One drawback of this design, however, was a net reduction of available space, due to the diagonal courtyard. In addition, triangular rooms proved awkward when it came to equipping them with furniture.

The design of the Saemteo Building, adjacent to the Arko Theater, was a commission awarded to Swoo-Geun Kim through his personal relationship with Jai-Soon Kim, former chairman of the National Assembly and the founder of Saemteo Magazine. They had known each other before their work in Daehangno and found that they really hit it off well when they commonly resolved to develop the area as a cultural center for Seoul. Drawing on his innovations in the Space Group Building, Kim accommodated complex functions such as a *café*, a small theater, and several galleries in one building. His method of distributing those functions through the interior space was also very similar. One difference is that the Space Group Building has a skip-floor circulation system, because it is sited on a steep slope, while the Saemteo Building does not. Furthermore, while the Space Group Building is composed of two articulated masses, the Saemteo Building is treated as a single mass. More crucially, while the Space Group Building had no need to consider the passage of pedestrians, Kim felt it important to create a circulation flow in the Saemteo Building that would fuse the building indissolubly with the urban space around it. To do so, he turned part of the ground floor into a communal space. Today, seen from the perspective of the communality of architecture, this building was very much ahead of its time, displaying major features of what has come to be called landscaped architecture.



06 Swoo-Geun Kim, Korea Overseas Development, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. © Yung-Sun Jang, 2014.

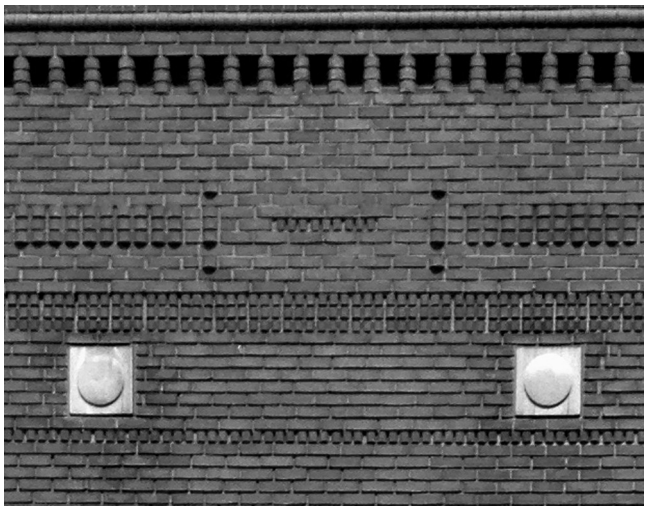


07 Swoo-Geun Samteo Building Daehangno, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. © Yung-Sun Jang, 2014.

Bricks and a Consistent Urbanscape

In Daehangno, Swoo-Geun Kim continued his practice of using the most affordable local materials to secure a consistent urban landscape. One of the prominent changes in the works he undertook in the 1970s was his adoption of the use of bricks. Previously, he had tended to use exposed concrete, under the influence of the New Brutalism movement in architecture, but a close study of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses in Oak Park, Illinois, convinced him that bricks also held a strong appeal. As he later recalled, he had been struggling to find proper materials to express the locality of Korea when a producer of traditionally made bricks offered to supply them to him free of charge. But as he discovered, bricks were far from a simple material. In an interview, when asked why he used bricks, he replied, "Bricks are easy to obtain, and their texture appeals to Korean taste." He went on to elaborate: "I was greatly influenced by the traditional Korean bricks called *jeondol*. I think bricks stand for something that can be easily handled by people. I love their warmth, but I also want to point out the plasticity of the material. Bricks must be piled one by one. To me, this implies a process of gradual humanization"[11].

This fondness for bricks was a good fit for the particular urbanity of Daehangno. Prior to the opening of Korea to foreign countries in 1876, *jeondol* bricks had been used occasionally but were not mass produced, so brick buildings were rare. After the country's opening, bricks were mainly imported from China, but that supply was interrupted by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894. When Korea became a protectorate of Japan in 1905, the colonial administrators created the Takjibu brick factory to supply bricks for the new buildings planned for the empire. Dahan Hospital in Daehangno was the first of these to be constructed. In a similar vein, the new buildings of Gyeongseong Imperial University, conceived by the Japanese architects attached to the Government-General of Joseon, went up in 1924. These buildings adopted simplified Romanesque forms and used yellowish brown scratch tiles as finishing[12]. On major buildings, multi-layered arch porticos were used to accentuate their frontality.



08–09 Swoo-Geun Kim, Arko Theater, Liver Research Institute of Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. © Inha Jung, 2014.

