

## CHAPTER 4

### Rediscoveries and Redesigns: Dongdaemun History and Culture Park

*The World Design Market will become a design business hub: where design related projects and transactions will be conducted, business partnership will be pursued, new designs will be introduced. Libraries and data will be available both on- and off-line. From 2010, the Design Market will be the key business sector of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza & Park that leads the design industry of Seoul.<sup>1</sup>*

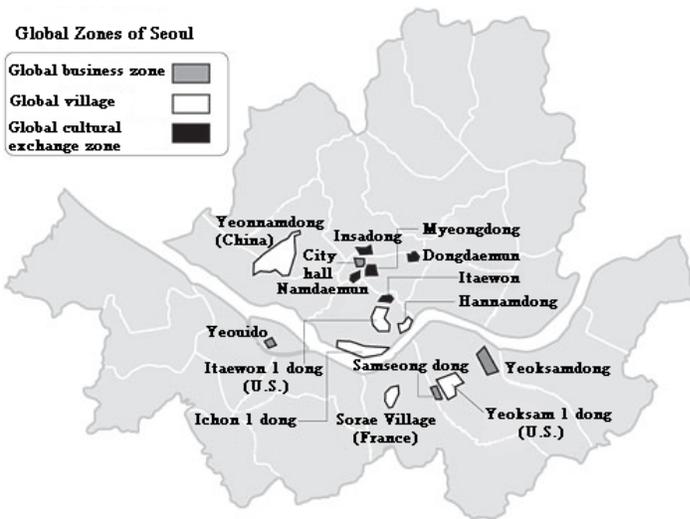
– Seoul Metropolitan Government

The ambition to promote design related businesses through the construction of Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (DDPP) is expressed quite clearly in the statements of the Seoul metropolitan government. Dongdaemun Stadium Station of the Seoul Metro has been renamed Dongdaemun History and Culture Park Station in December 2009, when the sports stadium, first opened in 1926, was demolished to make way for DDPP. Designed by Zaha Hadid, the plaza and park complex is planned to be completed by December 2011. The site is located in the eastern edge of the historical Seoul, near the landmark of Dongdaemun (Eastern Gate) and Dongdaemun Market (Fig. 1). Occupying the total site area of 65,232 square meters (16 acres), it is considered the new landmark not only of the Dongdaemun Market but of the city of Seoul. DDPP is not only promoted as the public park which adds amenities to existing fashion industries but also as potential world-famous landmarks, such as the Sydney Opera House and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.<sup>2</sup> The presence of DDPP in Dongdaemun market is expected to generate even bigger influences on tourist activities in Seoul. Construction of DDPP, which occurs near the year 2010 when Seoul was selected as the World Design Capital by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), is part of the local government's *DesignSeoul* campaign to elevate the status of Seoul to the hub of world design industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Seoul Metropolitan Government, *World Design Capital: Seoul 2010*, Seoul, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> DDP & P Site and Information Center, *Dongdaemun Design Plaza & Park Seoul*: Seoul Design Foundation, 2009.



[Figure 1: from top, a diagram showing the locations of Global Cultural Zones and the aerial map of Dongdaemun Market showing the construction site of DDPP]

Construction of DDPP is an example of series of new developments which have characterized the transformation of the urban landscapes of Dongdaemun Market. Since the late 1990s, constructions of high rise shopping malls have started to add new ambience to the marketplace, which contains many smaller sized retail shops and wholesale markets. Although sales of goods in general plummeted during the Asian financial crisis, sales in newly constructed mega-shopping malls such as *Doota* and *Migliore* have boasted a phenomenal growth, coining a term “myth of Dongdaemun.” Economists and urban scholars have attributed the success of such

shopping malls in the late 1990s to the entrepreneurial sensibility to detect an emergent “youth culture” and consumption habits of teenagers.<sup>3</sup> They argued that construction of fashionable shopping malls selling affordable items catered to the “youngsters’ desire to shop in places, which look like upscale shopping malls, with limited budgets.”<sup>4</sup> As the result of continuous construction of high rise shopping malls, the area exudes the youthful atmosphere of hip and fashionable lifestyles. In addition to high rise shopping malls with trendy shops, construction of DDPP is expected to add new attractions to the Dongdaemun market which has been designated by Seoul city government as one of the Global Cultural Zones of Seoul.

This chapter explores how the city government’s constructions of DDPP as a part of the DesignSeoul campaign and promotion of Dongdaemun as the epitome of fashion industry work to legitimize continuation of urban redevelopment projects. Continuing on the theme of “tradition as rediscoveries” discussed in previous chapters, this chapter illustrates how rediscovered city walls dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century has become a part of rationale for the city government to pursue urban redevelopments. One of the design strategies of Hadid’s *metonymic* architecture included integration of the historic city wall in the park, discovered after the demolition of the old sports stadium. Politicians and policy makers’ assessment of Hadid’s design as “respecting Korean tradition,” regardless of the way it is integrated, demonstrated a primarily materialistic and simplistic understanding regarding the abstract term “tradition.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the decision to demolish the sports stadium has generated controversy among Seoul residents who considered the stadium an emblem of “modern sports cultures” with an eighty-

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<sup>3</sup> Yu, Jaeyun. “Seoul Dongdaemun Sichang ūi Byunhwa wa Jōngchekjōk Sisajōm.” “The change in Dongdaemun Market and the Policy Suggestions.” *Dosi Munjae. The Urban Question* 37(3) 2002. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Kim, Yanghee and Yongnam Shin. “Jaerae ūiryu Sichang ūi Buhwal gwa Sisajōm.” “The Resurrection of Old Apparel Market and What It Suggests” in *Dongdaemun – Wigi ūi Jaerae Sichang e Sōh Fashion Moonhwa Myungsoo Dongdaemun – From Old Market in Crisis to Fashion and Cultural Attractions*. Seoul: Dongdaemun Forum, 2001 45-60.

