

**Institutional Explanations of Shaping a Particular  
Housing Culture in South Korea:**

**A Case Study of the Gangnam District in Seoul**

by

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## ABSTRACT

High-rise urban housing has been one of the most contentious themes in academic and policy discourses regarding urban built environments, connoted in many western countries as 'slums' with social delinquency and dysfunctional family lives. This has often been contrasted with the ideal of the suburban house. Together these have framed a 'deterministic dualism' of built environments according to the physical and spatial features. Such extreme comparison has helped to reinforce social and spatial segregation, resulting in the deep stigmatisation of high-rise built environments. This has left little room for other possibilities, in particular in the context of recent issues of sustainable development, such as new urbanism, struggling to transform images and perspectives of high-rise city living. However, there is a contrasting reality in South Korea, where the same built environment involves exactly the opposite story of these predominant discourses, where fundamental changes in the country's housing market have occurred in tandem with the rise of a so-called 'apartment culture'. Urban high-rise living has come to be seen as representative of modern middle-class lifestyles in response to dramatic economic growth over the last half century, accompanying by the transformation of low-rise settlements into high-rise blocks in both urban and suburban areas. As a result, the mega-sized capital city, Seoul, embraces half of population within an extremely compact area, 10 % of the nation.

This example of Korean high-rise living suggests a lack of deep understandings about built environments, in which the deterministic framework of the western-centric view cannot explain a different reality generated from the same built form. Instead, by focusing on cultural identity to shift away from deterministic analyses of built environments, this research aims to understand how a 'housing culture', as a form of 'institutionalised built environment', can arise and operate socially, culturally, economically and politically in a market-driven capitalist society. Seoul offers rich source of this exploration, especially in the case study district of Gangnam, where Korean apartment culture was literally born. Based on qualitative methodology with mainly semi-structured interviews, the research found that built forms are not entitled with innate entity, but socially constructed meanings. The analytical lens of housing culture enables this complex and dynamic construction of built environments to be

captured. Given this potential of a new thinking, this thesis suggests some renewed ideas and perspectives, and the new way of framing problems beyond simple physical and spatial factors in understanding built environments.

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## Glossary

<i>apt danji</i>	Apartment complex
<i>Bansanghoe</i>	A local meeting
Bogeumzari	Meaning ‘nest’ in Korean, adopted by the housing project
<i>bokbuin</i>	Women making money through estates
<i>Buneohoe</i>	Women’s communities
<i>chaebol</i>	Korean multinational conglomeration
<i>chonsei</i>	A renting system, unique to South Korea, in which ‘key money’ is paid at the beginning of a tenancy and is returned without interest at the end of a tenancy. No monthly rent is paid.
CHC	Choson Housing Corporation
CUDPA	Choson Urban District Planning Act
<i>daseidai jutaek</i>	Dense multi-household housing
<i>donghoin</i>	Persons interested in the same subject, in literal meaning of Korean
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<i>gookmin jutaek</i>	Meaning ‘national houses’
<i>hakgun</i>	A category of educational regions
<i>hakwon</i>	An after-school education centre
HCAA	Housing Construction Acceleration Act
HR	Hapdong (meaning ‘joint’) Redevelopment program: a public-private partnership model
HSS	Housing Saving Scheme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
<i>jibun</i>	The right as an amount of land allocation in the process of redevelopment or reconstruction
<i>jjokbang</i>	An informally settled habitat with a small room

<i>Jugong</i> apt	Apartments supplied by the KNHC ( <i>q.v.</i> )
KHB	Korea Housing Bank (later merged with Gookmin Bank)
KLDC	Korea Land Development Corporation
KNHC	Korea National Housing Corporation, previously CHC ( <i>q.v.</i> )
KOSIS	Korean Statistical Information Service
LDK floor plan	Open plan living room, dining room, kitchen
LH	Korea Land and Housing Corporation (combining the KLDC and the KNHC, both <i>q.v.</i> )
NHF	National Housing Funds
LRS	Land Readjustment Scheme
MLIT	Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport
<i>munwha jutaek</i>	Japanese style houses (literally, ‘culture houses’)
<i>ondol</i>	Korean traditional floor heating system
<i>pyong</i>	A measure of plot size. 1 <i>pyong</i> is approximately 3.3 square metres
SH	Seoul Housing Corporation
TMHC plan	Two Million Housing Construction plan
<i>ttebuja</i>	Someone who suddenly becomes rich through land compensation from the government due to regional development
UNKRA	United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency
UTH	Urban Traditional Housing
<i>won</i>	Unit of Korean currency. £1 Sterling is approximately 2000 won
WTO	World Trade Organisation
<i>yangban</i>	The aristocratic elites in the Choson dynasties from 1392 to 1910

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Bye, Gorbals!...I'm so lucky in fact to get that and I'm happy and when I move into this new house, I'll be really happy...Bye, bye flats!...It's going to be much better. It's better than a flat...I just think that it's amazing. How a person like me stayed in high-rises can get a house like this, so I just cannae believe it. (10 year-old Paige in 'Poor Kids' broadcasted on BBC)

Indeed, those who live in shanty settlements over the boundary of apartment complex came to feel their low-rise roof and poverty as much as the height of tall high-rise buildings. In particular, children who live such places used to express 'if I come to live in apartments in the future' as representative meaning of 'if I come to be rich in the future'. (Jeon et al. 2008, p.247)

Figure 1. 1 The landscapes of different cities



(a) The UK (Source: Google map)



(b) South Korea (Source: Google map)

Imagining that you take a plane to travel from the UK to South Korea. The landscape in the left picture would be seen just after leaving the ground at the Heathrow Airport in London, and after around 10 hours flight, your eyes would catch the landscape in the right picture when you are just about to land at the Incheon Airport in Seoul. Then, if you meet and chat with someone in Korea, you might hear the very different story as much as the contrast of these landscapes. In the quote on the right, Jeon et al. (2008) briefly and concisely recounts a different view of the world through the dream of children living in the next neighbourhoods where the redevelopment of Seoul was carried out through the building of high-rise apartments in the 1980s, which is exactly opposed to an exciting life story of Paige whose dream came true by being rehoused from Glasgow's tower blocks in the Gorbals to her dream home with gardens 30 minutes away. Here – in the tower blocks – is the same built form, but a different

reality. A central focus to explore for the thesis is located in this crossing point illustrated by these stories and pictures: the different experiences of high-rise housing in Korea, as compared to hegemonic ideas which circulate about urban high-rise built environments in many parts of the rest of the world.

Over the last half century of housing research and policy practices, high-rise urban housing has been frequently equated with urban slums where abnormal families live in delinquency and dysfunction. This has been dramatically contrasted with the ‘garden city’ articulated by Ebenezer Howard in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to separation of land use and a low density housing archetype becoming a major ideal of urban planning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Howard’s idea, a message was that ‘The tide of urbanisation must be stopped by drawing people away from the cancerous metropolises into new, self-contained garden cities...The residents of these happy little islands would feel the “joyous union” of town and country. They’d live in nice house and gardens at the centre...predicted that both the new language and his new utopias would soon spread around the world.’ (Kunzig 2011, pp.132-3). This has casted shadows on the other modern language of ‘the street in the sky’, which was thrilling social housing tenants with their futuristic high-rise homes in the 1970s (Collins 2011):

“We saw our flat first through a letterbox and we were amazed. Oh crikey, we’ve got a new house! Well, a flat. We used to call it a house because we weren’t used to saying flat, of course. We thought it were absolutely marvellous...I think it looks a lot better than estates, they’re just houses, rows of houses. But here, it’s modern...We thought we’d died and gone to heaven...You know, people loved Park Hill and they loved the way it were. You belonged.” (The first residents of Sheffield’s Park Hill estate, in ‘The Great Estate: The Rise & Fall of the Council House’ broadcast on BBC, quoted in Collins 2011).

Estates like Park Hill have a notorious reputation today, swiftly shifting from heaven to dereliction and ready for the demolition men, having become part of a landscape of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and crack dens (Collins 2011). Indeed, commentators such as Alice Coleman (1985) and Oscar Newman (1972) have written

extensively about the contribution of failings in the physical design of high rise estates to the social problems that emerged within them.

However, the confronting narratives to this fate of high-rise built environments seem to rise in very contemporary planet of the earth. Although lengthy, the following quote from the scientific journalist Kunzig (2011), is helpful in seeing the changes in urban lives:

‘Urbanisation is now good news. Expert opinion has shifted profoundly in the past decade or two. Though slums as appalling as Victorian London’s are now widespread, and the Victorian fear of cities lives on, cancer no longer seems the right metaphor. On the contrary, with Earth’s population headed toward nine or ten billion, dense cities are looking more like a cure – the best hope for lifting people out of poverty without wrecking the planet...Harvard economist Edward Glaeser...talks...“There’s no such thing as a poor urbanised country; there’s no such thing as a rich rural country,” he said...Cities allow half of humanity to live on around 4 percent of the arable land, leaving more space for open country. Per capita, city dwellers tread more lightly in other ways as well, as David Owen explains in *Green Metropolis*. Their roads, sewers, and power lines are shorter and so use fewer resources. Their apartments take less energy to heat, cool, and light than do houses. Most important, people in dense cities drive less. Their destinations are close enough to walk to, and enough people are going to the same places to make public transit practical. In cities like New York, per capita energy use and carbon emissions are much lower than the national average. Cities in developing countries are even dense and use far fewer resources. But that’s mostly because poor people don’t consume a lot...its residents lack safe water, toilets, and garbage collection. So do perhaps a billion other city dwellers in developing countries. And it is such cities...that will absorb most of the world’s population increase between now and 2050 – more than two billion people. How their governments respond will affect us all. Many are responding the way Britain did to the growth of London in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: by trying to make it stop. A UN survey reports that 72 percent of developing countries have adopted policies designed to stem the tide of migration to their cities. But it’s a mistake to see urbanisation itself as evil rather than as an



inevitable part of development, says Satterthwaite, who advises governments and associations of slum dwellers around the world. “I don’t get scared by rapid growth,” he says. “I meet African mayors who tell me, ‘There are too many people moving here!’ I tell them, ‘No, the problem is your inability to govern them.’”...There is no single model for how to manage rapid urbanisation, but there are hopeful examples. One is Seoul, the capital of South Korea.’ (Kunzig 2011, pp.133-40)

As suggested from the long narrative above, the South Korean capital, Seoul, has come to be an example of ‘hope’ for rising developing countries as well as towards sustainability, similar to the principles of New Urbanism in some developed western societies. Even though its success is noted, and most Koreans’ aspirations seem tilted towards life in these high-rise apartments, the notorious discourses of high-rise built environment from the western view nevertheless circulates around academics and policymakers as well as the public in Korean society. Discourses in the field of academia and policy framework seem to be far from figuring out these high-rise built environments so far, even now when high-rise city living is seen as an urban ‘solution’. The future of the high rise model remains to be tested. Besides, discourses of built environments may stem from imagination beyond the reality. Planning and its practices seem to be carried out somewhat by narrative fashions, in particular, in terms of ‘built forms’, in which the deeper insight is not caught, but only simple facts are taken into consideration.

#### *Research aim*

Given the problem outlined above, the research aim is to move away from deterministic discourses about built environments that may cause the stigmatisation of certain types of urban residential settlement. Widespread assumptions about different built forms – especially high-rise housing – may preclude an understanding of different contexts in other parts of the world or the imagination of alternative policies. With the intention of uncovering and overcoming preconceived discourses, the research aims to provide a new way of seeing urban (high-rise) built environments. It should be noted that while a crude comparison between England and Korea has motivated the research interest for the thesis, the study is not intended to be

comparative in the pure sense. The main framework is thus not comparative, but is about looking at alternative explanations for the development of high rise housing that move beyond deterministic approaches in broad terms of economics and architecture.

To do so, the research is conducted by a consideration of the social, spatial, cultural, economic and political construction of high-rise built environments in the metropolitan city Seoul in Korea, focused on the lived experiences of the residents, and the role of the housing market and the governmental perspective. By employing the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘institution’, the research aim is sought out, particularly, by conceptualising ‘housing culture’ as an analytical framework. The adoption of these concepts is to depart from the predominant arguments over urban (high-rise) built environments. In order to contribute to unsettling some ingrained beliefs about these built environments, thus, a hybrid approach is devised with the intention of neutralising the ‘deterministic’ conceptualisation of built forms.

This chapter introduces some topics and issues underlying this research aim and approach. Discourses and meanings of housing are firstly discussed, which is then followed by a discussion of some traits within housing research to see how built forms are neglected in the discussion of built environments. Instead of conforming to a deterministic dualism between suburban houses and urban high-rise buildings, the notion of *cultural identity* is considered as representing the characteristics of urban built environments in the third section. Then, urban built environments in Korea are briefly explored. Finally, the chapter outlines the thesis structure.

### **1.1 Housing, its discourses and meanings**

From the introductory quotes it can be seen that housing brings to the fore two major metaphors: the ‘physical shell’ and ‘human mind’, both attached to a particular built form. These metaphors tend to be employed in terms of a dichotomy between ‘building’ and ‘home’. This may be categorised into the hard and the soft space (Smyth and Croft 2006). Basically, the former provides the concept of shelter to protect from certain weather conditions which connotes the scientific, physical and artificial place. On the other hand, the soft space relates to human experience or practices, reflecting the desires and the fears and representing the identity of the

occupants. Therefore, the hard space forms ‘the built environment’, whereas metaphor of the latter might be described as ‘the poetics of space’ in Bachelardian (1994) terms to remind nostalgia of past time (Moran 2006; Clapham 2005; Dovey 1985).

By combining these two concepts into a particular form of housing, it comes to represent the certain ideology, such as that of the ‘ideal home’, that penetrates into ideas of people. Given the important role of housing, many academics have committed to uncovering these meanings and bridging the gap between them, which shows a great deal of complexity and difficulty to reduce into a single term.

In relation to the physical sense, objective and physical factors, such as size, facilities, building condition or form, are attributed to material structure constituting ‘units of accommodation’ (Clapham 2005, p.117). Built forms, such as detached houses or flats, is one of the salient features in this category of meanings. One extreme expression of this feature is well described in a phrase of ‘a machine for living’ coined by the famous modernist architect Le Corbusier. Clapham (2005) is left without any doubt that many academics, policy makers and professionals have been solely devoted to this physicality of housing to the point of proposing extreme comparisons between high-rise and suburbanised housing. To bridge this physicality to the soft space, Somerville (1992, pp.532-3) distinguishes in two ways, which one is ‘abode’, or as he says, a ‘place which can be called home’, and the other is ‘hearth’, or ‘emotional and physical well-being of warmth and cosiness’. This combination of hard and soft senses in physical space seems to be usually not received in discourses of high-rise built environments within western-centric scholars, whereas Koreans would more readily accept both these meanings in high-rise apartments, but separately and not integrated. The general perception is based on the contradiction of these two concepts, as Kunzig (2011) acknowledges:

‘The apartment blocks may be uninspiring on the outside, urban planner Yeong-Hee Jang told me, but life inside “is so warm and convenient”. She repeated the word “warm” three times’. (Kunzig 2011, p.140)

On the other hand, the meaning of ‘home’ is diverse and plentiful, which is difficult to make into a simple categorisation. There is, nevertheless, a common understanding

that home is far more than simply its physical attributes, instead perceived with emotional and intimate relations and directed to a lived life. There has thus been a spike in interest in social science and investigation to connect this humanistic meaning to home in terms of the diverse experiences and roles of the home, in reifying and envisioning human life. Clapham (2005) calls upon a range of authors to make this point, for instance in terms of,

‘a kind of psychic warehouse in which memories are added in layers and stored...over time as new experiences happen and memories re-emerge or fade’ (p.140, see also Gurney 1996)

and as,

‘a symbol of our bibliography [sic], an expression of self, and a source of security as we become attached to it’ (p.140, see also Altman and Werner 1985).

By Bachelard (1994) in the topography of a house, routinised memories of our lives come from our everyday interaction with matter and space of the physical world, conveying to broader psychological states such as heritage, taste and class (Moran 2006). Després (1991, pp.97-9) depicts the meaning of home richly in terms of security and refuge, permanence, control, personal values, a locus for personalization and personal activities, and as an indicator of personal status.

Somerville (1992, pp.532-3) categorises these into broadly two conceptions as ‘roots’ of ‘one’s source of identity and meaningfulness’ and ‘heart’ of ‘emotional affection of happiness and stableness’ clearly to connote the soft meaning based on the reflection of one’s lived life, as compared to ‘abode’ and ‘hearth’. However, these are very subjective and are in some sense isolated from the society and collective meanings and also provide no immediate connection to the discussion of built forms. The ideas of Somerville themselves are not likely to help us understand not only how these meanings are integrated to a particular housing but also how they are differently adopted, for example, the different perspectives about high-rise living between Korea and other societies. Moreover, in the modern era, the change in the modes of economic and social life as well as political context largely due to the Industrial

Revolution has brought the new systematic ideas into the meanings of both hard and soft space. The ‘hard shell’ of built forms is often representative of ‘soft’ meanings under the commercial relationship and the creation and expression of consumerism in the capitalist ideology. This idea is returned to in the section 1.3. Prior to the discussion of such expansion of modern meanings, the next section reviews the housing research that has been undertaken in various disciplines.

## **1.2 Marginalisation of built form in housing research**

The reason why housing meanings remain in the separate areas of ‘building’ and ‘home’ may be partly due to the deterministic discourses in which only houses are considered in terms of ‘home’, while high-rise buildings are an inevitable facility for the residual class to stay temporary within society. This leaves housing forms merely to the physical assessment of housing condition by the adoption of objective factors, which might have caused the lack of theory related to the built form. Given this situation, the elaboration about built form is hardly found in terms of analytical and theoretical discussion, even though housing research ranges over various disciplines, and from a variety of academic traditions, such as anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, architecture and design areas, and also housing studies as a recent specific line of enquiry.

In the most basic sense of a physical building, without doubt housing is expected to be dealt with in architecture as a discipline which studies buildings. As housing is categorised into ‘vernacular (or folk, or popular) architecture’, however, it has been mostly neglected in the history and theory of architecture, despite its large portion of the physical built environment covering all over the place (Rapoport 1969, p.1). ‘Spontaneous’ and ‘romanticised’ or vernacular versions of architecture, based on cultural and social adaptation of design rather than mass produced housing, have predominated (Franklin 2006, see also, for example, Hamdi 1991; Rudofsky 1964; Turner 1976; Oliver 1987 2003). These works have tended to provide no room for discussion about housing produced in the modern mass-production system, which instead tends to be degraded and disqualified in architecture. Meanwhile, in *6,000 Years of Housing*, Schoenauer (2000) explores a brief history of the evolution of dwellings from the dawn of urban civilisations to the end of the twentieth century

over the world from the oriental to the occidental, including modern housing such as high-rise buildings and a variety of house styles. This attempt has challenged the fact that traditional domestic architecture was not a topic of great interest to architectural historians and that housing is not architecture until fairly recently.

Given the relatively recent interest in housing and its nature within the architectural discipline, however, the discussion mainly retain the description of types and styles of housing that are based on historical changes in relation to social, economic or political contexts rather than any analytical and theoretical meaning or process (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Franklin 2006). In this, meanings of built form tends to directly reflect social and cultural background without considering its process of meaning construction, which is simply interpreted by the superficial facts, for example, linking high-rise buildings to the meaning of social housing. This makes it difficult to see how a certain built form becomes idealised and adapted to the society, and differently accepted in different places. These critiques are similarly attributed to archaeology and social anthropology, which is difficult to develop theories for analytical system rather than descriptive knowledge, although they suggest a variety of topics as well as methodologies and epistemologies (Rapoport 1969; Franklin 2006).

Regarding the modern system of housing production, economics has probably gone ahead of architecture for interest in housing. This may be because housing is in some sense a matter of quantity as it is produced in bulk and standardised. The provision of housing can then be based on the scientific methods in terms of the economics of housing supply and demand as well as land economy. However, not only were urban economics, land economy and housing economics not identified before the 1920s, but those academic traditions were also not interested in the housing or residential structure of the city as a crucial area of research for many years (Maclennan 1982). Since the 1950s, as microeconomic theory has been reflected in housing economics, the neoclassical equilibrium framework has come to form the core of microeconomic thought, revealing how consumers and producers behave in a particular market (*ibid*).

In fact, this development of economic theory was in the middle of a suburbanisation period following the garden city movement, which must have been a great influence on scholars' thoughts about the built environment. It is perhaps inevitable that

economists generally dealt with housing through the development of space and space-access models, such as those associated with Alonso (1964), Muth (1969) and Mills (1972). These models tend to explain and predict sprawl, suburbanisation and single-family dwellings. Economists have long been concerned with apparently systematic patterns of housing and land uses within and around urban centres and the measurement and setting of criteria that attempt to map 'human experience into abstractions and concepts' (MacLennan 1982; Moran 2006, p.36, see also Brand 1997; Alexander 1979). Considering this, it is not difficult to imagine how extreme comparisons have arisen between the idealised garden city of suburban houses and the problematised social housing of high-rise buildings, in which built forms have been imbued with deterministic power.

Even though the sociological tradition has been more committed to the soft space of home, based on a more rigorous approach to theory, it too may have helped to promote deterministic ideas related to built forms. While sociology has paid attention to structured inequalities in the distribution of housing, in so doing it has focused on the constraints on choice rather than on the choice process itself (Clapham 2005). This has been based on the thoughts that home is reflexive of people's sense of self, and that meanings of home can differ according to social groups such as gender, class and race (Blunt & Dowling 2006, p.9). Saunders and Williams (1988, p.81), for example, highlight the interests of home in terms of 'household structures and relationships, gender relations, property rights, questions of status, privacy and autonomy, and so on' for research in the sociology and political economy of housing (cited in Blunt & Dowling 2006, p.9).

As the housing distribution between suburban houses and high-rise blocks has been set up broadly with a basis of social structures, images of social class, such as those found in economic and material effects, have certainly been reflected in the meanings of built forms. This has possibly reinforced the deterministic dualism with the evidence of social meanings in addition to the physical description from economic theory, in fact, without actual discussion about built forms, even leaving no room for it.

All of these research traditions discussed above have been integrated within the newly emerging discipline of 'housing studies', which is a combination of various disciplinary and theoretical traditions in examining the cultural, sociological, economic and political dimensions of the housing distribution. According to some, such as Franklin (2006) and Blunt & Dowling (2006), it has its basis primarily in legislative and policy issues in terms of the administrative, accessible, management and financial matters in housing. It has been argued that this (including the disproportionate dependence of housing researchers on government and policy-maker funding) has led to a lack of theoretical and conceptual strength in housing research, relying on a limited empirical tradition and producing taken-for-granted assumptions (Franklin 2006; Jacobs and Manzi 2000; Kemeny 1992). This has led to a bias towards quantitative endeavour within housing research at the expense of understanding more humanistic perspectives (Franklin 2006).

This section has explored some of the main research traditions with regard to neglecting the built form in housing research, the ways that these have been derived and why this matters. The next section aims to broaden the ideas of housing research towards social and spatial construction of housing in a position of a modern market's role, and the linkage to the city as cultural identity in urban built environments.

### **1.3 From dualism to cultural identity**

In modern society, discourses of home as 'roots' of identity and the 'heart' of humanistic relationships are no longer confined to the individual ideas and personal experiences, but linked to the public discourses, socially and spatially, in the wider context of the city. Public discourse inscribes an ideal or dominant form of 'home' in the soft sense of built environments, in which specific structures of housing and well-being social relations are aspired and reified as mediated by 'the media, popular culture and public policy' (Blunt & Dowling 2006, p.100). Blunt & Dowling provide a broad definition of these structures and social relations, in which idealised locations (neighbourhoods) and types of built form are included. These are seen as leading to the typical depiction of, in many western societies, 'belonging and intimacy amongst members of a heterosexual nuclear family, living in a detached, owner-occupied dwelling, in a suburban location' (*ibid*, p.101). It is doubtless the case that such a



deterministic idealisation has implicitly or explicitly been produced from, as well as absorbed within, housing research as discussed in the last section.

Blunt & Dowling's definition of housing structures and relations has its origins in the distinction between private and public space, and the emergence of this division particularly associated with suburbanisation trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Schoenauer 2000). They draw on work by Somerville (1992) and Davidoff and Hall (1987) to examine how 'privacy' became prioritised in the form of 'power to exclude others and prohibit surveillance'. The Garden City movement associated with Ebenezer Howard, and influential in the design of many suburban housing estates in England, is seen as espousing the privatised ideology by – rather than solving urban problems, allowing the avoidance and escape of the well-off population, insulating their families from severe urban environments (Schoenauer 2000). This can only have served to reinforce the dualism.

The idealization of suburban detached family housing also has its basis in the intimate relationships of family in which the ideal home is conceptualized as a soft space, as a place or an institution in which members of family are reared, rested and kept to familiar everyday lives (Saunders 1990, p.263). Even more, since the 1950s, the discourse of ideal family home has been reinforced by a housing policy focus that promotes ownership over other tenures. Ownership is depicted as having an entrenched and natural appeal, considered as 'the only type of tenure which permits pride of possession, accrual of wealth, freedom and a sense of well-being' (Franklin 2006, p.47, see also Saunders 1990; Gurney 1999).

These discourses towards an ideal nuclear family home seems to be mostly the same as those found in Korean society since the period of industrialisation and urbanisation, however with one important distinction: in Korea the same ideals and 'soft spaces' are found not in suburban houses but in high-rise apartments. In particular, the fact that the rapid economic growth was expressed to middle-class high-rise apartments, and now advanced to the producer-branded apartments is perhaps a suggestion of a unique cultural phenomenon. This has been based on the marketisation of housing products to boost developmentalist ideology, which has directly and continuously been controlled by governmental intervention, such as price caps. Moreover, highly

segregated built environments and uneven patterns of development in Seoul, which stem from high-rise buildings in general, are difficult to understand by the western view of suburbanisation and stigmatised urban high-rise housing. The Anglo-US western orthodoxy and its methods of analysis do not seem to fit in analysing the Korean housing market, which means that the western-centric dualism is not able to make a direct adoption to the Korean context. Instead, this may mean going beyond traditional economic or quantitative indicators as set up in the context of suburbanised patterns of the city, to look for new ways of evaluating the cultural production of housing and its encouragement by marketing processes and support from governmental policy in Korean contexts. Analyses that conform too narrowly to the western neoclassical economic model of land use, and which are not sensitive to social, cultural, economic and political activities and processes, are unlikely to be transferrable to the Korean context.

Since the rapid economic growth and the advent of visual media, memory and desire shaping the meaning of home cannot be separable from marketing processes, and is governed by broader cultural imperatives (Moran 2006). Wealth, taste, class and nostalgia as reminiscent power of houses is largely influenced by a highly advanced process of media organisation in the routine and unnoticed daily life, which is also connected to the unequal distribution of power, status and money (Moran 2006). This has brought new phases of socio-spatial politics in terms of inequity and unaffordability, and how these economic inequalities are encouraged by a market economy impacts upon cultural identity. This is important in the discourse of housing (Alcobia-Murphy 2006). It leads to a focus on the social and cultural aspects of institutional practices that are integrated in urban built environments.

In a sense, the research attempts to integrate spatial, social, cultural, economic and political concerns, in which urban built environments are institutionalised within the city as social spaces entailing their identity and power. This is to appreciate the construction of meanings of built environments as representative of cultural identities in the position of the city in social, cultural, economic and political terms. Their diverse and complex phenomena, and dynamic processes are also emphasised in order to move away from deterministically simplified accounts of, for example, built forms

or tenure patterns that are neither directly linked to the social structure, nor are merely physical and material entities.

This research, therefore, draws on the concept of ‘culture’ as a social and spatial construct, which is based on humanised perspectives and experiences. To do this, ‘housing culture’ is conceptualised and used as an analytical lens. Housing culture is understood as the institutionalised built environment through the institutional activities under a variety of constraints or opportunities, in terms of social, cultural, economic and political level. Here, ‘culture’ allows an understanding of urban built environments based on their complex and dynamic phenomena, and the role of the social processes. This is not only to avoid the simplistic view of ‘ideal’ suburban houses and stigmatised high-rise buildings disseminated by deterministic discourses, but also to suggest different possible understandings of certain features embedded in urban built environments. A housing culture approach is then seen to justify the purposes to prevent from the deterministic views and explore complexity and diversity based on social and cultural interests, as discussed in this section. The next section introduces the research setting of Korea, which was analysed by the approach.

#### **1.4 Urban built environments in Korea**

Even though the recognition of cultural difference in Korea might give rise to the analytical framework of comparison study between the East and the West, in fact, the distinctive patterns are also perceived even within East Asian countries. It can be thus that contemporary context and cultures within individual countries (and even cities) may be even more interesting and worthwhile to explore in relation to built environments. Korea is an especially interesting source of issues about urban high-rise built environments. As one of the world’s fastest growing economies, that increased from one of the world’s poorest countries with less than 100 US dollars a per capita GDP in 1960 to the world’s 13<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the 2000s (OECD 2007), intensive population growth and housing provision has been seen over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the capital city, Seoul. At the national level, this process has been intensified to overcome the poor condition of the country after the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the opening to foreigner relationships. The intense growth included a variety of complex

societal transitions, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and democratisation, in a relatively short period. Effectively, Korea changed from an isolated agrarian society to an advanced globalised economy. The emergence of high-rise apartments was at the centre of these changes. Such apartments now represent over 50 % of housing stock and are symbolic of middle-class status and modern family lifestyles, which clearly differs from the developed patterns of many western societies (although not necessarily of post-Communist societies such as those in Eastern Europe). High levels of socio-spatial inequality and centralisation in Seoul are, however, reflective of rapid growth of high-rise built environments in terms of social, cultural, economic and political meanings. This inequality has deepened since the 2000s after the Asian economic crisis in 1997, and, since then, the development of luxury branded apartments, by conglomerates such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai, have served to further polarise the housebuilding structure. Despite significant increases in housing prices and the associated socio-spatial problems, around half of population lives in the Seoul metropolitan area in 2012 (MOPAS). The density of settlement is reflected in the statistic that housing for about 50% of the population, such as high-rise developments cover just over 10 % of the whole land area in South Korea (KLP).

High-rise apartments in Korea are a symbol of an urban middle-class which represents success and wealth in one's life, and a change into a better lifestyle in Korea (Lett 1998). This started from, notably, developments in the Gangnam district, where the government created new residential settlements to alleviate the population density in the city. A severe housing shortage in Seoul, particularly in traditionally settled areas, emerged from the beginning of the 1970s. Since then, Gangnam, originally located in rural areas outside of city, came to be a representative of the richest residential settlements with high-rise apartments in Korea (which has recently been reflected in contemporary pop music in the so-called 'Gangnam Style'), and a trigger of widespread apartment developments and extension of the city through the redevelopment, reconstruction and new city developments. This has led to massive changes in terms of housing patterns, housebuilding structure, and housing policy as well as lifestyles in Korea. The photographs below in Figure 1.2 show evidently this change, in which informal settlements formulated with a basis of spontaneous and vernacular architecture over the mountain hill (a) were redeveloped into high-rise apartments for middle-classes (b), which transformed the landscape of the city (Kim

1994). The transformation of landscape means all the difference from the previous socio-spatial characteristics as improvement of neighbourhoods, which entails changing socio-economic structure as well as built environments.

Figure 1. 2 Development of high-rise apartments in areas of informal settlement

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(a) 1980s (Source: Kim 1994, p 7)

(b) 2005 (Source: Google map 2008)

In such a transformation of the city, consumers and developers in a highly marketised system of housing production and consumption have been significant, important actors in Korea, which is based on the governmental support of housing policy in social, economic and political processes in local as well as at a national level. Besides, these socio-spatial developments have been accompanied by complex formal and informal processes with connections to power structures and social and political arrangements. To collect data on housing culture in this framework, a qualitative methodology was used in the case study in Gangnam neighbourhoods where the research was carried out. The case area was intentionally selected with a basis of historical and social meanings as a prototype of apartment developments, as the research setting and forming a specifically appropriate object of study.

This section has in brief outlined some contextual background of the research setting of high-rise built environments in Korea. As presented in the previous sections, the research pursues to provide a new way of looking at housing in the debates of urban built environments taking a cultural point of view to exploring the construction of built environments through institutional practices. In the sense of a humanistic viewpoint, it is also an endeavour to look beyond simple assumptions of rational and universal views regarding people as uncontentious and perceived in uniform ways,

and neglecting the actors' behaviour (save to say that 'outcomes' are usually seen as evidence of behaviour). These are again reviewed in the concluding chapter of the thesis by reflecting the discussions through the next chapters. To conclude this chapter, the next section outlines the thesis structure briefly.

### **1.5 Thesis structure**

Before exploring the issues outlined briefly in the preceding sections, the empirical setting of high-rise built environment in Seoul is discussed to develop the contextual considerations in Chapter Two and Three. Chapter Two describes how macro-level processes of the transformation of the social system based on capitalism have shaped Korea's housing market and urban landscape, where, while housing production is highly privatised, its continuous developments rely on the governmental policy through the control of land and urban planning. These led to the social and spatial extension of the metropolitan city Seoul, in which high-rise city living has been reified and normalised. Continuing this theme, Chapter Three explores how the structure of the housing market has led specifically to the provision of high-rise buildings, which supported the production and reproduction of high-rise built environments over the last half century. At the local level in Gangnam, the neighbourhoods where the case study is carried out, particular features such as regional socio-economic characteristics and the remarkable social and spatial interests have influenced the augmentation of high-rise development. The discussion of the case study then leads to the specific issues in the research context, and knowledge gaps in existing research.

Given the contextual setting, Chapter Four reviews several key debates on urban built environments over the last decades, which are broadly based on three traditions of environmentally deterministic, sociological and mainstream economic accounts. This draws on the 'deterministic dualism' in order to discuss how urban high-rise built environments have become stigmatised in academic and policy discourses, while other housing forms have been accepted largely uncritically. Other possible concepts of interpreting urban built environments differently are suggested in order to highlight their complexity and diversity, and the cultural and institutional process of constructing them. This leads to the conceptualisation of a 'housing culture' in

Chapter Five. As an alternative analytical framework, it enables an understanding of urban built environments as reflecting the culture of the institutionalised built environment, which secures identity within the city, rather than understanding residential settlements in deterministic terms. The conceptions of culture and institutions stress the significance of social, cultural, economic and political matters, which are linked to power structures.

Chapter Six presents the methods used to gather the information required to answer the research questions. In order to focus on cultural dimensions based on the socio-spatial construction of built environments, qualitative methods were considered as most appropriate. Within a case study framework, semi-structured interviews with major actors (residents, developers and policymakers) related to the construction of built environments in Gangnam were mainly used, and other sources such as archival, visual and documentary data were used as complementary to the interview data. This allowed more attention to be given to perceptions and processes, which are often ignored and obscured. Selecting participants, getting access and analysing data are discussed with regard to reflections on the research process.

As the first analytical chapter, Chapter Seven examines cultural constructions of high-rise built environments in the city of Seoul, based on the public's views of lifestyles in order to examine how discourses are shaped around high-rise apartments. This 'value construction' of built environments is complex and often falsified through the public consensus, academic preconceptions or policy practices. However, this process also includes and develops social ideologies in which groups within society seek particular ideas of social life as well as negotiation of certain features arising from structural constraints. These constructed ideas are reified to a symbolic capital as representing cultural identity within the neighbourhoods and over the city, evoking the power of the cultural discourses, which is discussed in Chapter Eight. The potential effects on social and spatial segregation of the inscribed symbolic ideas based on the cultural boundaries of apartment complexes are discussed. This implies a conceptual framework in which collective identity influences social inclusion as well as social exclusion at the same time, demonstrating a complexity of power relations. Chapter Nine focuses on institutional practices under the superstructure of a housing culture in relation to the dominance of high-rise built environments. Social, economic and

political processes of housing culture, which consist of everyday activities, the market's operation and policy interactions, highlight the complex and symbolic power of a predominant culture in shaping the development of high-rise residential settlements. Institutional behaviours within a housing culture can be seen as a form of strategy to secure the ontological identity in an uncertain and insecure world based on the modern capitalised system as opposed to the traditional fixed society. These activities and ideas are embodied to societal perspectives, generating discourses and supporting spatial developments.

To conclude, Chapter Ten explores the implications of the analysis for understandings of urban built environments. The deterministic dualism of the ideal suburban house on the one hand and stigmatised urban high-rise buildings on the other seem to be limited, as they can be constructed in opposite ways in Korea compared to usual western narratives. On the contrary to simplified discourses, this thesis suggests that the analysis in constructing urban built environments can be diversified through the complex institutional relationships and processes at the macro and micro level. A more complex and dynamic understanding of built environments is then required, which explains cultural and symbolic meanings as well as economic and political power. The concept of a 'housing culture' enables representing the dynamic phenomena and including a variety of formal and informal institutions, in which urban built environments are constructed through them socially, culturally, economically and politically. This is to overcome the views of a deterministic structure of the city living. These theoretical concerns and issues are reflected in the final comments of the chapter with some implications for further research.



## *Chapter Two*

### **The Growth of Seoul in Korea**

#### **Introduction**

South Korea has a housing market with particular characteristics that sets it apart from many other developed countries as well as within the eastern countries. The high-rise apartment is now the most favoured form of housing in metropolitan Seoul as well as other regions. Over the last half century, as a response to intense industrialisation and urbanisation pressures following political and economic reform triggered by the globalisation process, there has been massive transformation of spatial and physical forms. Not only have societal changes made way for high-rise housing as a rational response to the population growth, but high-rise apartments have also allowed Seoul to grow and expand. Recently, distinctive luxury provider-branded apartments, developed by conglomerates such as Samsung and LG, have come to dominate the market and the physical city. The construction of massive apartment blocks is still an ongoing process in the South Korean capital city.

This suggests that Korea is highly contrasted with many western societies, and looking into this is worthwhile to explore the diversity of built environments. The next two chapters contextualise some of the issues that will arise from theoretical chapters four and five. The contextual setting is based on two logics. On the one hand, the first idea is followed that high-rise apartments have been a simply rational way of accommodating the population growth. On the other hand, there is also an alternative story that the growth of apartments and the way the apartment market develops has allowed the further expansion of Seoul and has done so by becoming culturally embedded within modern Korean society. These are discussed specifically in relation to the case study district of Gangnam, a recently developed wealthy district, characterised by high rise housing, in the mega-sized capital city of Seoul. Based on the two possible logics, the chapters also highlight significant understandings from the local to the city contexts in the wider city considerations and globalised society. This discussion also shows the distinctive social, cultural and economic processes in Korea

which differ in many ways from existing knowledge and understandings of built environments, especially in the western context.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Prior to the detail discussion of Korean housing development, the first section briefly explores the global contexts in housing development along with the ideological development over the last decades. Examples of high-rise housing are shown in the global experiences in order to contextualise the focus on cultural diversity of the research. Then, the central issues underlying the construction of the housing market in Korea over the last century are discussed in the second section. Dramatic urban growth and the development of housing markets are based on significant changes in social systems and structures by external forces leading to the globalisation process in Korea. In the third section, the discussion is based on urban governance and housing production according to the changes in urban contexts and structure. Given the experience of rapid urban growth and high profiles of high-rise development based on policy support, Seoul is seen as representative of urban landscapes across Korea and as the trigger of dynamic urban processes of the expansion and reinforcement of city living, which is discussed in the fourth section. This then leads to the next chapter, Chapter Three, which turns to a more local scale to discuss the contemporary housing market in Seoul and the case study district of Gangnam.

## **2.1 Housing in global contexts**

This section presents the broad setting of global housing contexts and development according to the market-oriented direction in housing production and consumption over the world through the last century. How neoliberalist and developmentalist ideologies have been developed in housing privatisation and home-ownership is explored first. Within this ideological development, the second part of the section shows how the cultural diversity of built environment, especially high-rise housing, has been contextualised over time and place. Some examples from different countries are given, which emphasises a need to understand historical and institutional backgrounds.

### **Global trends in housing**

The key global feature of housing is its mass provision, a necessary requirement of population and economic growth. Its formulation process has been transformed according to societal change. The concept of production and consumption, in which the latter came to be recognised much later than the former (Miller 1995), even more lately in housing sector, may be related to the transformation of construction and distribution modes in modern system compared to the vernacular styles of pre-capitalist society. Through globalisation processes, these changes have crossed over the world, mainly from the West to the East. In particular, a new ideological paradigm, so-called neoliberalism, accelerated in the 1980s starting through the policies of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and President Ronald Reagan in the United States, have crossed over multiple geographical and sociological conditions (Park et al. 2012). This has brought about a general shift in attitudes towards housing provision away from public concerns to private acquisition over the last decades (Forrest 2003).

The early developed countries, such as the northern Europe, had established the welfare state to reconstruct society from aftermath of the World Wars in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was based on Keynesian managerialism (Hill et al. 2012). Within this, housing was largely provided by the state, in which it was generally considered as a public responsibility rather than a market product. However, given the lack of public resources and its concomitant economic recession, the strong regulated turn towards the market-oriented housing system has swept through countries, leaving deep traces of neglected social groups and thus widened social inequality (Forrest 2003). For example, the Right to Buy policy in the UK successfully transited council housing to privatisation (Whitehead 2003). Whitehead (2003) also suggests that other parts of the world, such as the USA and Australia where the involvement of government is minimum, has even further retreated from direct intervention models, focusing instead on the improvement of financial systems.

Compared to the Western world, Eastern countries had later economic development, tending to follow the western model in broad terms. As a result, developmentalist ideology has been particularly concerned to ‘catch up’ with the already-developed countries, replacing public welfare services with the aim of economic growth (Hill et

al. 2012; Holliday 2000; Ronald and Chiu 2010; Ronald and Doling 2010). Although developmentalism has necessitated stronger state involvement of the state than in neoliberalist states, both regimes tend to regulate market systems, not adopt completely *laissez-faire* policies, in order to encourage private investment (Hill et al. 2012). Japan was the first Asian country to adopt a developmental state, followed by the four East Asian ‘tigers’ of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. Now, South East Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, China and Viet Nam are following. In the development of these countries, housing has been particularly important, not just in terms of a duty to distribute opportunity, but more as trigger of the nation’s economic development (Lee et al. 2003). South Korea and Taiwan have focused more on privatised developments in housing, which may be seen as closer to neoliberalist regime, compared to other countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore (Chen and Li 2012; Park 1998).

Under the neoliberalist and developmentalist strategy with the prime focus on economic growth, the home-ownership ideology has come to the fore in both the West and the East, because of its close relationship between housing consumption and economic performance. Although there has not been universal convergence (Hill et al. (2012) points to more nuanced or hybrid terms, such as ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ or ‘developmental neoliberalism’) policies across the world have generally taken a direction towards the market production and consumption of housing (Forrest and Lee 2003). This tendency has taken place at the expense of biased tenure distributions in terms of economic assessment and social ideology, which has led to clear preferences towards home purchase (Hirayama 2003; Williams 2003).

The growth of home ownership has enjoyed the energetic support of governmental policies and financial institutions, even global institutions such as GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), WTO (the World Trade Organisation) and IMF (the International Monetary Fund) (Brenner and Theodore 2002). The fantasy-like reality came to be at risk with major economic crises, firstly from the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and then the Global Economic Crisis triggered by the sub-prime mortgage program in the USA at the end of the following decade (Ronald and Chiu 2010). In addition, global economic development has brought about a concomitant

environmental crisis, for example, climate change. Even though it is not necessarily seen as the end of the Neoliberalism (Park and Saito 2012), the acknowledged insecurity and the uncertain sense of human beings have tended to lead to an emphasis on more ‘realistic’ approaches based on lived experiences rather than universal abstracts, for example, through critical views of tenure patterns, more diverse policy approaches, or new development patterns (Clammer 2012; Ronald and Chiu 2010). Consequently there are some important local differences within the broad neoliberal landscape.

There is now greater recognition of the socioeconomic problems engendered by uneven economic growth and volatile market conditions (Ronald and Chiu 2010). Yet we cannot transition from this without understanding the historical development and recognising that advancement is not achieved overnight. This means that there is a need for better understanding about the reality we have constructed, which is perhaps more diverse than we have imagined (Clammer 2012). The next section develops this idea through the position of diversity in housing production and consumption

### **The global position of high-rise housing**

Despite the adoption of similar ideological developments about economic growth throughout the world, there remain distinctive differences in local built environments and people’s everyday lives within those environments. Although the use of money to buy housing in the capitalist system is nearly ubiquitous, that same value can buy different housing in terms of physical buildings, lifestyles or social status. What is demanded and consumed within local housing markets relies heavily on the places where we belong to or live in, or when we are in historical events. Although not necessarily involving monetary exchange, this contextual importance is also clearly seen among various dwelling types of vernacular architecture. With modernity, these differences became even further diversified according to the technological advancement and institutional development. High-rise housing may be at the centre of this issue as the emergence of the modern residential development, varying its meanings and uses within the historical references based on local and contextual backgrounds. Nevertheless, there has been a dominant idea about the deterministic relationship between physical building forms and social realities based on an abstract

conceptualisation, largely within the western experience, until the recent challenge of the global financial crisis (Ronald and Chiu 2010; Baxter and Lees 2009; Forrest et al. 2000; Doling 1999).

In many parts of the West, such as the UK, USA, and Australia, high-rise buildings have become synonymous with the concept of social, or public, housing. Contrary to the optimistic expectations of the modern architectural rationalism, social problems have emerged from the unhumane built environments of physical high-rise structures, which have led to the direct relations with social stratification (Newman 1972; Coleman 1985; Spicker 1987). This is partly linked to the institutional setting, through policy practices that have connected high-rise built environments with particular social groups, such as those in particular classes and ethnicities, through allocations and other bureaucratic policies. Other explanations may be attributed to the contrasting model of 'modern suburban life', especially associated with metropolitan expansions in the 1930s, which effectively competed for middle-class sensibilities and arrived a little bit earlier than the modern high-rise era.

At the end of the last century and towards the beginning of new millennium, however, the fate of these models has involved an ideological transition, which is reflected in the regeneration projects based on the sustainable development in many part of the earlier developed western world (Baxter and Lees 2009; Lees 2008; Colomb 2007; Seo 2002). Especially in the UK, these projects have adopted the high rise model in the private sphere, with gentrifying tendencies, and there are new high rise blocks in places like Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle as well as the more obvious places like London. For example, in London, there are now many examples of renewed views on high-rise city living, such as Lauderdale Tower in the Barbican (now largely in private ownership) and Edrich House with high proportion of council tenants (for more examples, see Baxter and Lees 2009). Also, the Downtown South in Vancouver has been transformed from the run-down area with social delinquency into the vibrant middle-class residential neighbourhood (Davison and Lees 2010).

On the other hand, while recognising the 'failure' of high-rise living in the West in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there is a contrasting situation in many parts of the East where high-rise housing has been largely adopted along with the developmentalist engine of

economic growth (Forrest et al. 2000; Logan and Molotch 1987). Their adoption in housing policy came to cut across social structure or institutional diversity (Ronald and Chiu 2010; Lee et al. 2003). Basically, in Asia, as Lee et al. (2003) suggests, there is no clear distinction between public or private, ownership ratio and household affluence, as 'public' housing is in large part or increasingly meant to be sold rather than rented socially. This may be because 'economic globalisation does not alter urban cultures in deterministic ways, as cities are nested in different national, social and cultural contexts from which emerge different strategies for the management of or resistance to globalisation' (Clammer 2003, p.404).

Singapore and Hong Kong provide instructive examples of such differential strategies. Despite similar tendencies models of direct state provision, they have resulted in different proportions of home-ownership. An early commitment towards ownership, from the early 1960s, in Singapore led to a 90.5% ownership level in 1999, with 86% of that housing publicly constructed. Such success of the universal home-ownership model was based on a 99-year lease with state land ownership. On the other hand, Hong Kong consists of 50% of rent from the housing authority, with a much slower home ownership program, which achieved 52% in 2000, but may have led to high speculation tendency and widened social inequalities (Lee et al. 2003; Huat 2003; Wah 2000). Both countries have a relatively high living standard in Asia, and both have most of their population living in high-rise buildings.

Unlike Singapore and Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have much more limited state provision in housing being largely dependent on private developers (Lee et al. 2003; Chen and Li 2012). In Japan, apartments for rent have been provided at the initiative of the government, but now they are at the stage of the image transformation of high-rise city living from the step of property ladder toward the ownership of suburban detached-houses to the new lifestyles of young people since the change in ownership from public to private and the recent economic environment, especially in Tokyo (Ronald and Hirayama 2006; Ronald 2004). This change may come from the new policy practice of encouraging construction of high rise condominiums since the 1990s after the collapse of the economic bubble (Hirayama 2005). Even more extremely, it seems that South Korea is the home for high-rise apartments, full of them over the country despite not being a small country with land

constraints like Singapore and Hong Kong. They have come to represent modern middle-class family lifestyles in contemporary Korea, starting with mostly private ownership regardless of public and private provision since the 1970s but now moving the focus to social welfare after the economic crises (Ronald and Lee 2012; Ha 2010; Ronald and Jin 2010).

As can be seen from the examples above, there are clear cultural and institutional differences that have contributed to particular local housing systems, even given the same built form. What we see as the distinctive pattern of built environments seems dependent on formation processes, based on rules and behaviours, and the way people take for granted their contexts. Therefore, to help a broader understanding of high-rise built environments, contemporary Korean high-rise housing needs to be explored in the context of global trends and, within them, local historical developments. This is the focus of the next section.

## **2.2 Development of housing market in Korea**

This section presents the broad historical context of changes in the societal system of housing provision in Korea within the contexts of globalisation. The social, economic, political as well as cultural changes that Korea has undergone have influenced the urban built environment and urban governance. A privatised market structure has been a contingent and somewhat inevitable outcome according to the transformation of social contexts forced by a number of external pressures and its effects on the urban situation, and the incapacity of an unprepared government to respond to them. This discussion is chronologically structured, in brief from the early society of capital city Seoul to the modern-day transformation of urban and housing contexts.

### **Transformation of Korean society**

Since joining to the global world at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which will be described below, contemporary modern Korea has been shaped through the whole of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In history, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century will be seen as a milestone to distinguish previous society from the present and future Korean society, as current bases of social structures have mostly been as a result of transformations during the period. Industrialisation, urbanisation, capitalisation and modernisation are the key words in



the era that marks a tremendous upheaval from previous traditional society, in which the state had a central ruling power based on the fixed social structures pre-given at birth. Our lifestyles are probably at the centre in this remarkable change socially and culturally as well as spatial and physical urban landscapes. Undoubtedly, the total transformation of society has been accompanied by change in social ideologies, and economic and political systems, which was triggered by the modern world and external forces from other countries.

In the precapitalist era, Korea was in principle a class society descended from inheritance, which was similar in form to the feudal system before the modern time in many western countries. During the Choson dynasties from 1392 to 1910 in Korea, neo-Confucianism was a basic ideology combined with the class structure to order the society, ruling political and social ideas for over five centuries. Central state power was imperative and governed the whole society, and climbing the social ladder was not possible under the Confucian social system. The aristocratic elites known as *yangban* were recruited by the Confucian exam system, which was to acquire Confucian norms, such as self-cultivation and moral education. The system was in principle based on a meritocratic ideal, but limited in the hereditary class structure, and those who passed the exam dominated governmental posts (Lett 1998). As Lett indicates, although the number of *yangban* was less than 10% of the whole population, their hegemonic leadership predominated over the Choson society, by ruling with Confucian perspectives that became the 'common senses' of the society, such as the dependent relationship between parents and children (Lett 1998, see also Deuchler 1992, p.12; Eckert 1990-91, p.135; Gramsci 1971).

Furthermore, social and occupational order reflected the power structure of the Confucian system, and urban areas were centres of power and a consuming place for the ruling class (Cho 1991). As Korea was primarily an agrarian society, farmers provided most economic capital to the state and rulers in terms of taxation of surplus production. Cho (1991) makes a point from this that the rulers economically depended on rural areas, whereas crafts and commerce existed only for the consumption of ruling class. This structure was reflexive of Confucian class order that farmers were ranked next to scholars, and craftsmen and merchants were disdained in the occupation hierarchy. Given the basic assumption of occupational discrimination, the

free-market economy and capital accumulation were not possible in general, under which conditions not only were both business and industry difficult to grow, but foreign trade was also very limited and strictly allowed to only China and Japan until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lett 1998).

The closed and fixed Korean society, however, faced fundamental change at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, by abolishing old orders and accepting modern systems. It was in 1876 when Korea was finally opened to others through the Gangwha forced treaty by Japan, and then followed to make diplomatic relationships with the USA, Britain and Germany in the beginning of the 1880s. Since then, various foreign cultures from Japan and western countries penetrated and influenced Korean society. They came to mix with traditional culture or change old customs, which became new social norms and required new social institutions. It caused the Korean government to make way for new business perspectives, in which anyone could be legally engaged in trade (Deuchler 1977, p.127 cited in Lett 1998), whilst society and class structure became complicated due to a new ideology of the capitalist system. In 1894, thus, it resulted in reforms to the traditional structure, known as ‘Gabo Reform’, which mainly led to the abolishment of the class system and the extension of opportunity for technical jobs and for governmental positions to middle-classes. This social change led to a new society where not only has business and industry been developed through the adoption of a market economy and capitalism, but also economic ability has come to be a new measure of social status rather than social position given by birth.

Due to the successive historical events of the Japanese invasion and the Korean War until the early 1950s, in fact, the current structure of Korean capitalists including the construction industry, such as Hyundai, came to the fore later, although the basic system of capitalist society was ready to operate at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Gong 1991). During the colonial period since the annexation to Japan in 1910, not only was Seoul degraded from the capital city to a small city within Gyunggi-*do*, but the growth of Seoul was also restrained by the control of construction activities (Cha et al. 2004). In this context, most capital belonged to the Japanese, and Korean entrepreneurs were limited to grow and subordinated under the authority of the colonial government (Lett 1998). This resulted in an uneven occupational distribution in which the Japanese occupied most of the professions, but most Koreans were

confined to lower class occupations, such as peasants or labour, according to new social demarcations of landowners and peasant farmers, capital and labour, and bureaucrats (Jeon et al. 2008). The alleviation of such limits was however triggered by the expansion of the independence movement from 1919, which had the effect of change in perspectives of Japanese colonial government from an enforcement regime to cultural politics. This made way for the fast growth of Korean capitalists and the establishment of companies with a basis of headquarters and branch offices in Seoul and factories in outer areas of Seoul (Yang 1991). In addition to this, Yang (1991) also suggests that the rapid progress of industrialisation came to be due to the military demand for Japanese involvement in invading China and the World War from the end of the 1930s, impelling towards the transformation of the Korean society from agricultural economy into the modern industrial structure.

Another momentous change was, however, inevitable in the structure of social system because of the power transition to America since the independence from Japan in 1945 and following the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. During this period, the complex political context due to conflicts of global forces caused the chaotic society in which urban infrastructures were completely devastated, and industries were actually disabled. It was from the mid-1950s that the recovery started through the aid from the USA, such as supply of raw materials or importation of product lines. It has been argued that South Korea became dependent again under the regime of the capitalist system led by the new subordinated relationship with the USA in order to make a defence base against communism for political and military purposes (Gong 1991). Inevitably, the Korean economy was restructured, and land reform was driven by the U.S. military government against the North Korean system taken during the Korean War (Lett 1998). This arguably came to be a basis of the westernisation process of modern South Korea. In this context, some entrepreneurs in building industries, for example, Hyundai, Jung-ang and Daerim, grew from the construction economy engaged in recovery of the nation in the 1950s, which has continued to the present day (Gong 1991).

These series of historical events have influenced Korea to become a capitalist society highly influenced by the global power structure of modern history. In result, the development of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation took place in exchange for

urban contexts to be altered in terms of urban structure and housing condition as well as population distribution.

### Urban housing context

Korea remained an agrarian society up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Although Seoul, which was called Hansung previously, had a typical pre-industrialised society, it also had urban features with shops and densely settled traditional houses along the main street in the urban centre even before opening to the external world (Jeon et al. 2008). Since the forced treaty in 1876, as shown in Figure 2.1, the tremendous changes in Choson society influenced by foreign countries were seen in the physical transformation of traditional urban areas over a period of 25 years at the turn of the century in which industrialisation and modernisation were in progress. The change of society was not only seen in urban landscapes, but it was also reflected in residential settlements, which became more complex, structured by a new social order and populated by Japanese settlers.