10 Swoo-Geun Kim, Arko Gallery, Daehangno, Seoul, South Korea, 1977–1979. Brick details. © In Space Magazine, Jan. 1980, p. 76

Swoo-Geun Kim's buildings in Daehangro were designed as reinforced concrete structures with red brick cladding. To enhance the surface of the brick façades, he added a number of inventive details. In the Arko Gallery, a remarkable motif is the irregular protrusion of bricks from the wall on the Marronnier Park side. This feature dramatically emphasizes the visual properties of the material, lending a singularity to the entire building. Since the wall is oriented toward the west, the shadows cast by sunlight as it plays across the protruded bricks project so strongly that they seem to stand out in stark relief on the wall. To Kim, this method of articulation was a succinct way to add texture to a plain wall whose scale would otherwise seem too immense. To realize his idea, in the absence of desktop computers (which had not yet been introduced), the architect indicated the location of each protruded brick with a dot drawn directly on the wall. Assistants then made 1:20 drawings to guide the plan's execution[13].

Swoo-Geun Kim also used other methods to reduce the weight of massive brick walls. In the Arko Gallery, he experimented with multi-layered openings reminiscent of Gothic portals. He had been impressed with the arch porticos of the former headquarters of Gyeongseong Imperial University, and he wanted to acknowledge that inspiration with these visual cues. In the Arko Theater, he segmented large brick masses to make them feel more approachable on a human scale. Indeed, when the Sun shines, casting deep shadows, clear articulations of the theater's massive wall can be perceived as independent towers. In the Liver Research Institute of Seoul National University, he placed rows of rounded bricks in the exterior wall to impart subtle changes to the grid-like brick-laying pattern. Their effect is to vary the rhythm and make the building appear more fanciful.

Conclusion

Swoo-Geun Kim's projects in Daehangno illustrate both the theoretical and the practical dimensions of the concept of correlativity. Inspired by the urban equivalent of a traditional village structure, Kim sublimated the lessons of Bukchon and translated into modern building types the fluid indeterminate spaces created by its alleyways and *madang*. This legacy is what has enabled these buildings to survive handsomely for some thirty years amid the omnipresent threat of high-density development in Seoul. What's more, the innovations in Kim's buildings merit evaluation as *practical* methods of adapting building forms to changing urban environments. What they show, above all, is that the public interest must be placed at the center of the design process if buildings are to function properly as reciprocal loci in high-density environments. Their form needs to correspond appropriately to the scale of the buildings around them, and their circulation system need to be closely linked with the urban tissue to secure a continuous flow. Their ground floor should be open to the public to preserve social commitment to common urban spaces, and they need to employ consistent building materials to achieve an integral identity. Finally, the interflow of space between interior and exterior environments, both in the public and the private realm, has to be treated with the utmost delicacy and candor in order to disclose the correlativity of the architectural and civic dimensions of existence. Swoo-Geun Kim's attempts to realize these goals in Daehangno might serve as important references for other Asian cities that now find themselves at risk from the familiar issues of disorderly development and urban sprawl. ▮

Notes

1 Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1984, p. 44–46.
2 Peter G. Rowe, *East Asia Modern: Shaping the Contemporary City*, London, Reaktion Books, p. 37.
3 Kevin Lynch, op. cit., p. 45.
4 David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, "Chinese Philosophy," in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 1988. Retrieved in December 12, 2013, from: http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G001SECT2.
5 The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty, the Reign of King Taejo, Vol. 8, September 9, 1394.
6 See, for example, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, "Imaging Nothingness," in *SMLXL*, New York, Monacelli Press, 1995, p. 202 and Ignasi Solá-Morales, "Terrain Vague," in Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Anyplace*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1995, p. 118-123.
7 Swoo-Geun Kim, *Jobeun Gileun Jopeulsorok Jotgo Nappeun Gileun Neoleulsorok Jotda (A Good Way is Better as it Gets Narrower, a Bad Way is Better as it Gets Wider)*, Seoul, Space Publisher, 1989, p. 102.
8 Boem-Jae Lee, "Hanguk Munhwayesul Jinheungwon Misulhoegwan" (The Arts Council Korea Gallery), *Space Magazine*, October 1989, p. 68.
9 Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998, p. 130.
10 Inha Jung, *Kim Swoo-Geun Geonchukron — Hanguk Geonchukui Saeroun Inyeombyeong (Architect Swoo-Geun Kim — In Search of Modern Ideal Types)*, Seoul, Migeonsa, 1996, p. 189.
11 "Gim Su Geun to Renga" (Swoo-Geun Kim and Bricks), *SD Magazine*, Dec. 1983.
12 Gukga Girokwon (National Archives of Korea), *Ilje Sigi Geonchuk Domyeon Haeje I — Hakgyopyeon (Bibliographical Notes On The Drawings I — Schools)*, Daejeon, Gukga girokwon, 2008, p. 59.
13 Interview with Boem-Jae Lee, Seoul, June 1994.

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