<sup>5</sup> Oh, Saehun.

year history.

I analyze how the structural changes in the South Korean political economy since the 1980s have affected governmental policies and urban discourse regarding Dongdaemun Market. In particular, discussions of elevating Dongdaemun as “the world design capital” illustrate that seemingly a matter of beauty, fashion, or lifestyle is not simply a matter of aesthetic but a way to stimulate economic growth.<sup>6</sup> The long history of Dongdaemun Market—including entrepreneurial skills of some Korean merchants during the colonial time and relative economic success in the middle of the Asian financial crisis—is used as a means to justify continuation of large scale urban redevelopments. Unlike the case of Insadong, changing commercial ambience in Dongdaemun is promoted as the sign of endless adaptability, one of the necessary factors to become “winners” in the ever-changing economic conditions. High-rises and mega-scale shopping malls simply become catalysts of further developments rather than becoming targets for fundamental reexaminations of the developmentalist economic framework. Imagined as the place for the young, signs of aging or old-fashion becomes marginalized which need to be redesigned or eliminated. The government’s usage of terms such as “world design capital” illustrate how the word “design” can be used as the catch-all phrase which justifies and facilitates the process of urban redevelopments.

More importantly, this chapter questions the thesis that design-oriented space brings further economic growth, let alone produce “cultural space.” In order to show negative externalities associated with mega-scale projects, I turn to other cities which have pursued similar strategies. Despite popular expectations, emphasis on aesthetic has not always produced corresponding economic growth. At the same time, this chapter discusses how the DesignSeoul Campaign has inadvertently encouraged discussions regarding what constitutes urban culture as

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well as what defines the status of a “global city.” The city government’s attempts to redesign the Dongdaemun Market have not been received with universal acceptance of DDPP and the architect’s alleged claim that DDPP’s architectural aesthetics connect the present and future of Seoul. Local residents’ reaction to the government’s *DesignSeoul* campaign, including construction of DDPP, includes active resistances by young students/artists as well as the street vendors. While elite-dominated nature of South Korean NGOs prevents a broader politicization of the issue of cultural representations, such limited scope of NGOs has not prevented the spontaneous development of informal resistance practices. This dissertation argues that the ambiguous status of civil society in South Korea has encouraged development of “flexible resistances” through inventions of counter-narratives and alternative urban aesthetics. Such cases of subversion demonstrate that processes of globalization cannot be described as a simple top-down or a from-below phenomenon. Rather, processes of globalization involve constantly shifting and negotiated local articulations of what “being global” means.

### **A History of Dongdaemun Market**



[Figure 2: This historical photo of the Dongdaemun Market in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century shows crowded streets

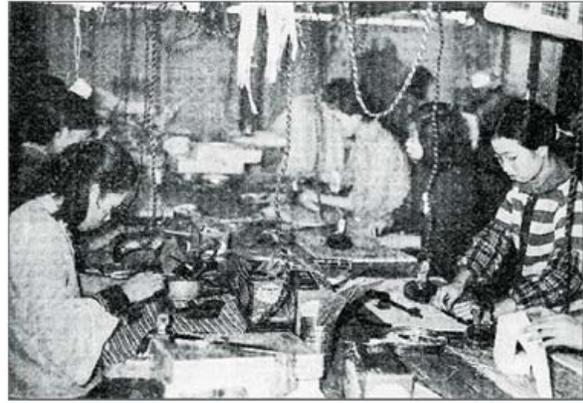
filled with pedestrians, horse carriages, and various goods including dried-vegetables.]

A brief examination of a contested history of Dongdaemun Market not only reveals the complicated place-marketing practices but how commercial activities have always been shaped by larger political forces. While unrecorded history of Dongdaemun stretches beyond that of official document, this chapter begins in the end of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century since it was during this period that nationalistic sentiments have been strongly associated with the place. The predecessor of the current Dongdaemun Market was Yee Hyun Market (Fig.2), which was one of the three biggest markets of the late Chosun Dynasty.<sup>7</sup> Dongdaemun Market was established in 1905 when Korean merchants formed Gwangjang Corporation to mitigate the financial loss caused by the Currency Readjustment Project. The currency readjustment replaced *Beckdonghua*, the currency of the late Chosun state, with Japanese one, depreciating its value significantly. At the same time, expanding businesses of Japanese merchants began to threaten the economic status of Chosun merchants in areas such as Namdaemun Market and Yongsan. To counter increasing Japanese commercial influences, Chosun merchants with enough capitals started Gwangjang Market near Dongdaemun.<sup>8</sup> Continued prosperity of Dongdaemun Market represented the remaining strengths of Korean merchants against the colonizers.

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<sup>7</sup> Board of Seoul Metropolitan History (Seoul Tuickbyeol Sisa Pyunchan Wewonhui). 2007, Seoul ui Sichang (The Markets of Seoul), Seoul.

<sup>8</sup> Among the merchants was Seung-jik Park, the founder of Seungjik Store in Dongdaemun which later became the Doosan Group.



[Figure 3: The Pyunghwa Market in the 1960s was the center of manufacturing. The growth of the light industries was possible due to urbanization and increasing number of labor force. ]

After the brief cessation of commercial activities during Korean War, Dongdaemun Market expanded to incorporate refugees and rural migrants who opened unlicensed markets. Construction of Dongdaemun General Market on the garage sites of outdated streetcars in 1970 signaled the stabilization of commercial activities. Under the developmental regime of the president Park, industrialized manufacturing enabled faster production of goods, which was met by explosive demand from war-deprived consumers. Before the late 1970s, the state's economic policy emphasized the growth of light industries, such as manufacture of clothes and shoes.<sup>9</sup> In such context, proximity to the *Pyunghwa* (Peace) Market (Fig. 3) containing many sewing factories and laborers was conducive to further commercial success of the Dongdaemun Market.<sup>10</sup> Rise of Dongdaemun was in large part indebted to long hours of labor provided by young women who migrated to Seoul from rural countryside. Most of them worked fifteen hours per day in a very cramped environment—often illegally subdivided into two floors with a height of each about four feet—getting minimal wages.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1970s, Dongdaemun Market had

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<sup>10</sup> Pyunghwa Market not only contained wholesale stores but many sewing factories, where productions for domestic products as well as the exported textile goods took place.