Figure 2. 1 The transformation of urban areas, Jongro Street

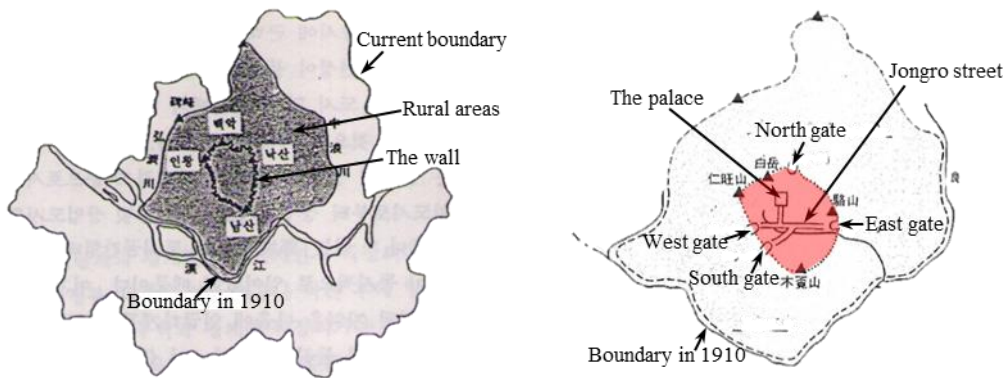


(Source: re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2008, p 30)

Originally, in Hansung, the structure of residential settlements was spatially separated by the Confucian class structure, with usually the ruling classes residing in the urban centre, and farmers and lower classes in rural areas. As can be seen in the map in Figure 2.2, higher-classes occupied places around the palaces in the north side within the walls, whereas the lowest bureaucrats or poorer scholars were located in the south near the bottom of Namsan Mountain. Those who worked in commerce or crafts lived around the main street, Jongro Street, in the urban centre. Meanwhile, farmers were settled in rural sites near the farm lands, which were situated in outer areas of the

walls. In principle, this residential differentiation was a strict rule based on the class structure and reproduced through governance of the urban planning (Cha et al. 2004). Cha et al. (2004), however, also suggest that this basic structure came to change under the Japanese colony, as they moved the central business sector towards the south area, dominating the commercial power apart from the previous centre. They show that this new urban centre resulted in restructuring the residential settlements: the areas in the south which were previously left to the poor scholars or lower civil servants became Japanese residential settlements, and accordingly the colonial government focused on the development of the south within the walls; furthermore, as the population of Japanese increased since the mid-1930s, their settlements were extended to the north, which resulted in mixing Korean and Japanese; on the other hand, middle- and lower-classes, or down-graded previous high-classes were relegated out of the centre, due to the high cost of housing. It seems that these new spatial orders brought about the extension of Seoul, as the whole area within the walls came to be the core of the city unlike the previous Choson society with only a central street.

Figure 2. 2 The development of Hansung (Seoul) in the early 20th Century



(a) The boundary within and out of the wall      (b) Urban structure within the wall

(Source: adapted from Lim 1985)

The extension of urban areas was in fact originated from the population growth in Seoul after the relationship with foreigners in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Choson dynasties of over 500 years since 1392, the growth of the population was not significant, and the administrative boundary of the city continued without major differences (Cha et al. 2004). Cha et al. (2004) provide the following statistics. Although Seoul was characterised by relatively high density in its urban parts, as

100,000 people in 16.5 km<sup>2</sup> within the walls (approximately 60 persons per hectare), but only 10,000 people in outer walls in 1428, the population in Seoul maintained at around 200,000 since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century for 200 years until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In fact, this figure represents a big size of urban population for pre-industrialised society, but housing shortage was not a big problem for over 500 years by keeping the ratio of a house with a household (Son 1986). According to Son, the statistics in 1899 shows that a household included only 4.7 people occupying a house as recorded at 200,922 of population and 42,879 houses, although the quality of houses varied from the class structure and lower class housing was very humble and scruffy with higher densities associated with the extended family structure. Son (1986) suggests that this figure remained steady until the 1920s with little growth of population at 0.8% in Seoul, even though other local cities had an enormous growth, such as Busan at 34.1% or Pyongyang (the current capital city of North Korea) at 63.5% from 1914 to 1920. Since the 1920s after the independence movement in 1919, however, the population increased sharply in Seoul, especially out of the central urban area because of Japanese occupying the centre (Son 1996a, p364 cited in Park and Jeon 2002). It reached up to around 730,000 in 1936 and 900,000 in 1945 compared to 250,000 in 1910 when Korea was annexed to Japan, largely due to changes in socio-economic structure leading farmers to move into urban areas (Cha et al. 2004). There was thus an inevitable result that the issue of housing shortage came to the fore during these periods.

Table 2.1 shows that, as population went up increasingly since 1919, the shortage of housing became significant at 5.77% in 1926, and doubled to 10.62% five years later in 1931. With continuous increases, the shortage of housing stock was around 10-15% through the beginning of the 1930s, and became worse at over 20% since the mid-1930s. Surprisingly, in 1944, its figure reached 40.25%, as housing stock increased only just over twice but households increased more than three times compared to 1926. Such housing shortages since the 1930s were serious in many cities, even in medium and small cities as well as big cities, such as Busan, Pyongyang, Daegu and Incheon along with Seoul (Son 1986).

Table 2. 1 Housing shortages in the Japanese colonial period

Year	Households	Housing stock (units)	Housing shortage (units)	Housing shortage (% of households)
1925				4.45%
1926	68,862	64,889	3,973	5.77%
1931	77,701	69,453	8,266	10.62%
1932	78,261	57,965	20,296	25.94%
1933	79,519	70,599	8,920	11.22%
1934	80,961	68,186	12,775	15.78%
1935	131,239	101,767	29,472	22.46%
1936	138,583	107,946	30,637	22.11%
1938	148,856	-	-	-
1944	220,938	132,000	89,000	40.25%

(Source: Son 1996b, p.246 cited in Park and Jeon 2002)

However, Son (1986) emphasises that the problem of housing shortages was only of concern to the middle classes at the time of the colonial government, and these figures thus include only them, not lower classes or squatters for who the problem was doubtless worse. During the 1920s to 1930s, the residential settlements for higher classes were thus expanded around and out of the city centre in Seoul as well as significant increases in the informal settlements of squatters (Cha et al. 2004; Yang 1991). Meanwhile, the spread of some high class residences to outside of the city walls was encouraged due to the land development by private industries, although the highest class of Korean settlements still remained in the north within the walls (Cha et al. 2004; Yang 1991). Given the context of the colonial period that was interested in exploitation rather than welfare of Korean citizens, it seems that the problem of urban housing was broadly left to private solutions, and poor housing was not considered generally a central issue. This may be the origins of the privatisation of housing in Korea, which is not based on the ideological underpinning, but a sort of survival competition.

### **Privatisation in the housing system**

It can be seen that housing became more than a shelter or a living space from the severe context to survive under a colonial government with indifference toward Korean lives. Through the difficulty of housing shortage during the 1920s to 1930s,

therefore, there was a change in housing perspectives that housing came to have a meaning as an asset, which led to growth of the housebuilding companies and the housing lease business (Park and Jeon 2002). In addition, urbanisation, which is more likely to make residential movements compared to the domiciliation of rural living, influenced the shift of ideas from self-building to the idea of living in houses produced by others (You 1985). The concepts of private ownership and rental institutions came to be significant under the conditions of a lack of public housing supply.

In Choson society, lands were not owned individually, but use-rights were rented or bought from the government, although ownership of housing was approved (Jeon et al. 2008). The public ownership of land thus consisted of a basic idea for members of society, and the land use was not limited to construct houses in a general sense (Shin 1983 cited in Jeon et al. 2008). Based on such ideas of land and housing ownership, houses originally had a meaning of living space occupied by social status, and was not considered as a product to be sold or exchanged in the housing market. It was perhaps that the meaning of home was dependent on individual experiences rather than public consensus by the time. The system, however, came to be reconsidered as Korea opened to other countries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Foreigners equated house ownership with land ownership, and did not allow others to build a house even on empty land, which was unusual to Koreans (Jeon et al. 2008). Despite the different perception about land ownership, lands were finally privatised as Japanese settlers insisted on ownership of land on which they bought a house, and in 1909, the tax law was enacted to recognise (and tax) ownership of houses and land (*ibid*).

Given the social and economic change of housing shortage and privatisation, the private housing market was naturally structured from the beginning of the 1920s and dramatically increased in the 1930s, in terms of housebuilding industries, housing lease business and companies, and consumers. Park and Jeon (2002) suggest that houses were thus built by private developers, and largely consumed by those who were to sell or to let them, which was mediated by leasing companies. Although many of them were sold to those who were the rich land owners in local areas and who moved to Seoul, they highlight the point that a large portion of new houses was also consumed by letting to students who came from local regions or poor classes. Because



of this purpose of consumption, Park and Jeon (2002) acknowledge that it necessarily led to increasing rental fees in order to make profits by mediating activities. This resulted in a social movement to decrease the rent in the 1920s and the imposing of a Fee Control Ordinance in 1938. Eventually, it can be said that the privatised ownership was important for higher class, whereas private rental market was the important and probably only method for lower class during the colonial period.

The renting system in South Korea was developed by the private financial institutions under the lack of public financial system. Rental contracts could be made by monthly rent or *chonsei*. The renting system of *chonsei* is a unique method to South Korea, in which tenants pay a lump-sum deposit of between 40% and 70% of the property value for a fixed period of tenancy, usually two years, instead of monthly rent, and the deposit is reimbursed at the end of the contract. Choi and Ji (2007) suggest that the origin of *chonsei* is not exactly known, with little written records. Whether *chonsei* originated before the Choson dynasty or from Choson society is a matter of controversial debate. Regardless, it is suggested that the *chonsei* renting system emerged spontaneously over time through individual transactions, as housing was expensive and formal financial institutions such as mortgages were not well developed (Ha 2006). The *chonsei* transaction is based on mutual benefit in some sense that it can be an informal financial source for landlords in order to attain multi-buy housing, while tenants consider it as a saving of their assets until achieving ownership. This custom has finally been legalised as a real right to strengthen its use, and it has been significant complementary with housing policy of ownership since the growth of the privatised housing market in South Korea. From the contingent response to urban housing contexts, the development of land and housing privatisation and private rental system has been a basis of housing production and consumption since the modernisation of Korea.

In this section, a brief review of historical change (summarised in Table 2.2) in urban and housing contexts has been explored in terms of social, economic and political processes at national level by global forces altering social ideology, urban structure, and economic and housing systems. Given this remarkable change of society, how the governance of urban growth and housing provision was carried out, according to the complex and dynamic transformation, is the focus of discussion in the next section.

Table 2. 2 Timeline of historical information in Chapters Two and Three

Historical events	Area of Seoul (km <sup>2</sup> )	Year	Housing policy	Population	Housing information	
Choson dynasties	250.65 (Whole) 16.5 (Within the wall)	1392-1910				
Gangwha forced treaty		1876				
Gabo reform		1894				
		1899			200,922 (Son 1986)	42,879 houses (Son 1986)
		1909	Tax law by privatisation of land			
Annexation to Japan		1910			250,000 (Cha et al. 2004)	
		33	1914			
Independence movement	1919					
	1934		Choson Urban District Planning Act (CUDPA)			
	132	1936			730,000 (Cha et al. 2004)	
		1937	Land Readjustment Scheme (LRS)			
		1941	Choson Housing Corporation			
Independence from Japanese colony		1945			900,000 (Cha et al. 2004)	
	268.4	1949				
Korean War		1950-3				
		1958				Jong-am apt.
Military coup		1961				
		1962	Korea National Housing Corporation (KNHC)			
	594	1963				
		1965				Mapo apt.
		1966	Public Housing Law			
		1967	Korea Housing Bank (KHB)			
3 <sup>rd</sup> Hangang bridge		1969				
Gyungbu motorway		1970			5,433,198 (KOSIS)	Collapse of Wawoo apt.
		1971				Yeoido apt. Dongbu-ichon-dong apt.
	605	1972				
		1973	Housing Construction Acceleration Act (HCAA)			
		1977	Housing Saving			

Historical events	Area of Seoul (km <sup>2</sup> )	Year	Housing policy	Population	Housing information
			Scheme (HSS)		
		1973-78			Banpo apt.
		1975-78			Chamsil apt.
		1975-82			Apgujung Hyundai apt.
		1981	National Housing Fund (NHF)		
		1983	Hapdong Redevelopment program (HR)		
		1984	Public Rental Housing Act		
Asian Games		1986			
Seoul Olympic		1988	Two Million Housing construction plan (TMH)		
		1988-92	Five New Cities		
		1992		10,969,862 (highest)	
		1994	Private Rental Housing Law		
		1998	Privatisation of KHB		
		2002	One Million Rental Housing Plan		
		2009	Bogeumjari program		
		2010			3,379,773 houses
		2011		10,529,000	3,449,176 houses 97.1% housing supply

### 2.3 Earlier housing provision in modern market

This section presents the urban management through the modern planning system and land control, and the concomitant changes in housing provision in Korea based on the transformation of Korean society. The urban housing market was influenced by the unstable social contexts due to the internal and external forces. As has been suggested above, the predominance of privatised housing provision in Korea is associated to particular features of specific structures in this context, for example the lack of public housing, and the governmental control of land provision. Housing production has then come to the outcomes of market activities of developers and consumers in the interaction with the structural framework.

### **Urban planning and land control**

Mainly since the 1930s, the spatial expansion of residential settlements and private development of housing was basically carried out on sites generated from new urban planning schemes by the colonial government. In response to the housing shortages described earlier, the colonial government made an effort to provide housing plots on the undeveloped sites in outer areas of the city centre in the beginning of 1930s, but the construction of housing did not make good progress due to the lack of building materials and funds under the economy of the quasi-state of war (Yang 1991; Cha et al. 2004). It was thus in 1936, Cha et al. says, that urban management commenced in earnest by the enactment of new urban planning policies, in order to accommodate the increased population, to manage the urban growth, and to make effective administration. They suggest that this was primarily constituted to include the extension of administrative regions over the whole area of Seoul, and the land management of undeveloped plots in the extended areas.

In 1934, the 'Choson Urban District Planning Act' (CUDPA) was enacted to include an architectural law and urban planning process in principle. Through planned extensions to the administrative boundary, planning included an area of 135.4km<sup>2</sup>, and aimed to accommodate a population of 1.1 million by 1969 (Cha et al. 2004). As part of this, the 'Land Readjustment Scheme' (LRS) became effective in 1937 and was continued on a full scale much later on by the Korean independent government since the 1960s. Lee (1986) suggests how, based on LRS urban lands were restructured by the colonial government to improve their use value and to regulate development on empty land by readjusting natural land. She argues that the aim of LRS was essentially an extension of residential settlements, and that most residential lands have been supplied by this process since then in Seoul. According to her study, over 70% of housing plots in Seoul was formed through the LRS, and over 90% of them were achieved between 1960 and 1980. Because mass provision of land was made in this short period, this caused not only physically indifferent residential structure and similar size of plots but also socio-spatial fragmentation from the limits of access based on social classes in urban areas (Song 1990; Lee 1986). In 10 districts designated by the scheme before 1945, they were spatially separated broadly in two forms. One was comprised of Japanese residential settlements based on industrial areas, while the other was simply housing sites for Koreans to solve housing shortages

in urban areas (Song 1990). Song thus argues that not only did this cause ethnic and class segregation, but also physical urban form and housing types were differentiated between Japanese and Korean residents. As a result, it can be suggested that not only did the scheme and urban planning extend the residential settlements, but it also transformed the urban structure of Seoul (Cha et al. 2004).

Even though the colonial government managed the process of development and the land supply of housing construction based on the scheme of urban planning, the actual provision of housing predominantly relied on private development. This was because housing shortages only affected Koreans, not Japanese (Son 1986). Since the Pacific War between Japan and China started in 1937, however, Son suggests that the colonial government was encouraged to provide housing for labourers to be involved in production of weapons. It led to the establishment of the Choson Housing Corporation (CHC) in order to build and sell housing in 1941. Due to the difficulty in the lack of building materials in the war period, however, Son (1986) acknowledges that its outcome was not great, resulting in the construction of only around 1,400 houses in 1942 and carried on providing 12,184 (4,488 of these in Seoul) until the independence of Korea in 1945. Moreover, although Korea became independent, the governmental housing provision could not be continuously achieved in the complex context following the Korean War. In the mid-1950s after the war, thus, the Housing Corporation resumed the provision of housing by the Korean government, with outcomes of 17,137 houses from 1955 to 1961 with foreign aid (Jeon et al. 2008). The CHC was succeeded by the Korea National Housing Corporation (KNHC) in 1962, which constitutes one of the public sector forms of housing production in Korea's contemporary housing system.

While the KNHC can be considered as achieving the crucial role to supply public housing, the discussion above shows that the number of housing provision could not cover a great deal of housing shortage. Its impact has been relatively limited and private supply has been in fact more important in meeting the demand than public provision since the colonial period. Private developers were actively involved in the construction of housing within the walls of Seoul from the 1920s, and spread to outer areas of the walls with mass provision since the LRS in 1937 (*ibid*). Jeon et al. (2008) also suggest that the mass-production of housing took place as a new business in the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which shaped a concept of urban housing as a solution of housing shortage distinguished from individual construction activities. Furthermore, they highlight that this housebuilding industry was an opportunity for Korean developers. As they acknowledge, this was the way that the scale of business thus came to increasingly grow from small builders with few funds to big companies based on the big projects over time.

Given the land supply by extension of residential settlements to a more systematic planning scheme, and the mass production system largely based on private construction companies, the housing industry became an important segment in Korea's social and economic structure since the 1930s. According to this backdrop for the housing market, housing came to the fore in terms of its meanings, social position, and political economics, transforming physical form in a response to contextual and contingent change.

### **Traditional housing production**

Given the context of private development, it may have been the inevitable effect that housing was considered as a product to be produced speculatively and sold in the market. This housing has different characteristics from the traditional methods of individual supply (self-build) or housing pre-ordered by the house owner. In the previous system, the builder was usually the owner of a house at the same time, and building experts were hired only for the high class. But as Jeon et al. (2008) highlight, this changed in that not only could experts be involved in construction of houses for other classes, but product values also became important as a commercial product to be sold to consumers. They suggest that this provided the new context of the housing market, in which providers should imagine what is preferred and seek to increase the value of product, as owners or residents were not involved in the construction and consumers were only imagined by suppliers. As a result, housing products tended to be ornamental in detail in order to create a commercial value, and standardised in the floor plan for mass-production to suit general households and to reduce costs, which turns out to generate particular patterns based on certain amount of provision (Park and Jeon 2002).

The mostly first type of mass-produced and privatised housing was the Urban Traditional Housing (UTH) started from the 1920s, which was a form of traditional housing transformed to fit urban contexts (Figure 2.3). This became the most dominant housing style constructed between the 1930s and the 1960s, coinciding with the CUDPA period (Song 1990). Song suggests that developers used to produce and supply collectively 6-7 units or 30-40 units according to plot size. This was not only economically advantageous for developers because it was cheaper to hire labour having traditional skills compared to those who had new skills for foreign housing styles by the time, but was also favoured for the renting business mentioned earlier as its structure of rooms were lined, which was thus efficient to let a room (Figure 2.3e) (Park and Jeon 2002). In addition, it could appeal easily to consumers at the time who were familiar with traditional Korean lifestyle until westernised house styles became dominant and popular in the 1960s (Jeon et al. 2008). In Figure 2.4, according to Jeon et al., western style houses or the Japanese houses (called '*munwha jutaek*' with meaning of culture houses) were only for the high class housing during the colonial period in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as they were expensive to build as well as suited to different lifestyles. They thus argue that most people were not familiar with them yet, but those who were connected to ruling class and experienced foreign culture could afford and accept a new housing lifestyle.

Figure 2. 3 The Urban Traditional Housing

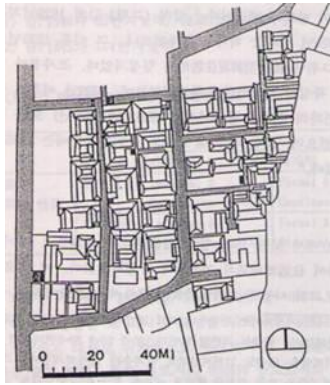
Copyright material, which has been removed for electronic publication. The original printed version of this thesis contains the full image.

(a) Roofs

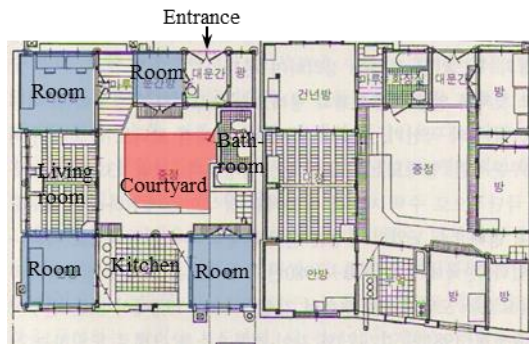
(b) Courtyard

(c) Alley

(Sources: (a) Kim 1994 (b) <http://www.makehopecity.com/?p=4809> (c) <http://younghwan12.tistory.com/2301>)



(d) Roof plans



(e) Floor plans

(Source: (d) and (e) adapted from Song 1990)

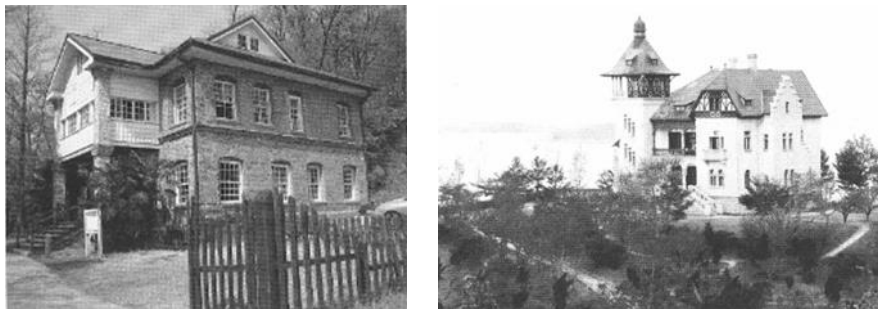


Figure 2. 4 Foreign-style houses



(a) Munwha jutaek (1920s-1930s)

(Source: re-adpated from Jeon et al. 2009)



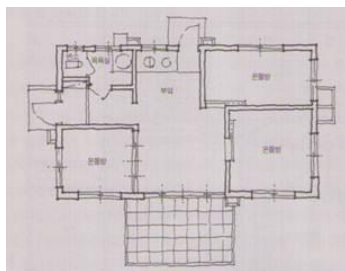
(b) Western style houses

(Source: re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2008)

During the 1960s, however, the traditional style of housing, with a wooden structure, was replaced with the western styles influenced from the production of concrete in 1953 and a shortage of wood building materials. The encouragement of such new housing patterns came from public provision in the mid-1950s by the government based on foreign aid, such as through the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA). Even though the amount of public supply was not enough, the effect came to be salient so as to boost private housing industry and to extend the development to the outer areas of the city. Various new design concepts were introduced, such as cluster schemes or cul-de-sacs, for a number of houses, for example the Housing Corporation provided the ‘Gookmin jutaek’ (Figure 2.5) from 1958 to 1961 in the outer areas of Seoul city centre (You 1985). From then, most private housing followed western styles, especially in new residential settlements, including in Gangnam, then situated in a rural site out of city centre from the 1970s (Figure 2.6). Son (2003b) emphasises that the new residences were restricted to upper-middle classes through a regulation setting a minimum plot size of 50 *pyong*

(165m<sup>2</sup>, as 1 *pyong* is approximately 3.3 square metres), a minimum building size of 20 *pyong* (66m<sup>2</sup>), and a maximum building capacity of 40%. This meant that those owning a plot of 50 *pyong* could only build a 20 *pyong* of house (no more or no less) with 30 *pyong* of garden and parking spaces. This regulation resulted in bigger and luxury houses in Gangnam compared to other areas, although its affordability was questioned (Son 2003b).

Figure 2. 5 Gookmin juteak (1950s-1960s)



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(a) Floor plan (b) Gookmin juteak (c) Blocks of Gookmin juteak in 1958, Ui-dong  
(Source: (a) Jeon et al. 2009, (b) Kim 1994, (c) re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2008)

Figure 2. 6 Western style detached-houses (1970s-1980s)



Copyright material, which has been removed for electronic publication. The original printed version of this thesis contains the full image.

(a) Entrance of a detached-house (b) Blocks of detached-houses

(Source: (a) Jeon et al. 2009, (b) Kim 1994)

As can be seen from the discussion above, dynamic changes in housing production seems to coincide with the complex context of Korean society over a last century due to social, economic, cultural and political changes from the external forces as well as internal requirements of the country. In addition, it shows how middle-classes in Korea have transited their lifestyles according to social changes. Government policy has supported and brought about changes, but the majority of housing provision was undertaken in a private market.

Fundamental social changes from the fixed society to the capitalist system were reflected in a changing social relation to housing. During the Choson dynasties, houses were differentiated in terms of the style, design, size as well as materials according to social status, which made social class easily recognisable by distinctive features of the houses (Figure 2.7). The lowest classes, such as slaves, could build only with straw-thatched roof because of restriction of using roof tiles (Breen 1998). Separated spaces of men and women under the Confucian system were also deferred by social status in terms of degrees of size and complexity (Wright and Pai 1984, p116 cited in Lett 1998) (Figure 2.7b). In post-Choson times the Urban Traditional Housing imitated high class traditional but could attract those who wanted to climb the symbolic social ladder and not just those born into the upper classes (Jeon et al. 2008). Since the mid-1960s, westernised lifestyles became reflected in housing design (You 1985).

Figure 2. 7 Traditional housing



Copyright material, which has been removed for electronic publication. The original printed version of this thesis contains the full image.

(a) High-class housing

(b) Floor plan of (a)

(c) Lower class housing

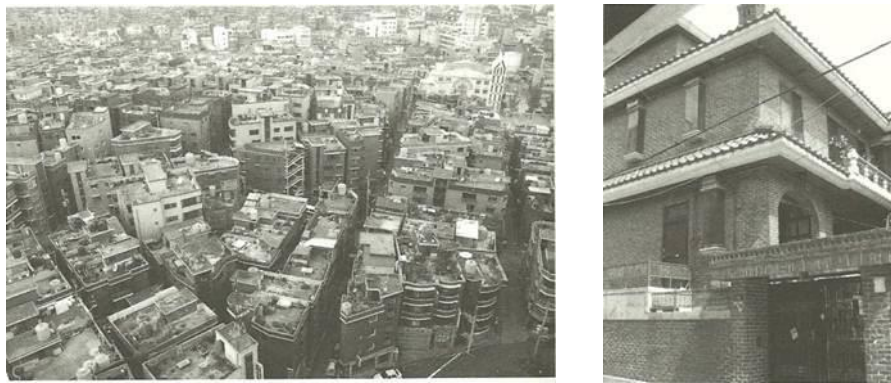
(Source: (a) re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2009, (b) Jeon et al. 2009, (c) Gang and Han 2004)

### *Emergence of high rise housing*

However, the symbolic meanings have shifted from those low-rise houses to the high-rise apartments that have rapidly grown since the 1970s, especially in the Gangnam district where the luxury houses were provided. On the other hand, a house's area has come to lose its status as influenced by a preference change towards apartments, as well as the deregulation of density policies on the areas in order to make dense residential settlements as a solution of housing shortages in the urban centre. Since the 1980s, the transformation from single-household detached-houses to dense multi-

family housing (called *daseidai jutaek*) (Figure 2.8) has in large part been contributed to lower class housing reached at around 30% of housing stock in 2000 in Seoul (Jeon et al. 2008). The activities have been encouraged for owner of houses to make profits from letting parts of property to several tenant households, which has caused the significant downgrade of residential environments. Moreover, in many cases, they are often manipulated in the process of high-rise apartment development, so as to retain multi holders for the rights of apartment allocation. In this way, whilst detached-house areas has become worse in terms of residential environment turning to lower class housing, high-rise apartments have come to represent the contemporary middle-class housing in South Korea.

Figure 2. 8 Dense multi-family housing (*Daseidai jutaek*)



(Source: re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2008)

In this section, the discussion has focused on the urban planning and land supply to boost housing production with the aim of solving housing shortage, and its dynamic change in the housing market. Based on these significant activities from the governmental policy framework and the market's practices in response to the structure, housing production has aimed to meet the demand in growing population, but it has also reinforced the urban growth and change in reflexive phenomena within the wider city, especially from widespread high-rise apartments. The next section therefore discusses how Seoul has grown into today's mega-city, not only through population explosion but also the massive provision of high-rise apartments starting from developments in the Gangnam district.

## **2.4 The growth of metropolitan city, Seoul**

This section explores the salience of high-rise apartment development in the development of Seoul. Even though high-rise apartments have been a response to the explosive growth of the urban population, it has in fact had magnified effects over and above the housing solution in the context of growth of capital city Seoul. The discussion focuses on spatial expansion through the residential development and also the social meanings of high-rise built environments in Korea. This leads to the emphasis on the potential gaps between existing knowledge and particular phenomena in diverse, complex and dynamic contexts.

### **Socio-spatial expansion**

Since the establishment of the Choson dynasty in 1392, Seoul (then Hansung) has sustained its status as a capital city over 600 years. With over 10 million populations now, not only does its role embrace all sections of society in terms of the social, cultural, economic and political sense in Korea, but Seoul is also one of perhaps 10 most influential cities in the world. Based on the assessment by a research institute (Florida 2011), Seoul has recorded the 10<sup>th</sup> rank in terms of three dimensions of economic power (economic, financial, and innovative), although its ranking varies according to the criteria and the institutes assessed by. Such growth of Seoul has gone with the spatial expansion of the city over the last century, and it continues to grow further. As was seen in the previous section, the expansion of residential settlements has been the major reason for the spatial growth of urban areas in Seoul. Through various measures of urban and land controls, the mass provision of housing from both private developers and the governmental involvement has made the massive residential growth possible. As this urban growth has been progressed incrementally over time, however, it has also led to the residential differentiation according to the concentration of certain socio-economic groups into the new development areas of high-rise apartment complex.

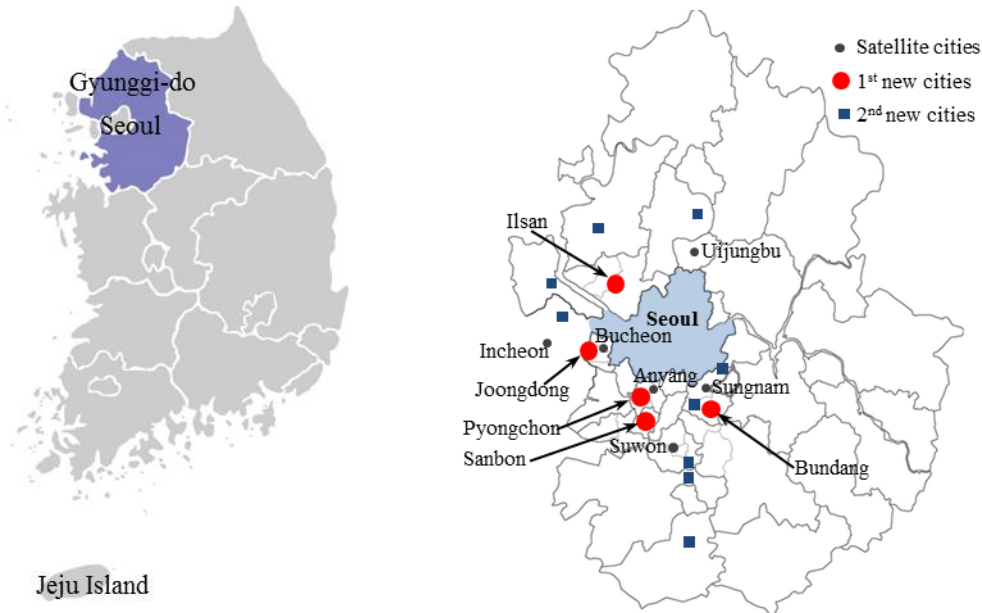
According to Lim (1985), the several stages of spatial growth of Seoul were followed by social, economic and political change over the last century in relation to the globalisation and modernisation. Seoul which was in fact almost intact with the area 250.6km<sup>2</sup> over the Choson dynasty, however, significantly shrank to 33km<sup>2</sup> in 1914 as

degrading the position of the city during the Japanese colonial period. Due to the population growth as exceeding over 20% of housing shortage from the mid-1930s, Seoul came to be extended again to 132km<sup>2</sup> in 1936 followed by the 'Choson Urban District Planning Act' (CUDPA). This was further extended after independence in 1945, as about twice as 268.4km<sup>2</sup> including part of Chamsil by the Korean government in 1949, which had a crucial meaning of the capital city as an independent country (*ibid*). Finally, the current boundary with the area 605 km<sup>2</sup> came to be much later in 1973 because of the complex contexts of the Korean War (1950-1953), the military coup in 1961 and other social changes, which was triggered by absorbing and managing the sprawl of population outside of the old boundary (*ibid*). It resulted in including all four directions of outer areas of previous Seoul, and Gangnam finally came to be in Seoul. Based on spatial growth of Seoul, the government initiated to restructure the distribution of population in Seoul from 1977 to 1986 under the 'Plan of Redistributing Population of Metropolitan City Seoul', in order to prevent an influx to Seoul and to redistribute existing populations to other areas. Of particular note, this scheme included the regulation of the education system to control the population. The foundation of new schools was banned, and schools in the Gangbuk district north of the Han River were encouraged to move to Gangnam.

Given the massive administrative extension of Seoul since the 1980s, Lim (1995) argues that the suburbanisation of apartment developments was remarkable, with huge apartment construction out of the city centre in contrast with conventional patterns of land use in other countries. In addition, he emphasises the distinctive pattern of development from other western societies: not only has the most new building in the suburban been consisted of high-rise apartments, but the distance has also become far from the city centre. For example, as given by Lim, the ratio of apartments was only 10% in the central areas with little change from 1984 to 1992, whereas in the northern part it increased from 8.1% in 1984 to 53.6% in 1992 with a similar pattern in the west, and the highest ratio in the south and east (including the Gangnam development). Moreover, although administrative boundaries are separated, new city developments (Figure 2.9) as well as sprawl development have contributed to the growth of Seoul. Satellite cities such as Suwon, Incheon, Bucheon, Sunnam, Anyang and Uijungbu have also grown in the process of Seoul's spatial expansion, sharing

industrial and residential functions (Jang 2002). The mega city of Seoul has been shaped by the connection of all these regions.

Figure 2. 9 The extension of city developments



(a) The location of Gyunggi-do in South Korea (b) Satellite and new cities in Gyunggi-do  
 (Source of maps: Author's drawing onto the ground maps produced by (a) WhiteNight7 in 2008 and (b) Kladess in 2012, available from [ko.wikipedia.org](http://ko.wikipedia.org))

The spatial expansion initiated to control the growth of population and the economic growth has thus brought the growth of the mega city Seoul. However, the intense concentration of economic activities, political central power, urban infrastructure and socio-cultural facilities has also been accompanied with the growth of Seoul (Jang 2002). For instance, Ronald and Lee (2012) state that 22% of the nation's GDP, about 50% of its universities, 30% of healthcare institutes as well as all public administrations are included in Seoul. The city has only 0.6% of national area but is home to 35% of the nation's population. Ronald and Lee (2012) thus suggest that such attraction has reinforced the concentration of economies and attracted more and more people, which led to the movement from local areas for approximately 2.3 million to Seoul, 225,800 to Incheon (west of Seoul) and 759,000 to Gyunggi-do in the 1980s. By emphasising the motivation of over 50% of movements being in order to seek better chances of economic activities, they estimate migration of 3.3 million

people who settled in the Seoul metropolitan area. In this expansion the development of high-rise apartments has reached all parts of metropolitan Seoul.

In such a mega-sized city, the concentration of population and resources is not only a matter of spatial economics, but it is also entangled with the agglomeration of political and cultural power (Jang 2002). The massive spatial extension of Seoul, and the expansive supply of high-rise apartments (including suburbanisation of apartments), new cities and satellite cities, then, seems to be representative of the important position of the high-rise built environment in contemporary Korea.

### **The rise of 'high-rise city living'**

Unlike most other societies high-rise apartments are at the centre of contemporary Korean society. Size, location or brand name of apartments thus shows social position of those who occupy it, and high rises have dominated the spatial and economic expansion of Seoul. Chon (2004) indicates that high-rise apartments have clearly been correlated to the growth of the middle-classes, which has helped to shape a particular lifestyle of urban residents. As adopted for middle-classes and the modern form of housing, she argues that it is contrasted with the history of high-rise buildings as an ideological form of labour classes in some western countries since the industrial revolution. The modern middle-class housing of high-rise apartments in the city has thus attracted the massive residential movements from rural to urban for expectancy of better life, providing more economic opportunities, better education, and cultural enjoyment (Kim and Park 1993). This has been a critical cause of the dramatic urbanisation in Seoul, and high-rise apartments came to be the notion of middle-class in the city living. Especially, as Lee (1980) suggests, massive high rise developments have helped to transform the Gangnam district into the pre-eminent residential concentration of Korea's middle-classes. Moreover, this has had the further effect that 90 % of those who live in more than 30 *pyong* of apartments consider themselves as middle-class, as shown by a study of the living standard related to the size of high-rise apartments (Hong and Lee 1993).

Associated with the expansion of high-rise apartments for middle-classes, it is also suggested that social relationships have been changed in neighbourhoods with



particular perspectives and behaviours, as certain socio-economic groups are concentrated in terms of occupation or educational status (Chon 2004). Based on these collective pattern of certain groups, as Chon suggests, many researchers show that neighbourhood relationships are characterised by their exclusive ideas of norms and values in high-rise residential settlements: for example, the lack of social contacts; the loss of the concept of neighbours; the deficiency of community conscious; the importance of privacy to detach from others (see also Gang 1983; Song 1979; Shin and Kim 1984; Shin 1985; Jung and Woo 1985; Hallman 1984). Meanwhile, there is the difference between high-rise residential settlements and other settlements such as detached houses in the consciousness of neighbourhood boundary. Interestingly, Chon (2004) finds that the neighbourhood is considered to be the administrative region by residents of detached-house areas, but on the other hand apartment residents tend to consider their apartment complex as the administrative unit, with a strong correlation to the complex size.

It has been contended that residential segregation between social groups or classes has been encouraged through the massive provision of apartment development by aggregating similar socio-economic households (Hong 1991). Apartments have physically separated middle-classes and non-middle-class households with different lifestyles. Research by Kim (2002a, p.69) shows that spatial hierarchies have been transformed by the residential concentration of power elites. The increase in the ratio of power elites was visible in Seoul between 1994 and 2001: while the population ratio in Seoul was fallen from 23.8% to 21.4%, the ratio of power elites was increased from 53.8% to 54.9%; this means that the concentration (ratio between the population and power elites) increased from 2.3 to 2.6 times over the period. Especially, this ratio has continuously risen in the Gangnam district since the 1970s to around 50% from 1989, whereas the central areas that were traditionally settled by elites (*Jongro-gu* and *Jung-gu*) have decreased to 7.93% in 2001.

The middle-class culture that originated in and shaped high-rise apartments, especially in Gangnam, has since been widespread to other social classes (Lee and Hong 1991). Urban middle-classes have tended to represent their social status or social ladder through the residential lifestyles, and accordingly those who cannot achieve the similar position has been isolated and deprived in housing conditions

(Hong and Kim 1988). Such norm of urban middle-classes has been different with other societies. Lee and Hong point out that the ideal housing norm is a single detached-house in many western societies according to Morris and Winter (1978), whereas high-rise apartments has come to be the ideal norm of Korean middle-class housing. However, little research has been carried out to understand this gap, which requires the fundamental setting of understanding high-rise buildings departing from perspectives of conventional explanations (such as land economics). This seems to indicate that there may be not any differences between housing forms, but they are seen as resultants of socially specific contexts. In this sense, understanding the emergence of a distinctively Korean high-rise apartments 'culture' may allow a step towards deeper understanding of residential environments more generally.

Not only has high-rise built environment been remarkable in quantity and spatial terms as mass production, but it has also been significantly influential over Korean society in terms of lifestyles, social identity and social norm as an ideal home for middle-classes, which confronts with the existing discourses around high-rise buildings as predominating debates in academic and policy. The next chapter then will explore how high-rise apartments have evolved to become normalised as middle-class housing and the role of Gangnam developments.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the historical background of Korea and Seoul in order to provide the historical and social context for high-rise apartment developments. Huge changes in society and economy came from, especially, external pressures and the rise of the developmental state. Rapid industrialisation, capitalisation, and centralisation have changed the urban situation in Seoul, with implications for its socio-spatial structure, for example, uneven development and rapid urbanisation, and the role of Seoul as a metropolitan city. Other social, cultural, economic and political circumstances in the housing market, such as the lack of a public housing system and the largely privatised housing market have also been entangled with this transformation of urban governance in which high-rise apartments have become widespread over society as representative of middle-class housing.

A developmentalist ideology, in which supply-oriented urban planning and housing policies for economic growth (discussed more in the next chapter), has been crucial to help maintain the privileged position of high-rise apartment developments. While this has been criticised as a cause of residential concentration and segregation, it seems to have further implications: not only have large-scale high-rise developments influenced social and spatial development within the city, but their position as middle-class housing, and the effects of socio-economic structure, have also taken place at the same time as the expansion of Seoul into the mega city. This major structural change has brought socio-spatial impacts in the local level of neighbourhoods through the restructuring of residential settlements induced by the development of high-rise apartments, which is related to social and cultural change in lifestyles as well as socio-economic characteristics. These issues suggest that further enquiry into high-rise built environments, which seems to be distinguished from other societies, giving an appetite to explore more about high-rise developments and their specific contexts in Seoul, especially the Gangnam district. The next chapter then introduces the development of high-rise housing market, and how Gangnam is positioned within the socio-economic structure of metropolitan Seoul.

## *Chapter Three*

### **High-rise City Living in Korea**

The stereotypic image of South Korea's contemporary middle class included not only residence in Gangnam south of the Hangang River but also life in a high-rise apartment complex. (Lett 1998, p.110)

#### **Introduction**

As Lett pinpoints the defining characteristic of urban middle classes in the above quotation, a high-rise apartment in Gangnam holds a special meaning to the contemporary South Korean. The prestige position of high-rise living in Gangnam derives in part from its association with the remarkable achievement of Korea's development. The country's development from the poor agrarian society to one of the world's largest economies, and the growth of Seoul from a small walled area to a mega city have been accompanied with the intensive housing production based on the initial development of multi-family housing in the Gangnam district. The power of the developmental state has been central to this transformation, which may be in testimony of either cohesive corporation to the growth or concentration of the wealth (Kim et al. 1997).

Korea may be, then, positioned at a turning point towards the future, and present an example of a different or opposite way of urban development compared to other developed societies. The aim of this chapter is to continue the story from the historical context of Chapter Two, in particular, relating to the contemporary metropolitan housing market that gave way to high-rise apartment and its impetus to the growth of Seoul. The district of Gangnam comes to the fore as an appropriate case study to explore the complex and dynamic residential neighbourhood in terms of its social, cultural, economic and political interrelations. The discussion is focused on the description of the interaction between policymakers and developers according to the specific social contexts, and its construction of socio-spatial responses. This leads to the reconsideration of residential environment, especially, high-rise buildings in this particular setting of research, which requires broader and deeper perspectives rather than a universal explanation.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, the power of the developmental state is introduced and its role as it emerged out of the complex social and urban contexts, contributing to the intensive concentration on high-rise apartments, boosted by an active private housing market based on high-rise-centred policy. From denial to promotion of luxury branded apartments, high-rise developments have varied by social, economic and political contexts, which are discussed in the second section. Gangnam was the primitive form of urban residential neighbourhoods, which has been at the centre of the expansion of Seoul based on high-rise apartment developments. This is presented in the third section as an initial setting of the case study Gangnam in terms of major characteristics of historical origination, physical and spatial features, and socio-economic structures. The discussion is developed to connect the broad research aim into the specific research questions by exploring the features of the particular neighbourhoods.

### **3.1 High-rise housing system in Korea**

This section introduces the development of urban and housing policy, and the structure of housing market and its main characteristics in the context of high-rise apartment developments in Seoul. The structure of the housing market and governmental intervention has affected the growth of the city with a close relation to high-rise residential settlements, especially in the Gangnam development, leading to the reconfiguration of urban settlement over the last half century.

#### **Urban growth and high-rise-oriented policy**

Following independence from Japan in 1945 and the Korean War in the beginning of 1950s, South Korea remained a poor agrarian society, particularly before 1962 due to the poor industrial and urban infrastructure as well as social and economic condition (Ronald and Lee 2012). Following the military coup in 1961, a change of economic policy resulted in the transformation of Korea into an increasingly rich urban, industrial nation (Lett 1998). The crucial power of dramatic economic growth from GNP of 80 dollars per capita in 1960 to 10,000 dollars per capita in 1995 was seen in Seoul: its population increased almost five times as a result of migration from rural and local urban areas over the period (Gelézeau 2007). By the 2000s, finally, Ronald

and Lee (2012) point out that Korea came to be the 13<sup>th</sup> biggest country as one of main manufacturer in the world's economy (OECD 2007).

The reorientation of the country's economic base and reorganisation of industry into an export-oriented structure by the dictatorial Chunghee Park administration included the aim of replacing a public housing solution with macro-economic growth so as to increase households' income that enables consumers to purchase their own housing in a private market (Lim 2005; Ronald and Lee 2012). In this context, poverty alleviation became just a part of broader economic policy in this period. Implicit here was the expectation of a 'trickle down' effect of economic growth to all parts of South Korean society. Under the Park regime, not only did residential settlements jump beyond the traditional boundary of Seoul, which had remained intact for over 500 years, but the housing type was also innovatively transformed. Gangnam became centralised as the residential development to prevent the over-concentration of housing in the central city, and high-rise buildings were adopted to increase the land use. This has, however, taken place in exchange for an impetus to the influx of population from out of Seoul, and accelerating the capitalisation of the housing market (Lee 1986). This is perhaps because the state was more concerned with the market construction in terms of organising industries and distributing resources and labours rather than the simple aim of accumulating the wealth during the 1960s and 1970s (Kim 1996a).

Given the scale of the new housing development, the reinforcement of housing policies came in the beginning of the 1970s in addition to the previous structure. Even though the public housing support decreased in the 1960s because of the focus on the macro economy, some organisations and statutory law related to housing were prepared: as discussed in Chapter Two, the Korea National Housing Corporation (KNHC) was refounded in 1962, which used to be the Choson Housing Corporation established in 1941 (discussed in earlier chapter); and the 'Public Housing Law' was enacted in 1966 to supply lower price housing for sale or rental housing for lower-class households, which was the first law regarding housing. Furthermore the Korea Housing Bank (KHB) was established in 1967 as a state institute for housing finance (until it was privatised in 1998) (Ha 2000). The state prepared an ambitious '10 Year Plan for Housing Construction' to provide 2.5 million units of housing, the housing

construction faced with the new transitional phase from relatively small business to conglomerations through the enactment of the 'Housing Construction Acceleration Act' (HCAA) in 1972 (Kim 1996a). This made the process of housing development more flexible, and the term 'apartment block' was conceptualised to build higher density housing, with 300% of land use and permitted heights of more than five floors. By altering the HCAA in 1977 and 1978, housebuilding industries became even bigger from the policy of 'designated companies', which have a legal priority to construct large-scale projects and benefited from financial support based on pre-sales of apartments. This actually furnished the capitalisation system of housing production and consumption, in which housing industry came to be equated with the measure of national economy (Kim 1996a).

Alongside the pre-sale policy, the Housing Saving Scheme (HSS) of 1977 enabled those with saving accounts to have priority allocations for new apartments at below-market prices before they were built. This became a core part of public housing funding, that is, the National Housing Funds (NHF) organised in 1981 and managed by the KHB (Ha 2006). These measures were enacted to encourage housing supply (Ryu 2004) and essentially subsidised new apartment housing for middle class residents. It allowed beneficiaries to make a windfall profit equivalent to the value of several years' salary when they resold their apartment (Kim 2004). The instalments paid during the construction period effectively became an interest-free fund for the company, usually large builders. Furthermore, loans made from the saving scheme funds were given, usually to large construction companies at low rates of interest by the government (Ryu 2004). Although levels of public housing provision were very low, the private residential development industry was heavily incentivised to respond to the needs of middle- and high-income groups (Son 1997), helping to bring about new housing consumption patterns.

Urban redevelopment policy also intended to systemically regenerate slum areas into new urban functions, with the 'Hapdong Redevelopment program' (hereafter HR program) offering a public-private partnership model in 1983. This scheme attempted to find a way of undertaking urban renewal without significant use of public funds, following financial problems faced in previous programmes (Lee et al. 2003; Ha 2004; Kim 2001; Ryu 2004). The intention was that redevelopment projects could be led by

market mechanisms with private participation and funds, rather than through a public driven approach (Lee et al. 2003), changing homeowners from passive position to main actors in cooperation with housebuilding companies (through the pre sales policy). As a result, the redevelopment and reconstruction programmes have more than doubled the amount of housing stock that originally existed in certain neighbourhoods (Ha 2007), at the same time improving the residential environment for the middle class through a gentrification process (Lee et al. 2003).

Since the 1970s, therefore, the massive projects have continued by increasingly extending the areas of high-rise apartment development based on these reinforced housing policies. The districts of Gangnam in the south and Gangdong (Figure 3.1) in the east of Seoul achieved 72.5% of apartment construction from 1981 to 1985 (Gwon and Yoon 1991). The northern and western part of Seoul (Nowon, Dobong, and Yangchon in Figure 3.1) was also massively developed, providing for 95,000 households between 1986 and 1990 (Doh 1994).

Figure 3. 1 Seoul City divided by 25 *gu* [ward]



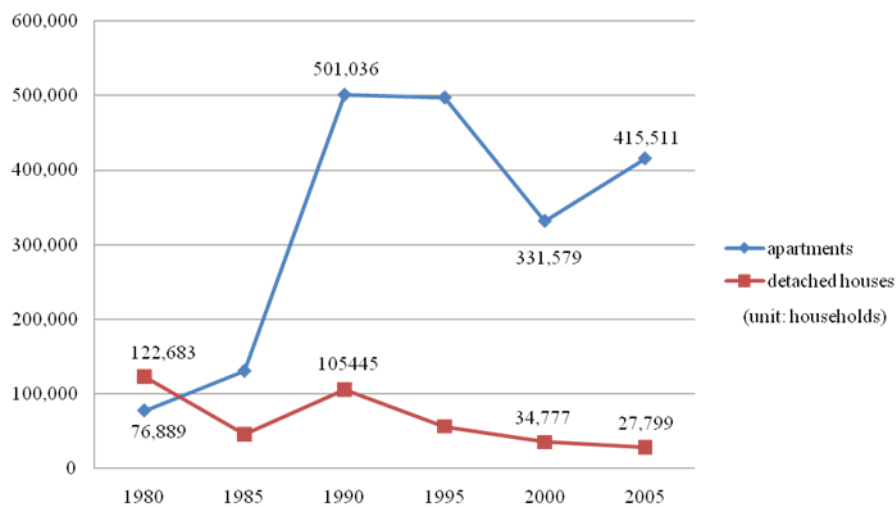
(Source: adapted from Seoul GIS, <http://gis.seoul.go.kr/Information/District.jsp>)

Furthermore, various stages of new city development have added to the extension of high-rise development since the end of the 1980s, while the New Town scheme on 26 designated sites, which aggregate local and small redevelopment and reconstruction into mega projects, is actively in progress by the current government within the city of Seoul. Indeed, the areas of the New Towns are much larger as totally 24,050,000m<sup>2</sup>



than 19,390,000m<sup>2</sup> redeveloped areas for 36 years from 1973 to 2008 (Kim 2009). As a result, the number of housing stock increased almost thirteen times from 260,000 in 1960 to 3,379,773 in 2010, relieving the housing shortage as reached at around 97% of housing supply in Seoul. Moreover, the ratio of housing supply to households exceeded 100% in 2002 at the national level and in 2010 in the metropolitan city Seoul. This was certainly encouraged by replacing detached houses with apartments as shown in Figure 3.2, reaching about 90 percent of new built housing stock between 1980 and 1990. Accordingly, this has led to the reconfiguration of the total housing stock where in 1970 4% of the stock was apartments and 85% was detached-houses, to the situation in 2010 where 58% of the stock was apartments and 16% was detached houses. Less than 5% of urban housing built before 1960, and 3 percent built before Korean War, existed by the time of the 2000 census, and apartments have come to represent the symbol of these changes (Gelézeau 2007).

Figure 3. 2 The supply of new apartments and detached houses in Korea, 1980-2005



(Source: adapted from Cha 2007) (Note: Data from MLIT)

From the contexts towards high-rise apartment developments, the mass production of them extensively transformed the skyline of Seoul, which was relatively low-rise in character up to the end of the 1970s (Gelézeau 2007). Moreover, high-rise developments predominate in the structure of the housing market and its mechanisms in terms of social, economic and political interests.

### **The contemporary Seoul housing market and its problems**

Ronald and Lee (2012) suggest that Korea is now considered to have a well developed economic system with regards to the issue of housing shortage. They highlight that this was based on the developmental state that aimed at rapid economic development, as distinguished from welfare states of governance (see Johnson 1982). In particular, Ronald and Lee make the point that the government's role to bolster the market and assist a corporate-friendly policy framework was accomplished by strategic coalitions between politicians, public bureaucrats and the administrators of corporate conglomerates. As this governance form encouraged large scale projects of housing production it led to the housebuilding industry in Korea being formed to largely speculative and distorted structure towards big conglomerates in order to achieve goals of housing provision according to the supply-oriented housing policy (Ryu 2004).

#### *The structure of housing supply*

Priority to large construction companies by the government to support building activity and private housing supply of quasi-governmental institutions are clear characteristics of the structure of the Korean housebuilding industry (Ryu 2004). In this context, Ronald and Lee (2012) pinpoint that public housing was more aimed to support development purposes rather than social justice, with the common sense of market contribution to social stability based on improvement of material conditions and better social equity. New housing provision is of two basic forms, which are by public institutions and private companies. Firstly, the public sector participates in the development of land for housing as well as the construction of housing through several quasi-governmental institutions, such as the Korea Land and Housing Corporation (LH: combining Korea Land Development Corporation and the Korea National Housing Corporation), and the Korea Housing Bank (emerged to Gookmin Bank after the privatisation). At the local level, the Seoul Housing Corporation (SH) established in 1989 consists of a public institute to supply lands and housing mainly in Seoul. On the other hand, the private housebuilding industry is characterised in three categories according to their size, output, and capability (Lim 1994b). While registered builders (of which there are over 7,000) can provide over 20 units annually, small-sized non-registered builders are restricted to building fewer than 20 units per

annum. Particularly, designated builders have a legal priority to construct large-scale projects (Ryu 2004).

Through the support of the government to encourage private sector rather than public sector provision, a large portion of new housing has been provided by private companies, usually for private sale (Ha 2006). As can be seen in the Table 3.1, the majority of housing in the 1960s was built by the private sector. Although the public sector provided similar rate as the private sector during the middle of 1970s to 1980s as encouraging the development of high-rise apartments, private provision increased again since the end of 1980s at 60 to 70% by incentivising large builders.

Table 3. 1 The rate of supply of housing (unit: 1,000(%))

Year	Public sector	Private sector	Total
1962 ~ 1966	39.9(12.2)	286.0(87.8)	325.9
1967 ~ 1971	69.9(12.9)	470.7(87.1)	540.3
1972 ~ 1976	228.8(30.1)	531.8(69.9)	760.6
1977 ~ 1981	495.4(44.4)	620.7(55.6)	1,116.10
1982 ~ 1986	549.4(47.6)	606.0(52.4)	1,155.40
1987 ~ 1991	876.8(36.7)	1,509.5(63.3)	2,386.30
1992 ~ 1996	1,140.3(36.9)	1,964.0(63.3)	3,104.00
1997 ~ 2001	769.5(33.9)	1,500.8(66.1)	2,270.30
2002	123.7(18.5)	542.8(81.4)	666.5
2003	120.5(20.6)	464.8(79.4)	585.3
2004	124.0(26.7)	340.0(73.3)	464
2005	140.9(30.4)	322.6(69.6)	463.5
2006	143.6(30.6)	325.8(69.4)	469.4
Total	4,822.1(33.7)	9,485.5(66.3)	14,307.60

(Note: Ha 2006, Data from MLIT)

New housing by public institutions from Table 3.1 is, however, not all for public housing in order to rent to the poor. Importantly, the public sector has been very actively involved in the production of private housing to sell. It is shown in Table 3.2 that the KNHC provided almost 60% private housing of their total provision during the last 40 years. This suggests that not only was public provision very weak for lower classes, but the role of government also led to have different meaning of state housing with other countries. It is applied to housing owned and managed or built for sale by

the KNHC or local governments. Largely, it is rooted in the lack of public housing policy and the position of KNHC generally competing with the private sector in the housing construction for sale.