<sup>11</sup> *The Peace Market* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1970) Requoted from *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*.

become the biggest clothing market in Seoul. With the abolition of curfew, commercial activities continued during night times, making Dongdaemun Market as the haven for the night time shopping.

Although individual shoppers could purchase items in Dongdaemun, most of the commercial activities were centered on wholesales.<sup>12</sup> The clustering of manufacturing functions and economy of scale has enabled production of cheaper goods in Dongdaemun market. Small business owners purchase lots in a larger market structure called *sang-ga*, and Dongdaemun market currently consists of about 30,000 shops and thirty *sang-ga*.<sup>13</sup> By 1970 when the Dongdaemun General Market was established, Dongdaemun Market occupied seventy percent of the domestic production and distribution of clothing items.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the abolishment of night curfew, constructions of highways around country have facilitated movements of local merchants to and from Seoul. From the early 1980s, it became common for groups of local merchants to travel in reserved bus cars for an overnight trip to Dongdaemun.<sup>15</sup> Due to the dominance of wholesale, the economy of the market relied more on the production and sales network than on the visual attraction of the shopping mall or the comfort level experienced by shoppers. As such, Dongdaemun Market was different from department stores which emphasized leisurely shopping experiences.

However, the economic conditions which allowed spectacular growth of light industry began to change in the mid-1980s. Labor organizations began to gain strength as the result of democratic movement. Although early labor movements included the factory workers' demands

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<sup>12</sup> Kim, Yanghee and Yongnam Shin. "Resurrection of Old Market and the Implications" *Dongdaemun: From the Old Market in Crisis to Fashionable Cultural Space*

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<sup>14</sup> Shin, Yongnam. *Dongdaemun Beckseoh 2005 동대문시장의 변화와 발전과정*.

<sup>15</sup> Bus was convenient since it not only provided safe storage of purchased goods but also could function as a place to sleep. See Seoul ui Sichang (The Markets of Seoul)

regarding working conditions, they failed to bring meaningful nation-wide institutional changes due to military suppression.<sup>16</sup> When the military dictatorship ended in 1987, the suppressed labor movements brought issues of worker's rights in the forefront of the democratization process. For instance, the labor movement earned the collective bargaining rights and increased the percentage of union membership from 13.6 percent in 1987 to 18.6 percent in 1989.<sup>17</sup> The tripartite committee (made up of state, corporate, and labor representatives) held under Kim Young Sam's regime in 1993 was the first gesture of the state to include labor party in the discussions of larger economic structure. Although series of negotiations led to increase in minimum wages and formal recognition of collective bargaining rights, labor movement gained limited success since the negotiations simultaneously brought liberalization of labor. (SOURCE) In return for the recognizing collective bargaining, conglomerates now had increased labor flexibility. While the labor condition improved, it was only limited to "regular workers" with more job security. Big corporate employers began either to relocate their production sites in another country or employ more numbers of "non-standard workers" who could be more easily replaced.<sup>18</sup> In this changing labor regime, mass productions of wholesale goods became less profitable while the tailored productions of retail goods became more feasible. Already in the mid-1990s, Dongdaemun Market saw development of new shopping malls such as *Art Plaza* which catered to "the casual fashion tastes of the young population."<sup>19</sup> Although construction of mega retail shopping malls such as *Migliore* seemed too risky in the abrupt economic recession, the marketing strategy of combining modern facilities with bargain goods was met by explosive

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<sup>16</sup> One of the most famous incident was the self-immolation of Chon Tae-II in November 1970 who worked as a garment industry worker in Pyunghwa Market.

<sup>17</sup> Cho, Hyo-Rae. *The Change of Labor Regime After 1987 In South Korea*. Visiting Fellow Working Papers. Cornell University ILR School 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> According to Chang,

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demand from young adults.

In addition to institutional changes, the breakout of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s resulted in disruption of existing production and distribution networks of small businesses. Overall sales of small and medium businesses decreased rapidly due to the recession. Unlike big corporates, small and medium businesses could expect much less monetary support from the financial institutions. At the same time, the governmental policies during the IMF crisis were focused on restoring foreign exchange liquidity and financial restructuring rather than seeking a comprehensive plan to solve the problems faced by small and medium businesses.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the most adversely affected by the changed labor condition were small business owners and manufacturing industries. Crisis of small businesses could be felt in Dongdaemun Market. Despite reported successes of *Migliore* and *Doota* (Fig. 3), which have earned the nickname of “myth of Dongdaemun,” many smaller shops and factories closed down due to financial difficulty. It was not until the mid-2000 when new department-like shopping malls began to emerge in Dongdaemun Market. Hello APM, Good Morning City, and Maxstyle are examples of the retail shopping malls built in the 2000s following the strategy of catering to young casual fashions. Notwithstanding the continuation of wholesales, retails have become the more prominent commercial activities of Dongdaemun Market.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Song, Ugyo. “IMF Wa Jungso Gi-op Jongchek.” “IMF and Policies Regarding Small and Medium Businesses” *Gukhoebo The Newsletter of National Assembly* 392 June 1999 24-27.

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[Figure 3: A picture of Doota Fashion Mall shows a tall building with the advertisement “Fashion is war.”]

At the same time mega shopping malls providing more comfortable shopping environment were built, increasing number of individual shoppers were filling the streets in Dongdaemun during weekends as the result of changing labor policy. In 2004, introduction of five-day work week in large companies and public institutions in South Korea meant that regular workers had more time during the weekends.<sup>22</sup> Such policy did not guarantee shortened work hours since it did not apply to smaller businesses and weekday overtime continued in big businesses. Some even noted that the policy burdens temporary workers since the rate of temporary workers (rather than regular workers) are higher in leisure industries. (Source) However, it had the effect of bringing more people on the streets during the weekends, making them potential consumers. According to LG Economy Institute’s research, household leisure

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<sup>22</sup> Five-day work week policy, or forty hours work week policy, was first introduced in large companies and governmental offices. It was applicable to businesses with 50 to 100 workers in July 1, 2007. One year later, it was applicable to businesses with more than 20 workers. In July 1 2011, it will be spread to businesses with less than 20 workers as well.

expenses increased 3.4 % from 2003 to 2005.<sup>23</sup> Leisure related businesses, such as tourist companies, restaurants, and concert venues expected increased sales due to the implementation of the policy. Local governments began to embark on various projects to redesign the cityscape to suit the new production and consumption patterns. A study by Seoul Local City Officials Training Institute recommended that the city government cultivate various programs such as Nature Learning Centers and Cultural Exploration Courses to “make good use of the leisure time” produced by the five day work week law.<sup>24</sup> Starting with Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, the remaking of Seoul included series of new urban investment such as designation of Cultural Districts and Exploration Routes.

It was in such a political and institutional context when Seoul was selected as the World Design Capital (WDC) by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) in 2007. Immediately after the selection of Seoul as the WDC, the Seoul city government embarked on the DesignSeoul project, which included construction of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (DDPP), re-designing the national landscape of the Nam Mountain, and hosting Seoul Design Olympics. Seoul city government established an organization titled DesignSeoul Directing Headquarters in order to implement various projects. As part of the renovation efforts, Seoul Sports Stadium (also known as Dongdaemun Stadium), considered obsolete by some urban planners, was scheduled to be demolished to make a way for the park. While Dongdaemun Stadium hosted many historically important sports activities in Seoul, its presence was no longer considered essential because of “traffic issues, low level of use, and weakening competitive

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<sup>23</sup> Yu, Sungho. “Leisure Yoesik Tuksu Jonmang... Gajok Danwi Sobi Nuldut” “Leisure, Eating Out Industry’s Boon” June 14, 2011 *Hankook Gyongje*

<sup>24</sup> Seoul Local City Officials Training Institute. *Problem Solving Working Papers: Development of Leisure Programs such as Cultural and Tourist Activities According to the Implementation of the Five Day Work Week*, 2003

edge.”<sup>25</sup> Supporters of the construction of the park argued that Dongdaemun Market desperately needed a public space where pedestrians can take a rest. At the same time, the brochure promoting DDPP emphasized the fact that the old sports stadium was first constructed during the Japanese colonial period “to celebrate the marriage of the Japanese crown prince.”<sup>26</sup> Amid much controversy surrounding the demolition of the stadium, design competitions for a new park began in 2007. Among many contestants, Hadid’s design (Figure 4) was selected as the winning project. Selection of Hadid’s design reflected not only the desire to provide appropriate urban amenities but the desire to promote Seoul as the center of fashion industry by using the brand power of a star architect.



[Figure 4. the architectural rendering of Zaha Hadid’s design showing part of the historic city wall in the foreground]

### **“Selling Feelings?”: Rhetoric of the DesignSeoul project and Counter-rhetorics**

The construction DDPP in Dongdaemun Market is part of the larger rubric of encouraging use of urban design to facilitate transformation of Seoul. The DesignSeoul

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 82.

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campaign, which started in 2008, is the effort to re-situate South Korea within the global economic structure by transforming it from a “hard city” to a “soft city.”<sup>27</sup> Whereas Seoul represented an industrial “hard city” emphasizing speed and efficiency, the concept of a soft city emphasizes “soft” aspects of a city such as appreciation of “traditional cultures.” In this urban discourse, the contemporary South Korean society is imagined to have “lost touch” with emotional wellbeing and other values because of the emphasis on the fast economic growth. Planners have argued that it is time to reverse such tendency by “rediscovering” cultural heritages of South Korea.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, cultural heritages and historical relics need to be actively incorporated as the elements of new urban landscape. By doing so, it is hoped that pedestrians’ appreciation of “Korean culture” will improve.



[Figure 6. Posters advertising DesignSeoul campaign became ubiquitous in Seoul in 2009. On the left a poster placed on the roof of a subway train car reads “It is worth living thanks to (good) design.” On the right, a poster shows a business man smiling with bubble reading “I like Seoul.”]

The government rhetoric of the DesignSeoul campaign regarded residents as the client and beneficiary of the design campaign. The mission statements of DesignSeoul include five kinds of *considerations*—rather than policies—for economy, environment, everyday life, culture, and empathy.<sup>29</sup> The five considerations are designed to fulfill the ultimate objective of caring for citizens. Compared to government-led projects in the previous authoritarian regime, the language

<sup>27</sup> Oh, Jongtack. “Shi Goo Ui Hui Goochungjang 3Joongbuck e Makin DesignSeoul” *Joongang Daily*. July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Seoul Development Institute.

<sup>29</sup> Official website of DesignSeoul. <http://design.seoul.go.kr>

describing the project is much softer, emphasizing friendliness and sensibility rather than containing a top-down command. The main objective of caring for citizens is carried out by improving the quality of public space through design. As such, improving the appearance of public space such as sidewalks and streets is considered to contribute to the pleasant experience of everyday life. To promote the concept of DesignSeoul, the city government has actively utilized friendly images in its posters and signs emphasizing the new aspect of the projects to transform Seoul's urban landscape (Fig. 6). These images convey the message that unlike previous development projects, contemporary urban projects are designed to satisfy individual needs and comforts rather than fulfilling abstract national goals.