Table 3. 2 The number of housing provided by Korea National Housing Corporation

Year	Public housing (%)	Private housing (%)	Total
1962 ~ 1966	62(1.2)	5,097(98.8)	5,159(100)
1967 ~ 1971	1,008(13.0)	6,731(87.0)	7,739(100)
1972 ~ 1976	18,650(34.3)	35,770(65.7)	54,420(100)
1977 ~ 1981	47,717(31.0)	106,314(69.0)	154,031(100)
1982 ~ 1986	35,294(18.9)	151,384(81.1)	186,678(100)
1987 ~ 1991	180,970(65.8)	93,991(34.2)	274,961(100)
1992 ~ 1996	94,807(27.4)	250,708(72.6)	345,515(100)
1997 ~ 2001	140,311(53.5)	121,972(46.5)	262,283(100)
Total	518,819(40.2)	771,967(59.8)	1,290,786(100)

(Note: Ha 2006, Data from Korea National Housing Corporation)

### Tenure

Housing supplies from the private and public bodies have consisted of private housing market for sale with relation to the *chonsei* system described in Chapter Two. Those who can afford with saving accounts of the HSS are eligible to buy new provision of apartments and become owners. On the other hand, rental tenancies, such as *chonsei* or monthly rent minority tenure), have been a way of resolving housing needs for those who are not eligible for purchase schemes. The *chonsei* system has played a role of private finance due to the weak public financial system, which had a record of 5-6 times more *chonsei* funding than public funding from the KHB in 1986 (Kim 1996). This has caused not only the continuous speculation from multi-buyers with the aid of *chonsei* fund given by tenants from the beginning of high-rise development, but also the inconsistency between ‘ownership as investment’ and ‘dwelling in better places’ in more recent days (Choi 2012). In this sense, Ronald and Lee (2012) highlight that the ratio of home ownership is not higher in comparison with the other developed East Asian nations due to the lack of connection between homes and households in policy terms, despite the high level of housing supply. Therefore, it is noted that the Korean housing supply curve has operated inelastically as adjusted by the government policy,

and has resulted in the institutional problems of the housebuilding sector (Renaud 1993; Green et al. 1994).

Moreover, the strong position of *chonsei* tenancy is not only originated from the unaffordable housing by private developers, but also the privatised housing produced by public institutes that again contributed to the lower *chonsei* market compared to private company's product. This may be due to the role of the public housing market. There are differences between the Western welfare systems and East Asia with high-speed-growth economies in the meanings of public housing (Ronald and Lee 2012, see also Forrest and Lee 2003; Groves et al. 2007; Ronald and Chiu 2010). Ronald and Lee suggest that this is largely oriented from the aim of social policy to meet intensive economic growth in 'developmentalist' states, as a form of 'productivism' (see Kwon 2003; Holliday 2000). Given this context, they thus point out that public housing as 'state coordinated' differs from social housing as 'de-commodified' based on post-war European governance. In this sense, the history of 'social' housing is very short in Korea. The first social housing as a limited provision of permanent public rental housing for vulnerable low-income households came in 1989 based on the 'Public Rental Housing Act' in 1984, providing 190,000 homes through the Two Million Housing plan (Ha 2006). However, it stopped since 1993 due to the huge financial subsidies it required, the high cost of management and low rate of occupancy, which changed to long or short-term rental public housing. It means that the provision of new, purely social housing has disappeared in South Korea. Long-term public rental housing comprises only 2.3% of total housing stocks in 1999, which is very low compared to many other countries (Ha 2000). This means that very few low-classes can be allocated to there, while many are marginalised from housing provision (Ha 2006).

### *Affordability*

From the most privatised housing market, affordable housing for lower classes came to be extremely limited. Alternatively, the 'Private Rental Housing Law' became effective in 1994 as a producer subsidy system, providing residential land, the benefit of tax and financial support to the private sector, which means the commodification of public housing limited to be sold after 5 years. This again resulted in the fact that not

only is the volume of 'social' housing substantially insufficient, but it is also unaffordable for lower income households (Ha 2006). It means that most Koreans are obliged to get their housing through market mechanisms, and social exclusion has been inevitable for those who cannot afford market price of housings in the context of the lack of public housing policy. Instead, public rental housing is subsidised in priority for those who contribute to economic growth, such as public officials or other professions, in accordance with the developmentalist aim rather than social welfare housing (Ronald and Lee 2012). This, therefore, seems to resonate with the perspective that public housing is usually programmed for enhancing urban infrastructure and expanding household autonomy rather than supporting expectations of rights to state services (Lee 2004 cited in Ronald and Lee 2012).

However, Ronald and Lee make a point that the structure of public and private housing market based on the marketisation and de-socialised housing of neo-liberal ideas has faced a challenge against the new environment arisen from the Asian economic crisis in 1997, which led to high levels of volatility in private housing markets due to the transformation of housing financial systems in the beginning of 2000s (see Ronald and Jin 2010; Yu and Lee 2010). This, however, as Ronald and Lee suggest, has not affected the speculative housing market as continuing increases of prices, which reinforces the volatility and the exclusion of middle-income households in the housing market. On the other hand, they argue that the reinforcement and reorientation of public housing came to the fore from the volatile market conditions and unstable economy, in the pressing context of political regimes against the developmentalist legitimacy and authority. This has led to the fundamental transformation in the provision of public rental housing in both quantity and quality terms: extended supply from little stock to 7% of housing with more plans of provision by 2018; planned to provide bigger size of public rental housing as 85-149 m<sup>2</sup>, more oriented for middle-class families (Ronald and Lee 2012). This might influence or be influenced by the current complex context of change in perspectives towards tenure from private ownership to tenants (including public rental as well as *chonsei*).

The 'One Million Rental Housing Plan' was announced in 2002 by the government of Dae-jung Kim just after the Asian economic crisis from 1998 to 2002, even though he

was more focused on boosting the economy by deregulating housing controls. The last government of Moo-hyun Roh from 2003 to 2007 had a more radical approach to the policy of social housing through various programs of public housing, in order to embrace the ideas of social mix and vulnerable social groups. On the other hand, the ‘Bogumjari’ (Meaning ‘nest’ in Korean) program initiated by the current Myung-bak Lee government since 2008 has in principle different perspectives from the previous two regimes. As compared to the two preceding programmes, the Bogumjari program is more influenced by neo-liberal ideas to encourage economy, which includes a wide range of income groups and diverse demographic groups. It was enacted in 2009 with the aim of 1.5 million public housing supply between 2009 and 2018, in which 700 thousand units is provided for selling, and 800 thousand for renting. One million of them are planned to be built within the metropolitan city Seoul, hoping to contribute to affordable housing although it is highly controversial as mainly situated in the Green Belt.

#### *Oligopolistic housebuilding industry*

The strength of the private housing market leading to likely unaffordability as a competitive environment may be partly based on the strategy of the government to encourage mass-production rather than affordable public housing. The government has designated specific builders which are usually large construction companies called the *chaebols* (Korean multinational conglomerations, such as Hyundai, Samsung, Daewoo and LG). Only designated builders could have a permission to participate in larger projects with the government’s support legally to achieve the goal of the mass production of houses and to bring the large builders’ capital into urban housing markets (Ryu 2004). On the other hand, Ryu argues that small registered firms found it difficult to get large project or fund and non-registered builders could not gain financial support from the government. As a result, the housing market has mostly been led by the large builders, which could exploit the market conditions and structure the housebuilding industries to the predominated high-rise market, while other housing such as detached-houses has reduced in prominence. This structure based on the capacity of *chaebols* and the governmental supports has predominantly lasted to produce massive apartments during the economic growth and the explosive growth of

population since the 1970s until the change in housing context from the Asian economic crisis.

Based on the changed environment of housing market since the 1998 IMF bailout, however, big companies have become even more active and exclusive in the housing market, promoting 'brand awareness', whereas small and medium construction enterprises has gone bankrupt. Large branded companies have had a trend for supply of more luxurious, differentiated and higher apartments equipped with all facilities in a same building, or development such as fitness centre, golf practice space, shops and reinforced security system etc. These luxury and branded apartments have been profitable to big companies, targeting the higher class which may be the only group able to consume housing regardless of price in economic recession. As a result, the price gap between branded and non-branded housing has increased considerably (KHI 2005). This may lead to the deeper social class gap limiting the access for low- and middle- income households to affordable housing. Likewise, preferences for branded housing have brought the imbalances of business activity between large and small firms (CERI 2006). As shown in Table 3.3, while the rate of acquired work by ranked 1 ~ 30th company increased since 1997, that of by ranked 31<sup>st</sup> ~1000<sup>th</sup> firms decreased over the given period, which is followed by more polarisation after 2005. Furthermore, in this volatile context of housing markets, town houses, which had hitherto not been recognised or popular in the housing market, have increasingly developed as a result of successive regulation by the last government to solve the problems caused by apartments, such as extreme speculation and deepening unaffordability. The town houses seem to be in general preferred by relatively small and medium-sized companies to produce, as they cannot compete with big companies in the polarised housing market.



Table 3. 3 The percentages of acquired work by ranked builders (unit: %)

Groups	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	05/04
1 ~ 10	21.1	20.9	24.1	24.5	17.4	16.9	19.9	23	27.1	4.1
11 ~ 30	14.4	14.7	13.4	11.9	15.2	11.5	11	11.7	14.5	2.8
31 ~ 100	20.9	16.9	16.2	14.9	13.6	12.6	13.6	15.5	15.7	0.2
101 ~ 300	13.6	13.9	12.8	11.9	10.2	11.1	11.7	10	9.7	-0.3
301 ~ 1000	11.8	13.1	12.7	12.1	11.4	10.3	10.6	10.9	9	-1.9
under 1001	18.3	20.5	20.8	24.6	32.2	37.6	33.2	28.9	23.9	-5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

(Note: CERI 2006, Data from the Construction Association of Korea)

### Housing policies

According to the priority of economic growth for developmentalist strategies, the features of governance as somewhat top-down and plan-oriented interventions contributed to the intensive economic growth between the 1960s and 1990s with the results of a remarkable improvement of urban living conditions (Ronald and Lee 2012). In this process, the role of government has shifted from constructing market conditions in the 1970s to supporting and controlling the expanded and empowered market since the 1980s according to the polarised structure between *chaebols* and small and medium developers (Kim 1996a). In the 2000s, as discussed above, housing interventions further transited from a focus on the private market to being more interested in public housing, in the context of political pressure arising from acknowledged social inequalities. In response to these economic and political aims, the governments have been involved in the housing market, using the measures of regulation and deregulation in order to manage market failures. Accordingly, various measures have been taken to control the housing market, including direct methods of ruling supply and demand, such as density and price controls on new apartment developments, resale restrictions, and taxation and loan access restrictions.

#### *Price controls*

Probably the most contentious intervention has been a price control system, unique in Korea, which is a strong measure fixing a price cap on new apartment provision as well as a way of fostering supply. In 1982, a limited ceiling price was introduced that

builders could not sell over the price arranged by the government. It was set usually at between half to one-third of the market price to tackle the housing problem caused by dramatically increased housing prices. It aims for people to have ownership at a lower price and for the housing market to be stabilised (Ha 2000). Yet it has been criticised that while the policy discourages private sector activity, controlled housing prices were crucial factors for builders to construct standardised high-rise apartments to reduce costs and to gain more profit (Ryu 2004). On the other hand, Ryu points out that it encourages speculation by the price gap between supplied price and resold price in the market, and accordingly beneficiaries of HSS have been the upper- and middle-classes who can afford to save their surplus income. Due to the sensitivity, this has been usually a major method of intervention, for example, abolishing the ceiling price in 1998 to boost the economy followed by the Asian economic downturn. It was however reinforced again to supply lower price of housing in 2007, resulting in decreased construction quantity. It is now the most controversial issue that the current government has pledged to stop the price control with the aim of the recovery of the housing market so as to help overcome the global economic crisis. In concert with this, to prevent speculative transaction of buying at controlled price and selling at higher market price, the limits of reselling new apartments introduced in 1978 is assigned by certain period up to 10 years according to the grade of speculation area. It is applied to those who buy housing which are provided in over 20 units by registered or designated builders. This policy is, thus, applicable mainly to high-rise apartments. Again, as most speculation areas are being removed of designation gradually, the limit to resell is also being deregulated by a maximum of 5 years for public housing and 3 years for private provision.

### *Density controls*

Density controls are also a strong measure to control development, which is directly linked to profit for builders as well as consumers under the HR scheme. The ratio of total building area (aggregating all floors) is counted as  $(\text{total building area} / \text{total land area}) \times 100$  (%), which is different with the building ratio between the building and land areas in the ground level. As the higher the ratio is the higher density is, the maximum of the ratio is designated to secure the appropriate residential environment as a basic rule in urban planning. This limit is assigned according to the

characteristics of areas in terms of regions and use of lands. For instance, residential sectors in urban area are limited to build up to 100-500 %, whereas the total building ratio is 900-1500% in the urban commercial sector. On the other hand, rural and green belt areas are only approved to construct with 80% of building density at most. As this density was strengthened usually at fewer than 200% by last government in 2003 to prevent sprawl and high density development, it has been blamed for making it difficult for developers to progress their business, resulting in a frozen housing market. This has, thus, become a political issue that the government is trying to alleviate for developers and apartments residents to proceed their projects, planning to build over fifty floors in certain projects.

### *Taxation*

While the interventions of price and density controls are mostly adopted to the development, tax and loan systems are assigned to control consumption as well as production. Taxation policies are directly influenced to exchange and housing construction, aiming at expansion of supply and prevention of speculation. In the 1990s, a revolutionary tax reform, an 'aggregate land tax' was imposed on excessive windfall profits from holding undeveloped land. The Korea Land Development Corporation has engaged in large-scale residential land development processes, purchasing agricultural land, converting it to residential use, installing infrastructure, and selling it to public institutes and private builders. On the other hand, private development of land has been very limited (Ryu 2004). This led to the continuous speculation, and the price of land increased dramatically by over 1,500 % from 1979 to 1985 (Kim 1996b). The land tax was thus the resultant of the extreme context. Those who own undeveloped residential land over 200 *pyong* (about 661m<sup>2</sup>) must pay higher percentage tax on the value of land over this limit (Kim 1996b). However, it resulted in also increasing land price, and so practically tax burdens were shifted to house buyers (Ryu 2004).

Meanwhile, the reinforcement of possession tax and the establishment of taxation based on the price of real transaction, not on that of assessed value of the property has been massively influential on consumers' real estate transactions. Moreover, a transfer income tax has also been strengthened on those who have more than two properties,

up to 50 % of the capital gain counted on real sold price. In particular, a new ‘total property tax’ targeted usually on higher middle-class groups in 2003 has been a controversial issue affecting the political arena. A higher rate of tax is levied on those who own properties whose total value is in excess of a certain limit. In 2005, the tax was extended, so the number of households which have to pay it increased from 40,000 to 160,000. Especially, residents of Gangnam and neighbouring Bundang comprised over 50% of these newly-burdened households and property taxation has been a very notable national political issue.

### *Housing loans*

It is noted that the strengthened access criteria for loans has been the most effective tool to control the housing market among all the measures taken by the last government (Jung-ang Ilbo 2007) through the designation of ‘speculation areas’, which are high value housing areas including Gangnam. Housing loans are typically categorised as ‘consumption finance’ in comparison with ‘development finance’ which is related to production and provision (Malpass 1990). Loans to consumers in 2001 were at an average of 60% Loan to Value (LTV). The LTV was, however, limited to 40% in the speculation areas in 2003, and a buyer who wants housing over a certain value was subject to a Debt to Income (DTI) assessment from 2006, which aimed to discourage speculative demand for apartments. On the contrary, town houses can avoid this regulation, which is thus likely to be exploited as an alternative marketing strategy instead of high-rise apartments.

In this first section of the chapter, discussions about housing market and housing intervention contextualised the concentration of high-rise apartment developments. Despite the various stages and diverse features in a transforming housing market, the endeavours have mostly targeted high-rise apartments, whereas economic and political concerns have less been interested in other types of housing. In this context, high-rise apartments have exclusively grown in accordance with the development of formal and informal institutional frameworks. The next section discusses how high-rise apartments have evolved over the period of policy development.

### **3.2 Evolution of high-rise apartment living in Korea**

As discussed in the last section, tremendous changes have been seen in housing policies and housebuilding industries, which have influenced all sections of society in terms of social, cultural, economic and political contexts. In addition, since the 1960s, social values, norms and institutions have fundamentally been transformed following the dramatic economic growth due to intensive industrialisation. This has been accompanied with the explosive population growth, urban concentration and expansion of the nuclear family, which caused the extreme housing shortage in Seoul. According to this momentous social change, high-rise apartments came to the fore as a method innovatively to resolve all matters of housing as well as to contribute to economic growth. As a result, there is no doubt that the typical urban housing is high-rise apartments in contemporary Korea despite its unfamiliarity in the beginning. In doing so, a variety of development stages have been crucial to how high-rise apartments have evolved from the aversion to the luxury branded apartments as modern Korean's lifestyle.

#### **Initial failure in low-class housing**

Rather than providing a solution to the housing shortage, the construction of apartments was firstly raised as trials of a new housing model under the insufficient planning of housing supply after the Korean War. In 1958, the pioneering Jong-am apartments were a direct result of, and facilitated by, advances in researches of construction technology for high-rise buildings (Gelézeau 2007). Equally, these new apartments were seen to represent the modernisation of the country as they were seen to be a model of western housing style (Lim 1994a). Based on advanced technologies, the Mapo apartments were one of several developments built in the 1960s by the KNHC, which adopted the concept of the 'apartment complex', shown in Figure 3.3. The complex was characterised as an independent and autonomous housing block, separate from neighbouring areas (Gelézeau 2007). This was an attempt to improve urban environment and urban structure through physical transformation (Lee 1995). Beautification, improvement and sanitation were thus the initiatives to redevelop urban squatter areas, which was aggressively pushed by the mayor of Seoul. The provision of mostly small apartments of 10-15 *pyong* with medium rise was achieved through national public funds and foreign aid finance, but without appropriate urban

and housing planning. This led to a number of ‘Simin’ (meaning of citizen in Korean) apartments being constructed by the demolition of existing settlements and forcibly relocating evictees to outside areas of Seoul with no compensation under the clearance and relocation policy.

Figure 3. 3 Mapo apartment complex in 1965



(Source: re-adapted from Gelézeau 2007)

The government’s efforts to improve urban squattered areas and the housing shortage by introducing a new housing style of apartments, usually for the lower class, however, were unsuccessful during the 1950-60s. This was due to the preference for lower income households of young and small families, whereas middle- and high-class households preferred detached houses until the 1960s (Gelézeau 2007), as discussed in the last chapter. Until the beginning of 1970s, most housing was thus constructed by relatively small companies or tradesmen, and the number of apartments was few (Jang 1994 cited in Gelézeau 2007). A study conducted by Lee (1971) shows the clear sense of dislike:

‘Apartments were not suited to a traditional lifestyle; Koreans wanted to own real estate which, of course, was not possible with apartments; and since many households live in the same building, each family is conscious of having its living standards exposed to the scrutiny of immediate neighbours.’ (Lee 1971, p.41 cited in Lett 1998)

To make matters worse, the accidental collapse of 15 buildings in the Wawoo apartment complex built in 1970 by redevelopment of urban squatter area, which consisted of 16 buildings with six floors each, happened just in three months' time of foundation. It resulted in 34 deaths and 40 injuries. Although it was due to poor construction as a result of corruption, the negative perception of a general insecurity about high-rise buildings was inscribed in people (Gelézeau 2007). This incident caused the end of provision of Simin apartments. On the contrary, however, it became a motive of breakthrough that the aim of apartment policy was diverted into middle-class housing (Lee 1995).

### **Landmark developments towards middle-class**

In 1971, two successful developments in Yeoido and Dongbu-ichon-*dong* constructed by the government, which targeted the wealthier classes, turned such dislike into a positive attitude, leading to the interest of private developers. In Dongbu-ichon-*dong* as shown in Figure 3.4, the complex including the largest unit (80 *pyong*: about 264m<sup>2</sup>) was named the 'mansion' that symbolise housing for the wealthy, and marketing strategies, such as advertising and show homes, were employed to promote sales (Gelézeau 2007). This was initiated to attract the private funding for middle-classes based on the realisation of the limits of the governmental support:

'Since the Mapo apartments, a number of apartments has been built with public funds, but it was inevitably resulted in the poor condition for lower classes as the nature of public funds...Would it be the effect of killing two birds with one stone, on the one hand to solve housing shortage, on the other hand to relieve the public financial burden of the government if apartments could be supplied for middle-classes without the support?...Although all non-ownership households are clearly low classes, not all middle-classes cannot be supposed to have a proper housing...Not only are they sacrificed for local housing sellers' interests and profits, but it could be also wasting the time and effort, occupying excessive lands, and making extravagant for property investment if they build by themselves. Therefore, it could prevent the scramble for residential environment and to prepare for the increasing future demand. This is how

Mansion apartments are planned.’ (Lim 1970: Seung-up Lim, the chief of the Korea Housing Research Institute)

Figure 3. 4 Dongbu-ichon-*dong* apartments in 1971



(Source: re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2008)

Similarly, Yeoido apartments in Figure 3.5 were called ‘Sibum’ (meaning of a model for others in Korean) based on the aim of changing the images from the disappointment of the incident of the Wawoo apartments (Son 2003a). This was thus constructed to the luxury high-rise apartments with 12 floors equipping firstly elevators. Moreover, Son emphasises that the very heart of this plan was the establishment of the education system, granting the privilege that schools founded in the complex were succeeded by themselves from primary, middle to high school, which led to the fact that 70% of women in apartments had a university degree. Finally, this came to be successful without any public funds, and led to not only the premium price for them but also the boom of high-rise apartments afterwards, even though it was difficult to sell at first as the plan was announced just after the Wawoo incident and the civil officers who planned were accordingly encouraged to apply for the apartments, highlighted by Son as himself was one of them. These developments acted as a pioneering model for the ‘Gangnam development’ onward.

Figure 3. 5 Yeoido Sibum apartments in 1971

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(Source: <http://blog.naver.com/jkhan23/150068538411>)



Given the new housing schemes since the HCAA in 1972, mass-production targeting the middle classes in the 1970s started with the series of new neighbourhoods in Gangnam from the 1970s to the beginning of 1980s (Figure 3.6). This was intended to alleviate over-population in ‘Gangbuk’, the traditionally settled area of the city.

Figure 3. 6 The Gangnam developments of apartments in 1970s



(Source: adapted from Gelézeau 2007)

Starting with the Banpo complex in 1973-78, targeted on the middle-class, a continuous sequence of apartment blocks was developed in Gangnam. In 1975-78, Chamsil new town was constructed with high-rise apartments with a central heating system and lift, which influenced the perception of the convenience of high-rise living, propagating an ‘apartment lifestyle’ and targeting a young generation with smaller apartments. It was also the first attempt of ‘mega complex’ of apartments as shown in Figure 3.7. The Apgujung-Hyundai complex, constructed between 1975 and 1982, was the first apartment complex in which a private company was involved in cooperating with the government for urban middle-class housing with units of 32 *pyong* to 80 *pyong* (Kim and Choe 1997). Representatively, these three cases in Gangnam development of the 1970s had made Gangnam a special region despite the initial reluctance, leading many people to move into the new development area.

Figure 3. 7 Chamsil apartments complexes

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(Source: Kim 1994)

Behind this success, there was the government's strong support for educational and economic incentives for people to move to Gangnam, which was desolate, so people were reluctant to move at the time (Lett 1998). Usually, Koreans believe that graduation from a prestigious high school leads to entry into not only a prestigious university but also success in social and economic life. Early in the 1970s, the government, thus, moved many of the top high schools and teachers to Gangnam, which was successful in helping solve the housing shortage quickly. Not only did this lead to making apartments in Gangnam have a special meaning afterwards, but it has also caused increases in the price of apartments, particularly in Gangnam which remains the richest residential area so far in Korea (dark area in Figure 3.6) and is also reported as one of the most expensive areas in the world. Amongst Koreans, it is thus said that buying an apartment in Gangnam is akin to 'entering a castle' in economic and social meaning.

### **Widespread provision**

Based on this fundamental change in perspective, in the middle of 1980-90s, the construction of apartments boomed across Seoul and in new cities. Moreover, the Asian Games in 1986 and Olympic Games in 1988 prompted the deregulation of massive high-rise building to provide athletes' accommodation in Chamsil. This provided an opportunity for big companies to recover their business successfully from the recession of the construction industry in foreign countries caused by the Middle-East war. By more augmented support for massive housing construction, such as the HR scheme, the redevelopment projects had been much stimulated due to the Asian Games and Seoul Olympics in the 1980s (KPA 2000). In particular, the deregulation of density to underpin the financial method has encouraged redevelopment of existing

apartment schemes (Choi 2000). From the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, the density limit was alleviated from 250% in Gangbuk and 300% in Gangnam to 400%, in order to aim at the quantum growth of housing. Given the preferences for high-rise apartments, high-end developers have also increasingly sought to redevelop old traditional sites or slum areas, and to reconstruct original apartment blocks within the city due to no more space in the Gangnam development. Eventually, high-rise apartments have spread all over districts in Seoul, which have transformed its physical and socio-spatial structure.

As developable land became scarce in Gangnam, 'new city developments' in surrounding areas of Seoul were initiated at the end of the 1980s. The 'Two Million Housing Construction Plan' aimed to solve the housing shortages in and near Seoul in conjunction with the 'five new cities development plan' (Ha 2000). It has been situated as satellite cities in *Gyeonggi-do* surrounding Seoul consisting of Bundang, Ilsan, Pyeongchon, Sanbon, and Joongdong. As a result, whereas supply of detached houses decreased gradually to just over 6% in 2005, the construction rate of new apartments increased from 200,000-250,000 to 500,000-600,000 per annum up to 1997 (Kim 2002b). This resulted in over-production, in excess of 2.7 million units, during the planning period from 1988 to 1992 (Bae 2002). In spite of this remarkable increase in supply, however, it is criticised that new cities plan was based on not the scope of urban planning but just that of housing supply. Accordingly, it ended up comprising 'enormous housing blocks' consisting of high-rise apartments rather than 'city' in suburban areas, which is peculiar and unprecedented in the world (Choi 2000). As not an autonomous city but a town, it has also caused in huge social costs of transportation and environmental problems by commuting from the suburbs to the central city Seoul. Nevertheless, high-rise building penetrated deeply into people's lifestyles over the period of these developments.

### **Reproduction of producer-branded apartments**

By the middle of the 1990s, the rate of building apartments decreased due to the saturation of construction as well as economic downturn. There was, however, another moment in which apartments flourished and reproduced themselves within contemporary Korean culture. Paradoxically, the housing market crisis caused by the

Asian financial crisis of 1997 strengthened the position of apartments. Price controls were completely abolished after 1998 to boost housing economy by encouraging private builders meaning that housing came to be regarded solely as a market product influenced by market price and context (Ha 2006; Yoon 1998). In addition, the cycle of building (usually 20-30 years) enables reconstruction of already developed areas including houses, medium flats and high-rise apartments built in 1960-70s. With schemes similar to the HR scheme, the reconstruction policy on apartments has given new opportunities of business for the housebuilding industry after declining of the redevelopment (Yoo 1995). Since the 1990s, thus, high-end developers have increasingly sought to redevelop old sites and reconstruct the original apartment blocks within the city. This suggests that some apartment blocks may only have a commercial life span of around 20 years. These reconstructed areas have led to luxury branded apartments as a response to the deregulation of housing policy, and it has become a distinctive feature of the housing market in Seoul. As well as encouraging the demand and investment of upper- and middle-class consumers, luxury branded apartments have brought about a price premium, inflating apartment prices enormously and causing middle and low income households to be unable to access affordable and appropriate housing. It also resulted in low income groups experiencing deprivation, which is exacerbated by the reinforcement of residential segregation between apartment complexes and other housing areas. This is particularly clear in local contexts where the areas are redeveloped or reconstructed, restructuring socio-economic patterns as well as revealing spatial and physical distinctions in both Gangbuk and Gangnam, as can be seen in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3. 8 Physical and spatial transformation



(a) Gangbuk

(b) Gangnam

(Source: Google map)

Following all these traces of development history in breathless haste, a variety of apartment developments is still continued. The second phase of New City developments and 26 New Town developments are in progress from the beginning of the 2000s. The Bogeumjari programme constructed in the Green Belt is filling up the gap between the New Town in Seoul and the New Cities surrounding Seoul. Seoul continues to expand through new high-rise developments. The next section introduces Gangnam neighbourhoods in order to explore how the particular developments have influenced the construction of the metropolitan city Seoul, focusing on their social, cultural and economic contexts.

### **3.3 The position of Gangnam in Seoul**

This section presents the case study neighbourhood, Gangnam. The discussion is grounded on three aspects: origins and location; population and housing distribution; and socio-economic characteristics. It focuses on the features and processes specific to the example of high-rise residential environment, positioning Gangnam in the context of wider city development and reconfiguration of the city. This exploration highlights potential gaps and inconsistency between the existing knowledge and some observed reality.

#### **Origins and location**

The use of the word Gangnam has multiple meanings. Literally and basically, the term ‘Gangnam’ was used in counterpart with ‘Gangbuk’ given name to the region of Seoul north of the Hangang (Han River), as *gang* meaning ‘river’ and *buk* meaning ‘north’ (Hwang 1991). According to this, the literal translation of ‘Gangnam’ is the ‘south of the river’, as *nam* meaning ‘south’. The Hangang now divides Seoul into the so-called Gangbuk and Gangnam regions.

Gangnam is also an administrative territory. Figure 3.1 (in section 3.1) shows the 25 *gu* (districts) that Seoul is currently divided into. Gangnam-*gu* is one of the larger and newest districts south of Hangang. However, more common use of the term is referred to recently developed areas in the south of the Hangang in connection with the modern high-rise apartment complexes and the new middle class, not just Gangnam-

*gu*, which is beyond the use of literal and administrative meaning. It connotes socio-cultural distinction from Gangbuk (Lett 1998). This exclusive meaning has led the distinguishable cognition between the old and new, or the traditional and the modern over two regions. In this sense, Hwang (1991, p.33) points out that ‘although the only thing truly dividing Gangbuk from Gangnam is the Hangang, the two areas have come to embody two diametrically opposed urban lifestyles and cultures’ (Lett 1998). It originally came from physical differences that while the road system is consisted of narrow alleys in Gangbuk as based on walking before the industrialised society, the wide, modern grid roads characterise Gangnam. In addition, detached-houses have shaped the landscape of Gangbuk, but high-rise apartments as westernised lifestyles are the representative housing in Gangnam.

Such cognition is originated from the history of building apartments since the 1970s as discussed in the last section. The modern Gangnam era was actually opened by the construction of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hangang Bridge (called Hannam now) in 1969. Previous to this, Gangnam was only an undeveloped rural area out of the city centre (Figure 3.9). Anecdotally, it is acknowledged that the bridge was planned not for urban planning to extend Seoul, but for an escape route from the attack of North Korea (Son 2003b). However, before long, as a central role in urban planning at the time, Son recalls that it became a home base of Gyungbu Motorway opened in 1970 to connect to Busan by the sudden announcement of the president Chunghee Park, and the motorway led to the Gangnam-oriented perspective of all citizens and the public recognition of the new development in Gangnam.

Figure 3. 9 Apgujung Hyundai apartments in rural Gangnam

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(Source: a photographer, Minjo Jeon in 1978)

Since then, in the master plan of Seoul city planned in 1970, Gangnam came to be the position as the sub-centre, and the vast lands of housing plot were supplied by the LRS (Figure 3.10). Following the plan of sub-centre, many public institutions, such as a courthouse, a public prosecutors office, the express bus terminal and prestigious schools were moved to Gangnam to restrain the growth of Gangbuk. According to this, Gangnam developments were lined along the south of Hangang as described in the last section, which is now categorised into Seocho- (the 1<sup>st</sup> Youngdong development), Gangnam- (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Youngdong development), and Songpa-*gu*. Now, Seocho- and Gangnam-*gu* are the richest areas, which are usually called ‘Gangnam’ together. Especially, Apgujung Hyundai apartments, which were built on the land compensated for the payment of constructing the Gyungbu Motorway, became the focus to lead the new developments. Furthermore, not only did Gangnam-*gu* complement to the city as residential settlements but it also came to be a new Central Business District in the southern part of Seoul. With regard to education system, Songpa-*gu* where Chamsil apartments were built in the 1970s is included into the same category of educational regions as Gangnam called ‘8<sup>th</sup> *hakgun*’ mostly having the best score in entrance exams of university. Therefore, the meaning of Gangnam is usually used to include Seocho-, Gangnam-, and Songpa-*gu* in socio-economic terms. Given the historical and cultural context, the case study areas for this project are basically centred at these three Gangnam areas as seen in Figure 3.6 (dark area) in the commonly understood meaning of ‘Gangnam’.

Figure 3. 10 Housing plots in Gangnam supplied by the LRS

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(Source: Kim 1994)

### **Population and housing distribution**

According to the explosive growth of population, Gangnam was prepared to embrace all influx by the last extension of Seoul in 1973 rather than to restrain the growth of

Seoul. The three Gangnam areas were little populated in the 1960s, with only 7,911 households and 46,780 people in 1963 (Son 2003b), which was only around 1.56 % of whole population when Gangnam areas were included to Seoul. As Gangnam development was in progress, not only could the population coming to Seoul be absorbed despite its enormous increase, but also the central regions became decreased in population ratio. Population density was in fact very high at 9,112 person/km<sup>2</sup> in 1960 compared to OECD countries as London at 5,100, Paris at 3,550 and New York at 2,050 in 2009. Even though the number of population increased over 1,300,000 between 1960 and 1966, as shown in Table 3.4, population density decreased by around two thirds as a result of the spatial extension in 1963. The CBD areas (Jongro- and Jung-gu) as traditionally favourable residential settlements of high-classes were home to 16.38% in 1960 and 10.06% in 1966 of the whole population.

Table 3. 4 Population distribution in Seoul

Year	Seoul population	Population density	CBD (Jongro- and Jung-gu)		Gangnam (3 gus)	
			Population	Population ratio	Population	Population ratio
1960	2,445,402	9,112.7	400,645	16.38		
1966	3,793,280	6,204.1	381,522	10.06		
1970	5,433,198	9,077.8	345,676	6.36		
1975	6,889,502	11,475.5	618,802	8.98	193,857	2.8
1980	8,364,379	13,819.9	535,067	6.40	750,907	8.98
1985	9,639,110	15,921.1	475,555	4.93	1,109,143	11.51
1990	10,612,577	17,532.2	431,449	4.07	1,521,099	14.33
1995	10,231,217	16,889.3	325,866	3.19	1,209,999	11.83
2000	9,895,217	16,342.2	305,291	3.09	1,525,645	15.42
2005	9,820,171	16,221.0	284,461	2.90	1,462,056	14.89
2010	9,794,304	16,188.9	276,719	2.83	1,567,881	16.01

(Source: KOSIS, Korean Statistical Information Service)

However, this figure has been reversed by the growth of Gangnam since the 1970s. In 1975, Gangnam had only 2.8% of population, but it was increasingly grown to 16.01%, whereas Jongro- and Jung-gu fell down to 2.8% by 2010. After the construction of five new cities development initiated by the Two Million Housing program, the population of Seoul started to decrease as clearly can be seen from 1995 in Table 3.4, and Gangnam areas also had fallen to 11.83%, which may be due to a

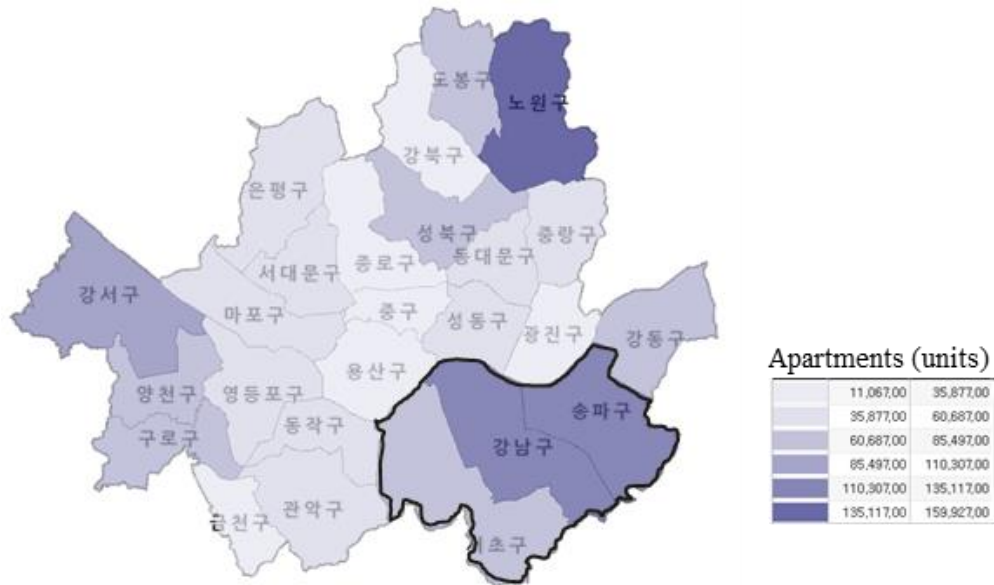


new city of Bundang just next to Gangnam. However, the population of Gangnam has risen again since 2000 with a slight decrease in 2005, whereas the CBD part has continuously been reduced over the period. The reduction in the mid-2000s may be attributable to the second phase of new city developments as started from 2000 including Pangyo attached to Bundang and near Gangnam. Also, the massive reconstruction in Banpo and Chamsil may have helped to the trend of reduction in 2005 and rise again in 2010. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Banpo Jugong complexes with five floors turned into luxury branded high-rise apartments respectively by Samsung Raemian and LG Xi with over 140% increase from 4,120 to 5,854 units in total and with bigger and various sizes from 16-25 *pyong* to 25-91 *pyong*. Similarly, the low-rise Chamsil Jugong from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> complexes changed from 15,250 to 17,614 units, while the 5<sup>th</sup> complex are waiting to reconstruct with more than double the number from 3,930 units. In both Banpo and Chamsil, 19,370 household units were demolished, and reconstructed units are 23,468 that were completed from 2006 to 2009. These figures may be thus partly explain the decrease of 25,341 in 2005 and increase of 41,994 households in 2010, as calculated from the Table 3.4 based on the average members in a household as 2.52 people in 3 Gangnam areas (Seoul GIS). Above all, this shows that residential movements are likely to coincide with apartment developments. In other words, Gangnam developments by the spatial extension of Seoul are seen as the policy for accepting more population along with massive apartment developments rather than controlling influx of population, which influenced all places over Seoul and resulted in the almost doubled population density from 9112.7 in 1960 to 16188.9 in 2010, rather than curtailing or spreading of population.

According to the initiation of high-rise apartment developments, three neighbourhoods of Gangnam could relatively accept higher numbers of population and apartments, while Jongro- and Jung-*gu* have decreased than other areas due to suburbanisation discussed in the last chapter. This pattern of developments has also led to the differentiation in the distribution of housing types. As shown in Figure 3.12, the ratios of apartments are higher in Gangnam- and Seocho-*gu* at over 60 % than the average number of Seoul and nation at around 58%, while Songpa-*gu* has a bit lesser at 52.3%. On the other hand, only 19.6% and 39.96 % of all housing stock are apartments in Jongro- and Jung-*gu* respectively. This is contrasted with the figures of the number of detached-houses, which three Gangnam areas have less than 4% (2.19-

3.99%), while Jongro-*gu* has 20.68% and Jung-*gu* has 15.6%. Other types, such as dense housing transformed from detached-houses or multi-households villas, fill up the gaps.

Figure 3. 11 The distribution of apartments in 2010

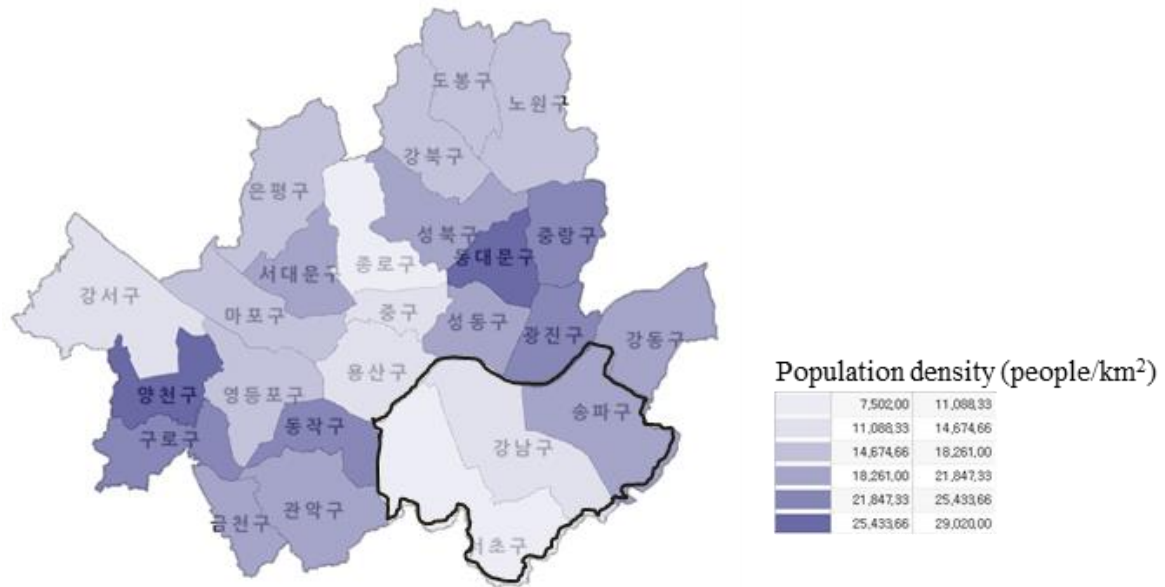


(Source: Seoul GIS)

However, notably, the number of apartments coincides neither with the population density, nor with the size of regions. Songpa-*gu* has the highest population but less apartments compared to Gangnam-*gu*, whereas Nowon-*gu* in Gangbuk has the most apartments although its area is similar with Songpa-*gu*. Accordingly, the distribution of population density by *gu* is different with the patterns of population and apartment numbers, as shown in Figure 3.12. Seocho-*gu* has the second lowest population density at 9,172 next to Jongro-*gu* at 7,426 people per km<sup>2</sup> in 2010. The rest of all areas are higher density than ten thousands per km<sup>2</sup>. Songpa-*gu* has relatively high with 20,346 over the period, whereas Nowon-*gu* is located in the middle range of population density with 17,359 despite the highest number of apartments and the second highest of population numbers. This shows that there is no consistency with the fact that the more density is, the more apartments should be. This seems to be against the general sense that people should live in apartments in Seoul because of high population. Gelézeau (2007), therefore, argues that the type of housing is not related to the ratio of population. There may be many other factors that cannot decide

the land use pattern based on conventional economics. One example is that high density of population is likely to be in regions where residential differentiation is bigger in socio-economic status, and the ratio of lower classes is higher (Yoon 1996).

Figure 3. 12 The population density in 2010, Seoul

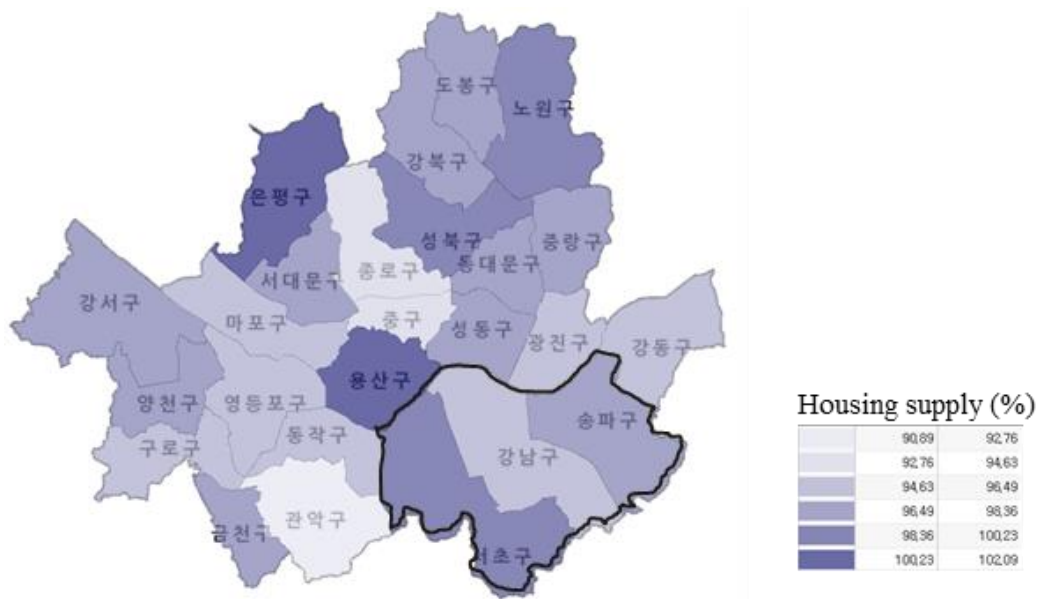


(Source: Seoul GIS)

Likewise, the ratio of housing supply is not consistent with the number of apartments. In addition, as Korea has already achieved a high rate of housing supply, the supply ratio is not very much varied amongst areas, although Seocho-*gu* is slightly higher than the two other Gangnam areas due to the lower population density, as can be seen in Figure 3.13. Following the figures exceeded 100% nationally in 2008 and metropolitan in 2010, and Seoul reached to over 97% in 2011, all regions are seen with over 90% of supply ratio (the ratio of housing stocks/households). However, it can be noted that Gangnam is not necessarily higher ratio of housing supply, but rather lower than some parts of Gangbuk regions. Furthermore, housing supply ratio is not necessarily connected to the rate of ownership. Gangnam-*gu*'s ownership percentages have continuously decreased from 57.5% in 1985 to 37.4% in 2005, whereas Seoul has increased over the same period. This resulted in lower ownership rate in Gangnam-*gu* than in Seoul, but the ratio of *chonsei* came to be similar in 2000 although it was about half of ownership in 1985. The decrease in ownership is, however, not necessarily linked to the lower classes. Instead, *chonsei* tenants with

ownership have increased that they own properties for investment in other areas, but live as tenants for better residential environments. Gangnam- and Seocho-gu rose to over 40% in the ratio of *chonsei* households with ownership in 2010 compared to around 28% in 2005. Songpa-gu also increased from 19.7% to 30.3% over the same period (Lee 2011b). This change in tenure may have led to the remarkable increase in *chonsei* price. On the contrary, there is a noticeable trend in both Seoul and Gangnam-gu that *chonsei* has fallen, while monthly rent has increased, as can be seen in Table 3.5. This is due to the low interest of bank lending, which led to transit from *chonsei* to monthly rent by owners in order to gain profits (KBFNG\_2011). It can be thus seen that the overall structure of tenure has shifted remarkably from ownership to tenants in both *chonsei* and monthly rent.

Figure 3. 13 Housing supply ratio in 2010, Seoul



(Source: Seoul GIS)

Table 3. 5 Housing tenure ratio (%)

	Year	Ownership	Chonsei	Monthly rent
<b>Seoul</b>	1985	40.8	36.8	19.7
	1990	38.0	40.3	19.6
	1995	39.7	43.8	15.0
	2000	40.9	41.2	16.3
	2005	44.6	33.2	20.5
<b>Gangnam-gu</b>	1985	57.5	29.5	10.1
	1990	52.6	30.5	11.9
	1995	48.3	36.2	13.6
	2000	41.1	38.2	19.4
	2005	37.4	33.3	27.7

(Source: MLIT and Gangnam-gu Office)

### **Socio-economic characteristics**

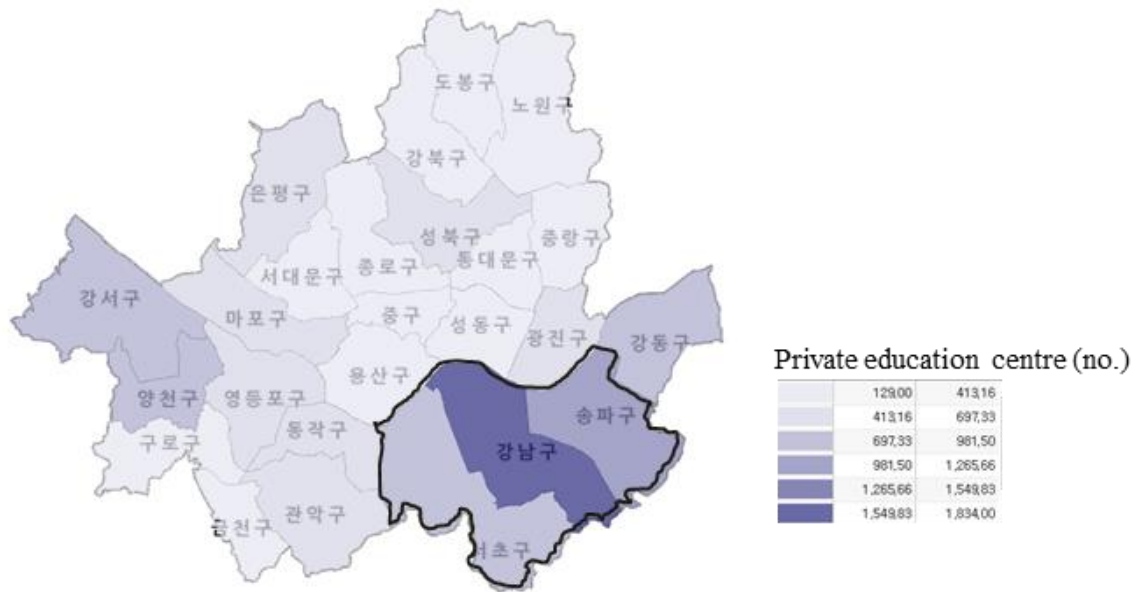
Following Gangnam developments and these configurations, high-rise apartments have transformed a typical modern lifestyle of middle-classes from detached-houses all over the areas in Seoul. Although lifestyles and socio-economic status assigned to high-rise apartments are widespread, Gangnam still retains its privileged status up to the present since the 1970s. Gangnam is not only a very small part of Korea as 0.12% and 21% of whole areas respectively in the nation and Seoul, but its history is also short. However, the influence of Gangnam has been enormous over the last half century in every aspect of society.

The privileged reputation was ironically motivated by a social incident, which led to make Gangnam a special place for rich and high-end consumption. In 1978, Apgujung Hyundai apartments became a central issue with the privileged distribution to the high-ranked leaders such as high-position civil servants, politicians and professors. It was a sort of reward as a lobby to build apartments for employer's accommodation, but some of them were allocated to the related social leaders (NAK 2008). Since then, Apgujung Hyundai apartments were not only inscribed as representative of a luxury apartment as well as speculation of high-rise apartments, but Apgujung-dong (an administrative division of Gangnam-gu) also came to represent a consumption place with big brand names for youth generation in the end of the 1980s. Moreover, this has developed to various discourses over Korean society by dualistic division between Gangnam and non-Gangnam (or Gangbuk), for example, high-classes residential

settlements and speculation in the 1970s, educational inequality and extreme educational fever expressed as 8<sup>th</sup> *hakgun* in the 1980s, conspicuous consumption in the 1990s, and all of them since the 2000s (Lee 2006). These discourses have been the roots of local identity formation of Gangnam (Lee 2006).

Based on such social discourses, the exclusive developments of high-rise apartments in Gangnam areas have accordingly transformed the socio-spatial structure of Seoul. This has been accompanied with the explosive rise in land values and housing prices, which is limitedly affordable for more than the middle-classes in general. Seoul was only considered as the areas of CBD within the walls in Gangbuk by the mid-1970s, but has been divided into broadly two social spaces by the distinctive residential settlements of Gangnam (Cha et al. 2004). This change has been followed by the residential movements of more than the middle-classes to Gangnam since the 1970s, whereas Gangbuk became fallen behind due to the policy of restraining from developments (*ibid*). As a result, Gangnam has been shaped to the area of over mid-40s aged and higher social classes with less differentiation among groups compared to other regions (Nam and Seo 1995). According to the socio-spatial concentration, educational environment has been a crucial factor that not only did the government encourage middle-classes by moving prestigious schools, but the concentration of them has also recursively strengthened the educational position, which formulates a cycle relationship between housing price and *hakgun* (Hong and Kim 1988). Moreover, the competitive environment in the education system has helped to establish the private sector education as well as the importance of *hakgun*, in particular, since the private education was legalised in the 1990s. The private education has been developed along with apartment complexes in terms of quantity of demand and higher education demands of middle-classes, which is closely related to economic ability to pay for additional education fees. This is thus seen in the number of private education centres, as shown in Figure 3.14.

Figure 3. 14 The number of private education centre in 2011, Seoul

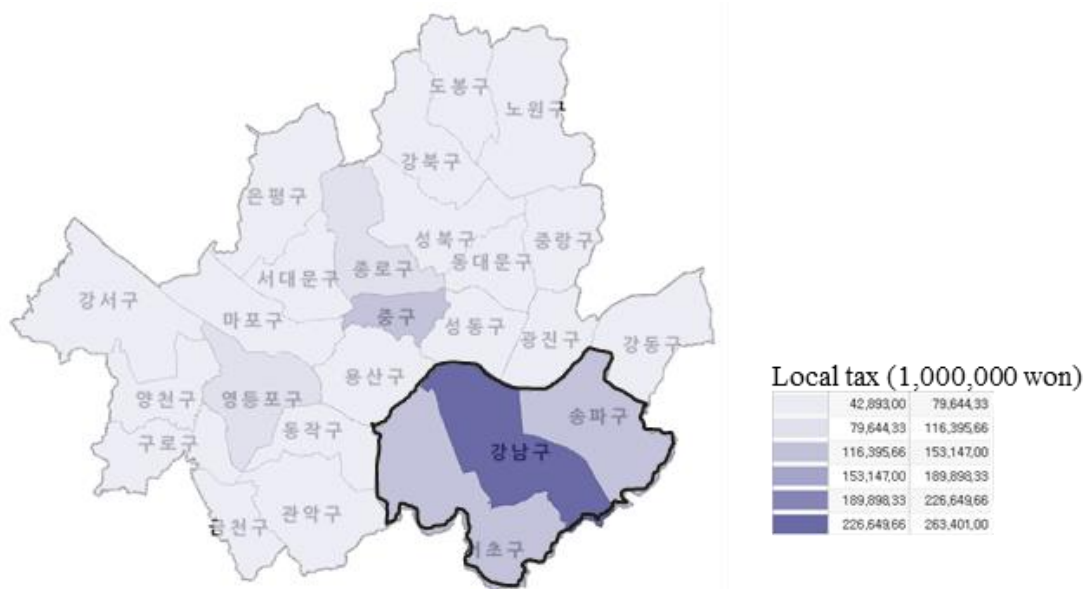


(Source: Seoul GIS)

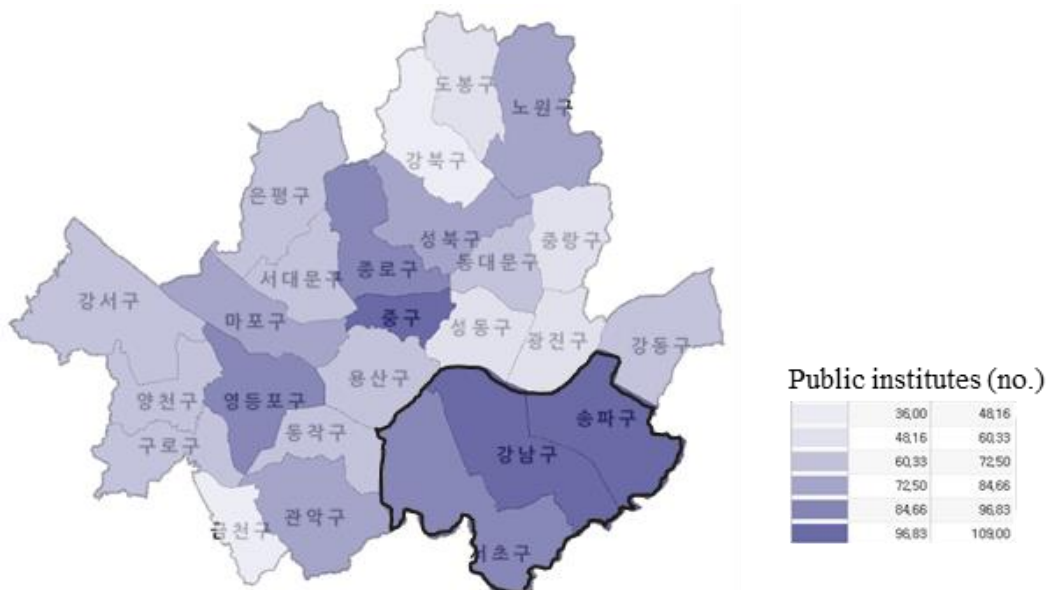
In addition, many advantages have been given to Gangnam that has also led to the residential differentiation and motives of residential movements. Public infrastructure such as road systems, cultural facilities, parks, and subway access as well as *hakgun* has certainly been reflected in housing prices and favoured by higher classes (Song 1992). Furthermore, this may have been reinforced by the logic of a rich-get-richer situation, as local-self government can collect more local tax from higher income classes. As shown in the distribution of Figure 3.15 (a), the revenue of local tax was certainly collected in Gangnam areas as the highest amount in 2011. The public institutions are also revealed as high numbers even though Gangnam has been established later than the original CBD areas and Youngdeungpo-gu (Figure 3.15b). Especially, Gangnam-gu is seen at the highest number of financial institutions (Figure 3.15c). These financial and public facilities show that Gangnam has become important as a new CBD, not just residential settlements. This may have reinforced the position of Gangnam and the extension of Seoul. In other words, Gangnam developments have clearly been a role of bonding between areas in and out of Seoul, not just suburbanised places. Interestingly, as can be seen in Figure 3.15 (d), the green space is relatively higher in Gangnam than other areas, despite its position of highly developed CBD areas with many high-rise apartments. Again, this shows that there is no concrete relationship between housing type and residential environment.