Individual Seoulites are imagined as optimistic individuals who carry out their daily duties with faith in progress and technology. Although residents of Seoul are mainly the beneficiary of services, they can also become participants of the campaign by making suggestions thanks to variety of advanced communication technologies. For instance, citizens' congratulatory messages sent from smartphones for the opening ceremony of Seoul Design Festival in 2010 were displayed real time on a big screen. In other cases, the websites of the Seoul Design Committee and Seoul city government offer online bulletin board for people's opinions and suggestions regarding the specifics of the campaign. The city government also set opportunities to engage in on-site conversations with a mayor which included the issue of Seoul's design policy. However, most recorded messages and conversations stopped short at discussing the specifics of the programs rather than the addressing the direction or the scope of the policy.<sup>30</sup>

Urban planners imagine that it is possible to illicit a certain kind of emotion by

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<sup>30</sup> Although the official website of the DesignSeoul contains the online *DesignSeoul Discussion Forum* open for everyone, all postings were confined to the topic of "the Appropriate Function and Program of DDPP."

engineering physical environments. In an interview, the director of the DesignSeoul campaign has observed that “the 21<sup>st</sup> century is changing from a city selling functions to a city selling feelings/senses” and “Seoul needs to be in tune with global currents of using design to demonstrate competitiveness.”<sup>31</sup> Such fashion and material driven view of the urban development is in tune with the city government’s policy to cultivate various programs and themed streets in order to “make good use of leisure time” in a changed economic condition. Although the government rhetoric regarding DesignSeoul involves political discourse of improving competitiveness of Seoul in a global economic structure, it says little about the unequal enjoyment of changed labor conditions such as five day work week. Despite the improvement of streets and other public amenities, it is not accessible to economically marginalized who has to work harder during weekends to meet the demands of consumers. The “competitiveness” generated by the look of urban crowds strolling fashionable urban environments has become possible thanks to invisible economic toil such as the long working hours of entry level corporate employees and job insecurity of temporary workers.

In *DesignSeoul*, adding a “sense of history” to the city of Seoul involved the resurrection of certain artifacts in expense of others. Supporters of DDPP argued that the rationale for demolishing the sports stadium was not only based on practical aspects—that the stadium was not used frequently—but also on the historical fact that the stadium was built to celebrate the matrimony of the Japanese crown prince during the colonial times. Such facts have made the stadium appear as an obsolete artifact of colonialism rather than the center of recreational activities in the recent past. The demolition was justified by the “public sentiment which supports elimination of Japanese colonialism.”<sup>32</sup> In comparison to the older historical forms

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<sup>31</sup> Park, Hyung-Young.

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associated with Chosun Dynasty, the stadium is relatively new, with the stigma of colonial history. Furthermore, discovery of old city walls during the demolition process and the architect's decision to integrate them into DDPP have added urgency to remove the colonial relic and "rescue" the more historical cultural heritage.

Notwithstanding the warm reception and favorable portrayal of DDPP in official sources, voices of dissension and criticism toward the project came from various camps. Sports fans who associated the Dongdaemun Stadium with cherished memories of urban sports activities and historically significant events opposed the demolition. Contrary to the assertion that the demolition of the stadium is necessary to eliminate the remnants of colonialism, sports authorities have argued that the stadium has accumulated different meanings as layers of positive memories replaced faded histories of the colonial period. Baseball fans opposed the demolition by arguing that the stadium was the "Mecca of the amateur baseball games" and "the cradle of many sports stars."<sup>33</sup> Others noted that the decision to demolish the eighty-years-old sports structure reflects that "more attention is given to the development and the profit rather than everyday memories associated with urban space."<sup>34</sup>

Others who criticized the project viewed it primarily as the expression of the mayor's personal political ambition. During *Citizen's Open Forum Regarding DesignSeoul* in September 2010, many voiced dissent against using urban projects as a political means to generate the public's support. For instance, during the discussion, a Congress member of the opposing party voiced her dissent towards current urban projects in Seoul as "putting excessive emphasis on

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<sup>33</sup> Choi, Youngjin. "Pungmul Sangin, Yagoo Fan Koom Ul Huhmulda. (Tear Down the Dream of Baseball fans and Pungmul Merchants)" *Newsmaker*, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> Kil, Yoonhyung. "2007nyun 9wol, Seoul Ui KiukSangshiljung (September, 2007: Seoul's Amnesia)" *Hankyoreh* 21, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

visible accomplishments.”<sup>35</sup> Another participant, a design critic, argued that “Seoul’s design policy has been utilized as the political propaganda of the mayor.”<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the controversy surrounding DDPP failed to discuss the political and socio-economic dimensions of the project as the word “politics” carried primarily negative connotations. Instead, the discussions revolved around historical aspects of the site and the architectural aesthetics of the proposal.

More successful attack on the *DesignSeoul* campaign came from those who politicized the urban projects to their advantage by drawing attention to socioeconomic issues. Just as the promoters of DDPP defined which cultural representations are appropriate through reference to anti-colonial feelings, young artists have started to use guerilla design tactics to redefine public space by using element of humor toward the preaching tone of the government campaign. The local government’s strategy of manufacturing consent through “selling feelings” backfired when exaggerated portrayals of residents as progressive and satisfied people was met by counter-images of disgruntled individuals. Significant portion of residents in Seoul do not share such a rosy prospect of DesignSeoul campaign and do not hesitate to express their oppositions. Some expressed that excessive campaign which bombards the public space with posters and stickers are irritating, sometimes inducing “design nausea.”<sup>37</sup> More adventurous individuals have engaged in guerilla design strategies by designing the parody of the government posters and displaying them in strategic places.

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<sup>35</sup> Yoon, Hyo-soon. “Design Seoul, Ga Si Jok Sung Gwa e Chijoong Hat Da” “Design Seoul Has Put Excessive Emphasis on Visual Accomplishments.” *Eun Pyung Si Min Shinmoon*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, Dongyoung. “Seoul Si Design Jung Chek ‘Design San Up Hwa’ ‘Jung Chi Jok Sun Jun Yong’” “Seoul’s Design Policy ‘Industrialization of Design’ ‘Political Propaganda’ *Dong-ah Newspaper*, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Park, Woojin. “Ham Gge Hanun DesignSeoul Mandool Uh Yo.” “Let’s participate in DesignSeoul” *Weekly Hanguk*. June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010.