Regardless of the logic, there is no doubt that high-rise apartments have come to be a general housing type in modern contemporary Korean society.

Figure 3. 15 The distribution in 2011, Seoul

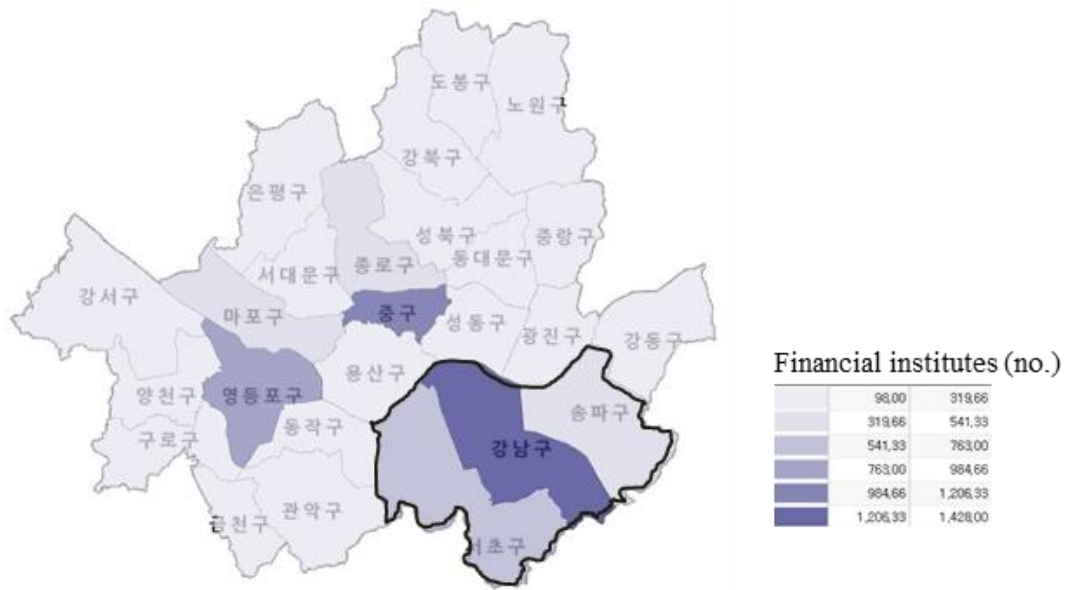


(a) The revenue of local tax

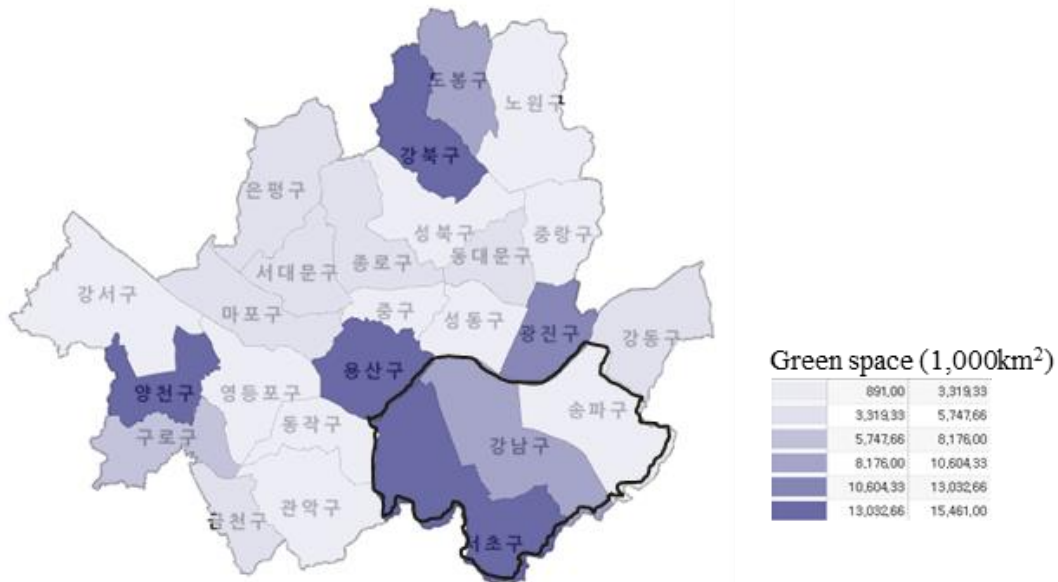


(b) The public institutes





(c) The financial institutes



(d) The green space (park)

(Source: Seoul GIS)

However, in spite of socio-economic status as normalised housing for middle-classes, high-rise apartments have paradoxically been the most criticised housing type in Korea in terms of high-density, high-rise and standardisation in physical sense (Gang et al. 1997b) as well as socio-spatial inequality. Based on the criticisms of harsh environment, usual and favourable explanations to understand high-rise demand in Korea have been linked to the motivation by supply-oriented policy or speculative demand in addition to the contextual conditions of high population and geographical

barriers of mountains. Contrary to the assumption of very passive consumers in these generalisations, Gang et al. (1997b) suggested that physical properties of high-rise apartments have been superior to detached-houses in the competitive behaviour of users. The study thus characterised the better conditions of apartment complexes, for example, outdoor space (e.g. playground), convenient facilities, parking plot, public usable space, and privacy and security. However, these may be specific to the perspectives of Korean apartments, as these seem to be raised for the lack of high-rise built environments in dominant discourses. Instead, most of the features described are seen in the depiction of suburbanised houses. Moreover, some of the critiques such as standardisation and segregation are similarly observed in suburbanised western societies. These show that there is little understanding around high-rise built environments, and how academics and policy discourses struggled with these neighbourhoods.

Given the context of lack of knowledge, the criticism may be usually originated from the superficial observation of, and simple comparison, with well-developed western societies based on suburbanised lifestyles, which may be also historically specific in the densely urbanised modern world as a rational response as well. Only the difference from place to place may depend on distinctive countermeasures they have responded according to the contexts they faced. The superficial comparison, thus, inevitably takes the irrational conclusion that high-rise apartments in Korea will become slum at the end only as other societies have done. This is not only a paradox in the logic that high-rise apartments became favourably accepted as a westernised lifestyle, but it is also a reversed statement that high-rise living is now being reconsidered for the future in the western world such as the UK and USA. This is not to overlook the critical reality of high-rise built environment where it faces with the limited resources or the lack of contribution to make it better, but rather to suggest requiring fundamentally different understandings of residential built environment beyond physical features of housing type, in order to overcome the illogical sense of comparison. High-rise apartments in Korea with equivalent socio-economic status of suburban houses in other western countries, then, seem to suggest a useful context to be better understood in urban built environments, by putting to equal position in terms of physical housing forms and more focusing on socially specific contexts to construct their own meanings.

## **Conclusion**

Following the last chapter as the first part of the contextual framework in Korea, this chapter has described the contexts of metropolitan Seoul and the district of Gangnam, highlighting some specific issues that are discussed in later chapters. A particular lifestyle of high-rise apartments has become predominant and normalised, in the context of housing trajectories in terms of social, economic and political development. This has not only been a rational response to population and economic growth, but has actually allowed the growth of them. In other words, high-rise apartments have been an engine to drive growth as much as a rational response to it. In these processes, Gangnam as the ‘pinnacle’ has been the most complete example of this trend of trajectory.

In line with the developmental path, the particular interests generated in Gangnam have become widespread in general public discourses. It has brought the issues of everyday life, such as consumption pattern and education concern, emerging from the particular residential settlements and affecting further socio-spatial development of the city. This has led to large-scale development and the growth of mega city Seoul. High-rise apartments in Gangnam are no less than representative of the remarkable development and growth of the city. In this context it seems that conventional discourses about high rise housing do not neatly fit the pattern of high-rise apartments in Korea.

The next chapter explores the theoretical debates, in order to unsettle the dominant discourses about high-rise built environments, and sets up the theoretical background to a new way of thinking. Based on the contextual and theoretical settings considered in this and the next chapter, Chapter Five then presents a conceptual framework, which will be a basis of exploring research findings in the thesis’ empirical chapters (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine).

## *Chapter Four*

### **Critique on the Discourse Construction of Built Environment**

#### **Introduction**

Even though there are considerable distinctive patterns in different places over countries, regions and cities (Kovacs and Herfert 2012, see also Murie et al. 2003; Van Kempen et al. 2005; Van Kempen & Musterd 1991), there is a common sense that high-rise buildings tend to be considered as housing of lower-income households, and in many cases such housing is often seen as ‘slum’ neighbourhoods, suffering social problems such as crime, vacancy and social decline (Kovacs and Herfert 2012, see also Beckhoven & Van Kempen 2006; Wassenberg 2004). Part of the problem in the built environment is the way it is framed within political discourse beyond material conditions (Jacobs et al. 1999 cited in Jacobs 2002a). Built environments are often deterministically conceptualised in policy and academic discourses, in which high-rise buildings are not seen as ‘normal’ family homes when opposed to the ‘ideal’ suburbanised home, and hence result in spatial segregation and the reproduction of social deprivation. The social and spatial stigmatisation of these neighbourhoods may come from the dominant discourses as well as poverty of material conditions (e.g. Wood and Vamplew 1999). Furthermore, such limited understandings of built environment may lead to equally limited policy implications.

Chapter Four, as the first part of the theoretical framework for this research, discusses how discourses about built environments are constructed through academic and policy frameworks. To do so, the chapter reviews theories that have influenced deterministic perspectives on the built environment, especially high-rise buildings, in order to critique them and to contextualise a new way of thinking for the aim of the research. Then, based on ideas from cultural and institutional economics, the understandings of built environment are explored in some complementary ways, which is continued in the next chapter in order to open up ideas of ‘housing culture’ as an alternative analytical lens for understanding urban built environments.

The chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, some critical issues on built environments are presented to understand how they have come to be framed in a 'deterministic dualism'. Three major traditions, which are based on environmental determinism, sociology and mainstream economic views, based on the underpinnings of the different perspectives in the approach to social problems and solutions, are discussed in the second section. Some criticisms are drawn from these discussions, which are seen to lead to assumptions of a deterministic dualism and reinforcing of prejudices against high-rise built environments as abnormal and dysfunctional. In response to this, alternative approaches to the analysis of built environments in order to tackle these deterministic discourses, are suggested as more suitable in highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of built environment in the third section.

#### **4.1 The problematisation of high-rise buildings**

This section reviews debates on high-rise built environments that have emerged since the modernist movement in the beginning of twentieth century. The discussion is focused on the discourses engendered from academic and policy backgrounds, which have framed high-rise buildings as an essentially problematic form for residential settlements. As a counterpoint to this belief, the newly arising interest in high-rise developments in many parts of the world that has emerged in the context of securing sustainable future development, offers a relevant focus for this research of exploring a new way of thinking about built environments.

##### **The 'stigmatised' high-rise built environment**

Most buildings around the world are residential. This leaves an overall impression on travellers about how cities are different at a glance. The differences are recognised as distinctive styles of built form and the spatial arrangement of visual details, which has been shaped over time in each society. At a deeper level, the relationship of housing to lifestyle also differs markedly from place to place. It is the cultural diversity, in which every society is distinguished by the way people live through manipulating specific built form and its built environment (Franklin 2006).

This may be the context that two extreme built environments, which are low-rise suburban and high-rise urban settlements, are contradictorily contrasted, as products of modernity by the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. There is increasingly a wide recognition that discourses have power. Discourse, as it is actively related to practice, contributes to the construction of social reality (Jacobs and Manzi 1996). In this social practice, the power of discourses tends to take both positive and negative forms, which may have a synergy effect that leads to the promulgation of extreme comparisons. The two extreme built environments described above seem to be a product of this effect, in which the more idealising discourse of suburban home take place in exchange for a more stigmatised discourse of high-rise buildings, or vice versa. In particular, policy documents and academic writings have been powerful in this effect. This is because language in policy documents actually helps to frame certain perspectives towards the social problems, rather than approaching them in a value free way, in order to deliver a ‘common sense’ policy response (Hastings 1999). Furthermore, the written words have a ‘normalising effect’ into stereotypes in shaping ideas, and a ‘disciplinary power’ into the taken-for-granted framework in governing behaviours which is then determined to be true (Franklin 2006; see also Foucault 1977; Gurney 1999). This is perhaps the way that the deterministic discourse about high-rise built environments has predominantly circulated against the suburbanised lifestyles, in terms of social norm for the public to conduct themselves and to judge others.

In the modern era, as Schoenauer (2000) describes, there was an astonishing moment when technology enabled the construction of high-rise residential buildings with not only more sophistication in terms of structural design and construction technology but also new materials and mechanisms to make lightweight buildings. Despite this new, optimistic perspective about an advanced future, it came to a disappointing end in a very short period. Schoenauer (2000) suggests that there have been a number of negative perceptions considered inherently in terms of social, economic and environmental problems. Moreover, it has been strongly considered that high-rise built environments are not an ideal family home, because of the restriction and reluctance of parents for their young children to play and use facilities, such as lifts, corridors and playground in architectural considerations (*ibid*). Problems with the lack of ‘defensible space’ (Newman 1972) associated with the physical configuration of

high rise developments have also been cited, as have social issues such as those arising from the management of and allocation of households to high rises (Coleman 1985).

Against this largely negative discourse, specific and identifiable images of ‘an ideal home’ have been created through middle-class efforts (Marston 2004 cited in Blunt & Dowling 2006). This is sought according to some presumptions, as opposed to the high-rise built environments that: a city living is not for normal family, but for others, such as gender related social groups or non-middle classes; an ideal home should have the spatially separated land and individual housing instead of a dwelling form sharing walls and entrances (Blunt & Dowling 2006). Given this ideological setting, much attention has been focused on the suburban house, which seems to have reinforced more contrary contexts towards high-rise living in the city. From the contrasted images with suburban houses, high-rise built environment came to be seen as opposite and negative meanings to ideal home – especially those associated with idealised western living. This has clearly been described in academic writings, for example:

‘High density living is said to produce family breakdown, delinquency and a variety of social problems...provides a bad environment in which to raise children, and that families are denied the privacy to which they are entitled. It is commonly suggested that these people are thrown into dangerous idleness when they have no garden to tend.’ (Stevenson et al. 1967, p.8 cited in Costello 2005, p.53)

The consequence of such negative expression and description has been the deep stigmatisation of high-rise buildings as an unsuitable housing form for much of the twentieth century. The stigmatised notion became apparent over time, for example, in terms of deficient construction, lack of external areas and social isolation in the UK, even though the standards of flats were increased to suitable even for family dwellings since the influences of huge political support through the Tudor Walters Report of 1918, the Dudley Report of 1944 (see Cole and Furbey 1994), and the Parker Morris Report of 1961 (MHLG 1961) after the two world wars (cited in Franklin 2006, p.95). The stigmatising effect has concomitantly reconceptualised high-rise built environments into ‘slums’ or ‘unhomely’ in a sense of ‘an absence of

home' (Blunt & Dowling 2006). As the result of this deterministic normalisation, high-rise living is usually regarded as an odd notion such as 'abnormal', 'unnatural', and in the somewhat modest term, 'unusual' or 'particular' rather than as a notion of cultural diversity or unconditional acceptance.

The problem of the deterministic dualism is to limit possibilities that cannot overcome the problems in its own power, which then tends to take actions in other ways, for example, the demolition of high-rise buildings. In addition, there is no room for certain built environments to be alternative ways of life, in the context of recognising the social and environmental problems, such as in suburbanised patterns of the city. At the local level of the neighbourhood, the deterministic notion may be also harmful for residents, reinforcing spatial segregation and social discrimination, which may preclude their positive ways of lives. Furthermore, this is an impediment in the development of urban built environments as well as the imagination of the future in the wider city contexts.

However, discourse can play a positive role as much as having a negative effect, when it is directed to the broad and open perspectives, not to deterministic views. In this hope, this thesis aims to reveal that the built environments do not necessarily conform to the deterministic characteristics, but the constructed ideas and features, so that it can contribute to understandings of more diverse, complex, and dynamic phenomena, the new way of framing problems, and enabling a positive and creative thinking towards built environments. An understanding of how the high-rise built environment has been shaped is then necessary to develop the further ideas and to renew the issues related to recent trends, which is discussed through this section.

### **History of high-rise built environment**

High-rise living originated from modernist western architecture through hard times of post-war period in urban areas with severe urban slums. In the early years of the 20th century, the ideology of the new era was not only to drop the established styles of the past, but also to signify the 'Machine Age' when technology and science can give an intellectually rational response to social problems. The principle of modernism, 'form ever follows function', thus, offered ideological underpinning that 'all workers were



identical cogs in the wheel of capitalism, and all were to be seen to be treated the same' (Franklin 2006, p.28), based on the standardised quality and mass production. The most crystallised example of this is seen in the radical ideas of Le Corbusier (1960), 'streets in the sky' as design concept and 'machines for modern living' as housing meaning, which influenced many cities to build high-rise blocks in the modern world. This modernist ideology was developed on the claim that the built environment is the chief or even sole determinant of social behaviour, which contributed to the clearance of slum areas in the industrialised world in the era of post War (Gans 1982).

Disappointments of high-rise buildings adopted for public housing and low-income people, however, have been predominate in many countries, such as Great Britain and many European countries as well as North and South America (Schoenauer 2000). The lack of security and safety, and poor maintenance are considered as major factors of the failure for high-rise built environments. In particular, there are several issues that have caused British disappointment with high-rise living. Unlike the expectation, high-rise buildings were in fact not efficient in terms of high cost and land use, and the social and aesthetic critiques of tenants were often negative (*ibid*). In this, the images of the Victorian tenements were also significant to attach to the buildings as dingy and unattractive features (Franklin 2006). Above all, the most influential impediment to attain interests in mass housing solution of European was primarily the 'Garden City movement' based on low density and green space, which was an ideology of 'the new, quintessentially English' (*ibid*) – in short, a suburban compromise of the best of urban and rural.

Urban planning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was born from the horrified perceptions of tenements in the Victorian cities of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kunzig 2011) as well as developers lobbying for new housebuilding on greenfield sites (Hardy 1991). The idea of Garden Cities was perhaps a natural and simple solution to the perceived environment of dense city living, as clearly contrasted ideas. The major trigger of the suburban ideal home is originated from the desire of middle class to separate public and private spaces and to escape the industrial city with condemnation about the attached house form (Davidoff and Hall 2002 cited in Blunt & Dowling 2006). Because of this idea, as Blunt & Dowling (2006) indicate, an ideal suburban home should be a detached or

semi-detached house, which is located on the boundary of the city with large land in order to be seen as natural and suitable for children. They suggest that this idea of individual houses with gardens came to be the prototype for many planning documents and practices, especially in many western societies: Blunt & Dowling identify examples in Britain, America and Australia of explicit policy moves in favour of suburban development. Also, given the historical contexts of early industrialised society in the developed western countries, suburbanisation may have been a constructed response in those times when there was not much interaction with other parts of the world, and also different social and economic conditions.

Understanding the limits of our perceptions and experiences, the historical developments can be also confined to the perceived reality. Although there have been efforts to construct high-rise built environments, such as in the UK or else, they have tended to have brought more stigmatised effects to them, perhaps partly because of separated discourses about built environments. Given the ideological settings of ideal suburban home for middle-class family, the negative perception largely stems from the characteristics of developments. Blunt & Dowling (2006) also point to the tenure associations of high-rise housing. High-rise buildings have usually been provided as public housing by governmental projects, clearing working class slum neighbourhoods and replacing them with high-rises in urban centres, especially in Britain, the United States and Australia in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Given the particular role that public housing has had in accommodating low income households and immigrant groups, such negative notions about high-rise housing have often been closely linked to racial stereotypes, especially in America and the UK (Murray 1995).

The perception about the physical deficiency of high-rise built environments for family has further developed to a normative idea, linking to the role of home and family as a basic and fundamental institution in the function of society, which suggests how things should be or what is right to do. Furthermore, this normalisation of the ideal home has been seen and adopted in political dimensions. Within the framework of capitalist ideology, home is regarded as 'a space of social reproduction', in which physical and emotional ability of workers needs to be sustained for optimal continuous working conditions (Blunt & Dowling 2006, see also Marston 2000). In particular, the home ownership of the working class has been seen

as the cohesion to capitalist values, and hence the reduced opportunities of revolution (Blunt & Dowling 2006; Harvey 1978). Housing conforming to the garden suburb ideal has also been politicised in many ways. The political slogan ‘Homes fit for heroes to live in’ (Clapham 2005) was instrumental in cementing views about the desert of returning war veterans of good quality homes with gardens. The privatisation of public housing under Margaret Thatcher’s ‘Right to Buy’ policy in the UK broadly enabled working class households with resources to purchase suburban houses, while leaving a residuum of unwanted high rise houses in state ownership (Jones and Murie 2006).

Despite the devotedness towards the ideal world of modernism, therefore, the critics of high-rise buildings have been harsh, and in principle denied their essential nature, as compared to the garden suburbs. These dislikes have accordingly appeared in many places as a form of language interpreted to discourses. For example, the ‘streets in the sky’, the most central idea of Le Corbusier (1960), expected to increase close social interaction and better neighbourhood through the enlivened life in sky streets free from dangerous cars, came to be described as ‘threatening places’ because of negative features such as being ‘hard to maintain, poorly illuminated, cold, draughty and menacing places where the prudent did not linger’ (Ravetz and Turkington 1995 cited in Clapham 2005, p.158). Media coverage of the Ronan Point disaster of 1968, in which a high rise tower partially collapsed, contributed to negative public perceptions in the UK. The stigmatising effect of the built environment is not just confined to depiction and ideas, but it has also a strong motive in policy implications. Again, such stigmatisation not only concerns the built form but the wider neighbourhood and social contexts (see, for example, Wood and Vamplew 1999), yet there is a strong tenorial and socioeconomic correlation with high-rises.

As a result, the predominant practice in the west has been the remarkable demolition of the stigmatised high-rise buildings in many places and over the long period from the last half century ago to the present. Early examples in the demolition of them were seen in 1976 two public housing projects of Pruitt-Igoe (1955) in St, Louis, Missouri and Lafayette Courts (1955) in Baltimore; also, in 1987, in Killingworth Township, near Newcastle in the UK, twenty-seven residential towers with a total of 740 dwelling units, built between 1969 and 1972 (Schoenauer 2000). As more recent

examples in the 1990s and 2000s, Norfolk Park in Sheffield, Red Road Flats in Glasgow, and redevelopment of Cabrini Green in Chicago show that these demolitions are not only a reaction against the built form, but reflective of a desire to change the social and economic composition of estates as well as react to unpopular or obsolete housing forms in a new economic era (Ferrari and Lee 2010). On the other hand, perhaps more strengthened position from these extreme contexts, the suburban house as ideal home continued through the twentieth century, inscribing an ideology of private spaces as the foundation of social life for the distinctive status of the nuclear family (Blunt & Dowling 2006).

### **Recent issues on high-rise built environment**

As discussed briefly, existing theoretical debates about high-rise built environments and their policy implications have been predominantly based on the contrast of urbanisation and suburbanisation and their consequences in modern, post-industrial cities. These theories, however, have come to be at stake in the most recent debates, as Kearns et al. (2012) indicates that ‘the current period is one of ambiguity and contestation over the future of high-rise’ (p.97). They acknowledge the new contexts of high-rise issues, based on two competing tendencies with different approaches in their ideas and practices towards high-rise living as simultaneously arisen over the last decade or so. On the one hand, it is suggested that high-rise blocks of social housing have often been demolished or replaced rather than repaired and renovated in renewal projects, which involve the initiative of rehousing residents into low-rise settlements with gardens. On the other hand, as encouraged by Lord Roger’s Urban Task Force (1999), high-rise living offers the potential of higher densities and more vital urban environments, and has come to be one of the essential elements in the projects of ‘urban renaissance’ for the future British cities, in which economic reason is primarily concerned unlike the intention of previous social welfare ideas in redevelopment schemes.

These two conflicting development patterns have in fact the same root in the paradigm of sustainability. A transformation from mass blocks of high-rise to low-rise neighbourhoods with mixed-tenure is considered as an endeavour towards sustainable regeneration based on the belief that better social communities and healthy

environments can be achieved, which is seen in the same vein with the ideas of ‘new urbanism’ as a basis of urban design that encourages the spirit of ‘public realm’ through the concept of mixing all together in terms of building types, mixed land uses, and socio-economic groups (Kearns et al. 2012). Meanwhile, in the criticisms against suburban lifestyles, two major concerns have been suggested. Not only has the high dependence on cars that is associated with suburban housing led to accusations of environmental unsustainability, but the unaffordability of ownership because of expensive suburban housing, which only a small portion of the population can afford, is also a negative issue towards social sustainability (Blunt & Dowling 2006). Some recently conducted research supports this point: 72 % of neighbourhoods are not affordable for families in general and hence places of walkable and easy access are better for living at least in financial terms (CNT 2012). The report suggests that the rise of transportation costs (i.e. for commuting) has been significant at 39% as much higher than of income compared to a decade ago in the USA.

In line with these initiatives, policies actively intended to carry out the ideas and their practices: hence, high-rise buildings are demolished on the one hand, but they are reborn in other contexts on the other. The regeneration of social housing to the low-rise, for example, is supported by combining the neighbourhood renewal policy (Social Exclusion Unit 2001) with the sustainable communities agenda (ODPM 2005) in the UK (Kearns et al. 2012). On the contrary, especially, in the UK, as Blunt & Dowling (2006) argues, suburban sustainability and regeneration has come to be the national agenda, while high-rises find new forms of popularity especially as second homes, among younger groups, and students (e.g. Barber 2007; Barber & Blackaby 2008). According to this challenge, Blunt & Dowling (2006) have given new attention to high-rise buildings as a ‘globalised housing form’ in the context of wide adoption in different nations and historical traces, or ‘hybrid high-rises’ in the terminology of Jacobs (2001).

However, not only could both these directions produce the other binary patterns of development reversely, but also provide another deterministic tendency, iterating the reduction to the built form of residential environments. This is then not free from the critiques, for example, that the new urbanism seems to be an unrealistic form of environmental determinism (Fainstein 2003), that will not overcome the segregated

patterns of metropolitan cities, but is a similar form of spatial manipulation as the orientation towards suburbia pioneered by idealistic urban theorists such as Ebenezer Howard. Likewise, generalising high-rise built form as ‘hybrid high-rises’ and ‘globalised housing form’ may also fail to explain various important aspects, such as dynamic economic activity, urban culture, and ‘real’ embedded causes of socio-spatial problems as well as innovations in creative production of diverse built environments. This can be again reduced to a deterministic view of built form by specialising in certain context of global or else, which is then assumed that other forms of housing, for example, detached-house does not exist in other places. In fact, any forms of housing potentially exist everywhere in the world, even more in the globalised society than in primitive society, though there were also similar patterns historically without interactions.

Instead, it can be argued that a neutralisation of the built form is needed in order to be free from the standardised normative discourses, which privilege the deterministic power of the built form. Two reasons can be given to support this argument. First, it could be said that any form of built environment can be a global home: humans are capable of meeting their needs for shelter in a wide variety of building types. Second, our imagination for life can go above and beyond the possibilities provided by physical built environments. Moreover, socio-spatial problems can be framed in different ways apart from the physicality of built forms. As will be discussed in the following section, the deterministic views based on past experiences may have partly contributed to the reason that certain urban built environments have been deeply stigmatised and have fallen into segregated use.

This section has briefly explored how academic and policy discourses have framed and strengthened the problematisation of high-rise built environments as well as practical implications for the built environment. In more detail, the next section explores the major leading traditions to have evolved in understanding urban built environments in their own ideologies.

## **4.2 A critique of the deterministic underpinnings in built environment**

This section explores three broad tendencies that, together, provide a more or less deterministic account of built environments in which high rise housing is ascribed to very particularised roles. These are the environmental determinist, sociologist and mainstream economics accounts. The specific ideas and theories are articulated according to the differences in how they ‘see’ the world. In spite of their different perspectives, it is emphasised how a particularly deterministic view on certain built environments has come to the fore, by considering the predominance of these traditions.

### **Environmental determinism**

Environmental determinism suggests that human behaviour is limited on the physical environment, which is a basic presumption of people-environment studies or environment-behaviour studies. The interaction between people and their environments are a main focus to characterise the cultural factors in shaping the built environment, and in turn, its influence on people (Franklin 2006). In particular, the urban design sector tends to rely on ideas of environmental determinist, in order to illustrate the behaviour effects from the built environment. As Baum (2002, p.510) defines, ‘in its most extreme form, this position argues that the environment causes certain behaviours...and that behaviour in a given environment is caused entirely by the characteristics of the environment’.

In this tradition, by focusing on the hard space as physical shelter in the meaning of house, which connotes a ‘machine for living in’, physical standards for houses are the major concern in large part for housing policy, academics and professionals in terms of the securing the proper quality of housing for public health and future generations (Clapham 2005). In this sense, from the 1960s, as Kearns et al. (2012) indicate, a large number of researchers endeavoured to identify the detrimental effects on people of high-rise environments. An influential discourse emerged, especially in America and Britain, that harmful social environments in terms of social breakdown, crime and vandalism had been generated from the modernist design, particularly of high-rise buildings. Most famously, Jane Jacobs’ (1961) analysis of New York City and the

problems she ascribed to Robert Moses' housing projects is considered as a seminal argument that heralded critiques of high-rise built environments based on the effects of rationalism in urban planning. She critiqued the idea that the pattern of land use can control social segregation, which led to the large block design and eliminating close street networks and mixed-use neighbourhoods. She argued that it resulted in reduced social contact and lessened the possibility of neighbourhood watch. Work on high-rise built form under the environmental determinist view also includes the empirical studies of Oscar Newman (1972) and Alice Coleman (1985) with concern about social order, as well as other critics with relation to social effects (for example, see Kearns et al. 2012).

Newman's study (1972) was an attempt to investigate the 'exclusive effect of the peculiar physical design' for the measurement of relationships between different built environments and social effects of crime and vandalism in New York. In his study, a comparative analysis conducted between high-rises in suburban locations and low-density projects in core urban areas, which were deliberately designed to remove the socio-economic correlation between suburban low-density housing and low crime rates, concluded that building height was a strong factor in explaining crime and vandalism. This accordingly resulted in seeing the built form in the deterministic perspective as a dualistic way between high-rise and low-rise settlements. Moreover, this work gave the original inspiration to Coleman's work (1985) on estates in London and Oxford, which sought to identify the most significant design elements for occurrence of 'social malaise', for example, numbers of children in care. By emphasising the damaging effects of high-rise design in terms of dwelling numbers per block and per entrance, and storeys per block, Coleman used deliberately emotive language, such as 'utopia on trial' and 'a verdict of guilty'. This preceded a change in housing policy in the UK in particular, manifest in decisions not to build more flats and to concentrate on houses instead, and on corrective measures that involved the rehabilitation of the blocks of flats that already existed, for example, through landscaping and security devices. This deterministic verdict was not only influential on policy and practice in the UK (see Sim 1993), but many studies also followed to report the social effects of high-rise, such as a lower sense of community or poor mental health (for example, see Kearns et al. 2012).



According to this deterministic built environment, policy makers attempt social control mostly through built form and design. Whilst a number of high-rise buildings in the UK have faced demolition in response to the types of studies just discussed (Jacobs et al. 2007) it has also been suggested that not only can this radical response be a waste of resources or diverted from basic needs, but also the assumption that modernist building is inevitably unsatisfactory can be a mistake (Spicker 1987). Spicker (1987) draws on evidence that 80-90% of all high-rise blocks are not posing any pressing problems (Anderson et al. 1984, p.29); that specific problems of high-rise living are considered as less important than other issues, such as neighbours, and the type of area (Littlewood and Tinker 1981); and that evidences from the Netherlands and the US about high-rise living is shown as satisfactory for middle and upper income groups (Anderson et al. 1982, p.16).

Although environmental determinism, thus, is at best a partial explanation, and has come to be highly criticised, it is still used as a principal argument in urban renewal programs. The built environment and built form cannot be seen, by themselves, to cause social problems. There are other factors at play, just as there are numerous examples of ‘successful’ high-rise developments. It is therefore necessary to examine sociological accounts of the use of space.

### **Sociological accounts**

While the built environment has been central for environmental determinists in explaining social and behavioural problems, a sociological perspective is more interested in social relationships and their connection to the built form, as the ultimate concern is the constitution of society as a whole (Franklin 2006). In this school of thought, a theoretical framework is built on ‘the notion of social structure as relationships between different entities or groups, or as enduring and relatively stable patterns of relationship’ (Deji 2011, p.71). This highlights the view that ‘society is grouped into structurally related groups or sets of roles’, such as family, genders, ethnicities and classes, ‘with different functions, meanings or purposes’ (Deji 2011, p.71). Social structures are thus a main focus through which sociologists seek to understand built environments, in which society is seen ‘as a complex system whose parts operate together to support solidarity and stability’ (Macionis and Gerber 2010,

p.14). Within this theoretical framework, the sociological interpretation of the built environment has often focused on the inequalities in the capitalist system or its functional inability to secure a stable society. However, this elaboration, while more subtle than environmental determinism, has brought the concomitant results in its association of high-rise settlements with social housing estates, compared to the suburban house in the context of many western societies. For example, critical research into inequalities of social class differences in Marxist framework or gendered space in feminist perspectives, and impacts on family structure in functionalist ideas have arguably worked out high-rise built environment as structural discrimination.

In this sociological analytical framework, high-rise built environments have tended to be the most contentious subject, which resulted in the critiques of high-rise built form with plentiful empirical evidence in comparison with houses. High-rise is usually seen as detrimental to families, in relation to the design or built form, particularly delivering mental health problems from overcrowding (Evans et al. 2002), for example, 'heightened family conflict within the home, slower social development of the children, and more isolation for parents from their neighbours' (Kearns et al. 2012, p.103, see also Kellett 1982). Appold and Yuen (2007) suggested the major three reasons of this in terms of functional problems to family life in high-rise housing: firstly, smaller size of apartments than single-family housing, which can affect the emotional anxiety and reduced family activities to tie together because of the limited space and less privacy (see also Chan 1999; Coleman 1990; Evans et al. 2001; Littlewood and Tinker 1981); second, the inconvenient everyday pattern that domestic activities are not achieved at the same time as supervising children's play (see also Gittus 1967; Huttenmoser and Meierhofer 1995; Pollowy 1977); thirdly, the easy access to public spaces takes place at the expense of nuclear family bond (see also Bott 1957; Young and Willmott 1957). Even in pathological reports, high-rises were often regarded as a major cause in mental and health problems, such as respiratory infections, and psychoneurotic disorders in women and children, from the above reasons with comparison to houses (Fanning 1967). Given this strong evidence, Evans (2003) has concluded that people living in high-rise flats are likely to have increased mental health problems, which is due to social isolation as a crucial factor.

Along with the perspectives about functional problems for family as a basic group of society, high-rise living has often been reported as remained for lower social class housing by structural inequality with least choice. In the sociological approach of housing research, these structural inequalities thus came to the fore through Marxist perspectives of housing distribution (Clapham 2005). Spicker (1987) argued that spatial differentiation has significantly been caused by the segregated distribution of class, in which the poor tend to be located in specific neighbourhoods. He suggested the market mechanism as a main factor to limit social choices of the marginalised people in the urban development process, which resulted in locating them to the least favoured places. His argument was based on the failure of public housing policies in preventing the circulation effect of stigmatisation that the poor occupy the unfavourable places, and in turn the material condition of their poverty reinforces the unattractive neighbourhoods. This is in fact a similar statement to Coleman's criticism that the mass-housing policy has limited the choices of people where to live, although he criticised her environmental deterministic idea as shown earlier. In a similar way, Rex and Moore (1967) argued about a constraint of ethnicity based on the competitive market logic as the relationship between housing supply and resources, such as finance or information. They then suggested that black migrants with inadequate supports of fund and social knowledge were likely to live in undesirable places.

The sociological focus on these structural constraints on choice has, thus, attempted to link the system of housing distribution to the wider structure of society, which provided the important notion of power as differentiating capability of choice (Clapham 2005). However, the tendency of a simple relationship between built environments and structural causes, in a similar vein to environmental determinist, may restrain the important role of institutional activities of human agency in the construction of built environments, in which diverse and complex phenomena may come from dynamic behaviours rather than the constraints themselves. Such simple reductionist explanations of built forms as one factor of structural choices may then lead to the effect of normalising built environments based on the ignorance of residents' lived experiences. Although the reality of stigmatised high-rise and the power of economic power in the market system must be noted, such theoretical rigidity may lead to meaningless practices or wasting resources, focusing on only problems of deterministic structural forces over the ability of people to act. Moreover,

by assuming the suburban ideal and overlooking the possibility of different preferences for different groups (Lawrence 1974), in fact, this analytical framework has helped to shape the idea of an ideal home into the suburban houses, whereas high-rise buildings fail to make a family home. This is despite greater acceptance in some parts of Europe, for example Italy, France and Spain, of the use of apartments for family life.

Structural constraints as outlined in this subsection are often similarly observed in different societies, but built environments are not necessarily the same. This means that only a factor of social structure cannot provide the understandings of built environments like the accounts of environmental determinist. How suburban houses came to be an ideal home is rather biased by a deterministic structural framework in sociological perspectives, instead of being concerned with its process. Mainstream economists, on the other hand, have been very concerned by this issue, using models based on rational reasoning to explain the emergence of suburban dwellings and the predominant archetype.

### **Mainstream economics**

Unlike environmental determinist and sociological perspectives, mainstream economists' views are in principle based on the wants and needs of the members of a society, in which the sovereignty of individuals is defined as 'independent, self-subsistent, and possessing given preferences' (Samuels 1995). Given this ideological setting of economic subjectivism, this perspective assumes the capacity of the market to achieve the equilibrium state where supply meets demand, which contributes to understanding patterns of price formation. As the most influential implication of these ideas for the built environment, Alonso (1964) and Muth (1969) suggested the access-space model that a trade-off between more access and less space or vice versa is found in the choice of household according to the income level. Given the assumption that house or plot size is the critical factor for housing satisfaction, it is then expected to formulate a ring structure of urban pattern through the economic process of explicit choices according to the variation of income level in the decision of housing locations (MacLennan 1982).

Based on this methodological individualism as isolated atomic existence of human being, the theoretical modelling in the mainstream economist view often conflates some aspects of reality in built environment with a mathematical structure to predict the future. This implies the assumption that, given the supports of the repeated outcomes from numerous researches, significant validity can be granted to the certain behaviour patterns (Ball 1973). From the belief of this logic, the examination of housing attributes derived from the consumer has been a great interest as stimulated by the residential location theory, and the revealed preference models have thus come to be of central interest to understand consumer behaviour and housing choices in mainstream economics (Maclennan 1982). The revealed preferences are thus defined as ‘observed choices’ by consumers’ purchasing habits (Varian 2005). In the policy implications, all these assumptions and logics are essentially based on the relationship between supply and demand. This approach often takes place through the ‘filtering’ idea (Lowry 1960, see also Galster and Rothenberg 1991) that sees the provision to meet demand as the ‘solution’ to housing matters across a range of demand groups and incomes. Housing policy analysts, then, see providing an adequate quantity of housing as the most economically efficient way to meet needs in all sections of society, by subsidising high value housing as a solution in which state intervention should be limited to only setting the right conditions for the market to operate. Within this analytical framework, the most influential outcome has been the two extreme residential patterns by the utopianist ideas of Le Corbusier (High Rise) and Howard (Garden Cities), which might be called as scientific facts based on the objective and independent variables, such as ‘access’ or ‘space’ and hence logical ‘choices’.

However, this perspective has been criticised for the number of reductivist assumptions it makes. Consumers are seen to be rational; urban systems are simple and the transmission of market signals through them is seen to be unfettered; and the ‘filtering’ process assumed to be unproblematic. Models risk missing a crucial point that only includes the contexts and choices as very limited time and place, especially in western societies since the highly developed industrialised period. Also, it overlooked the fact that the scientific method is based on empirical data, as its theoretical perspective stems from empiricism. Doling (1978) argued that this tradition that a modelling based upon questionnaire surveys or regression analysis for housing and urban research seems to be the prevailing approach in characterising of

supply, choice or prices by using various combinations of independent variables. Given the empirical tradition, as major housing and urban research remains dominated by the UK and USA contexts, these methods have accordingly reflected the dualised built environment by both the garden city movement and social housing program during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which suburbs have been occupied by the middle class, while high-rise buildings have comprised the lower class as social housing, as deterministic settings in general. This has been taken, unfortunately, at the expense of ignoring the locality and history, in order to induce a more universal demographic and economic pattern (Kim et al. 1997, see also Hauser et al. 1985; Fuchs et al. 1987), and built environments which are different from the standard pattern are treated as exceptional or particular phenomena.

As a result, the Western modernist perspective has dominated much publications, over-generalising the experience of Asian countries and focusing on cities of a certain period, mainly the last half century (Kim et al. 1997, see also Basu 1985; Beg 1986; Costa et al. 1989; McGee 1967; Ross and Telkamp 1985; Smith and Nemeth 1986). A fragmented view has thus been inevitable from the specific phenomena of certain cities, just stressing the particular functions of them (Kim et al. 1997, see also Richardson 1990; Rondinelli 1991). This means that many findings from even slightly different settlements are inconsistent with the basic model. For example, Diamond (1980) has found that the access cost to the city centre, even in American cities, increases at a rate more than proportional to income, which is contradictory to Muth's (1969) assumption that it increases less than income. This research suggests that families with higher levels of income have a tendency to live more centrally, as opposed to Muth's expectation that they would live further away, which means that the significant factors for values of land and location are amenities rather than access to the city centre with the income variable. Therefore, Diamond (1980) argues that the simple model of Muth may critically result in misunderstanding the housing choices and built environments.

Over-reliance on a simple and abstract model, implying overly unrealistic assumptions, may then lead to a theoretical disability, which leads to a similar determinism as physical and structural constraints. For example, as Jones (1979) indicates, only one confining element of income (see, for instance, Henderson and

Quandt 1958), or monotonous, undistinguished and boundless plain city and uniform transportation services all over the city (see Alonso 1964; Muth 1969) are supposed as simple as possible. Also, it is suggested that the basic assumptions of only one centre with centralised employment pattern and only one constriction of financial plan for the household are led to an assumption of trade-off between commuting costs and housing prices in choices of households. Accordingly, even though Alonso and Muth did not indicate specifically house type or locational preferences in their models (Jones 1979), this tends to result in suburbanisation, predicting sprawls, based on the dominant choice by the access-space trade-off model, which leaves dense settlements as the least likely choice. This simple economic model is thus limited in explaining the emergence of distinctive housing markets (Maclennan 1982). That is, the concept of revealed preferences does not adequately explain the behaviour of actors, and is not a good predictor of future preferences. For instance, the Korean value premium placed on compact apartments appears to confound neoclassical land economics with its emphasis on the price of space. Eventually, a rejection of using the access-space model in analysing housing market is due to its inability to challenge vital questions with regard to housing markets, rather than its innate contradiction (Maclennan 1982).

Therefore, as actual processes of the world are neglected and organisational and individual preferences are replaced with economists' own conception (Samuels 1995), the mainstream economics perspective is hugely contested and shown not to work in a variety of different contexts. Neoclassical approaches have necessarily an assumption of a static state to adopt logical analysis, which, practically, means emptiness to be applicable to the real world without additional assumptions (Samuels 1995). It has led property research to inhabit a technical world operated by investment far from the dynamics of demand, without any meaning (Beck 1992 cited in Guy and Harris 1997). It can also be criticised for the simplistic assumptions that supply will address the complex circumstances of built environment. For instance, individual free choices do not promote socio-spatial integration (Schelling 1971), and filtering housing policy has had little impact on the poor (indeed, it has been made worse by clearing low value sites for high value economic development – e.g., Smith 1987), as disconnections of policy where the benefits are not fully passed down to all sections of society. This is accordingly likely to be criticised, because ultimately such models may release the public role of housing provision for the marginalised sector.

Many problems, therefore, have not been considered in conventional economic models, such as various demand forms, actors with specific reasons other than economic profit in development, complex development process and so on (Healey 1991). This is because institutions, which might be considered as prior to and conditioning individual behaviour, are de-emphasized (Samuels 1995). Neoclassical models show little reflection on how markets form, operate, and generate rules, and any institutional change is generally viewed as unfavourable (Samuels 1995). Instead, by neglecting all these complex and dynamic mechanisms, a simple deterministic view has dominated ideas about the built environment, especially in terms of a dualistic framework as high-rise urban living for low-class and suburban houses for middle-class like environmental determinist and sociologist perspectives.

### **Criticisms of deterministic dualism**

Given the research traditions outlined in this section, it is perhaps not surprising how much deterministic assumptions about high-rise buildings sustain so far. Fincher (2007) acknowledges that the specific relationships between who lives and in what housing types is distinguished by specific physical aspects and features, and are persistently taken-for-granted by those who engage in the planning and housing production, such as policy makers or housing market actors as well as public consensus. As she also indicates, in these articulations through academic and policy documents, morality and expert knowledge are frequently evoked to stimulate formulating certain maps of built environments. However, there are in fact many evidences that high-rise is not necessarily insufficient living space for any types of households irrespective of public or private housing through the history in various contexts, such as 'Paris apartments with dominant ideals of home as a place for a family in the nineteenth-century' (see, for more examples, Blunt & Dowling 2006). Despite various historical examples, considerations of the housing market seem to be still pinned down to the key idea that 'an apartment cannot be a proper home to a family' described by Perin (1977) (Fincher 2007). Even in Korea where high-rise apartments have fully penetrated all walks of middle-class family life over the last half century (Ronald and Jin 2010; see also, Agus et al. 2002; Groves et al. 2007; Forrest and Lee 2003; Ronald 2007), many academic accounts as well as residents



themselves have often negative viewpoints through comparison with western suburban houses. Then, it seems right that ‘once established, these understandings are difficult to shift and often rest unexamined’ (Fincher 2007, p.635).

In order to grasp this context, there is a wide understanding that the roots of the taken-for-granted assumptions in housing are based on the tendency of housing research, which are mainly related to policy issues and usually adopt a restricted empirical tradition (Jacobs and Manzi 2000; Kemeny 1992). Jacobs and Manzi (2000) trace these views to Pinker (1971) who argued that social policy as a subject ‘has developed an impressive empirical tradition while lacking any substantial body of explanatory theory’ (1971, p.xii cited in Jacobs and Manzi 2000). They argue that part of this issue has been due to the way that housing research developed a strong dependency on governmental and housing organisational funding (see also Clapham 1997), which has thus resulted in conforming to their agendas with the clear figures and practical measures in terms of quantifying facts, rules, or data, and making normative judgements (King 1996). This positivist oriented paradigm might risk a misleading overgeneralisation of problems about the built environment, which leads to the passive world people just follow rather than actively constructing. Carrier and Miller (1998) are very well aware of this:

‘Economics has ceased to be just an academic discipline concerned with the study of economy, and has come to be the only legitimate way to think about all aspects of society and how we order our lives. Economic models are no longer measured against the world they seek to describe, but instead the world is measured against them, found wanting and made to conform. This profound and dangerous change in the power of abstract economics to shape the lives of people in rich and poor countries alike...has come to portray a virtual reality - a world that seems real but is merely a reflection of a neo-classical model - and how governments, the World Bank and the IMF combine to stamp the world with a virtual image that condemns as irrational our local social and cultural arrangements.’ (on the back cover page)

As the binary setting of lives to extreme conditions according to the abstract models, Jacobs (2002a) argues that academic circles of housing and social policy seem to

understand urban built environments in ways of social contests that policy agendas stem from the competition amongst different power groups to appeal to their interests. He shows that the remarkable example of these tensions is seen in the built environment of London, in which the common focus of housing academics on highlighting the social inequalities spatially and economically have actually burgeoned the production of policy packages to amend these conditions. This is not to deny, as Jacobs and Manzi (2000) also note, that the close relationship between academics and policy is beneficial for both the advancement of scholarly knowledge with secured support and the reinforced practices of policy makers. However, it would be important to remember that such projects have tended to ignore the academic aims of theoretical development or the other sensitive elements in housing such as humanistic notions, although it should accept the complexity of housing studies to conceptualise in simple ways (Franklin 2006).

It may be the case, then, that a 'social problem' is not just confined to the lack of material conditions, but it is also perceived in a way of framing political discourse (Jacobs et al. 1999 cited in Jacobs 2002a). Policy issues surrounding built environment, thus, 'become problems' in public through the media and within the framework of political discourse (Jacobs 2002a), not only physical, social, economic and cultural. In other words, the policy framework with support of academics creates criteria for the quality of built environment, which reproduces the deterministic dualism, for instance, as a standard of sustainability between high-rise and low-rise settlements. As Fincher (2007) points out, discussions of particular features of high-rise built form endure deterministic understandings of the high-rise versus houses by policymakers and those involved in housing supply in even renewed narratives, for example, high-rise living 'from the prisons to penthouses' described by Costello (2005). This shows the lack of housing theory, and instead the attachment to other interests, such as policy, in large part.

Not only have the mostly policy driven concerns reinforced or generated the discourses of the deterministic built environment, but it may have also been obstacles to develop housing studies. There has been a shared concern about housing research, which is lacking a conceptual and theoretical coherence as an individual discipline as well as a somewhat new field of study (Kemeny1992; Franklin 2006). The

deterministic view has been derived from the assumption of housing in dualistic ways of policy practices as middle-class settlements and social housing, mainly based on the relationship between supply and demand or choice patterns. There seems limited interest in how built environments are constructed with theoretical understandings or conceptual frameworks rather than only accounting for resultants of policy framework. In this background, many academics urge the need for establishing a more rigorous field of housing studies. Franklin (2006) indicates some examples of potential approaches that Kemeny (1992) has suggested the reconceptualization of housing disciplines as the individual area of academics, which then develop a theoretical understanding of housing; Rapoport (2001, p.145) has also argued the need for theory in housing, as ‘There is too much information, numerous disconnected pieces of empirical research, which, in effect, become counterproductive...Even a conceptual framework can help by organising material, although not as much as theory’; on the other hand, Lawrence (1987) has highlighted another way of doing so, in which multi-disciplinary or contextual approaches might help to characterise various features, such as geographical, cultural, social conditions and individual ideas within historical contexts.

The discussion in this section seems to clearly show how much deterministic perceptions about the built form are powerful in the understandings of urban built environments. However, it is important to remember that there are parts of the world where the pattern that has emerged in western scholarship and policy discourses does not necessarily hold true, such as in Korea. In recent years, different perspectives towards the built environment may suggest the better understandings of the distinctive reality. The next section discusses more explicitly cultural frameworks and their applicability to housing research.

### **4.3 The importance of cultural structure to housing research**

This section explores some alternative approaches and concepts in understandings of built environments, which may shift away from the discourses and assumptions discussed in the last section. A new way of seeing built environments is based on conceptions that focus on the complex and dynamic nature of housing markets in the modern system. This includes the concepts of *culture* and *institution*, which may

tackle the deterministic perspective with regard to the solely physical built forms. The ideas of culture as an institutional outcome and the institutionalisation process seem to offer the broadened debates about urban built environments in terms of social, spatial, economic and political arrangements rather than simply physical and material features.

### **Potential of social constructionism to housing**

Earlier approaches of the positivistic tradition to housing and built environment in most disciplines tended to hold a practical and cliometric perspective. Jacobs (2002a) highlights that this has often taken the ‘top down’ process from policy to a concomitant research agenda, which then leads to the focus on usually renewal process of physical and spatial arrangement. Over the last decade or so, however, he suggests that the reactive approaches of the ‘bottom up’ perspective have increasingly come to be salient, against the extreme interests of objective and materialistic science, in the forms of subjectivism or idealism that stress the influence of actors’ role in social outcomes. This leads to a main focus of social constructionism that looks at the conditions and processes in constructing and reconstructing social reality, which is innately an ongoing and dynamic process, and also possibly to change. By highlighting ‘the socially created nature of social life’, thus, social constructionism avoids the taken-for-granted views and interrogates deeply the origins of social phenomena (Marshall 1998, p.609). Notably, *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1967) focuses on social interactions that develop and maintain our taken-for-granted knowledge and common sense, by understanding, negotiating and reinforcing their common knowledge of everyday reality, which comes to be seen as an objective reality.

From the stimulation of social constructionist approaches, the research boundaries of housing studies have been widened and have also developed new ways of looking at housing concerns in terms of policy and practice (Jacobs and Manzi 2000). Jacobs and Manzi (2000) suggest that such social constructionist approaches are exemplified by the work of Hastings (1996), Sahlin (1996), Allen (1997), Clapham (1997), Franklin and Clapham (1997), Gurney (1999), Haworth and Manzi (1999), Jacobs (1999) and Jacobs et al. (1999). Given the social constructionist position, they share the ideas that actors are not considered as descriptive objectives, but as subjective constituents of

social reality, for example, policy discourses and conflicts. Social constructionist approaches seem to be then appropriate to explore the meanings of built environment. Their stress on the built environment as the outcomes of social relationships and subjective meanings, which is centred on human factors, can be very helpful. In particular, it can offer an insightful understanding in high-rise residential settlements where have been categorised into ‘unhomely’ built forms based on more deterministic views.

On the other hand, however, this constructionist perspective seems to ignore the critical factors in the construction of built environment, such as various forms of structural causes or specific and cultural contexts. For instance, the analytical framework of ‘a housing pathway’ advanced by Clapham (2005) cannot fully give an explanation about why and how different choices exist between British and Korean middle-class families with children. As a housing pathway takes individual’s experiences over time according to lifecycle in housing consumption, it clearly suggests a variety of aspects in housing studies. Housing consumption can be understood through qualitative and historical studies with interactionist and dynamic perspectives rather than longitudinal and quantitative measurement (Bengtsson 2002). However, two major criticisms of a housing pathway are critical, which is in fact consistent with the limits of social constructionism.

Firstly, social constructs are generally understood to be the by-products of numerous choices people make, emphasising agency more than structure. Jacobs (2002b) criticises the theoretical assumption that housing matters can be considered as the simple and linear summation of all personal ideas. He indicates that this is grounded on a methodological individualism, which cannot explain ‘collective decision’ as well as the importance of ‘social institutions’. Then, this is not so much different from a neoclassical economic tradition that imposes a focus on the quantity terms of demand and supply, which is ‘not generalisation but aggregation’ (Bengtsson 2002). Second, the notion of objective truth or fact is not adopted in analysis of social constructionism, but all ideas are equivalent. This means that it cannot avoid being categorised into relativism. In this sense, Borgegard (2002) argues that the concept of a housing pathway is limited to only ‘a metaphor as a way of ordering the housing field, not a theory of method’. Similarly, as Jacobs (2002b) suggests, a housing

pathway is only seen as suitable for the aims of ‘piecing together individual life histories’, but organisational and institutional processes are not integrated in the notion of it. It seems then similar to the perspective of the relationships between lifecycle and built form, which can be used to limit high rise housing choices in an analytic sense to certain household types (young couples) at certain stages in their life course (e.g. before having a family).

From this view, social constructionist approaches do not fully explain how British middle-class families with children apparently prefer to live in suburban houses, while the middle-class family also having children in Korea choose urban-centred high-rise apartments as their aspiration. It can be said that different aspiration has been socially constructed according to different institutional environments in each context, and become embedded within a distinctive cultural structure. This is to say that housing choices and preferences are not necessarily deterministic or individualistic, but institutionalised as a particular culture by institutional relationships, for instance, between the market and policy in the capitalist society. Here, Jacobs and Manzi (2000) suggest possible complementary concepts and theoretical framework to social constructionist approaches in terms of culture and institutions.

From the discussion above, it seems that the cultural and institutional dimension is a necessary conceptual framework in understandings of built environment along with the importance of subjective viewpoint. As individuals are members of the society, they are involved in the construction of society, but also integrated within its frame. This means that they are constituents to construct a meaningful entity in a particular way, not a single atomic element in random appearance. In understandings of the social construction of built environments, the importance of culture and institutions constructed by social members, as well as influences on them, is thus emphasised for this thesis. Prior to the discussion about the focus on culture and institution, the next should explore the development of cultural studies in housing research.

### **Position of cultural studies in housing research**

Based on the social constructionist approach, the notion of consumption and the role of agency have come to the fore, which were largely ignored by production-centred

theory (Miller 1987). With regard to consumption, cultural studies has been influential over many parts of the academic world and public consensus along with the explosive development of mass industry over the last century. Led by Richard Hoggart (1957) and then followed by scholars such as Raymond Williams (1983) and Stuart Hall (1980), mass culture has been analysed to mainly criticise the modern production systems and their political manipulation of everyday lives, and accordingly the decline of traditional order associated with more natural and humanistic sense with highly romanticised perspectives. These approaches intend to reveal the genuine culture of working class by their own capacity to create, which is seen as ruined by mass culture. This interpretation is based on the notion of cultural hegemony as a measure of political and social control suggested by Antonio Gramsci (Storey 1998).

Even though this perspective has contributed to the new conceptual framework for agency and everyday life, it may have inevitably fallen into self-contradiction: not only despite forwarding the role of agency, in fact, the facts that consumption is separated from production and modern mass systems are presumed as inherently faultiness lead the actors to be dominated only by the economic structure ; but also its narrow perspective breaks down historical development and continuity between traditional and modern as being essentially different, which necessarily results in a pessimistic view as failure of modern development (Miller 1987). Within this view, built environments in modern housebuilding industry, especially high-rise buildings, can hardly be seen as appropriate residential settlements, nor as advancement of building construction or lifestyles, compared to vernacular architecture. This means that those who choose the modern housing may be considered as a dupe with no satisfaction or with false satisfaction, because they have to choose among options simply given to them rather than involved in the production and consumption process. Certainly, it cannot explain then how the middle-class in Korea has moved from suburban detached houses to high-rise apartments, otherwise the Korean middle-class should be seen as either totally altruistic or a victim of governmental power. But it is not the case.

Nevertheless, discourses around high-rise apartments in Korea have in large part been based on this perspective, as a cultural hegemony to mask the public that leads to the

negative viewpoint towards high-rise built environments. This may lead to false practices of policy development in the situation of crisis like now when the housing market is unstable. In fact, the new policy aimed at building town-houses may have emerged from this discourse in the regime of the 'Lost Decade' democratic party, which opposed the developmentalist state policy of the Conservative party. This is not to say that town-houses development is wrong, but to recognise that it may lead to other critical problems. As the market for high-rise housing has depressed, consumers and developers have become more interested in other types of housing including town-houses triggered by the new institutional environment. Then, how and where should urban governance be going when the massive number of high-rise apartments are left in Seoul as well as other cities? On the contrary, it is the same case for suburban houses in the UK. If high-rise city living can be simply seen as a solution resolving problems of suburban lifestyles, where are all developed areas and infrastructures going? This is hardly seen as sustainable development as it should be.

Rather than being the passive agency above, the concept of 'taste' has been theorised to emphasise the active practices of social actors in consumption. For example, in Bourdieu's work, *Distinction* (1984), or Elias's *The Civilizing Process* (1978), the choice process is seen in terms of active struggles to distinguish a particular social position from others. In those practices, Bourdieu focuses on a 'habitus' reinforcing, and being reinforced by, class divisions based on cultural and symbolic capital (especially, education). Elias interprets the civilisation process as constituting particular activities promoting and separating a social status of higher position in order to avoid 'shame' and 'repugnance'. These are spread to other social sectors over time and generation. Because of the superiority, particular direction of practices and development are rationalised as taken-for-granted or doxa in Bourdieu's term (1977). Within them, the clear link between social structure and individual or group practices seems to be particularly important in consumption studies.

However, despite the active practices of social actors, these approaches seem to be not consistent with the social constructionist approach, but practically closer to deterministic approach as largely sitting within dominant social structures (e.g. class) and hardly leaving room for explaining the construction of social divisions and object's values contributing to its demarcation process (Miller 1987). This is thus not



likely to explain how the different tastes between Korean and British middle-classes might emerge in the built environment. In a similar vein, an analytical framework of middle-class formation seems to narrow down the urban structure only into a particular section without the connections or conflicts with other sectors, and hardly explains how different cultures are shaped for middle-classes in different contexts. More importantly, these perspectives can be difficult to suggest future directions towards social problems, in which deterministically fragmented view of social space cannot be seen to integrate all sectors into a cohesive society.

In contrast to their innate negative effects and structural inabilities, Daniel Miller questions the perspectives developed above. Instead, he stresses consumer culture as positive development in modern systems. The approach in his book, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987), is particularly focused on the physicality of material culture in industrial production and mass distribution in order to integrate subject-object relations. The conceptual framework of 'objectification' is established to develop material objects into consumer culture and mass consumption through appropriation processes. His analysis of semi-detached houses in the UK (*ibid*, pp.158-63) is thus seen as appropriated materiality with more traditional aspects, which is contrasted with modernist high-rise council housing as being inflexible for changes the exterior, such as the building façade. Although this approach has saved positive views towards material objects, he has failed to see, probably because of its focus on materiality, why and how the modernist architecture and the dominant group including authority who promotes the modernity actually tend to choose suburban life against modern high-rise living. He leaves this to 'curious' phenomena.

What is required then, seems to include how the collective choice towards particular objects without predetermined values can emerge in contributing to demarcation process of social division. It leads to the point that Jacobs and Manzi (2000) made earlier towards culture and institution in social constructionism. It should embrace both the neutral position of objects and their constructed values through social practices, which has an implication of normative position towards the power distribution rather than the judgement of material objectivity. Hence, for example, high-rise built environments are not physically problematic, nor is city living spatially inferior, but depend on how they are constructed through institutional process within

historical and contextual backgrounds as a cultural identity accompanied with the social, economic and political power. Therefore, the approach for this thesis is more focused on the construction process of culture and in turn its influence as organic relationships, although the critical concepts and characteristics of social practices discussed in this section, such as habitus, doxa, othering and distinction, are still very important to develop the analytical framework of housing culture in Chapter Five. In brief, thus, the next part explores the importance of a hybrid approach of culture and institution.

### **A hybrid approach: culture and institution**

Urban built environments are shaped, reshaped and mapped to certain patterns of socio-spatial environment according to shifting social, economic and political means and ends. The precise configuration of these social, spatial and physical patterns is different from place to place. This gives rise to some of the central issues of the sociological debate on culture. In talking about the development of the built environment Healey (2006) notes that:

‘We become increasingly aware of our cultural boundedness, our own biases and those of others. We recognise difference and differentiation in our systems of meaning, our ways of acting and our life-worlds, and see around us not homogeneous values and ways of life, but cultural diversity.’ (p.37)

Within the diversity of built environments, the choice to live in a particular place is part of a process of constructing one’s identity, as ‘where you live, and thereby with whom you associate, largely determines who, in personal and social terms, you are’ (Dickens 1988, p.261). The formation of identity, at both the individual and social level, entails symbolic order over the context of residential settlements, relating simultaneously to the social, economic and political logic of those places. The emergence of opportunities for social mobility associated with modernity has given a heightened importance to the role of housing in constructing individual image. While in traditional societies identity and residence were mostly set at birth, modern identity is constructed and the consumption of housing can be seen as a part of its process. It emphasises thus the activities of ‘choice’ rather than ‘given’ in constructing the social

identity and its meanings. This delivers the salience of ‘consumption as the privileged site of autonomy, meaning, subjectivity, privacy and freedom’ (p.31), which rationalises strategic and competitive economic activities of empowered organisation and institutions (Slater 1997). Nevertheless, such personal sovereignty is not the sole mechanism in choice practices. This is because ‘there is no neutral or innocent gaze’, as we perceive what we internalise through popular culture (John Berger 1972 cited in Jacobs 2002a). This is how and why ‘our outlook is dynamic rather than static and subject to change’ as Jacobs (2002a) argues, which may be through either the short term or the long term according to social context.

The idea of the ‘culture’ as signposting ‘identity’ in built environment, then, seems to call for further exploration as an alternative way of understanding urban built environments. In the context of urban geography and sociology, there has been a broadened argument that cultural frames are articulated (Healey 2006). In particular, Healey (2006) has emphasised culture as an analytical focus for understanding urban environments, which seeks to move away from a materialist viewpoint, and instead requires a new phenomenological inquiry about the nature of existence and its knowledge. She then acknowledges that ‘the focus on cultures helps us to see the social processes behind the formation of the ‘interests’ over which we get into conflict. If we can see them better, perhaps we can change them more effectively’ (*ibid*, p.63). Furthermore, by focusing on culture, it enables renewal of the perspectives towards the research into urban environments in East Asian cities from the assumption of a ‘Third World’ or ‘Asian’ model of development to more considerations of significant experiences and differences based on their own historical and institutional contexts (Kim et al. 1997).

For this focus on culture, Healey (2006) discusses and gives insightful ideas about culture as the institutional outcomes through ‘social processes’, becoming ‘systems of meaning’ and ‘modes of thought’ in our urban lives and environments. These cultural references are routinised and taken-for-granted in everyday life. As a symbolic structure, culture forms ‘our thoughts and feelings and our sense of ourselves, and our identities’, facilitating the reflection and arrangement of social relations. This perception leads to a focus on the networks of social relationships with others, through continuously reformed cultural resources in ways of thinking, organising and

conducting life. In addition to all these important roles of culture, Healey also draws on sociological perspectives to add further that such social relations produce ‘moral principles and emotive responses’ in terms of ‘practical consciousness’ and ‘common sense’ (Giddens 1984) or authoritative power of ‘doxa’ in Bourdieu’s term, which offers the ‘local knowledge and the cultural resources’ (Geertz 1983; Latour 1987). In this respect, land and property are not just surfaces and spaces where production and consumption are carried out, but the way of producing and consuming land and property themselves is involved into the processes of economic production and consumption (Healey & Barrett 1990). In our understanding and efforts of managing urban development processes, it is, thus, acknowledged that knowledge of the processes, particularly the processes of land and property development, through in which the built environment is produced and used, is important (*ibid*). This means that it requires the investigation of not only of technical or financial process, but *social* processes in the construction of high-rise built environment in Korea, in order to understand how its meanings and roles are different to other places.

More importantly, culture has the duality that not only is culture itself a product created by continuous interaction of actors, but it also influences economic life and institutional change through social structure, individual identities and lifestyles (Samuels 1995). Qualities of places are thus differently made by actors’ interrelationships as well as the surrounding environment, and in turn they create knowledge resources, social connections and cultural customs, which may stimulate or constrain certain economic opportunities (Healey 2006). This entails conflicts in our built environment, which have the possibility of provoking frictions and emotion ‘about the way we live now, about the way our society is going’, and affecting ‘our cultures, the taken-for-granted frameworks and systems of meaning’ in which we understand our lives (*ibid*, p.31). By this nature of culture, it has the realistic implications in the sense of how resources are allocated by particular interests in the competitive environment of the market, which can justify integrating culture into economic analysis (Slater 2002). It follows that the role of institutions becomes significant in market operations. North (1990) highlights that institutions, in a structural sense, contribute to securing certainty in everyday life, in which they inform the ways of conducting social interaction, confronting the tasks, and specifying the

choice sets in an uncertain world. Therefore, it can be understood that our built environments are the institutionalised outcomes of culture.

An institution is thus not just an organisation but an established way of addressing certain social issues (Healey 1999), offering the ‘ongoing framework’ by which actors conduct processes through various societal systems, such as economy, politics or laws (Franklin 2006). As North (1990) indicates, institutions are necessarily tangible, but are constructed by the human mind, and their function is delivered by our conduct. The significance, pervasiveness and inevitability of institutions mean that these ‘established ways’ of doing things have been of interest to many academics in various disciplines for a long time. Samuels (1995) identifies two broad traditions, that which is about habitual established patterns of behaviour over time (drawing on Veblen 1919) and that which is about processes of collective action and order (drawing on Commons 1934).

In brief, the cultural diversity we perceive seems to be originated from these institutional arrangements according to various groups, societies, or countries. It also frames the response of those groups and societies. This perspective may then provide a different way of seeing the built environment, especially high-rise buildings in this thesis, as cultural consumption with the meanings and practices of everyday life constructed through the institutionalised market activities. These seem essential in order to understand the difference between Korean and other societies, because some of the peculiar features of the Korean context that were discussed in the previous chapters are not well explained by conventional economic, sociological or environmental deterministic views. To bring together some of these issues, it requires a theoretical framework of relationship between culture and institution. To do so, the next chapter reviews some theoretical approaches to built environment in relation to culture and institution, which leads to the analytical framework for empirical findings.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to show how high-rise built environments have come to be stigmatised through the discourses largely engendered from the major academic traditions and their policy implications. In particular, the western-centric empirical

views have been drawn from the contextual settings of the modern times, in which the Garden City movement against the high dense urban environment was focused on the middle-class residences, while the modernist movement based on high-rise buildings was practically implied to social housing. Given the extreme movements, it seems to have been inevitable to reinforce the problematic assumptions of high-rise built environments as directly opposed to the suburban houses, and also to regenerate spatial isolation and discrimination through social segregation. This has led to a 'deterministic dualism' within approaches to built environments, particularly with the idea that suburban houses and high-rise buildings essentially differ in their suitability as ideal family homes, which accordingly results in a negative perception about high-rise built form, as the abnormal, dysfunctional, and harmful to the family life. These predominant discourses, however, have faced a new challenge in recent arguments and policy practices towards the sustainable narratives economically and environmentally, which requires a need of new thinking about high-rise built environments.

In some contexts, a renewed interest in high-rise housing, and new potential approaches to the built environment have demanded a broadened perspective and such a different focus may be able to challenge the existing discourses. This new way of thinking includes considering built form as a cultural product, and built environment as culture, continually constructing symbolic identity through the institutionalisation process, beyond fixed or standardised physical categorisations of built forms. The consideration of built forms as cultural products would then allow a more diversified view of built environments avoiding preconceptions about certain residential settlements. Culture and institution are required to take a broad view of built environments in the context of the recognised cultural diversity according to the different times and places, and also to look into existing built environment differently, which may have policy implications in facing with the developmental process, such as demolition or regeneration. The next chapter explores the conceptual and theoretical frameworks which may offer the potential for this rethinking of built environment, based on understandings of culture and institutions.

## *Chapter Five*

### **Institutionalised Built Environment: Housing Culture**

#### **Introduction**

Throughout history, housing has been formulated not only according to natural constraints such as the climate, materials and technology, but also to social and cultural codes such as religion, customs and rituals in general (Rapoport 1969). Since the modernist era with the advancement of technology and capitalism, however, these natural and socio-cultural constraints no longer limit the construction of housing to the some extent. In consumer society, instead, housing is a mass-produced good provided by a development industry within a mature market. Consumers purchase and, largely, live in standardised housing, which helps to form particular lifestyles and contributes to the reproduction of cultural norms, in a so-called 'consumer culture'. That is, as well as meeting basic human needs, housing is also shaped by symbolic structures which, themselves, become constraints on norms and expectations of within a consumer society. As Ronald (2004) puts it,

‘The development of consideration of the complexity of cultural elements and vernacular processes [following Kemeny] may provide a useful means by which to complicate ideological critique, and also a theoretical framework for the consideration of both structural and subjective elements’ (p.63)

The reinforcement of 'culture' in the built environment derives from the profound change of social systems associated with modernity. In the modern world where the production and consumption is oriented to the market, 'goods can always signify social identity, but in the fluid processes of a post-traditional society, identity seems to be more a function of consumption than the other, traditional, way round' (Slater 1997, p.30). This emphasises the importance of identity that reinforces the *purpose of* consumption, rather than simply a passive consumption responding to production. The economy is thus increasingly changed into cultural form, and culture is more and more shaped by the economic patterns. While housing continues to meet needs, the meaning of needs is thus no longer as simple as basic needs. This is because the view

that housing is a public good has weakened, instead it has become a commercial product since the modern era, unlike previous society where housing was perhaps less conditioned by market relations than in modern, 'hyper mobile' capitalist societies. Cultural diversity is found increasingly in our daily life, and public policy has encouraged economic competitiveness between our preferences within multiple cultural 'layers' in the modernist era (Healey 2006). How these preferences are shaped, however, is not always clear (Douglas 1992). Moreover, how cultural identity is embedded in the built environment and shapes collective patterns and values over the city and the nation is rarely found in housing and urban studies.

In continuing to set out the theoretical framework for this research, this chapter aims to explore the idea of a 'housing culture' using a hybrid approach in relation to culture and market institutions. In the first section, some of the main understandings of the concept of 'culture' are briefly summarised, in order to define the concept of a housing culture. Two conceptions to understanding the built environment, which are 'housing culture as symbolic structure' and 'housing market as institution', provide the complementary analytical perspectives, which are explored in the following section. Lastly, the analytical framework of housing culture is suggested as an alternative way of seeing the built environment holistically beyond the physical form while accounting for some of the limitations of the more deterministic viewpoints reviewed in Chapter Four. In concluding this chapter, some implications of the adoption of 'housing culture' as an analytical frame through which to better understand built environments are reflected upon.

### **5.1 Conceptualisation of housing culture**

This section outlines how cultural identity has come to be important in modern society, where the notions of lifestyle and identity represent the new social ordering in the built environment and govern ideas and everyday practices over the city and the nation. It aims to explore the salient meanings of 'culture' and its powerful role in relation to socio-spatial matters, based on its conceptualisation as a collective identity.



### **Identity and collectivity**

How social order is made is probably the most distinctive characteristic between traditional and modern society (Slater 1997). In traditional society, social status was more or less immobile, and was determined by birth. Consumption was limited according to social position regardless of the spatial location, or indeed where in the world one lived. For example, feudalism in medieval Europe and Confucianism in some Asian countries, including Korea until about a century ago, governed the society based on the fixed order of social status. According to the given orders, Slater (1997) argues that lifestyles were somewhat specifically obliged with assigned rights. He suggests that one of the most remarkable examples is 'sumptuary laws' as a form of 'symbolic regulation', in which central parts of consumption were ordered by social status, such as the conditional right of moving house as well as eating or clothing. Where households could live, or the materials they could use to build houses, were also limited in order to mark out positions within the status order in previous Korean society. This traditional order has been transited to the modernist idea that gives individuals the sovereignty and freedom to choose their own lifestyles, which promised rationality established on the capitalist system. Unlike this promise, however, it has created new social ordering that can be ascribed by consumption patterns, usually associated with monetary values, rather than the birth certificate. This has two implications in terms of uncertainty and disembeddedness in social life. Here, the work of Franklin (2006) is used to explore the new contexts of the modern globalised world for sociocultural consumption patterns of housing.

Firstly, Franklin (2006) notes that we live ultimately in uncertainty, which requires one's effort to acquire their position. How to live is now, more than before, idealized, individualised, and subject to conscious effort. As our lives are largely comprised of goods to be sold in the market (including, through our spatial position, labour), all actions of consumption determine not only 'how to act' but also 'who to be' (Franklin 2006; Warde 1994; Beck 1992).

Second, despite the importance of labour, locality is less important than other interests or global links in social relationships. Before modernity, social space was closely tied to the locality, and social relations resulted more from direct contacts. Communities in traditional terms were, thus, seen as close as face-to-face, and led by the given

position within the local boundary (see also Suttles 1972; Galster 2001). As much as closeness, it came to be also seen sometimes as 'restrictive, conflictual and oppressive', and not necessarily always 'harmonious and supportive' (Franklin 2006, p.47). In modern times, on the other hand, it has been considered that the links between close communities or societies are being weakened (Putnam 1995; Cattell 2001), with implications for housing, although it is not always the case. Instead, they may have come to be widely dispersed and selected rather than given without the limits of time and space and often with association of interest (see Crow and Allan 1994). This has resulted in 'disembedded' local and community relations. Franklin (2006) also draws on the work of sociologists Anthony Giddens (1991) and Zygmunt Bauman (1998) to explore various ways that social relationships have become free from geographical neighbourhoods, and the often confused sense in which policy defines and addresses communities and neighbourhoods.

The effect of this is that consumption behaviours and lifestyles have come to the fore as a form of social ordering. In Giddens' terms (1990), this seems to be commensurate with the consumption of one's 'ontological security'. Saunders (1990) has written influentially on the role of housing ownership in particular in bestowing ontological security on individuals. Ronald (2004) explores these ideas within more plural contexts, such as the familial institutions dominant in Japan, for instance.

Yet it is not only freedom from geographical neighbourhoods and the replacement with the ontological security of tenure that defines us, though these are not necessarily true for all. The perspective of Jenkins (2008) embraces further sociological ideas beyond the geographical and material conditions in the discussion of ontological sense of human being. Jenkins' (2008) definition of identity is based simultaneously on the notions of 'similarity' and 'difference', such as in comparisons between lifestyles, groups, or people (p.17). Identity, as the integration of these two concepts like a coin with two sides, gives a sense of belonging. As Jenkins (2008) argues, similarity is an explicit image of the collective as a plurality of individuals who want to be seen similar themselves or to have things in common. This seems nebulous at a glance, but it has clearly been exemplified in the suburban lifestyles exemplified by the Garden City movement and its logical antecedents in many western countries such as the UK, which emphasise the privatised home and middle-class values. On the

other hand, this representation of privatised middle-class home has been achieved by high-rise apartments in Korea. More recent examples of expressing a new lifestyle has emerged in a form of the gated communities that tend to reflect the new ideology of community against the individualism as the market products. In sociological or urban management sense, such a new mode of lifestyle can be seen as ‘the retreat of like-minded people’ or ‘private neighbourhood governance’ into walled and gated communities for the protection from social fears themselves (see Bauman 1998; Atkinson et al. 2005). Again, Jenkins (2008) points to the flip side of the coin. Because ‘logically, inclusion entails exclusion’ (*ibid*, p.102), seeking similarity in housing (e.g., in suburbia, high rises, or gated communities) creates a boundary beyond which the individual does not belong. This results in new social demarcation, which then leads to the social deprivation for those who cannot afford to be included. As Jenkins goes on to say, ‘collective identity is, by definition, institutionalised: as ways of being they are the way things are done’ (*ibid*, p.163). ‘Culture’ works over time and across social space. Therefore, the next part of the section will discuss how the idea of a collective identity, reinforced by exclusion/difference, has penetrated built environments in order to define the concept of a ‘housing culture’. To do this, the definition of culture is explored at first in the modern meanings.

### **Culture, power and dominance**

In a broad sense, there are two major contemporary meanings in the concept of culture. Firstly, Miles et al. (2004) suggests that it came to mean the arts, including a diversity of cultural production in the arts and media, describing ‘the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity’. They focus on this meaning as reflecting the distinction between middle-class and working class, in which the art is separated from social reality and displaced to an aesthetic reflection of urban industrial environments. The other meaning takes into account the anthropological meaning as ‘a way of life or collective set of values’, which have emerged alongside major transformations in society: technological advances, new production methods, and changes in social, economic and political environments more generally (Williams 1983; Miles et al. 2004). This definition can be used generally or specifically to represent a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group, which is comprised of various features, such as attitudes, beliefs, language, dress, manners, and

tastes in food, music or interior decoration, to differentiate from each other of social groups based on generations or social classes, and distinct ways of life (Abercrombie et al. 2000; Herder 1969; Ulin 2001). This relates to the mutually reinforcing dialectic of similarity and difference noted by Jenkins (2008). For both contemporary meanings, the concept of culture seems to reflect the social identity of certain groups, and a replacement of the traditional social order with a particular lifestyle of collectively shared values through the material developments in the modern industrialised contexts. As Miles et al. (2004) put it, culture as ‘a whole way of life’ involves,

‘...collectivities: the collective name for forms of cultural production, dissemination, and reception; and the collective values of a social group as expressed in the habits and expressions of everyday lives’ (Miles et al. 2004, p.51)

In other words, the practices of people and their products over space and time constitute institutionalised collective forms (Jenkins 2008). Following this, a ‘collective identity’ formed by an institutionalised collective form of a certain group in residential environment represents a ‘housing culture’ that can govern consumer preferences and decision-making in the development process. This cultural identity is not just confined to the physical and spatial built environments, but institutionalised as a whole package of relevant social resources, such as education, access to neighbours and particular social facilities in which these meanings are entangled with a particular built form and its environment. This is to say that the built form can have finally its particular meanings through the institutionalisation process, which includes both individual and social level, for example, social relationships, market activities and policy development. In this way of defining a housing culture, the built environment is then no longer limited to its physical built form, but includes sociological understandings in each context. This enables us to neutralise the deterministic discourses of built form, such as between high-rise buildings and houses or else, by institutionalisation of collective forms and values through the social process of shaping a particular lifestyle. A housing culture, therefore, might be defined as: the institutions, social resources, norms and accepted ways of life (lifestyles) that shape expectations and preferences for housing.

From the definition, a housing culture cannot be a neutral player, but becomes actively involved in the production and reproduction of symbolic capital of social power as a measure of securing a social position in uncertainty. Bourdieu (1984) described how for certain social groups, the distinctive forms of symbolic capital are used to express their difference or superiority over others. While individual identification emphasises distinctively represented differentiation, collective identification brings powerful images with some similar features or common interests to each other, which are no matter how vague, apparently unimportant or apparently illusory (Jenkins 2008). For instance, the very strong preference for, and expectations about, living in high-rise apartments for Korean middle classes described in Chapter Three can be seen as forming a collectivity, giving its participants the sense of a belonging to a dominant housing culture. Another example of a dominant culture in the modern era is ascribed by the labels of housing tenure, such as ownership, in relation to the wider society (Taylor 1998; Gurney 1999). This social construction of tenure has been particularly important, as described earlier in this thesis, in western notions of housing ideals, and is consequently collectively shared value as a culture. Expectations about collective consumption, norms and identity are at the heart of notions of social exclusion. Exclusion is no longer fixed to the materiality of poverty (e.g. absolute measures of poverty). Being able to engage in cultural life – which might be seen to include participating in a dominant ‘housing culture’ – thus forms an important part of process of social exclusion (Duffy 1995).

The normalizing power of a housing culture can naturally reinforce hierarchies of social space and the routines of power by signifying a power structure, in which particular places become appropriated by particular social positions for themselves, whilst others are left to be marginalised. In western society, the suburb has become predominant by the dominant interests of the middle-classes through the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to escape the dense environment of highly urbanised cities, except some parts of city centres for elites, for example, in London and Paris. On the contrary, in Korea, the superficially different urban development process actually follows the same logic of cultural norms and the reproduction of a dominant power hierarchy through physical space: in Seoul, rather than suburbs, it is dense high-rise living that has potentially come to dominate the city for the middle-class interests against suburban lifestyle. In this sense, it seems that there is no innate superior condition within built

environments, but that the superiority of built environments is constructed through the dominant power and institutionalised process.

The cultural identity that, in part through the built environment, represents social status and power thus becomes routinised and taken-for-granted. In Bourdieu's terms, the 'habitus' links individual ideas (and choices) to major structural constraints, such as those provided by dominant cultural norms. The social practices of individuals become informed by the dominant culture, more than they do from the comparatively inflexible ideas of class in the modern world. For instance, in the 2000s in Seoul, the super-rich joined in and subverted the dominant high rise 'housing culture' by then well established through super-luxurious and exclusive developments such as the Tower Palace complex described later in the thesis, and the 'branded' apartments described in Chapter Three. This shows the dominant power of culture, which leads to the social practices and governs the ideology of the society. In this sense, rational thinking is less important than taken-for-granted behaviour in informing decision-making and behaviour, once the dominant ideas are received and embodied, which may relate to 'doxa' of Bourdieu. This shows how collective patterns and values emerge at the same time giving a secure social identity to the individual, shaping a particular housing culture in each context.

As discussed in this section, the collective identity is neither given naturally nor determined by simple allocation, but socially constructed through the market system in modern society. Also, social construction is not a neutral process, but power is apparent in social and political relations (Healey 1999). Therefore, how a housing culture is symbolised in the modern space of a city and how the institutional process shapes and interacts with the symbolic power of housing culture needs to be understood. The next section will discuss complementary concepts of symbolic culture and the market to understand the institutional operation in the housing market.

## **5.2 Complementary conceptions of the built environment**

In response to the partial explanations provided by the discourses and assumptions described in Chapter Four, this section suggests some alternative conceptions of built environment, which reflect the definition of housing culture set out above. This may

help to explore the complex, dynamic and modern meanings of built forms, such as high rises, beyond the deterministic thinking that has tended to influence academic and policy treatments to date. By considering some ideas that emphasise the symbolic culture of built environment and institutional conceptions of the housing market as more complex and dynamic (e.g. in contrast to the Alonso (1964) and Muth (1969) models that still dominant basic housing economics approaches), it may develop the critique and discussion about built environments in urban and housing studies.

### **Housing culture as symbolic structure of the city**

The notion of housing culture as identity, power and socio-spatial order becomes a powerful idea in shaping the city's identity, furthermore the country's identity. This new identity of cities is compared to the traditional societies given by the fixed social and spatial orders, for example, when farmers were usually housed outside of the city walls in Choson society in Korea, similar to the mediaeval ages in Europe. Historically, the position, physical outline, and spatial distribution of cities as well as the conditions and sites of building houses tended to be governed by ideologies and institutions (Wheatley 1972). On the other hand, now, it is the built environment that performs the symbolic and ideological roles as the cultural support of status, power, and authority (Lawrence and Low 1990). In relation to this role of built environment, the meanings of city have come to the fore and the urban functions have expanded, which is the spatial response of the structural change in social, economic, and political transformation due to the societal transition from Confucianism (or feudalism) to capitalism and the growth of markets (Kim et al. 1997). According to the structural transformation, in Korea, rural Choson society has been changed rapidly to a highly urbanised society, in which the proliferation of high-rise apartments has been central to mark out the development of the city of Seoul in accordance with the economic growth. The city has thus become a place to seek the cultural identity, and the built environment has come to represent a symbolic image of the identity in the city. As was described in Chapter Two, urban high rises have been as much a symbol of Korea, the new economic power, as the products of industrialization themselves.

From the process of industrialisation and urbanisation based on the capitalist society, these cultural values of the built environment have been described as a positive sign

of movement toward 'modernity' based on the potential of cities. Kim et al. (1997) suggests that the built environment has not been just a background for social and political requirements, but has been integrated into it. Also, they consider the role of city in the same way that city has been a causal force, not merely a reflection of culture, for dynamic transformation during the period of Korean economic growth. A symbolic urban culture in the context of the wider city then seems to broaden the ideas of capacity and futures of the city, among policy makers, markets, and the public as a whole. In this sense, the organisation of society and a concomitant ordering of space are not only functions of providing the physical requirements for the society to sustain and reproduce itself, but also symbols reflecting cultural and political meanings and power in the built environment (Kim et al. 1997). This dynamic process between the construction of cultural identity and its requirements takes place in exchange for the fundamental change in socio-spatial configuration of cities. For instance, through modern times, a suburban life as cultural and symbolic image has led the middle classes to move out of the industrialised urban centre where the lower class was still confined in many western societies, which has constructed a new spatial order in shaping a new future of the city. On the contrary, city living in high-rise apartments, which has entangled with the massive expansion of capital city Seoul, has become cultural and symbolic representative of the middle classes in Korea by passing the industrialisation and modernisation process. More marginalized groups have found themselves at the periphery of these developments, in historic low-rise neighbourhoods (see Chapter Two). This is a form of gentrification not unlike that in other cities such as London where competition for central land and housing has altered to the socio-spatial pattern of the city (Hamnett 2003).

This pattern of development has been cloned in other Korean cities and even smaller settlements. This has resulted in the transformation of the rural to the urban and expanding city areas over the country. These examples show that not only is the idea of housing culture as collective identity at the centre of shaping and transforming cities and countries, but also suggests that cities are a 'playground' to construct or to reproduce the cultural identity configuring new socio-spatial orders. Such identities eventually become commonplace beyond cities, just as the acceptance of apartments and 'city living' (in not quite the same way as in Korean high rises) has recently spread throughout smaller British towns and cities. These seem to have represented



the modernity, such as freedom or Corbusian rationalism, distinguished from the traditional society and its structure, and city's boundary is flexible and also organic according to the identity construction of population and development opportunities.

### *Housing culture and social inequalities*

However, the positive idea of modernity has also been criticised for the social inequality and ethical value due to its reliance on urban consumption, which puts public concerns and identity crisis at risk of harm in the development of harmonious city according to the obsessive economic growth and hence results in the unstable urban lives with the rapid change of social, economic and political contexts (Sender 1994). The weakness of the state in the area of social welfare is seen in the rejection of public responsibility over public demand, for example, a collective neglect of the homeless (Zukin 1995; Smith 1996; Mitchell 1996). On the other hand, one effect of the weakened role of the national government has been to direct focus on the role of local governments and private entrepreneurs in decision-making processes (Kim 1993; Yeun and Wagner 1991). The result of this privatised governance can direct to the other extreme practices that, for instance, the construction of gated communities seems to be more motivated from the abandonment of public concern (Davis 1990; Ellin 1997; Judd 1996). This withdrawal of the public sector from the provision of collective consumption goods could thus result in greater social cleavages and deteriorating urban environments (Kim et al. 1997). The lack of social housing in Korea may well be one of the most notorious examples, due to the developmentalist ideas of the Korean state and its high dependency on private conglomerates, whilst high-rise apartments have evolved to more luxurious housing. As the private concern entails the competitive environment and concentration of resources, it has reconfigured the social and spatial inequality in unstable urban spaces with rearrangement of segregation and social tension in a city's life. Recursively, such spatial orders operates as a physical and symbolic constraint for social activities in the construction of the city and urban life (Lawrence and Low 1990).

In these both positive and negative effects outlined above, the city has come to be seen as a central place of social forces, which is a useful theme to explore the complex relations of forces (Castells 1977; 1983 cited in Kim et al. 1997). Not only is

the city a connection point at the local level to interact with the wider social system, but it is also 'a home to numerous people who often compete for power and space, creating distinctive spatial orders' (Kim et al. 1997, p.4). Because of this, Healey (2002, p.1777) argues that such strategic meaning as 'an active force' of the city requires a new thinking of city governance that includes 'complexity and diversity of urban life', and potential as collective site of the city. This seems more recognisable nowadays over a decade or so. Zukin (1998, p.836) focuses on the diversity of urban life in cities 'as a source of cultural vitality and economic renewal', after a long haul of hard times due to the disfavour of middle-classes and the loss of business sector interest. She observes that, based on the increased diversity of including both the poor and the rich with their juxtaposed and hybrid urban cultures, urban consumption has since the 1990s become seen more positively in terms of opportunities for economic activities. This is in contrast to the negative sense as a trigger of social segregation exemplified by gentrification and eviction processes in the 1980s (Smith and Williams 1986; Smith 1996). This may be the role of the city 'as a potentially integrative resource in governance contexts characterised by diffused power and dynamic relations...to mobilise collective effort, inspire individual initiatives and provide resources for identity formation processes' (Healey 2002, p.1777). Given this potential of cities, new understandings of high-rise living in Korea and the renewed idea of governance for its complex and diverse dimension of urban life seem to be needed, which may be not just a solution of housing shortage and passive response to the policy, but have been a major source of attracting the large population of not only the rich but also others with a hope. In this way of thinking, the deterministic views of built environments purely based on the physical and spatial factors can be overcome to renew the understandings of high-rise built environment within the framework of the city and identity formation.

Housing delivers the cultural identity of built environment for urban dwellers in these cities' lives. In modern social and economic systems, such symbolic operation of housing and built environment are acted on and mediated through urban consumption in the market, which needs more multi-dimensional perspectives of institutions in understandings of the market's role rather than simple mechanisms of allocation function (i.e., supplying housing in response to measured demands). In this sense, and in keeping with the idea of a dominant 'housing culture', the housing market needs

also to be considered as an institution with a complex of various social, cultural, economic and political processes, and built environments are institutionalised in the city as a form of collective identity through the dynamic processes of such markets.

### **Housing market as institution**

Regarding the cultural consumption as the meaningful practice of everyday life, Slater (1997) sees it as representing a social process of the modern market systems that link ‘between the lived culture and social resources’, and ‘between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources’ (p.8). This means that the operation of the market is closely related to the cultural structures. In this sense, some have gone so far as to assert that ‘there is more culture in the economy than the converse that there is more economy in the culture’ (Warde 2002, pp.185-6), and that ‘consumption depends on symbolic rewards rather than use values and the fulfilment of requirements’ (Baudrillard 1981, p.185). Cultural analysis has widely discussed patterns of everyday consumption in urban lifestyles discussed, but have until recently tended to neglect housing. A number of authors such as Gurney (1999), Rapoport (2001), Rowlands & Gurney (2000), and Flint (2003) have begun to draw more attention to the possible cultural significances of consumption within housing, for specific sectors, groups, and tenures. As the built environment is a resource of symbolic and cultural capital in the city (see, for example, Sassen 2000), its production is not merely based on the simple allocation of resources. Nor is it limited to the meaning of basic needs. Despite the remarkable role of housing consumption, the lack of concern about cultural effects may be rooted in its nature of housing as the meaning of basic needs that are not a choice but a necessity, which is why housing existed before the market system of production from the primitive form such as cave to building activities by residents themselves. Instead, housing had become to be regarded as public responsibility in general, based on the priority of public provision with the ideological perspective of the welfare state as an alternative method to meet needs rather than privatised commodification. Even very market-driven societies, such as the USA, do not leave housing entirely to totally market mechanisms, whether the reasons are rooted in basic human common sense or in political aims. There therefore exists a kind of ethical barrier against housing being regarded as a consumer product.

However, as a result of privatisation tendencies within the housing sector and land markets, stimulated by modernisation, the simple moralistic perspective based on housing need has been changed to the complex relation of consumption in the marketplace. In Korea most housing provision and stock has been based on the private market since the era of capitalist modernisation. Even social housing in the UK has come under the regime of active consumption by recent developments in social housing policy from direct provision to a strategic 'arm's length management', which is premised on the efficacy of market processes, and the desirability of empowering tenants as autonomous and accountable consumers (Flint 2003). This change in the production mode of housing questions the meanings of housing beyond basic and physical shelter, or even nostalgia such as place attachment or 'the poetics of space' in the terms of Gaston Bachelard (1969). Moreover, negative equity and the unaffordability of house prices have taken place to consider a new perspective in governing spatial orders, and also to doubt the simple relations of social subjectivity (Alcobia-Murphy 2006).

This change in the meaning of housing seems to be in principle originated from transforming the production mode of housing from individual or local construction at a small scale to a new market for housing of housebuilding industry. In this new environment of housing production system, the private housebuilding industry has come to the fore as a powerful institution (Franklin 2006). The planning and production of housing is closely and deeply related to the political, financial and administrative systems which have institutional properties to be developed over time for the operation of society (Samuels 1995; Adams and Watkins 2002; D'Arcy and Keogh 2002; Franklin 2006). Moreover, in Korea, housing policy and state intervention has given full power over the economic control of housing to private industry, which resulted in high reliance on developers for the national economy. It has also contributed to a mistrust of housing governance due to the makeshift reactions of intervention. This means that the housing constructors and the state are actively intertwined within a national framework of constructing the city and the country and rearranging resources. Therefore, the focus needs to be on the allocation of power in society and markets. This requires a shift of analytical framework, which denies positivist tradition unifying and materialising economic structures and actor's behaviours, in order to elucidate the complex relations generated by institutionalised

housing markets (Samuels 1995; Guy and Henneberry 2000). In this way, urban consumption of housing can be better understood, constructing the built environment and its identity formation within the wider framework of the city. Important institutions in shaping the housing market are discussed later in this chapter, but include financial institutions (such as banks), developers (including, in Korea, multinational conglomerates, or *chaebol*), government, and of course the influence also of cultural determinants of what might be possible or demanded within the market.

The discussion in this section has been focused on the formation of individual and collective identities through the symbolic meanings of housing generated by a 'housing culture', and the institutional characteristics of housing markets within which these meanings are generated. These perspectives of dynamic and complex built environment require the understandings of the relationships between culture and institutions: how they interact, evolve and change over time through the housing market, which is governed by, and also influences, the institutional environment and behaviours. The next section focuses on these themes in order to develop a conceptual framework that clarifies the relationships between institutions, the market, and a 'housing culture'.

### **5.3 Superstructure of housing culture**

In this section, how the concept of housing culture operates as an analytical tool is suggested. The relationship between housing culture and institutional operation is firstly explored, and then followed by a review of the role of various institutions. Lastly, how outcomes are produced as a culture and how they change and continue over time is discussed, which is based on the emphasis of the uncertain and complex characteristics of the modern market system.

#### **Relational approach of institutions and culture**

Housing culture as an institutionalised built environment of identity formation means that its values and meanings are not fixed and deterministic given by certain physical features and functions, but they are made and remade through continuous institutional processes within society. Healey (2006) highlights that the *making* and *remaking* of

*cultures* are natural as we are active agents. This is not considered in the utilitarian concept of preferences. As Healey (*ibid*, p.46) indicates, ‘the structuring is *inside ourselves*’, which is not a passive process at all that we are not only culturally made or socially constructed, but also makers of cultures and social structures. Although we are accustomed to the built environment in which we are born and grow, we are also able to shape and reshape a new built environment we construct for the present and the future based on the given experiences and further informed imagination through the social knowledge and socialisation. High-rise apartments have been framed towards the new values and opportunities in the city living, which triggered the middle-class to change their lifestyles. In particular, this process might be seen to have operated within the Gangnam developments of the 1970s by the governmental endeavours in response to the historical contexts of the poor urban condition left by the colonial period and the war in Korea. Although involving huge governmental intervention and resources, the possibility of this new development can only be seen to have existed because it was socially acceptable and people saw themselves as living in this new way. This new constructed built environment means that as Healey (1999) suggests, systems are not given, but are made, in a complex interaction between the imaginary and the material world, in which attitudes and values are formed through the particular contexts of geographies and histories. This is particularly helpful to see the reinforcing process of high-rise apartment culture in Korea, as it has evolved through the perspective and lifestyle changes of people over time, as outlined in Chapter Three. In this sense, a relational view is a basis of the understanding of social life, focusing on people’s action and interaction to construct their material world and its meanings under various constraints (Powell and Dimaggio 1991; Healey 2006).

In the relationship between structure and agency, the important point is posed on the nature of how the relationship between institutional environment and actor’s behaviour is evolved. Structure frames individual agents making their choices. Basically, this structural framework is revealed in the actor’s access to the various resources, their behaviour governed by the rules, and shaping their strategies drawn upon the ideas (Healey & Barrett 1990). In Marx and Foucault’s perspectives, these structures are expressed as external forces imposing on individual actors. On the other hand, in Giddens’ structuration theory (1984), the recursive relation between

structures and agency, in which agency interacts actively with structures constraining behaviours, is a key point. This means that, as Giddens argues, ‘structure’ is established by the way agents perform, in which resources, rules and ideas are organized, realised, challenged and potentially changed. This is carried out by power over forming rules of behaviour, and flowing of material resources (Giddens 1984). This is perhaps the way the development of high-rise apartments has governed Korean society over the last half century, as its rules and resources have been towards it through the social ideas, economic measures and political interests in a full scale over the city and the country. In this logic, however, structuration theory has been criticised for a lack of mediating concepts between structure and agency, and it has proved to be a difficult approach to operationalise through empirical research (Clapham 2005).

One of the limitations of Giddens’ structuration theory is that it does not explain why the built form or housing policy does not directly lead to the attraction of consumers or residents and its values or meanings. It is perhaps culture that links such resources or rules into a life of built environment. The fact that high-rise buildings could have a special life in Korea, whereas they have been neglected in many other countries despite governments’ attempts to put ideas, resources and efforts into supporting them, shows the need of the mediating concept between them. Healey (2006) emphasises that:

‘Culture, in institutionalist analysis, is thus given a particular definition. It is the continuously re-shaped product of the social processes through which systems of meaning and modes of thought are generated. Cultures provide vocabularies through which we express what we think and feel. They shape our thoughts and feelings and our sense of ourselves, and our identities. They provide symbolic structures, in metaphors and rules of rights and responsibilities, which help to reflect and to arrange the relations within a social group – a family, a firm, a government department, a sports club, a pressure group.’ (p.64)

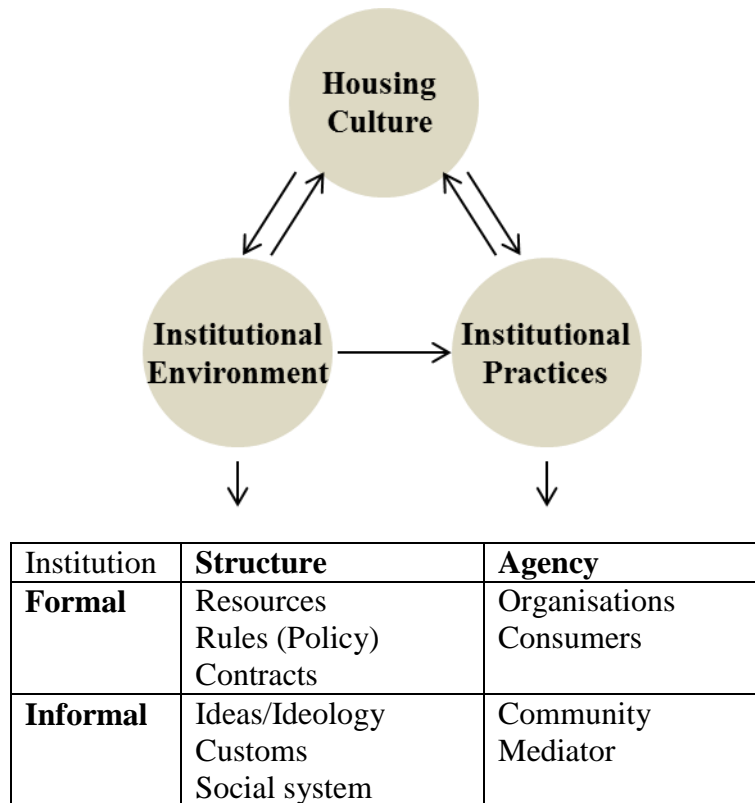
Systems of meaning are thus inscribed in, and cultural references are carried by, these abstracted structures, pervading our daily lives (*ibid*). In other words, these structures have operational meanings under a symbolic structure of culture. This is to say that, as

high-rise apartments came to be seen as representing a collective identity as the middle-class culture, policy and resources became structures of meaningful practices for actors to follow in Korea. Institutional practices followed because the cultural identity provided the right structure for it. On the other hand, where it has failed to create a cultural identity in many other societies (such as the UK), these structures have had no meanings to carry out, and instead the experiment has often led to the demolition of high rises.

Therefore, not only does 'culture define the way individuals process and utilise information in the short-run evolution of societies' (North 1990, p.42), but also 'the cultural filter...makes informal constraints important sources of continuity in long-run societal change' (*ibid*, p.37). This suggests a dynamic process that culture is a kind of 'organic entity' mediating between structure and agency. Culture, then, seems to operate as a superstructure governing individual's behaviour, by carrying collective identity and values in the built environment as a real sense of how one's life should be. In this sense, housing culture is not just a one-off outcome, but an important mediator as another level of structure framing individual agents in making their choices. Here, structuration theory can be complemented by seeing culture as a mediator giving contexts and reasons to make and remake institutional environment and practices, as can be seen in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5. 1 Institutional relationships and examples of institutions



The diagram shows housing culture as a kind of mediating superstructure, shaping the relationship between the institutional environment and institutional practices. Both this environment and these practices have formal and informal types. For example, formal organisations have agency, as structured by formal rules and contracts as well as informal customs. As a mediator to give implicit or explicit reasons for actions to change or conduct, the housing culture provides not only the taken-for granted social context but also shapes the institutional environment. Healey & Barrett (1990) describe how the institutional environment in the form of external constraints or opportunities, such as policy, is reflected in, and influenced by the way actors decide their strategies with certain projects and issues and conduct their relationships for their future activities. Furthermore, through the social relations of our life, structural forces operate and social context is actively constructed by actors' behaviours. Under this institutional environment, it is the process of institutional practices to shape a particular 'housing culture', as agents are motivated and created by the structuring forces through the social relationships. These institutional practices are encouraged by economic motivation and competition of the market through culturalisation. This can be actively shaped by market actors, such as through various marketing strategies

targeting certain groups who are informed and make decisions. In turn, housing culture as a symbolic structure becomes a dominant discourse of social and economic behaviour in structuring both actor's action and the institutional environment in the housing market. As the housing culture operates as a recursive structure, the interaction between institutional environment and practices is then routinised and taken-for-granted in daily processes.

Given the uncertainties and imperfections within the market mechanism, however, cultural identity is not always stable or secure from market failures engendered by either inherent or external forces. Therefore, making and remaking structures is also a routine, which leads to institutional change, and further brings historical change. From the relational view between institutions and culture discussed above, Healey (2006) suggests that another important interest is thus concentrated on a practice of choices in daily basis about 'whether to 'follow the rules', or whether to change them, to transform the structure' (p.47). Therefore, she emphasises that our history is made in the daily practices of our matters, not just by behaviours of conscious resistance. In other words, in the process of making our life in the culturally structured rules and resource flows, but at the same time, through our continual creative work, the systems and the structuring forces are remade, and we also change ourselves and our cultures.

In this institutional environment and practices for shaping and reshaping cultures, it is important to note that 'both formal and informal institutions' are involved in the human interaction, in which they are either to forbid or to allow particular behaviours, 'as institutions include any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction' (North 1990, p.4). The next section thus focuses on issues about the formal and informal institutions constituting institutional environment and practices in relation to the housing market and built environment. This is followed by discussion of cultural continuity and change that underlines both intended and unintended consequences of institutional practices respond to institutional environment, which will reflect the themes outlined through this chapter.

### **Formal/informal institutions**

The relationship between structure steering the development process and generating unique patterns in certain periods, and agency improving and achieving their strategies in decision-making is a key point to understand the development process (Healey & Barrett 1990). This relationship constitutes both an institutional environment and institutional practices to produce outcomes and a culture, which itself mediates the relationship. Institutions, both formal and informal, are basic elements of this framework to operate in everyday activities and housing markets in the process of constructing our built environments. The reason why institutions evolve is in fact, as North (1990) indicates, based on the weakness of human being as the limited capability to be rational in the complex world (unlike the assumption of rationality in mainstream economics), which produces uncertainties. He suggests that to reduce these uncertainties is thus an important purpose of institutions to exist. By structuring human interaction in such recognition of uncertain characteristics, it leads to the consequent institutional framework, in ways of which the choices available to actors is actually limited (North 1990). This suggests that high-rise apartments are more often than not chosen by Koreans because they are the easier option for them to choose, while British naturally go for the suburbs in the current institutional framework. Moreover, not only is this framework reinforced through practices giving certainty and stability to social interaction, but also change and develop over time according to circumstances and experience (D'Arcy and Keogh 2002), resulting in continually altering the choices available to us. Again this construction process of individual identities and preferences based on formal and informal institutions in social contexts is in principle distinguished from classical economics that assumes actors with rational preferences to maximise their utilities (Healey 1999).

In the framework being put forward here, 'structure' is provided by an institutional environment consisted of formal and informal institutions affecting institutional practices by limitations or possibilities on the strategies, as shown earlier in Figure 5.1. Formal institutions are basically related to various resources such as money, and the rules governing behaviour. Formal rules include political, judicial and economic rules as well as contracts between individuals, in which these rules become effective hierarchically as constraints from general political rules to particular rules and specifications within contracts (North 1990). For instance, as D'Arcy and Keogh

(2002) suggest, opportunities and expected outcomes to development are influenced by the political environment through specific initiatives of policy, such as urban regeneration policies aimed generally at economic change. They also indicate that the social environment, economic institutions and legal institutions all together based on their hierarchy and its mutual influence foster generating distinctive patterns and granting specific importance of objectives in the development process. The development of housing policy seems to be a clear example of this hierarchical and relational process of constructing formal rules towards high-rise apartments over time in Korea.

As well as formal rules North (1990) also highlights the salience of informal constraints because of the limited computational capability and the lack of information, as formal rules, in even the most developed economy, are only a small part in the constraints affecting choices. Also, the reality is not seen to be out there, but likely to be constructed and altered by certain groups and certain interests, which means that no one exactly knows what will happen. Within this uncertain and imperfect world, 'internally enforced codes of conduct, socially sanctioned norms of behaviour, conventions, and ideas' (*ibid*, p.40) (such as ideology or religion) come to be more convincing guidance in social relations and economic activities. Some examples of 'informal' constraints might also be seen in the real world issues affecting consumers. Advertising and show homes as part of supply strategy in Dongbu-ichon-*dong* project conducted by the government in the beginning of apartment developments have become everyday activities for consumer's day out to see new products and for developer's marketing strategy. More importantly, the movement of prestigious schools from the Gangbuk district of Seoul to Gangnam has been seen as a major trigger to transform the lifestyles and preferences in citizen's life, which is still pervasive idea and even deeper over time to influence choices. Education is a good example of an 'informal' institution (in that it is not directly concerned with housing) that, even so, might act as a significant shaper of behaviour within housing markets. Perhaps, these informal constraints, and also how these are perceived, are the key to the difference between Korea and other societies. In this sense, North (1990) highlights the importance of informal constraints, not merely as supplements to formal rules, but as critical factors because the same formal rules or agendas turn out to have different outcomes in different societies.

Organisations are also important units within these institutional frameworks, in which they depend on the actions and interactions of the membership composing the organisation, including the governmental administrations, professions, private business sector, the media and so on (Franklin 2006). They are networks of people with boundaries (Jenkins 2008), with purposive intent given by the opportunity within existing constraints (North 1990). Organisations distinguish members from non-members in inter-related and institutionalised ways to do something together with certain common interests (Jenkins 2008). Formal organisations, for instance, that participate in the housing market in ways of classical analysis and traditional institutionalist views include developers, builders, real estate agents, financial institutions and so on. In addition, consumers, although they are not formulated into certain organisations, are also crucial formal actors in the market, carrying cultural ideas that influence structural and practical constraints of policymakers and developers. Without them, the market would not exist, which means that they are a central part of institutional practices rather than individual players with very subjectivities. Because of this important role of the consumer, some companies make efforts to include ideas and assessment from consumer groups, such as *Jubu Monitor* ‘a monitor group of housewives’ set up by Samsung. More broadly in the complex interaction, various political, economic and social bodies can also act as informal organisations in the form of community or mediator in the housing development or decision-making process.

Given this complexity of formal and informal institutions, the choice set available to us and its outcomes are characterised by a combination of various informal norms and rules together with explicit formal rules (North 1990). North thus stresses that ‘looking only at the formal rules themselves, therefore, gives us an inadequate and frequently misleading notion about the relationship between formal constraints and performance’ (*ibid*, p.53). In this sense, he also suggests that the cultural process of information underlying informal constraints is the key to understand the way institutions evolve incrementally in long-run practices. This contributes to cultural continuity and evolution over time, which will be discussed more in the next part of this section. In particular, it is the case that it takes a long and continuous process to transform the built environments unlike other commodities despite the modern feature of housing as market products.

### **Cultural change and continuity**

Culture has inherently both characteristics of continuity and change. Not only is it continued over time and generation, but it is also continuously changed through history. This continuity and change of culture can be resultants of institutional change, but culture, as related to the collective values and power, may also cause incremental change of institutional evolution. As this process is continued from the past to the present and the future, history is mostly based on the incremental evolution of culture.