[Figure 7. Guerilla projects include placing stickers over the official posters to change the meanings. ]

For instance, an organization named *FF Group*, made up of freelance artists, has engaged in a *LikeSeoul* campaign by placing a sticker over the official *DesignSeoul* posters that twists the original message (Fig. 7). While the original word bubble said “design is good” and “Seoul is great,” new bubbles in the stickers said “children skip meals because [the city government focus on] design” and “only Gangnam (South of the Han River) is great.” Such acts pointed out that the portrayal of citizens as passive city dwellers in harmony with DesignSeoul campaign did not always match the actual lived experiences. One member of the *FF Group* explained that the group’s interest in DesignSeoul began when the city of Seoul started to use the phrase “Seoul is the design capital of the world” in the advertisements of DesignSeoul projects. He explained that group members questioned whether such a thing as a design capital could be defined. When asked what the group thought about the role of design is in current urban developments, another member noted,

It is something like this... Imagine that your neighbor has an ugly tree which protrudes to your garden. You want to get rid of it. You use the word “design” as a pretext to cut down the neighbor’s tree. The word “design” is like a master

key that can be used for anything.<sup>38</sup>

The group was initially formed by four college students “concerned about the possibility of having to work on something [they] did not want to do in the future.”<sup>39</sup> However, the group’s involvement in media arts soon grew to include social issues, such as displacement and socioeconomic polarization. After graduating college, members of FF Group have questioned the way Seoul city government use the term design to promote urban redevelopments. In another project, the group decided to test whether the rule of the law is respected in public spaces by displaying provocative political messages while not breaking any laws.<sup>40</sup>

The contrast between smiling faces and dissatisfied comments in the bubble comes across as a comical spin of the original poster. However, it does not stop at being a simple prank on the official campaign. With relatively little investment, such tactics have successfully subverted the image of contented citizens happily carrying out their routines in the city by delivering counter-narratives such as the regional inequality between Gangbuk (North of the Han River) and Gangnam (South of the Han River). LikeSeoul campaign also questioned the current city government’s emphasis on design-oriented developments, arguing that public fund spent on DesignSeoul campaign could have been spent on more pressing issues such as provision of free school meals for all children. In another instance, young artists have taken a more ambitious stance by actively imagining a future of a current project. In an art exhibition titled *There Is No Gold Medal in Design Olympic*, one artwork depicted an image of DDPP being demolished in the year 2040. Aptly titled “Alzheimer City,” it raised a question as to whether the current project

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<sup>38</sup> In an interview held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The group placed a large scale helium balloon with messages criticizing government project near the statue of Sejong the Great (former king during the Chosun Dynasty) in the busy thoroughfare of Seoul. This has created a comical impression of the historical king scolding the current government. Their exhibition was met with hasty warning of the police to remove it.

can be sustainable when the very impetus for its construction requires constant renewals.

Another challenge to the image of Dongdaemun Market as seamless collection of sleek shopping malls came from the street vendors. The demolition of the sports stadium became a big issue for them since it has been used previously designated as the Pungmul Market, occupied by relocated street vendors who came from the Cheonggyecheon area. Since the vendors have already been relocated due to another urban redevelopment project in the early 2000s, the decision to demolish the stadium became a source of resentment.<sup>41</sup> In addition, street vendors in Dongdaemun have also lost their space as significant portion of the sidewalks were closed off during the construction. In response to the protests by vendors, the initial position of city government has been that it is not necessary to provide an alternative since their businesses were illegal from the start. Although it later sought a more conciliatory approach by proposing an alternative site in Sinseoldong, street vendors remained indignant over the series of the forced relocations.

For the promoters of the DesignSeoul project, the protests of street vendors are nothing more than a nuisance. Street stalls are defined as “illegally conducting business by occupying public space such as streets and parks,” and considered as disturbances of public space, posing a possible hindrance to pedestrian traffic.<sup>42</sup> In many sites, street vendors are a target for constant crackdowns, although enforcement has become less frequent due to the increased number of vendors and decreased number of control enforcement officials after the structural adjustment period.<sup>43</sup> In the area of Dongdaemun, officials consider the presence of rows of unkempt carts

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<sup>41</sup> Park, Soran and Dohyung Kim. “Gookjejuk Pungmul Sichang: Hanbun Sokju Dobun Soka?” “International Pungmul Market: Can be Deceived Twice?” *Minjok 21*, March 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Seoul Development Institute. “No Jum-sang GwanLee Bangan Joongjanggi DeaCheck Moseck.” “Search for the Longterm Management Plan for Street Vendors” August, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, in Daehak-ro, one of the Cultural Districts in Seoul, it was recommended to crackdown street vendors five to ten times a month.

unappealing and messy, and not conforming to the state’s vision of area as the “world design capital.” While recalling the Cheonggyecheon Restoration Project, president Park remarked that while he once loved the urban scene at dawn filled with “motorcycles, local merchants with big bundles of clothes, and youths patronizing food vendors... it was now time to accept changes.”<sup>44</sup> Although street vendors may have played a role in local community in the past, they are considered the sign of backwardness when urban redevelopments are designed to generate a new urban image.



[Figure 8: SCSV’s camp outside the construction site of DDPP exhibits red placards protesting the government’s forceful removal of the street vendors. When I returned six months later, the camp has disappeared.]