This is important, particularly, because housing, and its collective resultant as built environment, is no longer limited to the individual action, but operates as the market economy in the modern world. Ultimately, in the housing market, institutions evolve and remain, or change to make profitability by reducing uncertainty and maximising behaviour in exchange of economic activity within the current constraints or changing the constraints. However, as North highlights, in an uncertain world, the maximisation of profits is in fact impossible, because there is no one to identify correctly problems and solutions we encounter.

This complexity of outcomes are basically inherent in the uncertainty of the world and the imperfect system of the market (Hodgson 1988; Maclennan 1982), and institutional change cannot be always considered to result in better efficiency deterministically in either institutional structure or resource distribution (D'Arcy and Keogh 2002). This means that no simple relationships between institutional structure and practices explicitly foresee the downstream consequences, but unanticipated consequences are often generated from the maximising economic behaviour (North 1990). Also, institutional change may be either supportive or impedimental to the market for the profitability of the activities that they undertake. Its effect is then actually complex. It can be negative, but sometimes perform more effectively in allocation and redistribution (Maclennan 1982), in unexpected ways. In particular, the residential development is essentially a complex process, as various actors and organisations are involved and cooperate so that they result in the satisfaction of the outcomes (Ball 2002). In this complexity of the process, a variety of forces, such as unanticipated consequences of choices or external forces, can cause alterations of existing institutions, which may have the effects of economic change, especially from

the tension and inconsistency between the rapid change by political actors and the existing informal constraints (North 1990).

In such a complex world, it may be inevitable that institutional change entails complex results different from their purpose, often in the social and spatial inequality in the construction of built environment. The economic downturn at the end of the 1990s in Korea, for example, resulted in ironically luxury branded apartments under a deregulated policy framework. This was followed by steeply rising house prices, leading to the strengthened policies on apartments later on during the last government in Korea. Policymakers then aimed to lower prices and prevent speculation. The result, however, has been the emergence of more luxurious town houses to compete with apartments as well as to overcome economic depression (Park and Ferrari 2011). As an unintentional result of this, a new market of relatively small projects of town houses can give an opportunity for small and medium companies against the market of high-rise apartments led by big companies, but far from the affordable housing for the policy's initiative under the current institutional framework. While policy changed rapidly, however, in fact, in Korea, the development of town houses was not an overnight outcome, but had its background in an earlier change in policy to provide the specific land for them, enacted in the beginning of 2000s. The initiative of the government was to diversify the residential culture against apartments. However, they did not seem to have attraction at first for both developers and consumers until the regulation on apartments. Since the political and economic changes in the mid-2000s, that is, few years later from the policy made, town houses became a public interest, though still not very favoured due to the very strong cultural preference for high-rise apartments. This example shows the typical characteristic of institutional change in incremental ways rather than in discontinuous pattern, because informal constraints embodied in customs, traditions, and codes of conduct are more solid to change policies than the overnight change of formal rules by political or judicial determination (North 1990). Franklin (2006) uses the example of privatization of social housing in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s as a long run effect, mutually supported by policy and a shift in societal attitudes and a reorientation (or reassertion) of the cultural position of owner occupied housing.

To conclude, we live in a continuum of the world, where the stability of everyday practices and their continuous evolution are emphasised. As North (1990) says:

‘The overall stability of an institutional framework makes complex exchange possible across both time and space...Stability is accomplished by a complex set of constraints that include formal rules nested in a hierarchy, where each level is more costly to change than the previous one. They also include informal constraints, which are extensions, elaborations, and qualifications of rules and have tenacious survival ability because they have become part of *habitual behaviour*. They allow people to go about the everyday process of making exchanges without having to think out exactly the terms of an exchange at each point and in each instance. *Routines, customs, traditions, and conventions* are words we use to note the persistence of informal constraints, and it is the complex interaction of formal rules and informal constraints, together with the way they are enforced, that shapes our daily living and directs us in the mundane (the very word conjures up images of institutional stability) activities that dominate our lives. Although the mix of rules and norms varies, the combination nevertheless provides us with the comfortable feeling of knowing what we are doing and where we are going.’ (p.83)

We call it ‘culture’.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has proposed that ‘culture’ can be an alternative analytical focus for understanding the built environment. In a consumer society, people are highly motivated by culture in economic activities as well as in social life. A particular housing culture has a dominant power, giving a collective identity which shapes consumer preferences and decision-making in the market. As a symbolic superstructure for governing actor’s behaviour in the housing market, it certainly affects social, political and economic activities in the market-driven society. This practice may be highly realisable in consumer society, as housing is a product which has high costs and exchange values in the housing market. This means that consumers would prefer dominant choices, safely made within a stable system of norms, with



secure economic and social status to comfort themselves. This accordingly results in a collective pattern of built environment over time. On the other hand, other cultures out of dominant patterns can struggle with exclusion in terms of market values and social discrimination. Therefore, housing culture is a critical issue to be dealt with in housing matters in the housing market and in the development process, and in terms of social justice in the planning system.

As outlined in Chapter One, this thesis aims to explore understandings of the built environment, by way of examining the cultural structure in terms of social, economic and political environments and institutional practices. This is derived from a need for alternative ways of understanding the socio-spatial phenomena of the city, given the critique of the deterministic view often elicited in dominant discourses of built environment as was outlined in Chapter Four. The fixed and deterministic understandings of existing frameworks are inappropriate to account for the cultural differences according to different historical and contextual contexts. In addition, the discourses generated from the deterministic perspective can not only neglect the actual mechanism in socio-spatial problems and housing market operation, but also strengthen the social and spatial exclusion in certain built environments.

To overcome this, the idea of a 'housing culture' has been proposed. The cultural operation of the built environment within the context of the city and the nation as a whole is explored and compared to the dominant assumptions. By considering built environment as culture constructed through the institutionalised collective patterns and values, the power relations and conflicts may be exposed in the form of collective identity over socio-spatial problems in the city. In this sense, the concept of housing culture underlines complex, dynamic and modern social orders over the built environment. Given this potential role, the idea of housing culture should then be considered in the discussion of built environment. This is applied to the research setting of Korea described in earlier chapters, in order to understand how high-rise built environment has become a dominant culture. Based on this framework, the methodological approach this research conducted is described in the next chapter, which is followed by the research findings and conclusions in the second half of this thesis.

## *Chapter Six*

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

High-rise apartments introduced in the earlier chapters occupy a privileged position in the Korean urban built environment in a social, cultural, economic and political sense, contributing to socio-spatial hierarchies in Seoul. Particular residential settlements are segregated spatially, and also socially, as they are stigmatised and marginalised by the dominant power of high-rise built environments. This preeminence and cultural embeddedness of high rise housing in Korea seems opposed to the predominant, western-centric discourses about built environments in many other societies. This risks generating not only a distorted view about high-rise buildings as abnormal phenomena in Korea, but also the barriers to understanding how housing markets work and the real causes of socio-spatial problems.

In this context, this research seeks to explore actor's perspectives, such as residents, developers and policymakers in how a particular pattern of the built environment has been shaped in the city. The theoretical framework emphasises particularly the cultural dimension of symbolic power in generating the discourses about and emergence of particular built environments. A qualitative methodology was employed in order to give more attention to perceptions and processes that engenders institutional behaviours and their outcomes. This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of this methodology and the methods, data collection and analysis undertaken in the research.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The research questions are firstly drawn with a basis of the theoretical underpinning of the research. The qualitative methodology and research strategy that informed the research design within a case study is explored in the second and third section. As the main method for the research, semi-structured interviews are discussed in detail in the final section.

## 6.1 Research questions

Previous chapters, especially Chapters Four and Five, proposed that high-rise built environments are largely stigmatised in academic and policy discourses. There is a ‘deterministic dualism’ between high-rise buildings and suburban houses that labels built forms simply according to fixed understandings of residential settlements. As discussed, such limited thinking precludes the understandings of built environments properly in different contexts over time and place, especially when and where different realities are recognised. Moreover, the deterministic categorisation of built environments (crudely, high rise = poor; suburban detached housing = rich) has inevitably had profound and excessive practical implications, such as the demolition of high-rise residential buildings in many cases. Also, it has possibly helped the reinforcement of the socio-spatial stigmatisation of particular settlements. These strong cases have arguably led to the misunderstanding of high-rise built environments in Korea, because western-centric views often consider the phenomena of Korean high-rise apartments as unusual or abnormal. Moreover, it supposes that mass high-rise housing provision has resulted either from major state intervention in the provision of low-income housing, usually for rent, or from the private market’s response to land shortages (e.g. in cities with limited land such as in Manhattan). To unsettle some of these problematic assumptions, therefore, the role of institutional processes within the development of built environments has been emphasised to move beyond deterministic thinking of built forms by emphasising contextual differences and modern market characteristics. This is based on cultural identities beyond physical and functional aspects.

In Korea, the modern housing market has been constructed predominantly through the development of high-rise apartments in large part by private conglomerations albeit with governmental support. The competitive and highly privatised environment of the housing market includes complex and dynamic characteristics, and also produces distinctive phenomena in order to connect between production and consumption with a variety form of metaphor, such as identity or lifestyle. This research setting suggests that existing theories may be insufficient to fully illuminate the spatial and social construction of built environment through the urban consumption as social ordering processes within the wider city. It may lead instead to an emphasis on the social and power-led market characteristics and their complex and diverse performance in

housing markets, which may be built upon economics, sociology and culture cohesively (Smith et al. 2006). How institutions and actors' behaviours interact with and shape culture in this context thus needs to be considered. Particular interests of, and relationships between actors, for example, could be examined to understand how high-rise apartments have become the embodiment of middle-class housing, while low-income families have been mostly excluded in the development of housing policy and the operation of the housing market. The analytical framework of housing culture aims to look into these processes and features. Given this research setting in Korea, the following research questions were established.

The main research questions are:

- How has a distinctive housing culture, as an institutionalised collective form of built environment, arisen in the form of high-rise apartments in South Korea?
- What does this add to our understandings of the development of high-rise built environment, particularly in academic and policy discourses?

In support of this, related research questions are:

- How are high-rise apartments culturally constructed in Korea?
- How are high-rise apartments sociologically constructed, individually and collectively, and what are the effects of this?
- How do institutional behaviours under a housing culture construct high-rise built environment, socially, spatially, economically and politically?

The main question has embraced the broad research interest to guide specific research focus and project, which led to the three subsequent questions presented in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine respectively. These are reflected upon in the concluding discussion in Chapter Ten.

## **6.2 Methodological approach**

Given the research focus on cultural phenomena within institutional contexts, a qualitative methodological approach has been considered as most appropriate to conduct the research, through an in-depth case study. The section outlines the

theoretical underpinnings of the methodological approach in the light of the research questions and other relevant considerations.

### **Theoretical approach**

Research approaches are differentiated in the way they understand their object, and in their methodological focus (Flick et al. 2004), which can be clarified by the nature of the phenomena under examination, and the characteristics of knowledge or evidence (Mason 2002). This research focuses on the socio-spatial construction of the built environment in terms of a distinctive 'housing culture', which represents, and responds to, a collective identity of the social members within the city or nation. This emphasises the institutional processes in terms of constraints or opportunities of practical activities. Culture, identity and institution are all products of social process through human activities and social relationships, which highly depend on historical and contextual developments (Clammer 2012). This means that there are no simple relations or answers to see the phenomena with a unified form and universal truth. Layder (2006, cited in May and Powell 2008, p.53), thus, warns us that 'true, we must be cautious about claims to objective reality, alert to ideological distortions, and aware that the world is a messier, more complicated place than the accounts of physicists would suggest'. In an ontological sense, this suggests that the world is not simply as described by deterministic perspectives with only one side of either social structure or individuals, but both are entangled in complexity. Therefore, in housing research, there is interest in 'what a socially inflected qualitative inquiry might add to a hitherto mainly economics take on housing markets work' (Smith et al. 2006, p.82).

In this sense, the 'hypothesis of unintended consequences' drawn from the work of Anthony Giddens is to resist the 'aggregation hypothesis' that 'macro-phenomena are made up of aggregations and repetitions of many similar micro-episodes' (Knorr-Cetina 1981, pp.25-6 cited in May and Powell 2008), which can be found in positivist and purely subjective constructionist traditions. This recognition of a complex view about the world has accordingly taken the ontological and epistemological turn from the micro/macro dualism to the duality of the structure/agency dilemma. Reconciling this focus with the perspective outlined in the first section, the recursive relation between structure and agency would aim to acknowledge the importance of power

relationships between the dominant and the marginalised in the construction of cultural structure, especially, high-rise apartments in South Korea for this research. This also seeks to examine the socio-spatial effects of the dominant culture as well as their underlying social causes, such as, power and inequality.

Denzin (2004a) suggests that the ontological perspective based on the ideas of Giddens coincides with assumptions of symbolic interactionist approach to the study of lives, identities and social relationships. He relates this view to the definitions of *symbolic* as ‘the underlying linguistic foundations of human group life’ and *interaction* as ‘the fact that people do not act toward one another, but interact with each other’ (*ibid*, p.81). Given this, he emphasises that all individuals are social agents whose activities are constrained by structural rules, material resources and structural processes. According to these ideas of symbolic interactionists, systems of discourse symbolically condense and generate knowledge about the world (Foucault 1980, p.27 cited in Denzin 2004a). This means that what is true and what is not true is constructed in different ways, embedded in competing discourses and connected to struggles over power rather than being objectively true or false (Denzin 2004a).

Based on these theoretical perspectives outlined above, the research methodology requires a way of exploring why and how certain identities and social relationships are related to the construction of the built environment, not only what that environment ‘is’. Given the critique of discourses of built environment presented in Chapter Four, it suggests that the certain deterministic ideas should not solely represent the world. The conception of ‘constructed’ built environment instead emphasises a focus on the processes and meanings of its construction. For example, the theoretical analysis of interviews of actors for their perspectives and behaviours may be useful to explore how high-rise apartments have come to have particular meanings in Korea, and how and why cultural structures or discourses of the built environment affect the institutional behaviours of residents or developers. Given this perspective, a qualitative methodological approach appears most viable for this project to examine the interactional behaviour between culture and institutions. A brief exploration of some aspects of qualitative approaches follows below.

### **Qualitative methodology**

Qualitative research can be used to ‘explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world’, by describing ‘from the inside out’ based on the viewpoint of people who play a part (Mason 2002, p.1; Flick et al. 2004, p.3). This gives capacity to grasp some of the ‘new obscurity’, in particular, due to the diversified and pluralised life worlds in terms of lifestyles and ways of living (Flick 2006, pp.11-2). As outlined in Chapter Five, the symbolic meaning and cultural power of a particular built environment depends on the contexts in relation to the various formal and informal institutional forms. This requires research strategies that obtain the subjective views of those engaged in social constructs of their world, rather than simply working with quantifiable and standardised notions categorised into more objective and normative concepts (Flick et al. 2004).

This research strategy seems to offer significant perspectives and to draw attention particularly to high-rise built environments. Because dominant discourses mean that the indifference towards high-rise built environment has been taken for granted, we hardly know about the plural and contingent ways that people live in high rise housing. Thus a methodology that elicits individuals’ own stories of their experiences and views, and meanings and motivations relating attitudes and behaviour may then explore the unknown reality of the built environments, providing patterns of choices and their significance rather than individuals for itself (Hakim 1992, p.26). In this sense, Flick et al. (2004) emphasises that the precise description of life-worlds ought to contribute to a better understanding of specific cultural phenomena and forms of action, in order to help in the recognition of structures and patterns of their social reproduction and their particular rationale.

Given this broad aim, Flick suggests that, in practice, qualitative research is normally based on the point that ‘there is no single method, but a spectrum of methods belonging to different approaches that may be selected according to the research questions and the research tradition’ (*ibid*, p.8). In a philosophical sense, thus, it can be somewhat considered as a interpretivism, on the basis of flexible and sensitive methods in generating data, in order to contribute to understandings of complexity, detail and context (Mason 2002, p.3). In this sense, Burr (2003) indicates that the statement that there are intrinsic methods in social constructionist approaches would

be erroneous. Despite this recognition, he accepts the fact that the importance of the social meaning of interpretations and discourses stressed in social constructionism tends to make a logical connection to the use of qualitative methods based on the analysis of interview transcripts and other types of written texts in practice. Flick et al. (2004) also agrees with the view of predominant text-based discipline of qualitative research, even though the importance of visual data sources such as photos or films is increasingly recognised. This perspective of qualitative research informed the research strategy and design, mainly based on the mode of inquiry, though without excluding other forms of visual data.

### **6.3 Research strategy**

Given the setting of research questions and theoretical perspectives discussed in the last sections, this section covers the research strategies to conduct the project based on a case study and research methods.

#### **Case study approach**

According to the type of research questions and the characteristics of research context, research strategies might adopt various techniques such as case studies, surveys, experiments or historical accounts. The aim of using case studies is to assist the understanding of complex social phenomena based on the potential of researchers holding the meaningful ideas of real-life events as a whole through the precise description and reconstruction of a case (Yin 2003). It is suggested that much of this ability is a result of the case study's unique strength in dealing with a full variety of evidence – documents, artefacts, interviews of the persons involved in the events, and direct observations of the events being studied. Given this openness of the research, a case study is preferred not only in examining contemporary events within some real-life context, but also in the case the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated, which differs from both historical account of events and experimental design. In this research project, the use of a case study framework was to construct an intensive event in specific neighbourhoods whose power seems to be so influential over other parts of the city and country, which generates the complex and dynamic phenomena based on their particular meanings and roles.



This aim is thus not to generalise the case through statistical sampling or surveys in order to establish a unified model. Indeed, it is this research's intention to understand something about built environments that existing approaches do not seem to explain satisfactorily. Despite the strengths of the case study approach, there remain concerns about its lack of rigour. Case studies provide little basis for scientific generalisation. However, Yin (2003) highlights that case studies are generalisable not to populations or universes but to theoretical propositions, which do not represent a 'sample' in the conventional positivist sense. He thus suggests that the research aim of a case study is to develop and 'generalise theories (analytic generalisation), not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)' (*ibid*, p.31-2).

In this sense of theoretical exploration to generate meanings that influence over the wider society, a case for the research was considered as an indicator of meaningful practices rather than as a generator of same patterns. This means not necessarily the same results of activities beyond the case, but the motivated activities towards the cultural meanings of the case. The case study Gangnam district, introduced in Chapter Three, therefore, was selected on the basis of historical background for intensive investigation, as a 'pure form' of the social, economic and political processes that have come to characterise the housing market in Korea and, in particular, in the capital city, Seoul. The history of Gangnam is also the history of high-rise apartment development (Gelézeau 2007). As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, Gangnam developments, especially towards high-rise apartments, have led to a fundamental change in Korea's urban socio-spatial structure, from traditional settlements to new modern built environments with the massive movement of higher socio-economic population in Seoul as well as housing market system in terms of scale, process, or meanings of housebuilding industry. Triggered by the Gangnam high-rise apartments and image-making of the area, it has largely been restructured from a localised and individual to an industrialised and collective system of housing production and consumption. This has led to the reconfiguration of social, cultural, economic and political maps with regards to housing forms, their meanings and citizen's lifestyles, which has resulted in new socio-spatial orders over the society. By this historical development, even though there are clearly hierarchies in socio-economic terms from Gangnam, Gangbuk, New Cities, Satellite Cities and local regions, they seem to be linked in their social and cultural meanings and the operation of the housing market.

In that consecutive linkage, Gangnam tends to play a role as the first block in dominoes: the models and cultural significances that Gangnam introduces later become replicated in other areas and contexts.

According to the meaningful representative of Gangnam, various discourses from housing culture to social influence such as fashion and education as well as housing market behaviour, emerge from Gangnam, which penetrates other areas across the metropolitan Seoul, other local regions, and even holiday and industrial islands. This is why a pop song, *Gangnam Style* has come to have a broad public resonance, well beyond those living in, or intimately familiar, with the Gangnam district. In this sense, for example, the price of high-rise apartments has been likely to be indicated by Gangnam regions, while other types of housing seem to be reacting against the price down of high-rise housing market since the economic downturn. From this analytical position, the boundary of Gangnam was set up as not as an administrative/geographical unit, but as the centre of theoretical focus for this research. Interviewees in other sites where their perceptions or experiences are related to Gangnam were thus also considered. The reason for this is that resident's perspective and behaviour is closely linked to Gangnam's apartment culture, even though they are currently not residents in there. The engagement with areas beyond Gangnam is possibly connected to the overall investigation of housing culture in Korea, although centred on Gangnam according to a theoretical position of the case as well as a practical sense of researchable scope in this project. The practical implications of this for interviews are described in the next section.

## **Methods**

Within the case study framework, the research method of this project mainly relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews followed by analytical coding procedures, which are discussed in detail in the next section. To complement the interview process and contextual background, a range of secondary data was also gathered. As other sources were considered as the complementary data to the main interview process, they generally followed up according to the interview data rather than collecting in priority, though not necessarily ordered in research process. This is based on the idea that linking different qualitative or qualitative and quantitative methods becomes essential

(Kelle and Erzberger 2004), and case studies usually consist of more than two methods of data collection, known as triangulation that increases the research rigour through the mixed use of methods, measures, researchers, theories and perspectives (Perlesz and Lindsay 2003, p.27, see also Denzin 1978; Patton 1990; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Miles and Huberman 1994). The available range of methods for collecting and analysing data can be thus allocated to the research perspectives, as triangulation goes beyond the limitations of a single method (Flick 2006).

The research was conducted over five stages in 2009-11 with four visits to Korea and one in the UK. The first and last stages visiting to Seoul in July 2009 and August in 2011 aimed to complement the research process by collecting documents and other secondary data, and visiting the case study neighbourhoods to take some photos, in particular, with the purpose of sensitising the research focus at the outset and supplementing research data at the end. Between these periods, three phases of semi-structured interviews were carried out from the end of 2009 to April 2010. In the first stage of interviews, the aim was to develop the interview questions through a series of pilot interviews, which took place in the UK with former Gangnam residents and a policymaker in the Korean central government who was visiting the UK. During the two further main periods of fieldwork, with a series of intensive semi-structured interviews took place. The first visit of these took place with easier contacts based on acquaintances and previous interviewees involved in research for a Masters degree project (see Park and Ferrari 2011), whilst making further contacts for the next phase of interviews to conduct interviews appropriately. Within this case study framework, a bulk of interview data and other materials were gathered as linguistic and non-linguistic (or visual) texts, which is discussed in later sections.

### *Interviews*

The main research method, interviews, was employed for this project based on the research perspectives to explore the actor's attitudes and behaviours in relation to the cultural structure. The use of interpretive inquiry approach was supported by its theoretical background that enables to reconstruct subjective viewpoints through in-depth explorations of personal experiences and feelings (Flick 2006). Especially, semi-structured interview, also known as qualitative interviewing due to its dialogical,

informal, narrative and contextual nature, is more likely to state the interviewed subjects' viewpoints than a standardised interview or a questionnaire (Mason 2002; Flick 2006). It can therefore expose not only 'underlying beliefs, strategies and constraints' shaping people or organisation's behaviour (Francis 1992), but also build up ideas directed by specific themes and analyse the meaning of interview data in connection with cultural circumstances (May 2001).

Based on these potentials, this technique was considered as suitable to the focus of the study on perceptions of housing culture given by three justified reasons: firstly, neoclassical economic models are often limited in explaining the emergence of distinctive phenomena within housing markets (MacLennan 1982); secondly, the limits of conventional economics may be due to the actual characteristics of how housing markets are as irrational, unpredictable and emotional embeddedness of the complex economy in practice (Smith et al. 2006); lastly, sudden changes that can be observed in data are often not coincidence, and can reveal a covered history potentially in social relationships between agents and institutions during a stabilised period (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). The context of the built environment and housing market in Korea is ongoing changes and dynamic processes socially, culturally, economically and politically according to their complex relationships and interactions. Investigation of the hidden intentions or suppressed preferences of households, which an economist might refer to as 'latent demand', can be a key to understand how a housing culture might be formed, reproduced or changed. Also, interviewing individuals who are directly participating in processes can account for substantial social change formed by agents in response to their strategy (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). With this in mind, interviews were open in scope and nature, although based on guide questions, as purposeful conversations (Burgess 1984 in Mason 2002).

### *Contextual background*

A variety of sources of data was also collected to support the main research method of interviews, in order to set up the contextual knowledge to frame some of the issues and to draw attention to some of the distinctive cultural aspects relating to the Seoul housing market, which respondents make reference to. The broad strategy was to analyse secondary sources of information that had become important cultural

reference points for discussions about, and responses on, the issue of high-rise housing in South Korea. This was so that an appropriate contextualisation of the culture within which the market was operating in Seoul could be reached. These include documents, archival records as well as visual texts in broad terms, which are briefly described here.

‘Documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic’, as any institutional activity hardly comes along without producing a record (Yin 2003, p.86; Flick 2006). Documents are, however, as Flick (2006) highlights, not just a simple representation of facts or reality but they are produced for some (practical) purpose and for some form of use. Because of this, the use of documents can be used ‘as clues worthy of further investigation rather than as definitive findings’, although it helps to make inferences which may find new questions (Yin 2003, p.86). Nevertheless, a very instructive addition to interviews or observations for understanding social realities in institutional contexts can be given by documents as communicative devices for specific practical purposes, rather than as bias-free data (Flick 2006). For example, housing policy documents, newspaper clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media, and formal studies or evaluations of Gangnam were good informants to guide interview direction and to complement the subjective idea of interview data. On a practical level, the most important use of documents was to confirm and augment evidence from other sources, providing other specific details and verifying the correct spellings and titles or names of organisations that might have been mentioned in interviews (Flick 2006).

Yin (2003) suggests, that ‘unlike documentary evidence, the usefulness of archival records varies from case study to case study, becoming the object of extensive retrieval and quantitative analysis’ (pp.88-9). He thus emphasises that ‘the archival records can be highly quantitative, but numbers alone should not automatically be considered as a sign of accuracy’ (*ibid*). He also reminds us that as ‘most archival records were produced for a specific purpose and a specific audience, these conditions must be fully appreciated in interpreting the usefulness and accuracy of the records’ (*ibid*). With this in mind, socio-economic and political information was gained in the form of survey data such as census records or data in order to apprehend the subjective viewpoints. To support a more practical perception of the geographical

characteristics, spatial maps and charts provided particularly useful insights. This helped not only in a more depth understanding of subjective ideas as inconsistent with factual sense, but also understanding the constitutions of residents in terms of social and economic status because development usually happen as largely blocked sites with certain patterns. Especially, satellite maps from contemporary internet archives were very practical in documenting bird's eye views of the scale and massing of high-rise developments that were described in interviewee's descriptions.

In addition to archival records, visual data was considered as relevant sources, giving the insights of socio-cultural features in built environment. During production process of high-rise apartments in Korea, marketing and advertising materials as cultural artefacts have been important. These could be thus a source of evidence to develop a more precise understanding of the market's applications over the principal development period, far beyond that could be directly observed in the limited time of a site visit (Yin 2003). Even earlier marketization of high-rise apartments in Korea was traced through the likes of advertising in newspapers. Photographs of sites were also useful visual data. Their own acquisition by the resesarcher, however, was not always successful because of the scale of high-rise apartment complex as well as photographing skills, which was thus supported by others' photographs.

Television programmes and films were also useful both in the sense that they influence everyday life but also as reflections of social attitudes. This can show and tell key moments of history, certain institutions, social values and relations, domains of everyday life, and emotions as the social construction of reality (Flick 2006). For example, Korean soap operas on TV are remarkably pervasive to most people and are even exported to other countries. Usually, within these programmes housing is illustrated as an object to describe socio-economic status of actors in the drama, representing cultural pattern of lifestyle in contemporary society. In the selection of TV programmes, it was firstly considered to include as broad as possible covering the period of high-rise developments. However, this seemed to be another project requiring a large amount of work with certain focus and criteria, which may be practically impossible to collect and analyse data. For this reason and, more importantly the main focus of in-depth interview, the strategy was the very limited use of them, which was only to augment the analysis of interview data.

A soap opera, called 'Follow-up Gangnam's mum' was deliberately selected and its whole plots were downloaded to analyse in relation to interviews. This was considered not only because of the most recent broadcast in 2007, but also its close relations to the case study for the project in terms of its theme of education and cultural aspects in the area. On the other hand, documentary films in the UK, especially 'The Poor Kids' and 'The Great Estate: The Rise & Fall of the Council House' broadcast on BBC in 2011, were selected by chance. The latter was fortunately captured and transcribed by the researcher through the BBC iPlayer on the website at the time of broadcasting for personal interest, which was easily adopted to the research. When it seemed relevant to the analysis later, however, the former had to be bought without subtitles, which ended up difficulty in transcribing as not very familiar with Scottish accent. Despite the coincident selection, they were considerably useful to sensitise the research focus and concepts by comparing social and cultural contexts, even though this research is not a comparative study. It is acknowledged however that these sources are not necessarily truthful descriptions of a phenomenon, but merely authors' or interpreter's ideas of reality influenced the film, which might be seen as embedded in or constitutive of social or cultural relations, rather than revealing facts about them (Denzin 2004b; Mason 2002).

This section has discussed the application of a qualitative research based on a case study framework. Within this framework, materials were gathered using a mainly interview method and a variety of complementary data sources. The next section is discussed about research design in detail, in terms of the process of semi-structured interviews from the data collection to its analysis undertaken in my research.

#### **6.4 Research design: semi-structured interviews**

During the research, 47 semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. Participants included residents and institutional actors (developers, policymakers, financiers and a community employee). The interviews were in general carried out using a topic guide, although the intention was to open the conversation up by giving room for interviewees to express issues as much as possible. 'In-depth interviews should, of course, always leave room to discover the unexpected and uncover the unknown' (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). This was generally more possible with

residents as institutional actors tended to have more limited time available. Interviews were typically between 30 minutes and 1 hour, although some were longer at over two hours. Inevitably each interview was informed in part by the experience of previous interviews, and the topic guide, list of questions and conversational flow changed slightly each time. This section covers the interview process in terms of participants' selection, access and analysis of interview data.

### **Selection of participants**

Research participants were selected purposively, with the criteria of either being a resident in (or connected with) Gangnam, or an involvement in the construction of Gangnam's built environment within the institutional framework discussed in Chapter Five. This purposive approach was deemed to be more appropriate than a random sampling or stratified selection as the aim was to identify key actors rather than ensure statistical generalizability (see earlier). The snowball method was thus particularly helpful, as the research set out to recruit particular people and particular groups with purpose. Key respondents were identified, divided into four groups at the initial stage – residents, developers, policymakers and other mediators such as bank managers, estate agents and marketing companies. Within this categorisation of interview groups, a purposive selection without any further stratified criteria (such as gender and age) was basically carried out with help of snowball effect starting from personal acquaintances or through direct access to some respondents.

Relying on interviewees' social networks to identify other interviewees using the snowballing selection method has strong advantages, particularly for hidden-population or power-elite groups which are difficult to reach using immediate and direct contacts (Atkinson and Flint 2001). While this was true for recruiting policymakers and developers usually, it was more useful for recruiting residents. Although residents were not necessarily a hidden population, nor a power-group, there remained difficulties with direct access to such populations. While in principle residents could be identified and recruited in the street or using publicity (e.g. leaflets) this was deemed inappropriate because of the issue of trust related to matters of privacy with very individual histories being talked to the stranger (the researcher). For this reason, the selection strategy was based more on a number of 'discrete chains



with fewer links' than 'a large single chain' (Atkinson and Flint 2001). This was to reduce the incidence of unwilling participation, as the deeper links might generate more 'strangeness' and erode trust. This was not only initially developed by the researcher's position (as will be discussed later), but also considered inevitably by the interview process. Despite the development of their hospitality and rapport during interviews, it was perceived that the interviewees usually would not harm their social networks by disturbing privacy to be involved in interviews as revealing individual histories to the stranger. By this social and cultural environment, it was considered better not to force them but to develop the researcher's own social network. It seems to contrast with, as Atkinson and Flint (2001) acknowledges, the deficiency of the method requiring prior knowledge and time consuming to identify the initial chains as well as establishing the trust relationship between the researcher and the respondents. This was possible not only because of the research context (high-rise apartments) are pervasive in Korea, but also the researcher's own positionality.

Given that analysis is contingent on context and power relations, the transparency of the participant selection process is important as it may be closely linked to the data quality and its analysis. That said, such issues have tended to be largely neglected by social researchers and in methodological discussions (Noy 2008; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). With this in mind, the reasons for choosing each of groups indicated above, and the selection of and the characteristics of key respondents within each group are outlined below. However, the last group of mediators involved in the development process became less significant at the end in the sense of rather mechanical involvement into the interviews, which may have been partly due to the power relations being pushed. There were also some difficulties of access to some groups which are described later.

### *Residents*

Residents of the case study neighbourhoods were numerically the strongest representation among the groups of respondents, numbering 29 out of 47 interviews (Table 6.1). This was intentionally considered, as the research focus is based on the construction of residential environment in cultural terms through the housing market. Not only were residents essential parts of residential settlements, but they are also

arguably the principle actors in the operation of the housing market. As mentioned earlier, the selection of residents was not limited in terms of geographical restriction of case study neighbourhoods in Gangnam district, nor stratified categorisation of demographic or socio-economic status. Five residents were thus currently living out of Gangnam at the time of interviews, but mostly had previous experiences in Gangnam. One resident had never lived in Gangnam, but had significant knowledge and perceptions about the area. Furthermore, although the majority of interviewees were high-rise apartment residents (reflecting the composition of Gangnam housing), housing types or tenure were not used as specific selection criteria, and some residents of other housing forms, notably 'town houses' (see Chapter Three), were included. This permitted an understanding of the features of high-rise apartment culture, according to interviewees' various experiences. In terms of tenure, the distribution of *chonsei* tenants (11 residents) or ownership (18 residents) while not a specific criterion, allowed the role of tenure to be explored.

The resultant list of participants was mostly representative of a particular socio-economic group, which is mostly university graduated females, currently housewives (not working currently, which is described in analytical chapters), aged mid 30-40s, with children. It may have been inevitable by the selection process and the cultural contexts (more discussed later), which might induce 'a selection bias which limits the validity of the sample and the quality of the data' (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Although not particularly diverse, however, this group is highly representative of occupants of high rise complexes in Gangnam. In brief, respondents of residents were categorised broadly into two groups. There were 5 respondents of what might be called the first generation of high-rise apartment dwellers (now in their 60s) and 24 respondents of the second generation (mid 30-40s) based on a middle-class socio-economic status with high educational background, but without significance of tenure types, though this categorisation was not remarkably different in analysis. Instead, these two distinctive categories were useful to contrast and compare historical continuity with perspectives about high-rise apartments. In particular, the cultural structure of the residential environment, such as the importance of discourses about education or housing price, was evident among both groups. Having acknowledged the social networks and power relations in selection process, however, it should be noted that the social knowledge generated from these specific participants may be

dynamic (may reflect the relationship between the researcher and the participants, which enabled exploring the deep insights for the research) and unique (in a sense of particular participant groups, which might have even reflected the researcher's personality how to see the world passing to the social networks) rather than static from random sampling (Noy 2008). The bold names in Table 6.1 are used in the analytical chapters to refer to specific respondents.

Table 6. 1 List of resident respondents and their background information

No.	Area	Housing type	Tenure type	Gender	Age	Work	Children
1.	Former Gangnam resident 1 <b>Gumho:</b> <i>Yeoksam-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	M	Mid 30-40s	Y	1
2.	Former Gangnam resident 2 <b>Hanyang:</b> <i>Apgujung-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	M	Mid 30-40s	Y	2
3.	<b>Tower Palace:</b> <i>Dogok-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	M	60s	Y	
4.	<i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i> <b>Bangbae Flats</b>	Flats	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
5.	<b>Ssangyong:</b> <i>Garak-dong, Songpa-gu</i>	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
6.	Samsung <b>Raemian:</b> <i>Dogok-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	60s	N	2
7.	<b>Hanyang:</b> <i>Chamwon-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
8.	<b>Shinsamho:</b> <i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
9.	Samsung <b>Raemian:</b> <i>Banpo-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
10.	<b>Seorae Village:</b> <i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Villas	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	1
11.	<b>Eunma:</b> <i>Daechi-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	60s	N	
12.	<b>Jugong 1:</b> <i>Gaepo-dong, Gangnam-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	1
13.	<b>Green Villa:</b> <i>Hang-dong, Guro-gu</i>	Town houses	Owner	M	Mid 30-40s	Y	0
14.	<b>Hyundai II:</b> <i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
15.	<i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i> <b>Bangbae Apt</b>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	3
16.	<b>Hyundai IV:</b> <i>Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
17.	<b>Hanshin:</b> <i>Chamwon-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
18.	<b>LG Xi:</b> <i>Banpo-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
19.	<i>Samsung-dong, Gangnam-gu</i> <b>Samsung Flat</b>	Flats	Owner	F	60s	N	3
20.	<b>Samho Garden III:</b> <i>Banpo-dong, Seocho-gu</i>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
21.	<b>Woosung:</b>	Apts	Owner	F	Mid	N	2

	<b>Chamsil-dong</b> , Songpa-gu				30-40s		
22.	<b>Ricentz 1:</b> <b>Chamsil-dong</b> , Songpa-gu	Apts	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
23.	Seocho-dong, Seocho-gu <b>Seocho Detached-house</b>	Detached -house	Owner	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
24.	<b>Jugong 2:</b> <b>Gaepo-dong</b> , Gangnam-gu	Apts	Owner	F	60s	N	2
25.	<b>Ricentz 2:</b> <b>Chamsil-dong</b> , Songpa-gu	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	3
26.	<b>Ricentz 3:</b> <b>Chamsil-dong</b> , Songpa-gu	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
27.	<b>Gwangju-si</b> , Gyunggi-do (former <b>Gangnam resident</b> )	Detached -house	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	Y	1
28.	Gwangju-si, Gyunggi-do <b>Gwangju Detached-house</b>	Detached -house	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	N	2
29.	<b>Rexle:</b> <b>Dogok-dong</b> , Gangnam-gu	Apts	<i>Chonsei</i>	F	Mid 30-40s	Y	1

(Note: Bold texts stand for references in quotes of analytical chapters 7, 8 and 9)

### *Developers*

Having the direct relationship with consumer behaviours, developers play an important role in the housing market under the capitalist system. In Korea, the structure of the housing market is largely based on the private housebuilding industry (mainly national and multinational conglomerates) rather than small local builders, and private provision of public institutes as discussed in Chapter Three. Their role and activities are frequently and closely associated with the political environment in terms of social and economic measures, affecting the activities of housing production and consumer choice. This weight of involvement in the construction of built environment led to the selection of developers as key informants for this research. Ten interviews with developers were carried out with five different organisations (four private and one public) and an individual developer (see Table 6.2). The discrepancy between numbers of interviews and respondents is due to the fact that some organisations were interviewed more than once, as contacted by different route.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, a public institution, LH chosen for the interview has been involved in the provision of high-rise apartment from the first construction of apartment complex in Mapo in 1962, followed by several Gangnam developments and the development of the New Cities. It in general aims to supply lower-income households' housing, which means it is likely to be sensitive to political contexts. It was considered as relevant participant to the research, because, despite its role as a

public institution, its provision of housing is largely to sell, but it is sensible in provision scheme with relation to the political aims) as well as market competition. Of private developers, two of the biggest companies active in the development of Gangnam were recruited. Hyundai was the first private developer to provide high-rise apartments in Apgujung (as discussed in earlier chapters), whereas Samsung had a later start in the beginning of 1980s in housing construction, although coming to be the biggest over the last decade or so. Their involvement to the research seemed important in terms of both quantity and quality in housing provision, especially since these two companies are particular associated with the adoption of brand awareness as a housing marketing strategy. Prior to branding, other companies that specialised in housing construction largely went bankrupt during economic crises, following which big conglomerates like Samsung and Hyundai came to be more recognisable.

Compared to the big brands above, Dongmun and Shindong-a construction companies are located in the mid-ranking of brand awareness in housing. By starting from the construction of high-rise apartments in Seocho-*gu* in 1978 as relatively earlier involvement in Gangnam developments, Shindong-a has come to be a company actively involved in various construction of housing, civil engineering, social infrastructure and so forth. Its provision of housing has been widespread geographically over the nation for over thirty years. On the other hand, Dongmaun established in 1984 specialises solely in housing construction, which has supplied high-rise apartments mostly in satellite or new cities in Gyunggi-*do*. The company has also come to specialise in town-houses development since the beginning of 2000s after the economic downturn. Both companies were considered as influential in the research because of their active involvement in provision of high-rise apartments and town-houses over the last decades of development period. Lastly, a small individual developer called Suji Town-houses, which introduced the *Donghoin* (persons interested in the same subject in literal meaning of Korean) town-houses, was recruited for the interview based on its reputation with a number of awards.

These different aspects of developers were deliberately considered to explore broader perspectives in housing developments, which gave their unique position and views in institutional environments. Although it was intended to include all different companies, the multiple interviews of same organisation were neither resisted nor

disadvantaged, because the research focus was not on the organisational differences but more on production activities and their meaning. The individual developer (Suji Town-houses) offered an alternative insightful perspective as he is engaged in the construction of town-houses (not apartments), which provided an external perspective and critical counterpoint to the otherwise hegemonic development structure and process in Seoul.

### *Policymakers*

The engagement of policymakers is important because of the important role of government support, within the context of the developmental state, for housing supply and private developers. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the role of the governments has been central to the structure of the Korean housebuilding industry, particularly in terms of the relationship between housing and the macroeconomy of the nation.

Five semi-structured interviews were carried out, with varying departments in the central government, such as urban and housing policy officials and housing supply officials. The interviews were not particularly straightforward. This group of the informants was the most limited in terms of both selection of participants and the interview quality. Basically, not only are policymakers a small number, but also there seems the matter of institutional system in the central government. This may be partly due to the characteristics of the Korean civil service system which is based on the constant circulation of roles and inter-department moves among staff rather than permanently specialised positions. This led to accordingly some lack of perspectives in responding interview questions. It was thus attempted to include the ex-policymakers in earlier period of high-rise developments which may be hidden-population and power-elites, but it was unfortunately unsuccessful as the current position of the researcher within the network of power relations in Korean government frustrated access. There were also other difficulties of access (more discussion below).

Table 6. 2 Non-resident participants

<b>Policy makers</b>	<b>Developers</b>	<b>Bank</b>	<b>Community officer</b>
<b>Policymaker 1:</b> Former housing and urban policy dep.	<b>LH (formerly KNHC):</b> Chief researcher	Giup	<b>Manager of community centre in Tower Palace</b>
<b>Policymaker 2:</b> Housing policy dep.	<b>Shindong-a:</b> Marketing dep.	Gookmin	
<b>Policymaker 3:</b> Housing supply dep.	<b>Hyundai 1:</b> Business dep.		
<b>Policymaker 4:</b> Housing supply dep.	<b>Hyundai 2:</b> R&D dep.		
<b>Policymaker 5:</b> Housing supply dep.	<b>Samsung 1:</b> Housing design dep.		
	<b>Samsung 2:</b> Housing development dep.		
	<b>Samsung 3:</b> Housing design dep.		
	<b>Dongmun 1:</b> Marketing dep.		
	<b>Dongmun 2:</b> Business dep.		
	<b>Suji Town houses:</b> Individual developer		

## Access

In the same way as in quantitative studies, significance is attached to the accessibility of the events, activities or individuals that form the object of the investigation (Burgess 1991). With individuals this problem can be characterised by their willingness to be reached: it is often the case that groups of people who are to be investigated, or individual members of these groups, refuse to cooperate (Merckens 2004).

The problem of accessing participants was not trivial in this research. Many of the high-rise developments are highly securitised and it is not generally possible to use random approaches to participant selection as personal visits and even mail are tightly controlled by concierges. A variety of access methods were employed.

The easiest start was through interviewing personal acquaintances related to the participants groups. This led to the snowball effect in large part of resident respondents rather than other groups (usually not possible to follow up). The residents were basically secured by the links of the researcher's acquaintances except in a few cases. While there were several interviews from direct relationships as friends or a step away of acquaintances of the researcher, a large number of interviews were

provided by key informants, consisting of clusters from their social networks. The networks included, variously, mum's meetings of their children's school or nursery, playground friends within the same neighbourhood, to the group of after school activities. These connections were usually made by one or two stages of the snowballing method. The clusters enabled the easier practical recruitment of participants and organisation of interviews

Other types of housing residents and household structure, however, were difficult to recruit using the snowball links, not only because of their relatively small populations but also the reluctance to disturb social relations, which resulted in a small number of involvements. Merkens (2004) argues that refusals or obstacles become important because they are often of a systematic nature, which might have the potential to distort the results in a particular direction as a whole of the case. For the complementary perspectives regarding the effects of the dominant high-rise apartments, it was tempting to interview residents and developers in various types of housing, but the recruiting participants was biased by the structure of housing distribution in some sense. This may have been why selected interviewees resulted in a particular group with easy access to high-rise apartments as mentioned earlier. In particular, it proved impossible to access a particular development of town-houses (called Hermann Houses) that was developed recently and recognised to the public as an issue of new housing culture, which could inform their perspectives of change in lifestyles and also provider's view. As they had too much media attention, the gatekeeper and management office strongly resisted the disturbance of residents. The developer of the Hermann Houses was never met, even though I tried several times by e-mails and calls. Through direct contact, however, the perspective of another town-house resident (the Green Villa, the first town-houses built in 1983) was secured by his strong willingness and empathy partly based on the village's circumstance confronted with the issue of reconstruction into the high-rise apartments.

On the other hand, the access to the notorious Tower Palace complex (the first development of the super high-rise condominium type) was one of the easiest interviews unlike prejudice from the media and in contrast to the experience of Gelézeau (2007). I was informed prior to the interview that its access could be extremely hard as the complex was consisted of a gated community with strengthened



security guards to prevent access by strangers. However, it turned out very straightforward and comfortable interview: an international call to the community office and connecting to the interviewee as agreed over the phone as well as an agreement of another interview.

Access to other groups such as developers and policymakers were usually supported by using a power or social relationship, through the use of personal contacts within civil service and public office. In the case of developers, the snowball method was partially employed by social networks of acquaintances of the researcher and the informants. The importance of power relations was greater for this group than it was for residents. For this reason access to policymakers was sought using personal acquaintances rather than direct contacts.

In addition to the use of personal contacts, three developers and four residents were contacted directly by making unsolicited calls to companies and making speculative visits to apartment complexes. Generally, however, methods of direct access like these seven cases were not successful despite various attempts at calling, emailing, posting on community noticeboards and personal visiting. Access was impeded by gatekeepers or officials' secretaries. Once it was made, however, it was found that trust relationships and the sympathetic response of the interviewee was generally no different to those respondents recruited using the snowball method.

In brief, in this research, the snowball technique was more effective in accessing the broader resident population rather than the power- and hidden-populations, for which personal direct social links were relied on. This may have provided rather broader perspectives as involving a variety of groups based on short links, compared to the access dependent on large links of small cases. Although the socio-economic status and housing types of participants was highly biased, their detailed histories were quite diverse covering the broad aspects than expected, which was surprisingly pleasant after interviews. Overall, although there were some difficulties, my interview experience was very positive without particular matters, such as arranging appointments in advance, making interviews at arranged time mostly, and the interview places (office, home or café) usually as convenient for the respondents.

## **Analysis**

Based on empirical research in a particular object area, *grounded theory* created by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), enables to formulate a valid theory for this area with the interrelated concepts through the production of a description and an explanation of the social phenomena investigated (Böhm 2004). This merit, however, often falls into the difficult and insecure position for beginner researcher, which requires ‘keeping distance from existing theories’ and allowing the theory to grow out of the data’ and demands investigator’s creativity’ (*ibid*, p.274).

### *Positionality of the researcher*

The researcher’s primary background in the natural sciences led to a temptation to rely on existing theories rather than to develop new data through being unaccustomed to qualitative research. Although various systematic coding mechanisms were considered, such as the use of ‘open coding’, ‘axial coding’, and ‘selective coding’ the principles of grounded theory were adopted. This entailed deep familiarise with the collected data through repeated reading. Based on this logic, finally, the meaning of analytical guidance became simplified as ‘grouping’, ‘sub-grouping’, ‘re-grouping’ and ‘heading’ for my analytical process. This process was conducted by bearing my research questions and theoretical prior knowledge in mind until I reached the theoretical saturation. The process was not linear at all, but iterative and complicated sometimes, with development of the theoretical framework continuing even after my writing of theoretical chapters in this thesis. Flick (2002, p.185) also suggested this point that ‘in respect of decisions about the transition points between the different phases of coding, there are scarcely any fixed rules’ (cited in Böhm 2004, p.274).

During the analysis, the personal experiences of the researcher may be important. Given the fact that the research theme emerged from the researcher’s own very individual interest based on various living experiences over time and place, bias arising from the researcher’s own positionality seemed likely. As a person, the researcher has been in the position of woman married with two children, and relatively highly-educated through various disciplines and degrees based on diverse interests (physics, architecture and currently town planning). This helped to widen the selection of interviewees, using social networks of myself and husband’s work and

academic colleagues as well as relatives. Although it tended to lead to a biased selection of participants, this position was significantly helpful in drawing out deeper insights as shared perspectives and symphasised involvements with similar socio-economic status, especially in family life, such as education and social relations. On the other hand, it was also important to consciously keep the neutral position during the interview and the analysis as much as possible.

Although the endeavour to be neutral was important, the researcher's own diverse living experience was considered to be an important ameliorating factor. Briefly, this has consisted of: born in the locality of Seoul in the beginning of 1970s; moving to Gangnam neighbourhood in the end of the 1970s and attending schools in the area, which lived for about 15 years; following family move to satellite city and marriage settled in new city, since the beginning of 1990s; moving to local area again due to the workplace of my husband for three years, and to the UK for his study in 2004, which lasts still almost ten years. In terms of housing experience in Korea, various types of housing were lived from traditional housing, detached-house, low-rise flat to high-rise apartments with *chonsei* or ownership. In the UK, a number of house moves also enabled the experience of residential diversity from semi- or detached-houses to flats. Given the diverse and dynamic history of the researcher, recruiting Gangnam residents was thus eased by the researcher's own personal connection, with many friends remaining in the area, and the familiarity of earlier perspectives about the neighbourhoods was felt rather useful than harmful during the interviews and for the analysis, which may be similar effect of participant observation. Also, diverse residential experience in the UK seemed more helpful in comparing perspectives of built environments by keeping somewhat neutral position.

#### *Practicality of analysis*

In a sense of practical process, transcribing was, especially, a very useful impressive stage in grouping topics as recalling the moment of interviewing over the recording voice and thus giving insightful topics developed to analytical framework. In this sense, it was critically useful to make transcripts by myself rather than to rely on automatic methods or the use of third party transcription. Transcripts were stored as computer text files for searching and organisation but otherwise grouping,

subgrouping and the identification of themes and headings emerged from an iterative and continuous process of transcriptions and reading. There were, however, some difficulties in translating from Korean transcripts into English. This was not only because of the comparative lack of English skills but also the nuanced use of words or quotes in a sense of cultural and social contexts, which are very difficult to translate into another language. In general, the analytical process carried out for this research was more complex and repetitive than was first anticipated, which resulted in the restructuring of the analytical framework several times and a complicated writing process. It seemed thus, as Crang (2001, p.216) says, that 'it is not as though interpretation produces results or answers that are then written up. Writing was another part of trying to order and think through the material'.

This section discussed semi-structured interviews employed as the key method within the qualitative methodology outlined in the previous section. A large amount of interview data for analysis was produced over the research in the complex circumstances and a variety of experiences as a qualitative research.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the methodological approach to provide the connection between research questions and research process, based on the theoretical framework and contextual reflections outlined in earlier chapters. The research questions were formulated with the aim of better understandings of built environment using concepts relating to culture, institution and symbolic power, drawing on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Five. An analytical lens of 'housing culture' was considered as appropriate in exploring these issues based on the theoretical position of duality framework of structure and agency, and interactionist approach. This led to the primarily qualitative methodology with the main method of semi-structured interviews within the case study neighbourhoods. The data for analysis was gathered through interviews with mainly residents, developers and policymakers as key actors in the institutional environment of housing market. Various complementary methods such as, documents, archive records and visual texts were also adopted to support the interviews in corresponding to research questions as well as setting up the contextual background.

The research design and strategy adopted revealed some strengths and weaknesses during the data collection and its analysis. It enabled to intensively and dynamically explore the close links between everyday cultural references in Korea and the research topic, and its importance to and resonance with certain communities in Korea. This was made practically possible by the selection strategy based on the wider snowballing effect and the social position of the researcher to access particular groups that might otherwise be difficult to access. Given the somewhat strong support of social networks, it was able to understand in detail, through qualitative enquiry, the relationships between consumer attitudes and developer strategies and how these are shaped interactively. On the other hand, the biased selection of participants from the research positionality might have potentially resulted in the partiality of the explanations found, if this danger was not adequately recognised and acknowledged. The case study chosen may also have been limited in generalizability to wider society, as the areas are highly representative of particular socio-economic groups. This might have led to the biased but unique social knowledge, which is not necessarily deficiency but fruitfulness as Noy (2008) argues.

The rest of the thesis comprises three analytical chapters structured according to the subsequent research questions with the guidance of main question, in order to present the research findings through the collected information. Chapter Seven describes day to day meaning of living in high-rise apartments in Korea, focusing on the case study neighbourhoods. This was largely evidenced by in-depth interviews mainly with residents' everyday life and developers' strategies, and other secondary sources such as maps, photographs and documentary sources. It provides the insights of cultural features in built environment, which is compared to dominant academic and policy discourses about high-rise buildings. Chapter Eight explores more sociological meanings of those features to represent a collective identity as a symbolic order over social space, and its concomitant socio-spatial effects. Residents' perspectives were particularly helpful in identifying the social and spatial cognition with some aid of visual data and the Korean soap opera reflecting the neighbourhood. Also, documentary films of the UK were useful to compare the different insights regarding built environments. This helps to understand how and why high-rise apartments are constructed with specific sociological meanings and socio-spatial superiority in the context of Korea, which is confounded by the mainstream economics and dominant

discourses of built environment. Chapter Nine looks at institutional behaviours of actors shaping the particular housing culture in the housing market and also its influence of the cultural structure in particular ways of practices. The interrelational perspectives between residents, developers and policymakers from the intensive interview data helped to explore the dynamic and interactional behaviours through how they are perceived each other in the operation of housing market. This focuses on their strategies and perceptions in their activities, as well as their understandings of the nature of housing culture. The final Chapter Ten provides the conclusions to the research, based on the discussion of how housing culture occurs in high-rise built environment in Korea, and implications for discourses about built environments, especially socio-spatial segregation. Chapter Ten returns to the main research question and the aim of the thesis and considers these in the light of the analysis.

## *Chapter Seven*

### **Lifestyles in Apartment Complex: Value Construction of High-Rise Apartments in Korea**

#### **Introduction**

Preconceived discourses of urban high-rise built environments, which are deterministically seen as ‘unhomely’ or ‘non-normal’ family housing, limit the understandings of complex and dynamic urban built environments. Theoretical and conceptual developments through various disciplines and policy implications have thus framed these settlements into a major problematic space socially and spatially. Even in Korea where a middle-class family life is settled in high-rise apartments, discourses about high-rise built environments are complicated. On the one hand, their success is seen as an abnormal phenomenon, compared to the viewpoint of ‘slums’ seen in many western countries; on the other hand, they are considered by Koreans to represent modernized western lifestyles. This contradiction suggests the need for deeper insights in relation to everyday experiences of and perspectives on high-rise built environments in the context of micro and macro interactional relationships. Based on the research question, ‘How are high-rise apartments particularly constructed as culture in Korea?’, this chapter focuses on exploring how high-rise built environments have constructed their particular values and status within the city life, which reinforce and reproduce social and cultural meanings.

Lifestyle is an important motivator in constructing values of built environment, which shapes and reflects social discourses in terms of individual perspectives, market activities, and policy initiatives. Such lifestyle values come from various sources, such as everyday activities, the ideological imagination, or even irrational perspectives that can be promulgated through social relationships, the media and so on. These ideas and practices inscribe collective values to individuals in their everyday life. This is the way that people interpret their built environment, and in turn these reinforce the construction of built environments socially, culturally, economically, spatially and politically. Based on the perception of high-rise built environments in the Gangnam district, the collective ideas shared by residents as well

as developers are described to explore how high-rise built environments are constructed as culture, which is contrasted with the preconceived perspectives.