However, in spite of incrimination of public selling, the argument based on urban aesthetics can be used against the agenda of removing street vendors from the sidewalk. When I visited Dongdaemun Market in November 2009, several members of the Struggle Committee of Street Vendors (SCSV) in Dongdaemun were camping out in a small make-shift tent in front of the construction site with red placards protesting the city officials’ decision (Fig. 8). One member

<sup>44</sup> Lee, Myungbak. *Cheonggyecheon Flows to the Future*. Pp.20

of the committee made a critical observation by noting that “there are too many empty lots in big shopping structures” and that “possibility of forcibly generating world design capital is very small.” A leaflet printed by the SCSV noted that “the presence of street vendors should not be considered ugly when many commoners find new hope and vitality in the process of bargaining with vendors.”<sup>45</sup> The protesters argued that the presence of street vendors is contributive, rather than detrimental, to the urban aesthetics of Dongdaemun Market. Furthermore, the leaflet quoted Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese scholar considered as the central figure of Taoism, to argue that too much planning and use of force in urban environment is futile. Interestingly, the Taoist philosophy of nonaction—or wuwei (無爲)—, which was used as the rationale for residences in remodeled hanoks in Bukchon, was utilized by street vendors to protest against the rediscovery of the city wall and construction of DDPP. I returned to the site six months later to discover the makeshift camp and placards have disappeared from the scene. Regardless of the unsuccessfulness of the protest, the fact that street vendors appealed to the same philosophy that the pro-development camp used is indicative of the elusiveness of the term “tradition” as well as “aesthetics.”

Such counter-narratives demonstrate that the depiction of Seoul’s residents as apolitical individuals is far from truth. Many protesters and artists refused to accept the claim that urban projects are designed to “care for citizens.” Rather, they awakened policy makers and planners to the fact that citizens are not mere followers but recalcitrant political constituents who might not give the consent to the project in the first place. At the same time, they redefined the geographical boundary of the sociopolitical issue from a global scale to a local one, by implicitly arguing that local problems—such as inequality between the South and North part of Seoul—

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<sup>45</sup> Interview conducted in November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

should be addressed before taking on the task of making Seoul a global design capital. Satirical remarks within the counter-narratives are stronger than accusing urban projects of being “too political” since their strategy avoids constructing a self-imposed obstacle to political participation.

Despite the strength of guerilla design tactics, they did not question the underlying economic structure which made the promotion of DesignSeoul projects possible. Although many critics remain skeptical of the feasibility of the city government-led campaign to elevate the status of Seoul as the “design capital,” larger institutional and policy changes which provided necessary conditions to initiate such projects have not been closely associated with recent urban transformations. The state’ vision to “keep up” with other cities by aggressively marketing newly designed urban environments is not only based on structural inequalities but also threatens to intensify the negative externalities associated with liberalizing labor conditions. Despite the reported successes of small business owners in Dongdaemun Market in the late 1990s, not all the venture capitalists in the area have been able to move up the socioeconomic ladder.

### **The Hidden Cost of the Dongdaemun Myth and Design Capital**

The success of the new retail shopping mall called *Migliore* has initiated a series of construction of large retail shopping malls such as *Doota*, owned by Doosan corporation. In the context of downsizing trend prevalent in the post-IMF crisis, increase of sales in retail shopping malls seemed miraculous. Although many analysts credited the novel marketing strategy of targeting teenagers as the main cause of increased sales, others placed more emphasis on improved shopping conditions such as modern building infrastructures.<sup>46</sup> After a brief moment of recession, many mega shopping malls were being built in Dongdaemun Market. (Need Statistics)

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Constructions of such large commercial structures were easier in Dongdaemun Market due to the peculiar practice of parceling out the lots to the tenant merchants before purchasing the land and before getting the construction permit.<sup>47</sup> While it is customary in South Korea to parcel out individual apartment units to prospective residents before construction is finished, it is extremely rare to parcel out commercial units given the high risk associated with managing individual shops. However, such practice became the standard in Dongdaemun Market because of the two conditions. First, there was an expectation that the increased sales will guarantee the profit necessary to recover the cost of construction. Ironically, the very success of Dongdaemun Market during the colonial period and the Asian financial crisis has made many to believe that combinations of entrepreneurial instincts and business skills alone will result in individual prosperities. In a sense, the expansion of Dongdaemun Market represented the continuation of the developmentalist framework which believed in the possibility of continuous material growth. Second, there were increased numbers of recently unemployed population looking for new opportunities through *Chang-Op*, which means starting one's own business. When the aftermath of the structural adjustment in the late 1990s has left many jobless, significant portion of the jobless turned to the option of starting their own businesses. It is estimated that number of street vendors alone more than doubled after the IMF crisis.<sup>48</sup> With the increased number of self-employed came the proliferation of books, magazines, and websites giving advices to starting small businesses. Many success stories and testimonials could be seen in various media.<sup>49</sup> Since many Chang-Op cases included fashion-related businesses, finding prospective tenants in new

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<sup>47</sup> Kim, Hyun. "Dongdaemun E Hwangkum Al Eun Upda" "There is no golden egg in Dongdaemun" *Hankyoreh* 21, no.469. 34-36.

<sup>48</sup> Seoul Development Institute. "No Jum-sang GwanLee Bangan Joongjanggi DeaCheck Moseck." "Search for the Long-term Management Plan for Street Vendors" August, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> One famous reality TV show during the late 1990s was *Freshly Opened (Shinjaang Gae-up)* which showed dramatic transformations of restaurants from drab stand-still restaurants to popular local establishments. An Equivalent show in U.S. is *Ramsey's Kitchen Nightmares* which debuted in 2004.

shopping malls was not difficult.

However, not everyone who put faith in the possibility of continuous material growth was awarded the entrepreneurial success. In 2003, the embezzlement of the lot distribution fund (paid by the prospective tenants) by a representative of a shopping mall named Good Morning City has generated a crisis among 3,400 prospective tenants who have invested capital for the right to manage a lot in the shopping mall. Since the costs of constructing the shopping mall were not paid yet, it was declared bankrupt. Tenants formed the contractors' council and borrowed money from banks to recover the construction cost. The shopping mall finally opened for business in November 2008. Located adjacent to DDPP, the building stands twenty stories tall, containing about 4,500 lots of shops. The case of embezzlement has brought national attention to the problematic real estate transactions in Dongdaemun Market.