This chapter consists of four sections exploring the process of value construction of high-rise built environments in Korea using the research findings. In the first section, how values related to the convenience and comfort of modern lifestyles are collectively perceived is described in terms of cultural characteristics as well as physical and spatial features. The second section discusses how social relationships are achieved and perceived within high-rises, which is often described as private space as well as communicative field in high-rise built environment, and accordingly in terms of advantaged social space over other residential settlement types. These collectively shared values are also negotiated with the trade-off values derived from the nature of collective buildings, which relates to disadvantages in apartment lifestyles, examined in the third section. Above all, as discussed in the fourth section, an apartment complex represents particular symbolic meanings, in which certain socio-cultural status is granted to apartment residents. The potentially broadened ideas from this discussion of value construction are briefly discussed to conclude the chapter in order to overcome and develop the discussion of built environments beyond the physically deterministic framework, as befitting the overall research aim.

### **7.1 Collective values**

The collective values of a certain group embodied in everyday life are an essential entity of structuring a culture as a whole way of life (Miles et al. 2004). In the discourses of apartment life in Korea, ‘a modern lifestyle’ has been constructed through urbanised apartment complexes in a way quite unlike many other western(ised) countries. This idea is collectively shared and rationalised through its physical, social and cultural values. Based on interviews and with the support of other sources, this section explores the distinctively perceived features and characteristics of high-rise apartments, in terms of ‘convenience’, ‘security and safety’, ‘brand awareness’, and ‘evolution of products’, which are also mostly common interests for any other countries to pursue, but achieved in other ways.



## **Convenience**

One of the enduring representations of life in high-rise apartments seems to be its perceived convenience, especially in comparison to detached houses. Quite unlike in other countries, the notion of a private garden has become a burden, although they were previously pleasurable in a detached house. Instead, management systems in apartment complexes replace the private garden with convenience. The unique design of apartment complex makes exclusivity of better lifestyles in addition to the attachment of technological development.

### *Management system*

Communal management is one of the key characteristics of apartment lifestyles, with most complexes having a management office. Its role is to sort out all matters related to the operation and management of the complex, such as maintenance and safety of buildings, repairing, gardening and cleaning. This has led to the belief that apartments are suitable for busy and complex modern lives. On the contrary, these used to be done by residents themselves regularly or occasionally in houses. Perspectives of what was normal in this regard came to change and turn into a burden since the adoption of apartment lifestyles. This was highlighted by resident respondents. Apartments residents mentioned that:

“As lived long in the house, it was so hard to look after the grass because of weeds in the garden, especially in summer monsoon season.” (Dogok Raemian)

The interviewee, who had a relatively stable life in a house, pointed out that she got tired of gardening and this was a reason she moved out of her house in the end of the 1980s, followed by her friends. Similarly, the other respondent who was previous residents in Apgujung Hanyang apartments made a point to move in apartments in the end of the 1990s that a pet as well as gardening can be a matter of convenience as his family used to live in a big detached house.

“My mum always used to say that she wished to live in apartments at least once in her life. It was because the house was so difficult to manage, such as feeding

the dog, gardening and so on...so after moving to apartments, my mum liked it so much because of its convenience.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

In these responses, the idea of a convenient management system was shared as influenced by neighbourhood and public discourse. Although they had an affluent life in detached houses, both interviewees above framed it in a similar way:

“A house had to be repaired such as painting once a year before summer. That house was strongly built with bricks, but it still needed fixing, such as roof tiles that required a sizable amount of money every year...the merit of apartments is convenience when repairing things. In houses, you have to call other specialists separately, which costs a lot. But you can get them fixed by the management office in apartments, so it is convenient.” (Dogok Raemian)

“It can be fixed quickly if apartments have some problem. But a house takes longer time - several months, because we need to call labourers separately. However, in apartments, the management office does everything, even fixing the water tap. It never happens in houses, and you should pay a lot. So, I mean that kind of convenience.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

This notion of convenience challenges the discourses not only that one of primary failure came from poor maintenance of high-rise apartments as discussed in Chapter Four, but also that the private garden is an important factor in the modern family life. Instead, shared public values and lifestyles can be influential. In this sense, even relatively small issues become important and shared towards the apartment life. For example, the role of security guards varies apart from their main job of patrolling and maintaining apartment complex. In fact, not only do they control traffic in the morning rush hour within the complex, separate recycling from litter, or deal with conflicts between residents due to noise, but they also give residents a variety of small favours such as entrusting keys, taking parcels and removing snow in winter (Hankyoreh 2011). This informal but very common relationship between security guards and residents, adds to the convenience and easement in urban life. This was alluded to by many resident respondents;

“First of all, the neighbourhood is clean in apartments. House areas are a bit dirty because there is no one else to tidy up recycling and so on.” (Chamwon Hanshin)

“One more thing is that I cannot get my parcels in houses if I am not at home. But parcels can be taken by a security guard office in apartments. Whatever I deliver, it is different whether it is apartments or not.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

“Snow can be cleaned by security guards. That is a difficult thing to do [otherwise].” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

This calls to mind the argument suggested by Lett (1998) and Gelézeau (2007) that security guards are like the modern version of slaves in Korean society. Lett (1998) states that:

‘These men were more than security guards. They were like servants who were grossly underpaid and often taken for granted.’ (p.115)

Although the harsh reality of the security guards may be the insightful observations of foreign academics, in fact, the relationship between them and residents is more complex. They can depend according to individual or contextual relationships, which mean they do not always a negative subordinative relationship but potentially complementary or humanistic relationships. This is because not only are security guards usually the elderly who are unable to get other jobs and so are willing to give residents favours, but also not all residents treat them as slaves or taken-for-granted. Since 2007 by introducing a minimum wage for them and the advancement of automatic security system, however, many of them have lost their job because of the increased financial burden for management.

There are broadly two ways that management systems keep the operation of the apartment complex. Residents can be directly involved in selecting a chief officer and also in dealing with the management. On the other hand, an external company can be commissioned to manage the complex, which in turn selects a chief officer and labourers as well. The system is regulated to an extent. A chief officer should have a

national certification of housing management approved by the government. In the process of decision-making, the meeting of resident representation seems to be crucial with the power of the representative, whereas the management office is supposed to carry out the given works in the complex. According to the Housing Construction Acceleration Act (HCAA) and the Management Ordinance of Collective housing, its role is to conduct a variety of services decided by the meeting of resident representation, such as building maintenance or repairs based on the safe and efficient management in order to protect the rights of residents or users in collective buildings. A chief officer also directs financial decisions including charging management costs to collecting and spending them. For instance, the Tower Palace complex is a big community of around 2,600 households, and has a meeting of resident representation with 8 representatives, and a management office with about 80 members, managed by an external company. The importance of this management system basically stems from the collective design of apartment complex, which is also found in the shared values of convenience.

#### *Design scheme of Neighbourhood Unit*

A number of factors in discourses of convenient lifestyles that characterise high-rise apartments in terms of physical design relates to the design scheme as a cluster unit of apartment complex. This concept of a complex in Korea was based on the theory of Neighbourhood Unit by C.A. Perry in 1929, having autonomous community facilities such as schools, hospitals and shops. In particular, parking system, communal garden and amenities have been important in the perceived convenience of apartment life.

Parking space has caused big differences between houses and apartments. Apartments have increased parking spaces, and it advanced from ground level to underground space, which allows more communal gardens. As car ownership increased sharply after the 1980s, however, there were not enough parking areas with less than one parking space per household, and even some apartments did not have any parking plots, leading to congestion on the ground until the 1990s, as shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7. 1 Before underground parking



(Source: (a) Google map (b) Author's photograph)

The lack of parking space not only led to change an open space or grass field into parking areas in the earlier developed complexes (Gelézeau 2007), but it also encouraged competition between builders in the way parking could be accommodated. A respondent of housing company described this, in particular, when apartments were mass-produced in the five new city developments:

“As far as I know, there was the explosion of housing prices in the beginning of 1990s, maybe in 1992. It was because supply was very limited, which led to the government-led development. The government developed new cities, and many companies were involved in them. So they realised about underground parking system as well as floorplan or complex design, which was very competitive. I remember that it was the time when people were concerned about whether they wanted cheaper apartments or a parking space as underground parking cost more at that time in the beginning of 1990s.” (Shindong-a)

While apartment developments have generally upgraded parking systems from the ground to underground, detached houses have turned into dense housing, for instance, removing a garage for cars as well as greenery spaces in response to deregulation discussed in Chapter Two. This led to the dichotomy between apartments and houses in terms of parking space. Despite being denser, apartment complexes have ironically solved parking issues, which have increased in areas of detached housing. One apartment resident, who used to live in a house after her marriage, contrasted this point:

“It was very difficult to park when I used to live in a house. So we had to come back home earlier just to occupy a parking space...it is much easier to park in apartments than in houses.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

The development of underground parking did not only come from the shortage of parking plots, but also the lack of playground and safety issue for children. As described in Chapter Three apartments are generally seen as housing for (middle-class) families in Korea in contrast to other countries. Since the 2000s, therefore, cars are no longer seen on the ground in most new apartment complexes, but only a driveway cut across the complex as shown in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7. 2 Underground parking system



(Source: <http://local.daum.net>)

Instead of parking space, the ground of apartment complexes is often covered by a variety of themed communal gardens as conveniently used for residents and their children without individual maintenance (Figure 7.3), which came to be one of key marketing points.

Figure 7. 3 Examples of communal gardens



(Source: (a) (b) and (c) Author's photograph, (d) <http://happy-box.tistory.com/1188>)

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Following the principles of the Neighbourhood Unit concept, various amenities are usually included in the apartment complex, which is one of the most important reasons for convenience. In commercial buildings within the complex, not only are neighbourhood amenities such as shops, health centres and banks often integral to the complex, but schools can be also organized in the case of the larger complexes. In particular, as outlined in Chapter Three, private education centres are a crucial part of the education system, which resulted in entwining with the apartment complex based on the mutual benefit between the private education business and residents. Figure 7.4 shows an example of a relatively big complex having a large commercial building, a primary school and a middle school integrated into the complex. Although all activities of residents are in fact not limited in the complex, the idea of the Neighbourhood Unit makes them feel convenient and comfort in the sense of making a boundary regardless of actual uses and of actual distances.

Figure 7. 4 An example of apartment complex including schools and commercial building



(Source: Author's drawing on the map from <http://local.daum.net>)

This idea may come from the difference compared to other types of housing neighbourhood with a dispersed pattern usually, which resulted in the polarisation between apartment areas and other housing areas in terms of access to neighbourhood amenities. A former Gangnam resident who used to live in houses until his marriage explained the difference:

“I think houses are very good for individual life as they have their own spaces and gardens, if simply considering it. But other factors of neighbourhood were inconvenient. For instance, in case of going to buy few stuff or going to laundry shop. In an apartment complex, most of them are aggregated together.”  
(Yeoksam Gumho)

The constructed idea of ‘all in one’ pattern may take place in exchange for a biased perspective. The distance from an individual apartment to the commercial building can be actually far to walk in a big complex, compared to the distance to local shops in areas of detached housing. In Figure 7.4, for example, the diagonal length of the complex is about a half mile, which can take relatively long time for those living in the end building at a corner. On the other hand, some shops are far, but others are close in house areas. This point was revealed from a respondent stressing a point on aggregation of amenities, which shows people make their perspectives regardless of a factual sense.



“My mum used to say about the convenience of apartments. There was the Hanyang shopping centre, which has changed to Galleria department store, just in front of the apartment complex. Also, a glasses shop or hospitals, etc. were just across the road. So it was very convenient. But in a house, we had to walk away to go shopping even for foods.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

As can be seen in Figure 7.5, this interviewee moved from a detached house located in the B area to an apartment in the area A. What he mentioned about amenities in apartments are the blocks of D and the road line of E. As the depth of the block A is about 300metres, it is actually not far even in houses area. Given the local market F in the centre of the area B, in fact, it does not seem too much different between the areas A and B in a sense of distance to amenities. This constructed value of apartments is also found in the discourses of technological advancement as contributing to convenient lifestyles.

Figure 7. 5 Spatial pattern of Hanyang apartment complex in Apgujung-dong



Note: A: Apgujung Hanyang complex, B: Other types of housing area, C: Schools, D: Galleria department store, E: Main road, F: Local market

(Source: Author’s drawing on the map from <http://local.daum.net>)

### *Technology and facilities*

Technological advancement seems to relate directly to the improvement of lifestyles, which reflect a desire to live in a ‘state of the art’ way. The coincidence of technology and housing development can cause particular perspectives with connection to a particular form of housing. Not only was technological advancement seen to be lacking in many housing areas, but also housing policy and planning schemes were not well prepared until the introduction of apartments. According to the dramatic

economic growth, the advancement of these systems has been mostly coincident with growth of apartments. Central heating and broadband systems are particular examples of this theme.

One of the most popular reasons for preferring apartments is that apartments are considered to be much warmer than houses. This perception came from some initial trials of a central heating system controlled as a whole building like commercial buildings rather than an individual household, which used to be equipped in the 1970s' apartments. It was accepted not only as more convenient at first because of no need to care about heating individually, but also much warmer. A developer recalled this influence:

“Previously, it was very cold in detached houses, even in western style houses. But it became widespread knowledge that people lived with sleeveless clothes even in winter in ... Gangnam apartments. In fact, however, it was because of a central heating system of a whole building, which was kept turning on and making warm. So it was considered as good, and led to the recognition of merits of apartments over society.” (Samsung 1)

This public recognition is often compounded by the irrational comparison between old houses and new apartments. A resident respondent who used to live in old houses and started living in apartments after his marriage in 2000 made a typical comparison:

“When I started to live in apartments it was so difficult to adapt as it was too warm. It was because I used to live in houses for over 20 years, which were extremely cold. So, at first, I thought I could not live despite wearing short sleeves, despite not turning on the heating.” (Gumho Yeoksam)

Unlike the constructed idea, in some earlier apartments, the residents used to feel very cold as they were not equipped with a central heating system by the time (Jeon et al. 2009). This means that warmth of housing depends on not simply housing types, but other factors may be important. In addition, heating system and heating sources have been developed along with the mass production of high-rise apartments. The radiator system of heating air was introduced by following the western style in the 1960s to

early the 1970s, but it was not well adapted to Korean as accustomed to the floor heating. Those who had radiators, thus, changed again to the *ondol* system advanced from the Korean traditional floor heating, which became general since the mid of 1980s (Jeon et al. 2009). A central heating system of *ondol* fuelled with gas and operated by each household is now adopted in most apartments as well as other types of housing, which means not much difference according to housing types. Some respondents pointed out this perspective of change:

“I saw news articles dealing with that Korea is the best country in technologies of housing construction and the *ondol* system is astonishing. So it is very warm in Korea. That is, it is not so cold even in houses.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

“These days, [even] houses have a central heating system, so there is not much difference between apartments and houses. I don’t think they are so different anymore.” (Gaepo Jugong 2)

In a similar way, the broadband system is often entangled with the apartment complex in discourses of the convenience of apartments. The development of the Korean IT industry since the 1990s has been concomitant with the widespread development of apartments. This point was clearly reflected in some interviews that in terms of setting the broadband, many apartments now have fibre optic broadband, but not in houses. Interestingly, this is not the case in the UK, but the other way round, which means that the efficiency of broadband system is not down to housing types but contextual differences. Likewise, this recognition seems to have recourse to the coincidence of technology and apartment developments. As Korea has the biggest rate in the supply and use of high-speed broadband in the world since 2001 according to the international assessment (Lim 2003), it is publicly shared that the rapid spread of apartments was a reason for the strongest broadband country as can be available to use it on the day when residents move in new apartments (Jeon et al. 2009).

In fact, there was the government’s encouragement by institutionalising a certification system given to buildings having high-speed broadband in 1999 in part to stimulate housing market due to the problem of unsold apartments after the IMF crisis in 1997, which led to the active participation of developers in apartment developments

equipped with the network system (Lim 2003). In this context, the concept of the cyber-apartment was created, and it keeps evolving in various ways of apartment lifestyle. For instance, a sort of cyber community operates through the LAN (Local Area Network) system, giving residents a variety of services such as apartment webpages, local area information, online market and apartment management (Lim 2003). Technology whereby all switches such as lights, heating or cooker could be also controlled by mobile phone or computer remotely is commonplace in apartments. The most recent developments are advertised as even no need to control but sensed by automatic system for energy efficiency. Now, an apartment building is like a computer, which means that housing is not just physical arrangement but perhaps more akin to an operating system in digital society towards more convenient lifestyles.

As discussed in this subsection, the shared perspectives of management system, design scheme and technology have constructed the convenient lifestyles of high-rise apartments by reducing individual burden from gardening and repairing, enjoying benefits of parking system, communal garden and all-in-one amenities, and also privileging the state of the art technology in facilities. The construction of these all equipment seems to lead to the perceptions of secure and safe environment as exclusive places to live in.

### **Security and safety**

Although problems with safety and security are often cited as major reasons of failure of high-rise apartments in other countries, security and safety are key words for those that prefer apartments to houses in Korea. Interestingly much of the academic discourse is that high-rise housing is particularly unsuitable for families with young children as based on inherent disadvantages such as not enough play areas and difficulties of surveillance. The opposite seems to be the case in Korea. The discrepancy between these seems to relate to social construction according to different contexts.

The comparison between apartments and houses is often in accord with the reinforcement of preferring apartments rather than houses in relation to the perception

of security. A resident showed her fear of daily life in houses to compare with apartment life:

“It was so stressful going out as I had to lock all windows as all houses are same. Even when I wanted to take a nap, all doors and windows had to be locked. Otherwise, I felt unsafe. But living in apartments, my only care is the entrance door, and no need to care about windows especially on higher floors.”  
(Chamsil Ricentz 2)

This recognition of security sense in high-rise apartments influences the change in perspectives against houses which used to be ‘normal’. Another resident linked social problem to the structure of houses.

“First of all, security is important although there is convenience. It is because houses used to be said that were often broken into by burglars. Also, they are very shallow as one or two floors, so that it can be seen very well from outside...” (Chamwon Hanshin)

In this constructed notion, security guards as a part of management system play an important factor in apartment life. Their main duty is to look after safety and security issues around apartment complex, patrolling at night and preventing entry by strangers. This helps residents feel safe and secure, which was stressed by an apartment resident:

“When I used to live in a detached house, it was so scary because there was an incident where a burglar broke in, moving over the roofs of neighbouring houses in the night. But here, security guards are always in apartment complex, so it was convenient and safe to go out just by locking a door.” (Eunma)

This is often compared to houses that do not have the system in general, but rely on security alarm, which is perceived as inadequate. This is an idea that circulates through social relationships, as a resident pointed out:

“I heard from other mums who moved out to the suburbs...security alarm services such as Cescio is not very reliable, because people operate it improperly sometimes and children can touch it. Also, although its service is supposed to come in three minutes, the service team tends to come after everything happened in many cases.” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

In a similar vein, apartments contrast with houses in terms of children’s playgrounds as equipped in the communal garden, which is not generally the case in areas of detached housing. Unlike the prejudice of existing knowledge, apartment complexes are thus considered to be much safer for children to play outside in Korea, whereas playing outside in alleys is seen as always dangerous because of cars in house areas.

“The most important reason for not wanting to live in houses is safety, as there should be kinds of playground for bringing up children. But there is not that kind of space in house areas, and it is very dangerous when kids go outside because of cars. They can be hurt if not watch out, and there are many accidents in the alleys.” (Chamwon Hanshin)

From this perception and accustomed practical sense, actually, the researcher myself took a bit of time to be familiar with the system of houses, which has no playgrounds but playing in the alleys for my two young sons who were just one and six year-olds, when moved firstly in the UK. As contrasted to the negative perspectives of houses in Korea, this calls to mind the opinion of Paige in the documentary film “Poor kids” that “Kids should be in houses with their dog and their rabbit and all that”. In this sense, it can be assumed that aspiration or preference is not definite values or concepts, but constructed ideas. This leads to the irrational effect that can ignore the reality. Many accidents in apartment complex are also frequently reported, although less than in houses: for instance, accidents involving children running out from entrances into the road or riding inline-skates and being hit by oncoming cars. Also, shuttle buses for nursery and *hakwon* (after-school education centre) cause many accidents when children get on or off from the bus. This is linked to the high ratio of walking accident as 36.4% in 2009 (over twice the OECD average of 17.2% and about four times that of other countries with around 10% such as Belgium and the USA; Park 2010). This figure can suggest that it cannot be presumed the relationship

between housing types and safety ratio. Nevertheless, the lower accident rate reported in apartment complexes than in housing area can make people comfortable, although car accidents are not avoidable as driveways are still passing through the apartment complex despite all underground parking system. A resident respondent expressed her comfort:

“These days, there are not many cars in apartment complexes. So, as I am bringing up children, it can make less sense of uneasiness even though I let my kids play outside, such as cycling.” (Bangbae Hyundai II)

This effect can rationalise the reality. As can be seen in Figure 7.6, the apartment complex where the interviewee of Bangbae Hyundai II lives in was built with 364 households in 6 *dong* (blocks) in 2001, which is not a big complex with a relatively small communal garden. Children’s activities such as cycling, skating and playing balls are thus likely to happen in the playground and communal garden. This may be a similar effect as cul-de-sac design that is preferred for children to play outside on the road, giving the safer sense in the UK. Apart from the practical and factual sense, the image is constructed over the particular built environment. This perhaps enables it to be sublimated into branding residential environment like other consumer products.

Figure 7. 6 Hyundai II apartment complex in Bangbae-*dong*, Seocho-*gu*



(Source: <http://local.daum.net>)

### **Brand awareness**

A secure and safe family life based on convenient facilities and systems is entirely incorporated to the perception of brand awareness, which grants the belief that all

needs and wishes are satisfied in these complexes. This seems to transform an aggregation of all shared discourses of apartment lifestyles into a single word, 'brand', apart from the practical sense. In other words, the brand name represents every aspect of apartments as a product. A respondent who moved to Dogok Raemian, which was the first complex to be given a brand name, stressed her belief in branded products:

“Anyway, Samsung is the best in Korea, so I believed in it. This was built in the intervention period of the IMF, but I moved here only based on the belief of Samsung. Because we think Samsung always does the best. In addition, people tend to say that I live in a nice place if I tell them that I live in Dogok Samsung Raemian. It is good not only that prices increase a lot, but also that I tell to others where I live. If people live in an unknown name of apartments, they should talk again in another way as others cannot recognise it. Anyway, I have a confidence that I live in the branded apartments. Well, I don't know, maybe small companies can also build very well. But I still think that the brand name is important because their services are much better. This means that it is not just physical factors, but, for instance, it can be much faster at AS (after service), if I need some fixing...” (Dogok Raemian)

As she indicated, brand awareness has taken place since the economic downturn in 1997, partly in response to the situation in which consumers were not convinced of investment to properties as well as the saturation of housing market (over 90% of housing supply ratio at the end of 1990s). This led to a competitive environment between housebuilding companies, challenging a new paradigm of a more 'luxurious' and 'differentiated' product with a target towards wealthier social groups. A developer described how his company strived to adapt to this new housing environment, emphasising the 'history' of Hyundai as the first private company involved in high-rise apartments, notably, Apgujung Hyundai apartments complex (see Chapter Three):

“Brand awareness of apartments emerged from around 1999 or 2000, and Cyberapartments by Samsung and Hometown by Hyundai may have been the first of the branding...When they changed the name from Cyberapartments to



Raemian, it became really famous. But Hyundai kept the Hometown, even though Hyperion came out together. Samsung has focused on services strategically, but we didn't catch it in negative point, although we can put it as tenacity on the positive side. So it has been around ten years, and we launched a new brand, Hillstate, 3 years ago, which intended to create 'a housing culture with housing history'. Based on that concept, we have focused on the strategy of luxury, and now moved onto a differentiation strategy." (Hyundai 1)

This new practice of targeting luxury segments through brand manipulation also coincided with a change in policy to boost the economy by the abolition of the price control policy in 1998. It is interesting to contrast this market response with the stigmatisation not only of public housing but mass-produced private housing in countries like the UK. The change in institutional environment (the abolition of price controls) has actually brought about unexpected outcomes in terms of, for example, housing affordability and social polarisation. At least, it has given a new opportunity for developers and residents to move onto different patterns of housing production and consumption, which may be seen as boosting market activities or as a renewal of institutional practices. This gave developers freedom to set prices without limits on the product quality. A developer highlighted the link between the policy change and their branding strategy:

"There used to be price control. But it had been removed since the IMF. As price cap was deregulated, companies could make differentiated [products]. If we improve the quality of the product, attracting consumers, housing prices increase even more. That is, say, I made a value of hundred won, and people appreciated it as good, which led to increase the price to two hundred won. In that way, we could make quality differentiation, and increase the value of the brand name. It would not be possible if there was still price control.... The strategy of making expensive and selling expensive would not be possible. But it was possible at that time. That is how Raemian has grown." (Samsung 2)

This mechanism is similar to the psychic costs of 'snob value' in economic terms, which can be a reason behind residential movement from normal to luxury producer-branded apartments engendered by the new institutional environment. A particular

development became a major issue, leading to a complete change in the marketing paradigm and resulting in much higher prices than before the IMF. A developer who was involved in the development explicitly showed this phenomenon:

“We supplied 142 units from 72 to 107 *pyong* (238 to 353 m<sup>2</sup>) in 1998 just after the IMF [crisis] in 1997. Others said that it was a crazy idea when we were selling them. It was even more expensive. But it was so competitive between consumers to get them. How could it be explained? That is it. There was over supply due to no demand, which was an impact of the IMF. But old apartments were more expensive, because there were not enough large apartments. It means that there was potential demand. It had to be a target. So we decided to provide them, and it was successful.” (Samsung 1)

The brand awareness can be rooted on not only physical improvements, but it can also emerge from such snob effect. This means that the brand name is not necessarily related to the physical quality of products. This idea was mostly recognised among interviewees, although they still valued branded apartments more. How the psychic cost can be effective is clearly seen in this sense. A resident respondent made a point of the irrationality of the idea and behaviour:

“Sometimes I wish to live in new branded apartments if I visit there. But it is said not as good as it would be with the name value from my friends’ experience...some people say that it is nice ambiguously. They don’t have concrete evidence, but they just say that something, even the door handle, is different...” (Gwangju Detached-house)

Given the mechanism of brand awareness appealing to consumers, developers cannot avoid manipulating this marketing strategy in their production. Not only is the product itself concerned, but the strategy of branding is also a critical point in the housebuilding business, as a developer suggested:

“We are a bit concerned. Since the Raemian, it has been weakened the image of brand name as mostly preferred by 30-40s in the survey. So it is concerning in some sense whether we should make [and even] more luxury brand. But it can

be risky that Raemian becomes image of cheaper. So we can do neither this way nor that way. We did Tower Palace, but others with same condominium type are named with Trapalace. This was because it needs to be different. So Tower Palace is the only one. And Trapalace is the brand name of the condominium type...however, we decided not to use the Trapalace, because there was an issue that Trapalace [would be seen as] more luxury and Raemian as less luxury. So we intend to use just Raemian for the new products for the time being, although it is still controversial...this is because we should do business for the masses, although we can aim completely for luxury. If we are biased to one way, it can make the other degraded comparatively. So we are quite concerned about it.”  
(Samsung 2)

In accordance with the value of brand name, the characteristics of housing products have changed remarkably from physical to non-physical terms. Not only have tangible factors such as exterior and interior designs improved, but intangible concepts of culture and service have come to be significant in the housing market.

### **Evolution of products**

Since the 1970s up to the end of the 1990s, an apartment product was relatively simple in the period of mass-production. Given the physical difference from houses, there was no need of any particular features as a product in the very first stage in the phase of a cultural shift from houses to apartments encouraged by the supply-oriented policy. The site was only considered by the time, as a developer recalled:

“From about the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, apartment demand was markedly increasing. So, it was all successful if companies just got such good sites...at the time, the middle classes aged 30s, 40s and 50s used to live in detached houses. Most of them moved to 60 *pyong* apartments, 50 *pyong* and so on because it was a progress of change to apartment culture.” (Shindong-a)

This simple notion of apartment product came to be distinguished by branded apartments from previous non-branded ones in terms of exterior and interior design with a variety of cultural services.

### *Exterior design*

The physical form of apartment buildings has changed in various ways such as their height, shape and aesthetics. The most remarkable change has been the number of floors, which have increased from five to over sixty in some developments. Until the Asian economic downturn in 1997, 12-15 floors appeared to be the norm, with the exception of some early period apartment developments having only five floors without lifts. This normalized pattern was, however, confronted with the turn into being outmoded all of a sudden after the deregulation of housing policy to overcome the financial crisis due to the bailout of IMF. In particular, the deregulated portion of residential part in condominium type of buildings up to 90%, as well as other policy derestrictions such as replacing office and commercial space with residences, contributed to the enormous increase in the provision of super high-rise apartments (Yang 2011). As the ratio of total building area could be legitimately achieved up to 900-1500% the in urban commercial sector (see Chapter Three), the super high-rise condominium apartments came to the fore as a new type of residential apartments, which is also a response to the new change in institutional environment. At the centre of this issue, the Tower Palace in Figure 7.7 became to represent the most luxury and expensive apartments as the first development of the type completed in 2002. This led to the new discourse of ‘the higher, the more luxurious’, as in the US skyscraper boom. A developer respondent framed it thus:

“Super high-rise development is prevalent at the moment. Even normal apartments are not just 20 or 25 floors, but over 50 floors in the case of Busan. So, as apartments are getting higher like 52 floors...consumers requires higher-rise as they tend to think that there can be premium value in super high-rise building. This is because super high-rise is more expensive than normal apartments.” (Hyundai 1)

Figure 7. 7 The Tower Palace



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(a) Entrance with commercial parts of buildings      (b) Blocks of the Tower Palace

(Source: (a) Author's photograph (b) Lee 2007)

As the condominium apartments have a different shape, it also led to a physical transformation in general apartment buildings from horizontally long and thin to vertical tower shape. The Tower Palace and the new developed areas has blocks that are shorter in length and taller in height, whereas the old areas has a typical shape of buildings with long length and thin width, as a south-faced arrangement in general. In the Figure 7.8, the old buildings contrast with new apartments. The tower shape is considered as giving more communal space than previous type of apartments, which is thus now recommended by the government based on the critiques of an ugly landscape with dull and grey features of old apartments.

Figure 7. 8 Old and new apartments in Chamsil complexes



(a) Unreconstructed 5<sup>th</sup> complex      (b) Recently reconstructed 2<sup>nd</sup> complex

(Source: Author's photographs)

Branded apartments are differentiated not only by their height and shape, but also through more detail and ornamental characteristics compared to the simple box design of old apartments. The design of branded products is more focused on the exterior to make the difference from the non-branded apartments. For instance, as can be seen in Figure 7.9, roof, entrance, and wall with brand logo contrast with previous apartments. As a developer described, this phenomenon is due to the brand name:

“Since the IMF, supply has been changed a lot from around 2000 up to now. It led to a sharp increase in apartment price, and the trend tends to move from the inner space to exterior based on the sense of ‘well-being’. So it was competitively developed by adopting brand name, which has focused on the roof, communal garden design, entrance and so on, like clothes!” (Shindong-a)

Even the exterior colour of buildings in order to mark out a unique identity and cohesive image of the apartment complex, designed in some cases by foreign artists, for example, French colour designer Jean Philippe Lenclos, has become a distinctive marketing point (Figure 7.10). These are due to the highly competitive market environment, which leads to the ‘tactics’ of developers:

“We specialise in exterior colour. This is because apartment buildings are inevitable to be simple with windows in the flat wall or at most patterns of concrete rib as they are built by stocking with a steel cast. So we paint on it with differentiated colours, for example, a rainbow colour designed by a French artist. Another trend is eco-friendly, using such as wind power. In some sense, it looks like [we’re] playing games, but each company has those kind of things, for example, saving system of heating, using terrestrial heat or solar heat and so on. In addition, as I watched on the TV, the Daerim Company is advertising that they enlarge the width of parking space by 10cm, because it is very tight with original law when the door is open. That is, it is like tactics.” (Hyundai 1)

From the competition of developers, the physical quality of housing can be improved in some sense. Nevertheless, based on the mass-production and the maximizing behaviour of developers, difference becomes similarity in no time as innovations become commonplace to a new standard as cultural structure in the housing market,

which is discussed in later section. This seems to be similar in the improvement of indoor design.

Figure 7. 9 Change in roof and wall design with brand logo



(a) Old apartments

(b) New apartments

(Source: (a) <http://local.daum.net> (b) Author's photograph)

Figure 7. 10 Distinctive designs in exterior

Copyright material, which has been removed for electronic publication. The original printed version of this thesis contains the full image.

(a) Entrance with the brand name      (b) Colour walls designed by a French artist

(Source: (a) <http://kiup.joinsland.com> (b) Hyundai Hillstate webpages

<http://www.hillstate.co.kr/>)

### *Indoor layout*

The most crucial change in the indoor plan of apartments since the branding era has been the enlargement of the unit size, which was led by the deregulation of price control. This assumed the potential consumer of wealthier social groups based on snob value, as mentioned earlier. A supplier responded as to why developers were indulging consumer tastes for larger size of apartments:

“Since the bailout of IMF, the housing market was remarkably supported by deregulation. This led to the new paradigm, and motivated the new investment

to buy apartments, which increased prices sharply. So developers went through fire and water for supply. This means that developers went for whatever or wherever to make profits as much as we can, because price control was abolished. So it was considered that the money was in large apartments, and the large apartments are more increased in price, therefore, large size is better. That is why developers supplied larger apartments unconditionally.” (Shindong-a)

Before this period, with the exception of some examples supplied by the government consisting of up to about 80 *pyong* (264m<sup>2</sup>) or duplex apartments as outlined in Chapter Three, most products of apartments were around 30 *pyong* by private developers, which is considered as the standard size of middle-classes, whereas the public sector was focused on smaller units. A developer respondent clearly told me that:

“We usually supplied the type of 30s *pyong*, with 25.7 *pyong* of habitable areas, and didn’t do small one. Also, we supplied bigger as well such as the Type of 40s and 50s, but over 50% were the Type of 30s...as we consider the Type of 30s as middle-class, it has three bedrooms generally. That is, it can give separate room each for son and daughter for the family aged 30-40s with two small children, and a room for parents. At that time, as the Type of 40s has a study room, those who are above middle-class with grown-up children tend to buy it. So we usually did the Type of 30s.” (Samsung 2)

Around 33 *pyong* normally with three bedrooms is the size most demanded by general middle income households (Figure 7.11).



Figure 7. 11 The typical floorplan of 30s



Note: The unit of around 34 *pyong* (approximately 112m<sup>2</sup>). Other size units have a generally similar arrangement, but only the number of rooms is different.

(Source: Samsung Raemian webpages <http://raemian.com/main.do>)

There are broadly two types of unit arrangement in a building, depending on the number of households that use a same lift. In a corridor style, all units in a corridor use the same lift, while a staircase style has a lift for only two units in a floor, which requires more lifts in a building. The former one is likely to have a lower construction cost and more units because of a lesser number of lifts compared to the other one. In the early period of apartment construction, the corridor type was used in general in smaller apartments. However, it has two major disadvantages in that not only does this plan have actually a smaller size of the unit as corridor is included in the area of unit plan, but it is also weaker at privacy opened to the corridor. Therefore, most apartments have provided a staircase style after around the 1990s.

The areas of a unit are divided into three categories generally. The first category represents actual habitable areas that include rooms, kitchen and indoor entrance only used by the residents of the unit, and that are accounted for legal ownership, housing size and taxation. The supply system of new buildings is thus based on this figure, which has four divisions of under 60m<sup>2</sup>, 85m<sup>2</sup>, 102m<sup>2</sup> and over 135m<sup>2</sup>. According to this categorization, eligibility to buy a new apartment is differently adopted, varying the types of the housing saving scheme. Secondly, staircase, corridor and outdoor entrance hall is categorised as inner common areas. Broadly, four standards above fall

into the types of 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s *pyong* respectively, which makes one of the representative factors in apartment units. Lastly, service areas are given to balcony, veranda or terrace as additional spaces, but not counted in the supply areas. The floor plan can be thus larger if service areas are more included, although it is the same Type of *pyong*. Therefore, less common areas but more service areas are an essential point in designing and supplying for developers and consumers.

In this sense, staircase styles are more likely to have enough service areas than corridor ones. Compared to (a), (b) and (e) in Figure 7.12, the rest of them have more service areas (grid) in back as well as front of the floorplan, and these can be extended to become part of the adjacent rooms. This enables even the small case of 60m<sup>2</sup> to become decent three bedrooms as can be seen in (d).

Figure 7. 12 The standardised size and floorplan since the 1980s



(Source: Gang 1997a)

The extension of service area use as living space was, however, illegal until December 2005, but it was very common for people to use larger areas. The areas used to be empty or storage space if not extended. After the law of balcony extension

became effective, it practically led to the extension of actual habitable areas. This resonates with the trend towards larger apartments, but actually caused a preference change towards smaller apartments, as they could be bought at a lower cost while giving bigger space. According to this, housing market seems to change, which led to developers' complaints:

“Previously, there was more supply in large size over 40s, 50s and 60s than now. It was because consumers had cognition that larger sizes can be more valued for investment. So we supplied on that standard. But it was destroyed totally...the main reason is that extension of verandas is legal now. That is, if you extend 30s, it can become around 40s. So you don't have to buy larger apartments.” (Hyundai 2)

“Larger apartments tend to be priced down and are not selling very well at the moment. I guess it is because there is much difference between current building and previous one in 25 *pyong*. 25 *pyong* apartment now is same as previous 32 *pyong* as all extended.” (Samsung 1)

In accordance with this phenomenon of extension, providers now tend to suggest two options, for example, that are basic style of (a) and extension type of (b), as shown in Figure 7.13. It is clear that (b) has much larger plan for living areas compared to (a). This is also an apparent example how institutional environment influences the perspectives of developers and consumers, which results in cultural change becoming a new standard in the housing production and consumption.

Figure 7. 13 An example of veranda extension



(a) basic type

(b) extension type



(c) connection to all rooms

(d) open plan

(Source: Samsung Raemian webpages <http://raemian.com/main.do>)

Following the enlargement of floorplans and the extension of service spaces, a variety of design changes emerged under the competitive environment. For instance, bathrooms and dress rooms became a focal point of marketing. In general, most apartments used to have only one bathroom in the Types of 20s and 30s *pyong*. Not only have two bathrooms, however, been possible even in the Type of 20s currently, but dress rooms have also come to be seen as essential in types of over 30 *pyong*. This is due to the extension of service areas in the staircase style. In addition, the number of bays counted by rooms in the front side, which are south-facing, came to be significant as competitively developed. As shown in Figure 7.12, a 2-bay design having only one bedroom and living room in front was usual up in types of up to 30 *pyong* in (a) to (f), but over 40s *pyong* used to have 3-bays having two bedrooms and living room in (g) and (h). The recent developments, however, have mostly a 4-bay design like Figure 7.13, even in the smaller 20s *pyong* type. On the other hand, although all of these various designs have been developed, the main concept of the LDK (open plan living room, dining room, and kitchen) plan is standardised and still

kept up to the present, as can be seen in Figure 7.12 and 7.13. This open plan LDK style is the most favoured as it can feel bigger, although there have been various trials such as Europe style (separate) kitchens in the 1990s.

This typical type of design scheme has been characterized as a western lifestyle with all rooms included inside a building, compared to the traditional housing consisted of array of rooms, which allowed for women to do housework mostly outside and also toilets existed in outdoor spaces. The inconvenience of the traditional layout is often raised as a reason why apartments are preferred. A resident pointed out this:

“In previous times, the insides of houses were only for staying, but most work was done outside. As water taps or wells were in outdoor, so washing vegetables or laundries were done outside. But in apartments, everything can be done inside, so it can make for a short line of path as well as being warmer.”  
(Gaepo Jugong 2)

Unlike this perspective, however, the western styles of floorplan were general in detached houses built in around the 1970s, and even previous houses such as the Moonhwa or Gookmin houses had also adopted the western styles, which is not very different to the current apartment layouts as discussed in Chapter Two. This also shows how ideas are collectively shared and normalised regardless of factual sense. In fact, new ideas in apartments that are differentiated from houses have emerged along with the brand name in terms of an intangible culture related to the service attached to the products.

### *Culture and service*

In spite of a number of design challenges as outlined in this subsection, exterior and interior design do not differ remarkably, because spaces are limited and profits should be maximized within a legal framework. Increasingly, differences thus came from innovative ideas beyond the physicality of buildings. For instance, developers do not only provide services for cleaning carpets or bathrooms, but also support the residents' cultural lives by holding music concerts, cultural lectures, festivals or leisure events (Figure 7.14). These have come to represent an exclusive identity,

incorporated into the brand name. Now, it became normalised in the housing market and Gangnam consumers expect such services naturally.

“Consumers even consider who designs, because we also market that, or whether it is a work of art, so it is getting harder to make products. Community spaces and facilities such as golf centres, kids or fitness clubs are basic...It is getting complex. Space only used to be provided before, but now we need to provide ongoing lifestyle services.” (Shindong-a)

As a result, prices of apartments have sharply increased, as all of these additional services require astronomically higher costs. A developer highlighted the inevitable phenomenon:

“Big conglomerates focus on services. It is not only our company, but others such as Samsung, Daerim and Daewoo are also the same. The costs to provide services are unimaginable. I cannot tell exactly how much it is, but it costs around several ten billion won.” (Hyundai 1)

Figure 7. 14 An example of cultural event marketing for residents



(a) Music festival

(b) Golf championship

(Source: LG Xi Webpages <http://www.xi.co.kr/main/index.asp>)

There is no doubt that apartments as a product have enormously evolved as a whole way of life congruent with the definition of culture being inscribing into the simple concrete box. As suggested in this section, apartments were not simply the physical shelter nor the individual emotion emerged from their private space in discourses of meaning of housing, as discussed in the introduction chapter. In this sense, the

existing explanations of why high-rise apartments have been favoured in Korea unlike other western societies in terms of rational and economic reasons are not fully satisfied to these broad and deep phenomena. Certainly, there have been collectively shared meanings and practices rather than calculable factors through the integration of the collective values into a particular type of housing, especially high-rise apartments in Korea. Furthermore, how social ideology is incorporated to a particular housing is also important part of constructing built environments, which is explored in the next section.

## **7.2 Social attachment**

Individualism and the weakened traditional order of community are the central ideas in the modernist ideology. This modernism in the built environment has been circulated around suburban houses separating private and public space in the UK and some western countries, which was discussed in Chapter Four. On the contrary, the same ideology has been attached to high-rise apartments in Korea. This inconsistency then suggests that the relationship between housing types and social relationships cannot be assumed in a deterministic way. In Korea, nevertheless, many people seem to believe that apartments are better for privacy than houses, while some think the other way round. High-rise apartment lifestyles have thus been accused of extreme individualism with the lost community by many academics and general public, and all features described in the last section have been considered as helping this modernist ideology. This section explores some of the ideas underpinning this notion in terms of privacy, communication and community.

### **Privacy**

Privacy may be not a concept that can be definitely achieved through particular forms of housing such as detached houses, but a socially constructed idea regardless of housing forms. Physical closeness in apartments seems not to relate to the idea of privacy, as many people consider that apartments can give more privacy than houses. A resident who has lived in apartments for over 30 years identified a private life in apartments compared by highlighting of the spatial merit of houses:

“Living in houses can be better in terms of space as it is more spacious compared to apartments. But in apartments, it is not only easier to be in groups, but also it is supposed to live in a private way without considering neighbours.”  
(Gaepo Jugong 2)

Presumably, it seems that social or individual ideas are reflected in the construction of a social ideology rather than the physical limits. In other words, individual experiences and social knowledge are entangled with a particular form of housing. During the massive supply of apartments, Korean society was adopting the western lifestyle of individualism based on urbanisation and industrialisation. Apartments and houses are often compared beyond the time combining social ideology with the individual life. A resident respondent who has lived in apartments since her marriage framed an ideal life and her experience in houses at younger age:

“Apartments are more convenient in the sense of privacy...because there is hardly any relation to others compared to in detached houses...In detached houses, neighbourhood relationships can be better. This can be good for adults, but I felt it was too open when I was young. I mean it looks like more open...but people have a sort of feeling to aspire more an individual and free life. When simply considering with foreign countries, they seem more free and comfortable at a glance.” (Chamsil Ricentz 1)

According to her, the westernized lifestyle of individualism came to be a social norm to aspire to. This is thus interpreted in various ways according to individual's circumstances. A resident who lives in a luxury villa, which is located in areas where many foreigners reside, contrasted apartments and detached-houses with villas based on the idea of westernised individualism somewhat extremely:

“The reason I have lived in villa is that it is very individualistic. We do not know who lives next door...my parents, parents-in-law and myself really don't like living in apartments...this area is where many foreigners live in, so it is very individualistic....Even we do not greet each other...I don't like apartments because I hate the relationship of strangeness between up and down stairs without knowing each other, but greeting awkwardly...I do not understand why



apartments are so expensive, and I think it is irrational...the merit of villa is a lot more privacy than in detached-houses. Detached-houses are very closely connected only by fence-wall and fence-wall.” (Seorae Village)

Clearly, her perspective shows the irrelevance of housing forms and privacy. Villas share walls with neighbours in a similar form of medium-rise flats in the UK, whereas neighbours in detached-houses are separated by fences. In addition, as she connoted, there may be a misunderstanding of ‘individualism’ for privacy as not care at all with neighbours in western society. In fact, it was one of the most impressive culture that many British greets each other in the street, as I came to be surprised at first in the UK’s life, though not all do in the same way. Interestingly, the next respondent found a better private life in detached houses since her marriage, although she expected to prefer apartment lifestyles as she used to live in apartments previously:

“I change my mind from time to time. That is, I think apartments are good for youth if I consider its convenience, but apartments have noise matters or neighbourhood relationships that are various in that some are good but some are bad. Such problems are not in houses. I now live in a detached house with two floors that my parents-in-law use downstairs and we use upstairs, so we don’t have that kind of problems...this area is very individualistic. Actually, one reason of not giving up this house is that we don’t want to be mixed with others as well...There is always too much talk if it’s crowded. So it is really nice once I just live in a house quietly, in some sense, without coming by others.” (Secho Detached-house)

These juxtaposed ideas from some examples above suggest a new way of thinking about the concept of privacy. What can be presumed here is that the dominant discourse of private life in apartments apart from the individual interpretation has been constructed by the entanglement of the mass production and the period of adopting the western ideology. In this context, a somewhat new concept of ‘communication’ as a neighbourhood relationship seems to be prevalent as a middle ground between privacy and community.

## Communication

Regarding apartment lifestyles, the word ‘communication’ tends to be widely used, often confused with community. Communication seems to have a meaning of practical relationship based on the give-and-take of information, such as about housing market and education, but to keep privacy not to be interested in others’ life. This conception of social relationship was explicitly described in the soap opera, called ‘Follow-up Gangnam’s mum’ broadcast in 2007, which dealt with the social problem of ‘education-fever’ in Korea. In the story, the main actress who moved from Gangbuk to Gangnam for her son’s education as a single mum working in a restaurant is following up lifestyles in Gangnam advised by her senior colleague:

A: Nowadays, men compare their wife with the types of duck...A sulfur duck (known as healthy food) is compared to those women who increase their assets by property investment although do not have occupation. They are not chatting and playing now, but communicating and discussing information together.

B: What information?

A: Well, either properties or children’s education.

⋮

A: Please don’t pretend to know something if you have really close friendship.

People in this area don’t like their privacy to be interrupted.

(3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007, SBS Broadcast, episode 4)

Regular meetings in apartments or through children in playground or schools are the usual methods of communication. ‘Women’s communities’ (*Buneohoe*), a ‘local meeting’ (*Bansanghoe*) or ‘representative committee of apartment residents’ as regular meetings, however, tend to be limited to only those who are interested, and most residents are not regularly involved. Instead, communication is more likely to happen through a mediation of children like mum’s meetings, as many students in a school might come from the same apartment complex.

“Mums tend to have a tea time in their homes in turn, chatting about apartments or education. For example, this is good at layout. This is south-faced or east-

faced. How this *hakgun* is...General opinions between mums are that apartment price is very well increasing in over 30s *pyong*, so you should buy not only over 30s *pyong* but also branded apartments if you want to buy one.” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

In this sense, apartment complexes can in principle ease communication. The interviewee who was quoted in an earlier section and moved from house areas to apartment areas with schools in the middle of them (Figure 7.5) recalled his memory based on his mum’s experience:

“Communication between next door neighbours, upstairs and downstairs through the line of elevator was very active for information of education or housing price and so on, rather than very close relationship...But house was not so close except just next door neighbour because it was dispersed horizontally...To be honest, I could feel that my mum favoured apartments not only because of their convenience but also she felt less benefit and bad emotion...because mums in apartment areas were much more powerful in communicating information.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

Based on the middle range of social relationship as neither intimacy nor strangers, neighbourhood consciousness seems to operate by a tacit understanding and its expectation, which is accepted as appropriate lifestyles in terms of ideas of modern society. A resident who has lived in apartments from her childhood and used to live in a semi-detached house in the UK from 2004 to 2008 made a point of her perspective to keep privacy and communication:

“I introduced myself to my neighbours with a cup of coffee when I came here at first. It was because it can be easier to avoid strangeness when I meet them in the lift. So we just can say hello when we come upon each other, but no more than that such as coming around their home...I don’t feel any inconvenience caused by others although I live in apartments, in my case. Others don’t bother me at all. It may be that people are not interested in their neighbours because of becoming individualistic by getting urbanised as big cities. I have hardly experienced inconvenience because of neighbours.” (Chamwon Hanyang)

Her individual effort to make a cup of coffee is seen to carry on the social relationship modified to fit in modern ideology. In fact, this behaviour is originated from traditional custom in Korea that those who move in a new home used to give a Korean rice cake to new neighbours to introduce themselves. Given the individual lifestyles, this custom has come to fade out, and is not expected to be done any more in modern culture. One respondent expressed her embarrassing experience to continue the culture:

“When I moved in the previous apartment, I distributed a cake to neighbours in my line. But when I did it, I just felt something uncomfortable, feeling that they think ‘why are you doing this?’.” (Dogok Rexle)

This modified social relationship and the privacy ideology seems to be interpreted as practically ideal, which can be achieved by apartment lifestyles in Korean modernity. Given this social ideology, the concepts of community have been adopted differently according to the central focus of social contexts, such as the traditional intimacy, social groups and common interests.

### **Community**

The concept of community is defined by broadly three terms. The first definition is the group of people living in a particular place and the place in which they live. The second meaning is people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group or nationality. In the third sense, it points out the neighbourhood relationship of caring and friendly feeling. These concepts have been adopted into particular forms of housing according to social change. In general, people recall their childhood living in local community with friendly neighbourhoods, which is combined with the first and third meanings. At that time, as most housing types were detached-houses, feelings about houses are likely to be connected to the intimate sense of neighbourhoods. On the other hand, given the social expectancy of apartment lifestyles in the sense of individualism to achieve privacy, the particular purpose of communities are focused on the second meaning, especially based on the social groups. In this, the third meaning has been removed somewhat on purpose,

which is perhaps why apartments have sometimes been accused of having broken the neighbourhood.

In the earlier development apartments, communities as an autonomous organisation are usually categorised in terms of gender or age, such as for children, elderly people, or women. The purpose of these communities is to support or contribute to everyday life in apartments. Elderly community centres seem to be well organised as their needs, which helps to socialise the lonely parents who originated from a previous rural life. In particular, activities of women's community (*Buneohoe*) are wide, formally and informally. Regular meetings are closely connected with women's community, operating apartment management: a 'local meeting' (*Bansanghoe*) is divided by local authorised areas, which was enacted in 1976 by the government to help residents' public affairs together, while an autonomous organisation of a 'representative committee of apartments residents' is present in apartments complexes. A variety of forms of participation is also seen in the role of women's communities, from control of all activities within the complex, such as a day market or a notice board, which generates funds for lending spaces for them, to serving lunch for elderly centre, supporting children's study, and organizing events or charities for the poor. Furthermore, their power sometimes influences economic and political practices over environmental issues or even controlling apartment prices. Anecdotally, the change in political power from Democratic Party to Conservative Party in the last presidential election in 2007 was due to women's power in Gangnam against the last government's regulation of a 'total property tax' targeting on usually higher middle-class enacted in 2003 as mentioned in Chapter Three. It is said that this consensus affected other areas and lower-class populations that are not entitled to the tax.

These communities, however, used to be considered as artificial meetings that should be made by some members for some specific purpose, and not many residents have been interested or participated in their activities. The resident above who had lived in the UK also mentioned not to participate in regular meetings and her individuality:

“I am not participating in the *Buneohoe*. There is also *Bansanghoe*, but I think it tends to be centred on those who are involved in the regular meetings...it may

be because I am not a very socializing person...I could be more communicated with neighbours when I lived in the UK. However, I think that it still depends on individual personality. If someone intended to communicate with neighbours, they could do so. But, in my case, I don't think that there could be any difference whether I lived in houses or apartments. It may be because not only were they foreigners, but my limits also made no connection.” (Chamwon Hanyang)

As compared with her experience living in a semi-detached house in the UK, she highlighted no difference between housing types but her personality. This may be compounded by a number of reasons, for example, not only individual personality but also social ideology as the individual idea is also prevalent in UK modern society. This again suggests that there is no definite relationship between built forms and social relationship. Nevertheless, the lack of community sense seems to relate, in particular, to the inherently negative view of apartment complexes in discourses. This has led to a recent discourse of community as a second meaning but focusing on common interests rather than social groups with the intention of reviving the third meaning. The newly created idea of cultural space described in the last section seems partly aiming at this ideology of community in accordance with the branding apartments, as with gated communities based on common interest development. This is achieved by the equipment of more facilities for various activities, for example, golf, swimming, free-of-charge saunas and fitness centres, cafe, a banqueting hall or even guest house for visitors like a hotel service (Figure 7.15). This was actually ignited by the Tower Palace, which created a ‘one-stop service’ culture, as pointed out by the officer in the management office:

“This complex is based on ‘one-stop service’. While previous apartments tend to be only for residential space, this is a condominium building with community that includes golf centre, swimming pool, sauna or fitness facility. In addition, there are not only study room for kids, billiards, karaoke and video room, but also a club house as a sort of a cafe to make people feel free. In existing apartments, there should be someone who leads artificial meetings such as women’s community, and they didn’t have spaces to make natural relationships because those apartments are isolated. However, here, such functions or

concepts are supplied according to various activities and individual interests. For example, residents can make a bond of sympathy between residents while they talk in the sauna or in the club house, or play golf together. Also, they can make a network of residents by children's activities in billiards, karaoke and so on. That is an invaluable function as it is not artificial but natural network space. So, there is no women's community in this complex, because of no meanings to formulate it...that is, it was a creation of a new culture." (Community officer in the Tower Palace)

Figure 7. 15 Various facilities in the Tower Palace



(a) Banqueting hall

(b) Guest house

(Source: Author's photograph)

As this new culture has come to the fore, most new apartments are developed in the same way. A new resident who moved to Banpo Xi apartment complex told of her feelings about the extreme condition like a whole world of the complex:

"I used to live in just a normal apartment, which was Dong-a apartments in Bongchon-dong. I recently moved to very new apartments from the previous apartments...The complex looks like an island with almost 3500 households, and there are all sorts of facilities. For example, there is not only a cafe exclusively for the residents, but also sauna, golf, swimming pool and fitness centre like a hotel and we can use all of them for free. This complex is the best at the moment for facilities in Korea. In addition, the complex is very big and the households have a big size of *pyong*, so it looks like another world inside of the complex. That is, if you look out of the complex, you may think how to live in that area located in very complicated and noisy as close to the express bus terminal. But, in inside, you cannot realise that there are so much traffic and

congestion out there, because squirrels run round in the complex. And marsh snails also live in the fountain, so children play with getting them. Really nice systems are well equipped, so it is very good for mums to let their children play there. So we live in like an island without going out. I feel really nice that I moved here from just normal apartments...” (Banpo LG Xi)

Although residents appreciate the environment of new apartments, it is too early to say that the resurrection of community as intimate relationship is achieved. This is because it has a short history yet and research has not particularly focused on it. What can be suggested here though is that social expectation seems to be moved on in what it is constructed to achieve. A resident who still lives in old apartments expressed her wish for residential movement:

“We live in a corridor style of apartments, and have many friends of my kids as their ages are similar. So we get on very well by coming and going each other...when I said community just before, it is important for neighbourhood community, but I envy now various facilities as I visited in the new complex of Raemian and Xi. In their complexes, they have a fitness club, swimming pool, play room, playground, especially, a water-playground which is very big. As my kids are still young, it looks so nice that there are lots of new playground and floor-fountain in summer...so I want to move in like that apartments.” (Bangbae Shinsamho)

She clearly suggests the constructed idea of community as a new standard of social expectation. However, what could be caught in her interview was the idea of neighbourhood consciousness unlike discourses of the broken community circulated over the social practices of privacy and communication of social relationship as discussed above. This may connote that intimate and friendly neighbourhoods as the third concept of community still exists in the individual level, while communication and privacy are achieved in social consciousness. This calls to mind the argument of Savage et al. (2003, p.116) that the use of the word community is ideological rather than based on reality, and also Bauman's (1998) 'non-neighbourhood' condition to be everywhere and nowhere as the ultimate security, which was discussed in the Chapter Five. There may be a lesser compulsory relationship in geographical neighbourhoods



to some extent, but more optional or selective from individual interests, which can come from neighbours, social groups or distance community beyond time and places. In other words, a variety of communities are 'layered', which then can be operated at each level. Here, neighbours are not the same position as the traditional locality, but they are met in the level of their interests selectively like social groups and distance community. In this sense, the ideology of privacy and communication is practiced at the top level, but these practices can also construct the intimate level of community. Some respondents showed their friendly neighbourhood relationship regardless of age groups. A resident of the first generation highlighted her friendship through communication as not the same as the discourse of the broken community:

“There are kinds of meetings such as *Bansanghoe*, so it is not a broken neighbourhood. But as my kids used to go to schools, we made friendships with mums in the same class. Then, we used to go to school meetings together, sharing information and talking each other, because we were all in similar situation.” (Eunma)

As the second generation, the other resident showed her implicitly different relationship between communication level and more intimate level:

“My apartments are very old, and [in the] corridor style. So we greet each other in the same corridor. And my kid goes to *hakwon* together with the similar aged kid next door, although mums are not close very much but greeting each other...but always greeting with the granny living in the end of line. She always gives much information, and then we can understand the situations.” (Banpo Samho Garden III)

Even another resident of second generation described the physical advantages of apartments as tight-knit and face to face relation like traditional community:

“I think that the relationship with neighbours is closer in apartments as they are attached closer and closer. But houses are like detached concept...in case that we couldn't come home on the day when going somewhere, I call to ask my next door to pick up newspapers, then they do me a favour [in return]. Because

we are closely attached, I think we can know each other very well as faced only by a door.” (Garak Ssangyong)

As can be seen in the views of some respondents, it cannot be simply assumed that apartments have been the major cause of the broken community. Hong and Lee (1993) also showed that two third of residents had close neighbours in most areas and groups. At least, there seems to be a variety of social relationships with the different layers of intimacy or practicality. This leads to the reconsideration of taken-for-granted idea of traditional community in all positive terms. As Franklin (2006) noted that the traditional community was not always the harmonious and supportive, but could be restrictive, conflictual and oppressive, it may be erroneous deterministically to distinguish between traditional and modern society as much as the determinism of built forms. This is not to deny the social problem of modernity, but critically to overcome the deterministic pessimism, as social relationship can be constructed by practices with the institutional support rather than demolishing all built environment. Given these understandings of social relationships in apartment lifestyles, how the demerits of collective high-rise buildings can be accepted and interpreted, which enables high-rise apartments to become embodied to everyday life, is discussed in the next section.