[Figure 9: There are many empty lots in high rise shopping malls such as Good Morning City Shopping Mall.]

The high risk in doing business in Dongdaemun is not only a matter of the method of real estate transaction. Unlike in the late 1990s, many shop lots in big shopping malls currently remain empty due to the oversupply of shops. According to Kim, the representative of the Korea International Trade Association in Dongdaemun, there is a joke that “there are a greater number

of shops than that of merchants” and that “agents (who sell lots) leave with big money while merchants have to engage in a repechage.”<sup>50</sup> Jung, a small business consultant, explained that there are many shopping malls which have closed down due to the oversupply of lots and it is essential for the prospective shop owners to find out the vacancy rate in advance.<sup>51</sup> After three years, the shopping mall still contains many empty lots (Fig. 9). Most of the newly self-employed are expected to demonstrate ingenuous entrepreneurship and business skills in order to survive in the increasingly competitive market. Yet, it is becoming extremely difficult for new business owners to achieve the same level of financial success the previous owners enjoyed until the late 1990s. Choi, the head of United Chang-Op Support Center, noted that “while there were many success stories without significant level of market analysis thanks to explosive demand, such cases are becoming harder to find in current era of fast information exchange.”<sup>52</sup>

**{ COMPARE THIS WITH VACANCY RATE OF CCTV BUILDING IN BEIJING }**

Despite the tragic case of the Good Morning City shopping mall, many tenants invested capital believing in the Dongdaemun myth of the late 1990s. In May 2007, a merchant in Dongdaemun remarked that “although sales in every shopping mall in Dongdaemun have decreased, merchants are holding out because of the expectation of further profit after the urban redevelopment project in Dongdaemun Stadium.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, notwithstanding the reported surplus of shops, new shopping malls continue to be built near DDPP such as *Hello APM* and *Maxtyle*. Maxtyle Management Company advertises that proximity to DDPP, which is expected to generate about “750,000 of floating population,” which will make business in the building

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<sup>50</sup> Kim, Il-San. *Dongdaemun Sichang Ul Bomyun Don Yi Boinda. (If you see Dongdaemun Market, You Can See Money.)* Seoul: Dunam, 2002. pp.74.

<sup>51</sup> Jung, Seung Il. *Fashion Valley: Nam, Dongdaemun Sichang (Fashion Valley: Nam/Dongdaemun Market)* Seoul:Gyungchoonsa, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> *Mk ChangUp*. “Chan Up-ja ui Anmok Gaebal” “Developing Taste for Small Business Starters” June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004. <http://changup.mk.co.kr/>

<sup>53</sup> Kim, Kyungmin. “Reportage: Good Morning City Ga Boo Hwal Shicho Duilka?” “Will Good Morning City be the beginning of Resurrection?” *Maekyung Economy*, May 23, 2007.

profitable for many merchants.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

So far, this paper has examined how the strong association of Dongdaemun Market with entrepreneurial success is appropriated to suit the agenda of urban redevelopment which privileges certain use of public space over others. Construction of DDPP as catalyst of “culture” was based on rediscoveries of pre-colonial artifacts as valid heritages and abandonment of colonial traces. As the city government selectively removed older physical structures, the urban scenes of Dongdaemun Market loose dynamic quality generated by coexistence of diverse – old and new – constituents. While provision of amenities and preservation of history have been used as justifications for selecting iconic architecture, such factors become secondary to the possible economic impacts generated by the building’s presence. In the meantime, the imagined distinction between the recent past and the present of Seoul – termed hard and soft cities - functions as the new developmental paradigm which enables implement of constant urban re-designs in many areas including Global Cultural Zones. However, construction of binary differences and of the need to construct “cultural city” did not guarantee the acceptance of the new development projects in everyday practices. Defining the appropriate cultural representations of Dongdaemun became a hotly controversial issue as sports fans, young artists, and street vendors actively participated in the renegotiations. Resistance to official urban design strategies by guerilla design groups as well as street vendors demonstrate that emphasis on constructing visual landmarks can be subverted by production of counter-narratives and counter-aesthetics. The street vendors’ appeal to the Taoist philosophy of nonaction demonstrates that the

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<sup>54</sup> Kim, Se-hyuk. “Dongdaemun Noryun Ja Wi Suh Jangsa Hashil Boon” “Anyone interested in keeping a shop in the best spot of Dongdaemun?” *Focus Newspaper*. September 15, 2010.

same logic can be applied to both justify and oppose urban redevelopment projects.

Within the process of using newly designed urban space as the engine of development, existing structural conditions which contribute to socioeconomic polarization become less noticeable under the phrase of “design capital.” The reorganization of economic policy has deepened the gap between big businesses and small business owners as well as the gap between the official employees and the temporary workers. Despite continuity of unequal labor conditions and increasing risk involved in running a private business, many choose to believe in the “myth of Dongdaemun” to overcome the economic recession. Yet the case study of embezzlement in one of the shopping malls and intensifying competitions among the tenants make it difficult to predict that design-oriented development will bring expected economic growth for all. As the case of China Central Television Headquarter building in Beijing shows, construction of visual landmark does not always guarantee the return on investment. Although the initial success of individual entrepreneurs in Dongdaemun Market has played a part in constructing the image of the invincible energy of the marketplace, many more have quit businesses due to financial difficulties.

It is difficult to predict what kind of economic benefits or misfortunes the construction of Dongdaemun Design Park and Plaza will bring to Dongdaemun Market. Nor is it possible to determine who will become the successful model of the versatile business-minded South Korean and who will lose and fade into backgrounds. However, the presence of the challenges to state’s vision of urban environments suggests that the urban politics will never follow a meta-narrative of globalization theory. Despite the trend of globalizing production and consumption of architectural practices, the act of conferring meanings to a given structure as well as making use of the physical environments remains on the local level. Only time will tell how the battle of

representations will be played out.