### **7.3 Devaluation: trade-off value**

As explored through the last two sections, a number of collective values are shared as lifestyles, and social ideology is integrated to apartments in various forms of social relationships. There are, however, inevitably negative elements in apartment living like any forms of housing. The discussion is then focused on how negative perspectives of high-rise built environment can be replaced by constructed ideas of apartment lifestyles in this section, in categories of standardization, management cost and noise.

#### **Standardisation**

The most negative critiques of high-rise apartments, such as being grey and dull, non-humanistic, and high density seems to be linked to the standardisation of built environment, which also connects with the standardised relationship by calculating

the standardised form as numbers without understandings of reality. The term of standardization is often raised as criticism of built environment in modern housebuilding industry not only in Korean high-rise buildings but also in suburban houses as well as council housing in the UK as 'jerry-built'. Based on the mass industry of housing construction, building forms are likely to be standardised and maximised within the legal framework. A developer respondent made the point that the given capacity of the building ratio is fully used to decide the number of apartment units followed by floorplan design:

“The forms are all the same. You know that it is not very flexible to control floorplan as the law is fixed in our country. It is profitable when it is the maximised capacity of building in the area of land. So elevation and section plan is decided according to that, and then floorplan can be varied within it...anyway, floor design is maximised within the law. There is no such thing that you build 280 % and leave 20 % if given 300% by the law.” (Hyundai 1)

This maximizing capacity then leads to the standardized differentiation through detail design factors or facilities as discussed in the first section, which the shape of buildings is likely to be similar, as the other developer put it:

“Differentiation in apartments is general similarity because we should supply products within the housing law or legal framework. Only what we can do is just how we reflect consumer's needs by adopting design techniques such as interior styles, exterior design or community facilities.” (Shindong-a)

However, the adoption of design techniques in turn influences the institutional environment. For example, housing policy is not always top-down, but it can also follow bottom-up process, as earlier shown in the legalization of extending service areas. Since the tower style building came to the fore in the 2000s, it has been recommended by the government in new developments based on the perception of previous grey and dull buildings. A developer framed this as new expectation of consumers and governors:

“In business strategy terms, the wide and thin building type is the best as it can make the most number of households and less cost compared to the tower style. But the government encourages us to follow [the latter]. It is not mandatory, but recommended under the construction process...also, consumers have some vague sense that tower style is better than wide style because condominium apartments are tower style in general, and can also have more green space...”  
(Hyundai 1)

Both old and new patterns are standardized with the ‘same difference’. In other words, given the mass production system, differentiation turns into standardisation quickly, which can furthermore represent collectivity as will be discussed in the next chapter. Difference is therefore not very far from similarity. In this sense, probably, the standardised design is not always one of constraints or downsides, but it is satisfied in some ways (e.g. see the interview quote below). This brings to mind the ideas of Giddens (1991) that the standardized consumption and regulated pattern reflect the stability of lifestyles, the decrease of unpredictable demand, and the stable growth from the individual to the society level. This perspective was captured by a developer saying that the innovative design is not always the best:

“There are not many differentiated floor plans by each company, but it only tends to follow trend, for example, that 3-bay used to be popular previously, but now 4-bay is trendy. Of course, we tried to specialise the plan with living room, master bedroom and kitchen arranged all in the front against typical LDK plan with kitchen in the back, advertising differentiation. However, although it is good design, the important thing is the acceptance by residents. I think people are reluctant with remarkable design...” (Hyundai 1)

The acceptance of standardization seems to be replaced with the other constructed values in apartment lifestyles, which was said by a resident respondent:

“There are so crowded apartments and visually not charming, so I am not so fascinated by its aesthetic as a housing culture. But, in some sense, it is only outward appearance. In a sense of life, I think that Korea is the most convenient country as far as I heard, in terms of, for example, warm because of *ondol*

system or life pattern inside if except external beauty and its starkness.”  
(Bangbae Flats)

Her perceptions about the life pattern in apartments apart from the physical shell may be how the contestable issue of standardized built environment has not been significantly problematic in resident’s lifestyles. This is also reflected in a piece of art work, as seen in Figure 7.16. and he explains that:

‘These apartments in the 25-story Evergreen Tower are identical, but each family adds humanizing touches to its 150-square-foot living room — from trophies and wedding pictures to a cross and a cuckoo clock. More than half of metropolitan Seoul's 24 million residents live in high-rises, deeming them safer, more energy efficient, and a better investment than single-family dwellings.’  
(Jung 2011b)

Figure 7. 16 A Place Called Home

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removed for electronic publication. The  
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contains the full image.

(Source: Photograph by Yeondoo Jung,  
[http://www.yeondoojung.com/artworks\\_view.php?no=83](http://www.yeondoojung.com/artworks_view.php?no=83))

The notion of starkness is perhaps the constructed idea to criticize the modernity (for example, ideas of Le Corbusier) based on industrialization, which seems to be separated from the reality. As discussed in Chapter Four, then, this resonates with some evidence of satisfaction in high-rise buildings as not depressing rather than focused on other factors such as neighbours or areas. In a similar vein, convenient lifestyles seem to compensate for the expenditure of management costs in Korea as well as standardisation.

### **Management costs**

As a collective system, an apartment complex generates costs to manage its operation, which is charged to residents every month. It includes all maintenance and labouring fees such as officers, gardeners, cleaners and security guards as well as bills for water, electricity, gas and even the TV license. The maintenance costs depend on each complex, varying in the number of households, complex size, heating system and management system as well as location in general. In fact, this is not affordable for low-income households, as it is not cheap compared to other types of housing management (Gelézeau 2007). Moreover, in recent developments, costs are remarkably increased due to more lights on the extended communal garden and in the basement according to the underground parking as well as under-road heating in winter (Jeon 2011). Although high maintenance costs are not popular, most residents seem to be willing to pay them as they value a convenient way of lifestyle in apartment complexes. As quoted in the subsection of *management system*, residents considered to pay for the individual repairs of their house as a burden, while management system is seen as a critical point in convenient lifestyles in apartment complex. This constructed idea is taken-for-granted over time, which then becomes a social norm as irresistible. A resident's rationalization of living in apartments shaped through the norm was shown according to no courage to live in houses, although her old apartment is not pleasurable:

“There is not any particular inconvenience due to my old apartment. It looks ok superficially, but the rooms have worn. So, I am reluctant about it, but I don't have any courage to live in houses. It is because there is a management office and those who manage in apartments. But you have to manage yourself in houses. So I guess it must be hard.” (Bangbae Shinsamho)

This constructed norm is not easy to resist in everyday life until the external forces or else of institutional environment, such as formal or informal institutions (e.g. education). The other interviewee who moved recently to a detached house situated out of Seoul from apartments in Gangnam due to an alternative schooling for her son pointed out how hard it is to escape the normal life as easier in apartments in exchange for management cost:

“I thought houses are not liveable until I moved to here. Because there are lots of things to do by myself in houses without my mum. In apartments, most management can be done just as paying for management fee, so I could not think of living in houses.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

This point is captured by a strategic perspective in the housebuilding business, as a developer respondent clearly described:

“Convenience is the first. How much it is convenient, that is, you don’t need to care about anything at all once you come home. It is convenience of house work, which is related to income. That is, what you can buy with small money, even though apartment itself is expensive, is that you can live without caring almost in all your life if you just pay some management fee a month.” (Samsung 1)

Regarding this perspective, the alleviation of management cost came to the fore in the marketing point since the economic downturn. For example, it has firstly linked to reduce security guards, replacing with digital systems such as automatic bar in the gate of complex entrance and video entry system in the building entrance and each household door, and developed to saving energy in the recent trend. A developer above made a clear vision of this point:

“Labour fees are a big portion of management fees. So labourers need to be reduced, and then it requires automatic systems. So our company introduced that system such as automatic security and recording meters. Like that way, it is also connected to Green-home, which is about saving energy, for instance, natural energy resources, although it has not achieved much yet.” (Samsung 1)

From this discussion, there seems trade-off value between convenience and expense in making a particular lifestyle in apartment complex. In business term, the matter of noise has also come to be a marketing point, but there are many related social problems. Given the earlier discussion on the role of security guards, it may be that too much automation might have an impact on community relations within apartment complexes. This question was not explored although it is likely to become more

important in the future as several complexes like Tower Palace are changing the way security is provided. Nevertheless, apartments have endured over the last half century, which requires understanding how this has been accepted in some ways.

## Noise

It might be imagined that the issue of noise is most prevalent in high-rise apartments. Hong and Lee (1993) shows that about 80% of apartment residents have experience of noise from neighbours in most areas. Accordingly, social conflicts between neighbours are often reported in relation to noise, which leads to move out or sue in extreme cases (Kwon 2012). In accord with this, the false advertising as a marketing strategy has been competitively employed that mitigative materials are inserted in the floor to reduce noise, although it turned out that no apartments have actually been built with them (Kim 2006). This means that the noise matters have been dealt with by residents themselves in some ways, such as through understanding or patience. Even this virtue was adopted in marketing as a campaign (Figure 7.17) congruent with the brand name of Hillstate, as a developer described:

“We tried to construct a culture, called ‘Hills Etiquette’, for example, ‘don’t make a noise in the evening’, ‘greeting each other when meet in the lift’, and so on. Although it was not very actively achieved, it was our intention to make such exclusive housing culture in apartments built by Hyundai...in fact, apart from our campaign, such things are spontaneously growing in apartment complexes. Because collective buildings cause social problems such as noise from upstairs, residents are aware of, and take care of them.” (Hyundai\_2-20)

Figure 7. 17 The marketing campaign

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(Source: Hyundai Hillstate webpages <http://www.hillstate.co.kr/>)



As he noted, the awareness of collective life is a key point implicitly or explicitly to make sense of apartment lifestyles in most resident's perception. From this perspective, a variety of ways are observed to cope with the noise. First of all, it is getting used to it:

“What is not good in apartment living was a noise at first. It was not comfortable for several months because of noise as I used to live in a detached house. But I got used to it while I was not aware of it.” (Dogok Raemian)

Some acts according to the circumstances, which may depend on how the relationship between neighbours is as one of layers in the level of privacy, communication or community:

“Well, when my daughter is studying I get angry because of noise from up floor. So my daughter hit the ceiling with stick. Although I am saying to her not to do, I feel good in my mind...so always I am so concerned when my guests come in the evening time, and wish better behaved children come. It is so hard to care about making noise...before moving here, it was understandable as we cared each other. If my neighbour says that they will have some events, I could stand it. But here, there is no such thing.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

In the face of conflicts, respect and understanding is perhaps necessary:

“We realise that children cannot run or jump in apartments. But I had a trouble once just after moving here in that matter. What I do in that case is that I need to be humble absolutely. I said that I am very sorry because I have a five-year-old son. Since then, they never complain about it, although my son still makes noise. So I guess they are not a bad neighbour.” (Banpo Samho Garden III)

All of these seem to be possible based on the acceptance of basic understanding about collective life:

“Noise from up and down stairs is not good...In the case of a corridor style of buildings, it can be much noisy in the corridor. However, it can be acceptable because we understand it is a collective building.” (Gaepo Jugong 2)

Despite the matters of this collectivity in physical terms of apartment lifestyles, the idea that privacy is a key feature of apartments as discussed earlier seems to suggest a different way of thinking the concept of privacy. It is not simply related to physical forms of housing, but perhaps social ideology in some sense. This may be also said in the context of semi-detached houses in the UK, which is considered as a private life for middle-classes, even though the noise from the next door is not less than flats in my personal experience.

This section covered how disadvantages of apartment system have been integrated and accepted to make a modern lifestyle in high-rise buildings. Combining together both the integration and acceptance of demerits, and the constructed collective values and the modified social relationships in various layers, an apartment complex has a special meaning in Korea, as a discourse of a contemporary middle-class lifestyle. The next section then explores the symbolic understanding of apartment complex what it means to Korean.

#### **7.4 Symbolic meanings: apartment complex**

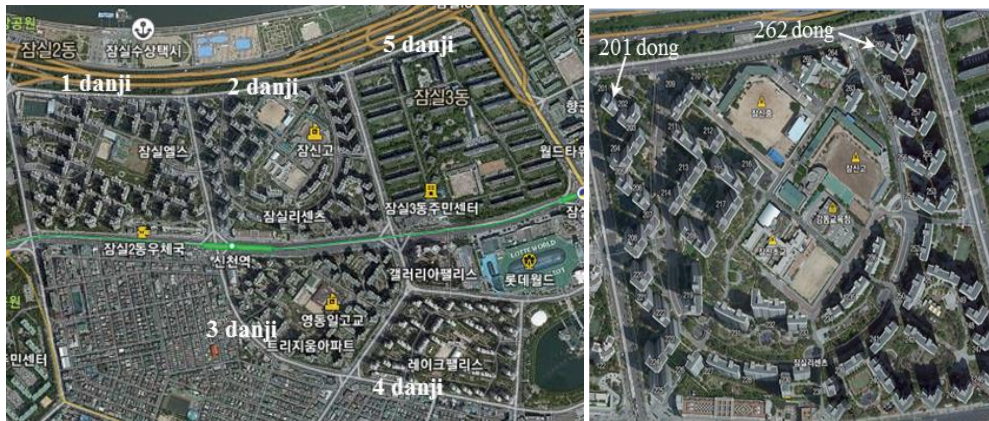
An apartment complex is an entity with its own characteristics based on the theory of the Neighbourhood Unit as described through the sections in this chapter. The definition of an apartment complex is based on three factors in terms of collective buildings with ‘over five floors’, ‘300 households at least’, and ‘a management office’, which is different from any other housing types in Korea (Gelézau 2007). The address of apartments is simply reflexive of this as a symbol of the complex according to its systematic logic. This is due to the system of address based on the numbering structure of the plots that commenced in 1918 during the Japanese colonial period. In this system, the name of apartments has played an important role to find the location. As apartment names are central in the address, it came to be a symbolic representative in terms of socio-economic status. However, since enacting a law of the new address in 2006, there is a process of changing into a new system based on the

street name and the numbering structure of buildings similar as the UK system or many other western countries. The initiative of a new address system is originated from the inefficiency of the complex structures of the old address system, as the plot-based numbers caused chaos due to the rapid growth of developments by dividing a plot into plural plots and accordingly numbering is not ordered. This has created difficulty in finding a location, which is why the apartment name became very effective, while houses are not recognisable and easy to find. In this sense, the new address seems to be welcomed to houses, but apartment residents are reluctant to this system. The reluctance against the new system to apartments seems to partly relate to the premium value of apartment name, which might influence to decrease the price, as well as residents being accustomed to recognisable old system (Lee 2011a).

Following the old address system, while a house address only gives vague information of local area as a local authority is relatively wide, a variety of characteristics is attached to an apartment address, which then has implicit assumptions according with social, cultural and economic power derived from the development process. In broad terms, the apartment address is compounded by builders, complex size, and brand name. The clearest categorization is the division between public and private companies as named after the local authorities such as *-si* (city), *-gu* and *-dong* in the address. This makes a difference basically in price, size and eligibility. As outlined in earlier sections, apartments built by private companies are usually considered as larger and more luxurious with no limits of eligibility but only relying on the saving scheme, resulting in higher price compared to public provision. On the other hand, public sectors are entitled to supply for lower income households or first time buyers according to also the saving accounts. This leads to a basic distinction between social strata, even though apartments provided by the public sector are also mostly affordable to the middle classes. The apartment size is also remarkable in the apartment address, by numbering complexes and buildings called *danji* and *dong* (same sound as local authority but different meaning) respectively. In the case of Chamsil complexes (Figure 7.18 (a)), for instance, five complexes are called from 1 *danji* to 5 *danji*, and a household in each complex has an address starting with the number of the complex and then ordered according to the numbers of buildings. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> *danji*, 62 buildings are thus numbered from 201 *dong* to 262 *dong* (Figure 7.18 (b)). The last element of the address, which represents *ho*, assembles

numbers of floors vertically and unit lines horizontally. This means that the higher apartments are, the bigger number of the address is. Those who live on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor and 2<sup>nd</sup> line have 1502 *ho* as the last indicator of their address, as an example.

Figure 7. 18 The example of Chamsil complexes



(a) 5 complexes in Chamsil apartments      (b) 62 dong in the 2<sup>nd</sup> complex

(Source: Author's drawing on the map from <http://local.daum.net>)

The importance of such a numbering system derives from the preferences for bigger complexes and higher buildings, because big conglomerates usually carry out large projects supplying better facilities in the complex. The size of a complex depends on the plot area developed, and the number of household units varies accordingly. Also, the number of complexes is related to the project's characteristics and its size. While the governmental projects mostly carried out massive complexes in the 1970s to 1980s, private companies supplied a range of scales from a small complex with around 300 households to a number of large complexes with over 9000 households (Gelézeau 2007). For instance, in Figure 7.19, the massive complex A was developed by the government, whereas B and C, which have different scales, were supplied by two private developers in the 1970s. Both D and E together were also provided by the government at the same period as A, called Banpo Jugong apartments (1-3 *danjis*). They have been, however, recently reconstructed by two separate private companies called Banpo Raemian (D) and Hynudai Hillstate (E). During the period of the economic downturn, Samsung came to the fore as commencing the brand name of Raemian, whereas Hyundai was down-graded due to various internal and external difficulties despite its first ranking from 1977 to 2000 continuously. This seems to be reflected in these development sizes.

Figure 7. 19 Examples of different projects



(Source: Author's drawing on the map from <http://local.daum.net>)

As can be seen in the example above, the name of Jugong apartments changed to the brand names after the reconstruction. This means that the new recognition is reflected in the address replacing simple institution and company or region name, such as Jugong provided by KNHC or Apgujung(-dong) Hyundai, with the sophisticated brand name. As a result, the broadest category is now seen in the address, distinguishing branded from non-branded apartments. According to this, even some old apartments change to the brand name, which influences the price. This has produced an anecdote that a member of Conservative Party has been sued by the representatives of residents in her apartments due to the false fact of her effort to upgrade the name of apartments, which was actually done by a member of the other Party in the same apartments (Lee 2012). Such a cynically absurd story seems to clearly reflect how a name of apartment complex is powerful in terms of social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. This distinction is however not seen in the new address system, and opposition against it seems to be natural as considering the cultural identity of high-rise apartments based on a variety of constructed values and social ideology through the discussion in this chapter.

## Discussion

Descriptions through four sections in this chapter have aimed to show how a particular housing culture, especially high-rise apartment city living in South Korea for this research, is constructed and perceived by the interrelations between institutional environment and institutional practices. As shown in the conceptual

framework in Chapter Five, this intended to focus on exploring the flow of shaping a housing culture by interactions between institutional environment and practices in the diagram of Figure 5.1 and to describe the features of apartment culture as a housing culture, based on the interview data and other complementary sources.

To achieve the symbolic meanings of ‘apartment complex’ (section 7.4) contrasted with ‘suburban houses’ as a collective form of identity and a collective name, various institutions including both formal and informal institutions have interacted closely. In the construction of *collective values* (section 7.1) as shared ideas about high-rise apartments, not only have formal constraints or opportunities, such as the initiative of new city development or the certification system of high-speed broadband buildings been significant, but informal ideas, such as the changed meanings of private gardens or competition of parking systems have also been critical decision points in changing lifestyles. In addition, for example, external pressure particularly in economic crises and its concomitant policy change have brought the new institutional environment for developers and consumers, which have resulted in a renewal of housing market based on branding strategies and new values in residential environments. These show the importance of institutional environment interacting with institutional practices in shaping a particular housing culture. Through the continuous change in institutional environments and actors’ perspectives, the cultural features of high-rise city living have thus evolved from physical aspects to non-physical factors as a whole lifestyle.

Social ideology as an informal institution in the construction of built environments has also developed along with the constructed cultural features of high-rise built environment, as discussed in section 7.2. The modernity idea of privacy has been attached predominantly to high-rise apartments in contrast to the perspective about suburban houses in many other countries. Interestingly, a somewhat unique social relationship of communication has emerged as empowering high-rise apartment residents over others. On the other hand, the concept of community has been adapted in high-rise apartments according to change in social issues (e.g. broken society) in relation to built environments, in which developers can adopt it as marketing strategies. All these social ideas have played a role as informal institutional environments in constructing apartment culture in Korea.

Combining the shared cultural values and social ideas, some disadvantaged features have been seen not so much as problematic but compromised in some ways individually and socially (section 7.3). This consists of both formal (e.g. management cost) and informal (e.g. noise) institutional restrictions in the construction of high-rise built environments. Standardisation of housing products may be seen as both formal and informal constraints, which may depend on how actors respond to institutional framework. Developers, however, can manipulate these constraints, while consumers replace the devalued aspects with other merits, such as convenience. This contrasts, and confronts with the only constraint of space-access in dominant discourses, which result in the extreme comparison between suburban lifestyle and high-rise urban living.

Integrating these merits and demerits into an apartment complex symbolically, a particular culture has arisen in high-rise built environment as an institutionalised collective form in South Korea. Cultural features and acknowledged devaluation described through the sections are not innately rational or deterministic factors in lifestyles, but constructed ideas and institutions. Likewise, it may be said that the ‘suburban houses’ might be an institutionalised collective form of new culture since the industrialisation and urbanisation, which was developed by the idealism and institutional framework at the time in many western countries, rather than deterministic form of built environment based on a rationality of counting access fees or spaces. In that sense, gardening has been seen as a virtue or a moral standard rather than an informal constraint generating costs and labours, unlike the perspectives of high-rise residents in Korea. This clearly shows the limited understandings of (high-rise) built environment in predominant academic and policy discourses. Then, the symbolic and sociological mechanisms of built environments need to be understood as a collective identity and its effects over social space, which is discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the process of value construction of housing culture at the level of everyday life, in order to answer the research question, ‘How are high-rise apartments particularly constructed as culture in Korea?’. Collective ideas and values

about high-rise built environments as a particular lifestyle were described mainly through the interview data complemented by other sources from visual and archival data. The collectively shared perception of built environments becomes cultural references in everyday practices and market activities over society. Given the constructed collective values, high-rise apartments were usually described in positive terms physically and spatially, such as convenient or safe and secure environments with physical and spatial merits of parking space, communal garden and so on, resulting in a better lifestyle in the modern society. Furthermore, these visible ideas were entangled with cultural symbols of apartment complex, which was perceived as exclusive lifestyles, and representative of the modern in the city living. This then comes to be connected to symbolic images and meanings, which may have the power of social ordering as predominant and exclusive housing culture. This shows that the physicality of high-rise buildings is not necessarily a failure for ideal family home unlike the predominant discourses.

In the process of value constructions, social ideology about the modern requirement of privacy also seem to be integrated to the high-rise built environments, as well as developing a communicative and dynamic social relationship, and also recent ideals such as different stages of community. Meanwhile, the constructed values of high-rise built environments are not just confined to 'positive' perspectives, but are also embraced with negative sides, such as standardised pattern and noise as acceptable or negotiable over the collective values, which shows the complex ideas of value construction beyond the simple and rational factors of space, location or price. Given these dynamic and complex relationships in the construction of built environments, the preconceived ideas and the complicated discourses according to deterministic dualism are likely to be seen as inappropriate, which shows the limits of existing theories for capturing the cultural diversities in built environments as well as the role of cultural structure. This suggests the renewed ideas about built forms and their socio-spatial environments, not to be physically deterministic but to be socially and culturally constructed.

The next two chapters focus on the power of cultural discourses, and symbolic meanings as resources or triggers in the identity formation and the development of city, which is empowered by value constructions of built environment outlined in this



chapter's discussion. In Chapter Eight, how sociological meanings of high-rise built environments are constructed is examined, which shows a tangible example of a collective identity of housing culture. This emphasises how these environments influence social and spatial relations, based on cultural and symbolic elements of housing culture. At a more practical level, Chapter Nine aims to show how institutional practices may relate to cultural framework as taken-for-granted in terms of both constraints and opportunities. This challenges a further step of understandings how the same built forms are constructed and perceived as the different built environments from place to place.

## *Chapter Eight*

### **Symbolic Power of Apartment Culture**

#### **Introduction**

In the modern society, urban built environments tend to be formulated in certain ways through the particular patterns of consumption. Symbolic meanings are a crucial part of housing consumption in urban contexts. As the possession of goods gives a sense of security in the uncertainty of the world, symbolic consumption is understood as a marker of well-being, success and status. In this context, consumerism as a structural force is then pervasive and reproduced in everyday practices for people in an understanding of themselves and their place in the world. In these practices of consumption, a lifestyle gives people an identity and a sense of belonging in a symbolic space rather than local and physical sense of home and community. As routinised practices, then, lifestyles replace the traditional status orders in the modern social order in a somewhat standardised and regulated pattern. This patterned consumption involves both similarity and difference, which generates inclusion and exclusion over social space.

According to the value construction of high-rise apartments as culture in the city, the previous chapter suggested that an apartment complex represents its symbolic and cultural power as a new reference of social order. A form of collective identity then can be seen as the reification of a particular housing culture in everyday practices and social relationships. Moreover, the formation of identity in built environments entails conflicts and power relations within the wider framework of the city. Based on the research setting of interactional relationships, symbolic ideas about high-rise apartments in Korea and how the value constructions are reified over social space can be explored through actor's perspectives. In this context of symbolic and cultural power, the chapter explores the sociological understandings of built environments, focusing on the reification of dominant culture in social space, in order to answer the research question, 'How are high-rise apartments sociologically constructed, individually and collectively, and what are the effects of this?'. This is an attempt to understand how a certain built environment is seen as superior, whilst others are

perceived as not appropriate built environments, which generates socio-spatial inequality and segregation.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the social meanings of consumption as a means of securing identity. This symbolic meaning frames consumer behaviours, and gives cultural references in order to achieve particular social position. The constructed meanings and acts are embodied in everyday practices in ways which are socially conformed to as a sense of the collective, outlined in the second section. As a result, these ideas and routinised behaviours become a symbolic capital, which reflects power relations over social space. The third section then outlines the impacts of these social and spatial relationships. These understandings of urban built environments through a housing culture approach are reflected in some potential implications for theoretical development of built environments in the conclusion.

### **8.1 In pursuit of identity**

Given the dissolved traditional order into an insecure modern society, the rootedness of being in the world has come to be acquired largely through lifestyles and everyday consumption, which makes difference from others and seeks ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1990). In particular, the trauma of citizens was deep after the colonial period and successive Korean War and its concomitant poverty, and their social position was solely thrown to the new system called capitalism, especially in a privatised housing market with hardly support from the Government.

#### **Symbol of difference**

As it has both functions of basic needs and symbolic representation, a housing form seems to be seen as a mediation of the symbolic consumption to mark one’s identity mediated by economic means. Given the dramatic economic growth in the 1960s-70s, the increased wealth and its fruits were often transmitted to high-rise apartments as a part of the industrial development augmented and enhanced by the government in the political framework. In this sense, high-rise apartments came to be a name of ‘success’ in life since the 1970s, replacing the position of western style detached-houses. The idea of success then had to be interpreted to a better life, which was

accordingly compared to the existing pattern of houses in terms of convenience and privacy, resulting in the construction of discourses. Against new and modern lifestyles of high-rise apartments, houses including both traditional Korean housing and western detached houses had become ‘old’ and ‘traditional’, all of a sudden. The difference was thus a necessary means to show the identity of success and its socio-economic status. This idea was not only recognized by the socially constructed ideas, but it was also compounded by linking social contexts.

In the earlier period of apartment development, the salience of apartments was not just through the building itself as a completely different form from previous patterns of low-rise settlements, although it was seen like a simple concrete box with a futuristic perspective of modernity. Its socio-economic meanings could be also seen in the exclusivity of everyday life. A resident saw the difference of apartments from the rare pattern of car ownership in the 1980s, interpreting it as a symbol of the rich:

“I lived with my sister when I went to the university, which was my first apartment life. At that time, I was very surprised not by the apartment itself, but by cars parked in the complex. They were mostly imported cars, but not many had cars at that time in Pyungtaek. It was 1987, but two thirds were imported cars there...so I and my nephews were very surprised and thought this area is really rich. Now, imported cars are not unusual at all, but it was very rare at that time...so I had an impression that apartments are for the rich...and it was big size of *pyong*. As it was big, I couldn’t think that small *pyong* of apartments exist.” (Dogok Rexle)

The symbolic image leads to a social aspiration to achieve, which moves from the previous pattern to the new constructed idea through a variety of experiences. Prior to apartments, the aspiration towards lifestyles was based on the western style detached-houses as widely developed until the 1980s, as outlined in the Chapter Two. This ideal home came to change through the trigger of apartments. After her leaving high-school in 1990, a respondent moved to an apartment, which was aspired to during her younger ages:

“I had an image of the rich about apartments...I probably had a thought that I want to live in there when I was young. It was like the idea that we used to aspire the western style of detached-houses with two floors.” (Chamsil Ricentz 3)

Despite these symbolic perspectives, such aspiration towards apartments has usually been described in terms of practical aspects as concrete ideas, such as convenience and privacy, by many academic, policy, and public discourses in Korea. Such explanation based on practicality often obscures the reality of social construction, considering as definite factors rather than as collectively shared values. The meaning of convenience without private garden in Korean apartments is, however, not the same but exactly opposite as the inconvenience in the UK high-rise buildings. Nevertheless, the constructed discourse is circulated and manipulated over society in shaping a new idea as the difference. Likewise, the previous apartments seems to be reduced to a basic and physical meaning of physical shelter suddenly, apart from the fact that it was a symbol of the rich and a new lifestyle even before the brand awareness. Setting this new contextual discourse, a symbol of difference is no longer limited to physical factors but widely extended to various forms such as detailed designs, services and culture as explored in the last chapter. This calls to mind the perspective that symbolic consumption becomes more focused on culture in economy than economy in culture (Baudrillard 1981; Warde 2002). This transition of symbolic image has been commenced from adopting the brand name to mark a difference. A developer highlighted this point:

“Housing culture is now changing into the symbol of wealthy from simple space of shelter for sleeping and protecting from cold. So its value is inscribed in housing culture. That is, it was practical previously that buildings used to have space for nuclear family practically. But now it is focusing on symbol of wealthy, so it requires more room and more ostentatious...therefore, companies have made their luxurious brand, which can make proud of like ‘we live in Raemian, we live in Hyperion’.” (Hyundai 1)

New references of non-practical features has an effect of differing from previous apartments, as another developer described:

“What is the difference between new supply of apartments and previous ones built before 4 or 5 years ago is that the appearance of apartments has become majestic. This means that it is overwhelmed if you enter in the complex. That is, it is the strategy that can make proud of living in that complex. So it became looked small if you go to old apartments even though it is located in a very nice area.” (Shindong-a)

In fact, this resonates with the development of marketing strategy. Initial advertising was usually based on simple information about physicality, such as size, location, floor plans, facilities or prices. In line with this, newspapers, magazines or leaflets have been used for the advertising methods, but there was very little on TV (Figure 8.1). On the other hand, little information is given in a factual and practical sense, but lifestyles or identities are highlighted to create symbolic images and differences in accord with the brand awareness (Figure 8.2). These are now mostly advertised on TV with the employment of celebrities or top actors, by coining eloquent slogans, for example, ‘when housing changes, the future of woman changes’, or ‘where you live is who you are’.

Figure 8. 1 Examples of advertising in the 1970s



Newspaper in 1971 (above) and TV in 1976 (below)

(Source: re-adapted from Chang and Park 2009)

Figure 8. 2 New trend of advertising



TV CF with various themes by LG

(Source: LG Xi webpages <http://www.xi.co.kr/main/index.asp>)

The symbolic marketing has been actually successful in changing consumer perspectives from acquiring the practical sense to the brand name. A resident made a point of her feelings about the first advertising of brand name:

“I remember that Raemian advertised ‘I live in Raemian’ with showing the key at its first advertising. But I didn’t understand the meaning at first why the beautiful woman is shaking the key to show she lives there. I thought that it is supposed to show how housing is well built or convenient, but wondered how that kind of scene can be advertising...it means that my status is high enough to live there. It was first brand apartments. Before, it was just Samsung or Hyundai apartments. But now it is not just Samsung apartments, but Raemian.”  
(Gwangju Detached-house)

As she showed, advertising is clearly effective in shaping a new idea or identity that ‘the brand name is who you are’, and enormously influential over society, even though consumers clearly recognise its irrational aspect. A resident framed this influence of advertising:

“Branded apartments are not built necessarily well, but they do very well about marketing strategy. So it is more expensive than others...it can be only name values, because they are advertising so well. The advertising is so powerful. In the past, there was a commercial advertising that said ‘bed is not furniture, but

science'. It influenced children that they answered all it is 'not furniture' in their exams." (Dogok Rexle)

Marketing of the difference often induces the higher price, especially in the brand name as she indicated, which seems to target specific consumers who can afford price premiums. As the brand marketing was triggered by price control deregulation in the economic downturn, it shows that a new pattern of development can happen under institutional constraints, and its response cannot always be downgraded but also upgraded. In an ideological sense, this is perhaps because not only is the nature of markets to pursue profits rather than social equity, but consumers are also market actors who try or, in a capitalist sense, intend to improve their benefits rather than to be social welfarist. This mechanism may be the reason why the luxury development could be successful and lead the paradigm change in the housing market as quoted in the last chapter, which can be connected to the snob effect.

### **Conspicuous consumption**

The difference to make 'who to be' becomes then a symbolic capital as an expression of superiority over others (Bourdieu 1984). This induces 'snob value' that would pay more premiums on a psychic cost rather than rational price, which can consume, for example, a luxury apartment 'because it is expensive' apart from its use value and practicality. Given this higher value, this may not be likely to be realistic for most people, but only for particular groups at the initial stage of development. In this sense, earlier developments of apartments usually were consumed by those of high ranking status, very wealthy, or 'early adaptor': for example, those who had some connection with the supplier such as high-ranking civil servants or employers, which can be informed in priority; and who would try a new culture as different from existing culture, for instance, ceo's of the backbone companies who would show social status by their successful business, professors who have been likely to live in foreign countries during their study, or artists and TV celebrities who may have had creative impressions (Jeon et al. 2008). According to this tendency, it was reported that 60% with university degree and 25% with high-school graduates comprised apartment residents in 1970 (Choson-ilbo 1970 cited in Jeon et al. 2008). This was an extreme distribution of social structure, as considering the fact that even high-school graduates



were not usual at the time. In a similar vein, an interviewee who currently lives in the Green Villa and used to live in Apgujung Hyundai apartments in the beginning, described himself as a family member of the company group which was one of the biggest companies since the Japanese colonial period, showed the resident distribution of high-classes:

“I and my friends used to live in almost the first apartments in Seoul, and I lived in Apgujung Hyundai apartments...at first, of course, usually the affluent and those who had lived in foreign countries started to live in apartments. In the case of Hyundai apartments, about 30-40 % of residents used to live and study in foreign countries, whereas the poor still didn't know about it...” (Green Villa)

The new trial might be risky as it has not been widely approved in social and economic terms, which is probably why most cannot afford it. In the case of the Tower Palace, the price was around three times higher than average price as well as a new condominium type of super high-rise apartments in Seoul by the time just after the bailout of IMF. These risks led to the controversial consensus in the market value, which thus seems to be encouraged by the difference and superiority over previous patterns rather than practical and economic values. A Tower Palace resident who moved firstly as motivated by his employment relationship highlighted his intention towards a special life:

“This is the first condominium apartments in Korea, so nobody knew whether it is good or bad. But it was built by Samsung, and I was told that it could be nice...So it was so controversial and not popular. In addition, estate agents used to say negatively that it might not be popular...I did not have any particular motivation, but just wanted to try and live in something special. It was quite expensive compared to others at that time when it was sold in 1999...but our ceo, Keonhee Lee intended to try building the best apartments in Korea like a style of super high-rise building in Manhattan, New York.” (Tower Palace)

Eminently, these two developments came to represent the new identity of apartments as well as Gangnam, and caused the consumer sentiment based on conspicuous consumption to be different over the society, influencing residential movements

onwards with 'bubble price'. Such perspectives are very well recognised by the public, as a resident who lives in detached-houses out of Seoul explained:

“People prefer apartments excessively...well, for example, 'Tower Palace' is the most expensive and preferred. In my opinion, it is not a good residential environment because of air ventilation matters and confined spaces, but still the most expensive. So I reckon people would go for it because it is expensive. The fact itself that live in there can make a show of their status, and living in Gangnam as well. Of course, they can benefit from living there, but people consider that they can be acknowledged to be better-off. It looks like people buy expensive cars because of luxury as well as safety...” (Gwangju Detached-house)

This sense of conspicuous consumption seems to become widespread over the nation, which can bias the market mechanism. The resident of Tower Palace framed the reason of increased price due to the snobbish demand:

“The reason why the price is getting increased here now is that riches living in rural areas (usually, *ttebuja* who suddenly becomes the rich by land compensation from the government due to regional development) come in Seoul to buy housing. Well, everybody knows 'Gangnam' or 'Tower Palace'. Rural women also know it very well. They want it for show-off about that they have bought 'Tower Palace', so they come and come.” (Tower Palace)

Given this wide social awareness, a particular discourse is likely to be circulated around the representatives of development, leading contradictory perspectives of both social aspiration towards and antagonism against them. This was metaphorically described in the soap opera, 'Follow-up Gangnam's mum', as somewhat oppositely characterizing two main actors. Minju fights against the Tower Palace, as she realises her extremely difficult reality, whereas Sangwon tries to achieve it by making a romantic relationship with a colleague teacher who lives in the Tower Palace regardless of any means. Likewise, in real life, all possibilities seem to be adopted to negotiate between the reality and the aspiration unless opposite it. Ownership is then

no more an end of life, but a lifestyle as who to be seems to become an end through a means of tenure.

### **Psychic ladder: beyond tenure**

Although the expenditure of the superrich comprises a small part of a whole expense, their behaviours significantly influence the consumption pattern of other social groups, such as middle- and even low-income households (Frank 1999). Unlike some other consumer products, housing is extremely high cost, and the achievement of buying it may be only once for the most or not at all for some in a life. In this sense, a peculiar system of *chonsei* tenure perhaps well fits to follow up the social ideology of modern life in high-rise apartments, especially under the lack of a public financial system in Korea as outlined in Chapter Two. In particular, as a mutual relationship, this tenure form has often been used as a means to the property ladder until achieving the aim of home ownership, whilst multi-ownership has been encouraged and supported by the fund from *chonsei* tenants. A respondent who used to live in Gangnam and moved out of Seoul for her son's alternative school, which is the education system out of the institutional framework to avoid the competitive and private education fever, made a point of her tenure ladder as normal to others:

“Since my marriage, I used to live in *chonsei* apartments, and then jumped to another like others do usually.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

As home ownership was a social norm to represent the success in the privatized housing market, this pattern of movement has been pervasive through the 1980s-90s during the mass production of high-rise apartments within Seoul as well as new cities. This resonates with the point made by Gurney (1999) that an identity of property owner provides the normalising power as a majority of housing tenure. Since the 2000s, however, ownership seems no longer to be a social norm as a life goal, which perhaps relates to the brand name with bigger size and new standards of luxuries. A resident who lived in the 20s *pyong* at the time of interview came across this change, although she has less than ten years gap with other mums as she had her daughter a bit late:

“I can see a change as I communicate with other mums. My generation has an aim that we should have our own housing. Although it is small, we should have one. That is, it is ok to live in *chonsei*, but it can be after buying one...my friends are also trying very hard to buy housing...but, as I am trying to seek one to buy, other mums are saying “why do you want to buy it? Its money is not worth to put it there, just live in bigger *chonsei*”. So I asked them “is it also put the money in there?”. They said, “But it is big. You don’t need to put your money to small space. You can live in big enough with that money”...so it changed to the thought that living in bigger can be more convenient because there is no need to buy.” (Dogok Rexle)

In this sense, she observed this in reality based on the pattern of conspicuous consumption:

“It looks like people become concerned about outward show. So they are getting to buy and move in bigger housing. It may be different cognition. I mean that I want to buy this rather than to rent *chonsei* of 50 *pyong*. But other young people think that it is nothing to do with buying 20 *pyong*, but better to live in 50 *pyong* of *chonsei*. So I looked at the address list of my daughter’s class and found that only four of them live in 20 *pyong*, and the rest live in mostly 4-50 *pyong*...” (Dogok Rexle)

The new identity is thus no more normalized in ownership, but in new standards of more luxurious housing through any patterns of tenure. This new consumption pattern may be linked to the recent increase of tenancy rate as outlined in Chapter Three. This means that *chonsei* or monthly rent transited the meanings from the methods of ‘property ladder’ aiming ownership to the means of ‘psychic social ladder’ acquiring a better social position. The importance of this psychic effect may be then linked to the communication level of social relationship and then can be developed to the community sense. A resident compared this relationship with the traditional way of life of her parents-in-law:

“It seems that there is some consumer sentiment. Women tend to live in luxury than frugality. In the mum’s meeting, they would enjoy spending their money

regardless of their status whether they live in *chonsei* or monthly rent. They all have meetings. They are supposed to come for the meetings in order to communicate with others. So I guess that is why they prefer apartments...They would make a show of their status between themselves, asking others: such as “which *danji* do you live?” or “that *danji* is consisted of what *pyong*” or “I live in that *danji*”. In this area, there seems not many people have their own apartments. Mums of friends of my kids usually live in *chonsei*, but of a big size. They can buy their own housing in Gangbuk, but instead live in big *chonsei* apartments in Gangnam. And they have luxury cars and a variety of cultural life unlike my parents-in-law, happy only with their own house.” (Seocho Detached-house)

The other respondent highlighted the intention of developing more intimate social relationships for their children:

“Dogok Rexle is located opposite of Tower Palace, and its *chonsei* can be worth to buy an apartment. But despite its price, some live there in *chonsei* or even in monthly with enormous rent. It can be a different view according to individuals, but normal people think I will buy one with that money or live in *chonsei*, because monthly rent is just gone. But there are still many cases like that way...as the Tower Palace is in the same group of education system, there is an intention to make friendships with them from childhood. Within the area, there is a Daedo primary school, which consisted of students from the Tower Palace, Rexle and Dongbu-Centreville as well...for instance, they can go abroad together in summer holiday...like that way, they can make better environment to grow up with them.” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

Given this new normalised ideology, its influence seems to become widespread, stimulating a residential movement, which shows a clear example of new cultural structure engendered by the change in institutional environment and housing market contexts:

“I am getting concerned with the size of *pyong* because my children are now in primary school. It was ok when they were young...After my kids went to

school, as I like people coming to my home, I invited someone and she came. So she also invited me to hers, so I went to there. But it was very very spacious, so I got embarrassed and regret that I invited her...I bought this at that time because I did not want to move whenever *chonsei* price is increasing...For my kids, I am now thinking myself to move in *chonsei* with 32 *pyong* after selling this.” (Bangbae Hyundai II)

As can be seen from examples in this section, high-rise apartments have been developed by inscribing a particular identity to be different or superior from others. This idea has been brought about by transforming the normalising effects over the society from detached-houses, own apartments to the branded luxury apartments, according to a change in the market environment and social contexts. The normalisation to achieve a particular social status, in fact, has recourse to the other side of difference, that is, similarity to be included in the group. This then formulates the collective sense of belonging, which has a practical power over social practices, which is discussed in the next section.

## **8.2 A sense of the collective**

Patterns of consumption may cut across social divisions and produce class realignment and are increasingly taken to be the source of important social divisions or cleavages (Abercrombie et al. 2000). As identity in modern societies is increasingly founded on differences in consumption, people therefore do not derive their identity from their class position or from their work lives but rather from the tastes, habits and consumption patterns that they share with others (*ibid*). As discussed in the last section, apartments have had a distinctive identity to be aspired to, which has an innate connotation of collectivity like a coin with inseparable two sides. This relationship seems to become more significant in an unstable society where the social position is required to be made through the market relationship rather than fixed social status.

### **Social boundary of similarity**

A lifestyle as a way of post-traditional identity constitutes a somewhat regulated pattern through standardised consumption (Giddens 1991). The standardisation has

been one downside of high-rise built environments, as discussed in the last chapter. On the contrary, however, this has taken the role of shaping a sense of belonging to a similar group as a collective form represented by the standardized pattern. In particular, as high-rise apartments have largely been developed over large areas in Gangnam, they have come to be seen as a collectivity as of similar social status. This has come to be contrasted with other areas, where a variety type of housing is mixed because of a relatively piecemeal development amidst the traditional residential settlement, with Gangnam as initially planned to large apartment blocks as a whole. In this sense, the discourse around the standardization constructed mainly by academics has not been significant in reality, although most people express it repetitively and naturally, but replace it with other merits. On the other hand, the mass-standardized development seems to have helped the construction of a collective sense of belonging. In this sense, the clear demarcation has been made between Gangnam and Gangbuk regions, which are actually not rational in a factual sense. A resident who moved from Bongchon-*dong* out of Gangnam boundary to Chamsil in recent years noted this point:

“You know it depends on where you live in Korea. Well, it is considered as rich if you live in Daechi-*dong*, Gangnam. In fact, it is similar values of *chonsei* between Eunma apartments and ones in Bongchon-*dong*, because Eunma is old enough. Nevertheless, people still think as rich if living in Daechi-*dong*.”  
(Chamsil Ricentz 3)

Nevertheless, the constructed idea of distinction is often reflexive in everyday life. One respondent was somewhat emotional to move into Gangnam as her son experienced the inferiority regardless of the physical condition:

“Especially, my son was desperate to come to Gangnam...because those from Gangnam let them from Gangbuk not get together as they want to be only themselves...we were better status with 48 *pyong*. So we were better off there in Gangbuk. He was really angry about his friend who used to look down on my son only because he lives in Gangnam despite the poor status of his apartment.”  
(Dogok Rexle)

The collective affiliation is thus linked to social boundary in which they would and should live with a similar standard of living and social position. This social boundary has brought the discourses that individuals should not live in mixed areas with other types of housing considered as lower social groups, as well as the stratification of Gangnam and Gangbuk. A resident highlighted the social boundary based on economic status:

“Here is all similar standard of living...basically, it is said that the most unpleasurable thing is to be mixed with house area...It may be because of housing price...Anyway, houses are cheap. Whatever buying or renting *chonsei* is much cheaper. Although it is owned, it is not so much valued...” (Chamwon Hanshin)

In this sense, even within Gangnam areas, this boundary seems to be similarly adopted to avoid social conflicts that might be happening between superior and inferior sensitivity. The polarization between apartments and other areas has been reinforced from the deregulation of density worsening the condition of the areas, as discussed in Chapter Two. A resident in Gaepo Jugong apartment mentioned the reason she chose the complex as similar status and not mixed:

“The reason I chose Gaepo Jugong apartments is...there is usually some kind of conflicts between mums who live in medium-rise flats and apartments according to living standard...Here, 5, 6 and 7th complex are high-rise blocks, so their status is similar. And there are no other types of housing, so most children from the complexes go to school together. So it does not make any stress in that sense...” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

Unlike the ideal of social mix, social tension is visible in everyday life, as she also indicated. As this is more likely to be in the mixed areas, those who live in Gangbuk regions seem to feel they do not belong to a particular boundary. This can be thus an impetus of movement from Gangbuk to Gangnam to be included in the similar social boundary. An interviewee clearly showed her expectancy in social position:



“I came here for my children’s education and friendships. It was a bit awkward area before...in a sense of whole educational environment, they were more competitive...well, it was like that way, which is kind of jealous about others doing something...but here is not a big gap of living standard. So I am happy to come here, as I expected, that it is an even environment to make friendships in a similar standard.” (Garak Ssangyong)

In a similar way, another resident also highlighted her intention to move in Gangnam based on her daughter’s position against others with different socio-economic status:

“Here, housing consists of apartments completely. So I thought it would be comfortable, because there is no mix with houses. I think it is not good for my kids if mixed. In school, there is something between houses and apartments. Personally speaking, I like houses. But people think that houses are considered as low status. We used to live in a big *pyong* of apartments before. My daughter’s friends came to play. Then, it has spread to other children, and she got kind of bullied by children living in houses. They used to tell my daughter that “you show off”. So she was very hard on it. That is why I wanted to move to the big *danji* as it is all similar in living standard...there may have been fewer gaps if there were only apartments...on the other hand, those children can get hurt in their mind if they are asked “where do you live” or “which *dong* do you live in”. Then, they could feel down because they are not said as *dong*.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

As she mentioned, social boundary can provide comfort as a collectivity based on similar social status. In this sense, her choice is not necessarily coincident with her aspiration in decision-making, but perhaps it is easier to follow the dominant discourses of social boundary. This conformity then becomes a critical factor in everyday practices, and suggests the mechanism of how the normalization can be accepted as a collective form.

### **Social conformity**

Given the social boundary collectively shared over the society, a social comfort can be practical in everyday life as well as social aspiration. Not only can a collectivity be constructed for most people to aspire to a particular identity, it can be also achieved from the practical sense of social conformity. In this sense, the resident above framed her apartment life as a socially comfortable feeling for her children:

“We actually not fancy about apartments. At the moment, we live in 25<sup>th</sup> floors, because it is just convenient for my kids. In secular terms, I don’t want to make my kids look small, but just make them comfortable.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

This social conformity can be entangled with a symbolic image and social ideology. As discussed in the last chapter, an apartment complex has a special meaning creating a social boundary, which gives a comfort within the socially imagined boundary of the complex. This boundary also reflects the contemporary social ideology to connect social relationships, which may be due to the collectively shared ideas. A resident expressed his sense of relief in the complex in terms of the practicality of his needs and social expectations, comparing his younger experiences with contemporary ideology:

“I like that apartments are consisted of a *danji*. It is because it can be seen as a boundary of my life. Once you are in there, you can feel a sense of relief...almost everything can be satisfied...In addition, there are more chances to have friends in apartments as many households are there...It is not easy to communicate with the next neighbour in houses. In old times when I was young and lived in houses, we used to be really like family in the boundary of the houses as if rural life of old days. But it doesn’t seem like that anymore even in houses. Instead, it looks better to have neighbourhood relationships in apartments as most people live in apartments.” (Yeoksam Gumho)

Based on the socially constructed ideas practically and ideologically, social practices become dependent on them. In particular, housing choice is not easy as it relates to everyday life as well as high value of assets, which means to require judgment in both financial and non-financial terms. This cannot be a linear and simple relationship, but

is complex in terms of social, cultural, economic and political power. In this sense, social conformity can be a practical norm to make an easier choice, which results in the collective pattern over the society. For instance, a British middle-class family with children tends to mostly live in suburban houses, which leads to the choice of high-rise living as unusual or prejudiced towards social housing in the UK. On the contrary, living in houses can be regarded as either very rich or very poor in Korea, because a Korean middle-class family with children is assumed to live in high-rise apartments. Therefore, both British and Korean choices are viewed as natural and obvious in each context because they give social conformity not to be unusual. This then becomes taken-for-granted, which leads to no need to think in decision-making. During many interviews, I was a bit embarrassed even to ask how residents came to live in apartments because of their reactive response without second thought:

“Well, there was no need to think about housing, and it was easy to follow because it was normal.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

“I have lived in apartments since my marriage...because a new life of a married couple is usually started in apartments.” (Yeoksam Gumho)

Given this disposition of an easy choice, an interviewee showed a disappointment against her expectation of apartment lifestyles since her marriage in 2002 as she has to live in a detached house with her parents-in-law:

“I thought obviously I will live in apartments after getting married and have that kind of lifestyle. At first, thus, I was disappointed that I should live in a house.” (Secho Detached-house)

The social norm has accordingly been linked to the traditional custom. In Korea, couples start to live together generally after marriage with a formal wedding ceremony. When they get married, men are supposed to prepare housing and women prepare for living by purchasing furniture, bedding and so forth, which are usually supported by their parents. In this, apartments came to represent parents' capability whether they can buy or rent, or not at all. The reason a respondent came to live in an apartment after marriage was because her parents-in-law bought her apartment:

“I started to live in apartments as I got married...A couple are mostly supposed to live in apartments as they get married at my age, so it was natural for me to start living in apartments. I didn’t consider living in a house at all. I just thought so because all live in apartments and my parents-in-law bought us an apartment.” (Banpo LG Xi)

As noted in this subsection, apartment living has become a normal pattern through the generation, as its meanings are embodied as middle-class housing. Both the generation of parents aged 60-70s and their children aged in their 30s-40s have lived along with the history of apartments for half or most of their life. Then, their lives are perhaps deeply penetrated to apartment lifestyles, which can be hardly free from them and influence their preferences within the social boundary and conformity.

### **Modified preferences**

As socially conformed in the life boundary of an apartment complex, the preferred pattern of life seems to be fixed to apartments in contemporary perspectives. A resident made a point that she prefers a collective form of lifestyle in apartments, and wouldn’t be changed remarkably from it:

“Apartments are expressed as stark, but I am not sure about it. Just it seems a bit close as made with up and down floors. So I guess maybe we need a garden as I am getting older, but I think that it may be better if it is not too much different from the form of apartments. I wish to live in a collective way.” (Bangbae Hyundai IV)

In a similar view, the first generation as lived in apartments since their youth ages seems to be not encouraged to change their life pattern in older ages:

“People like living conveniently without any disturbance from others by just closing door in young ages, but some of elderly think that they want to live in detached houses. However, they are not brave enough to do that, because they are already accustomed to this convenient life.” (Gaepo Jugong 2)

As can be seen from both responses above, there has been a discourse that life in old age is better-off in houses unlike younger ages since the 1990s when apartments became the dominant pattern of development, aspiring suburban lifestyles inspired from the extended tourism to foreign countries (Jeon et al. 2008). Nevertheless, the convenient and privileged lifestyles of apartments are often seen as a better option for the elderly. A resident clearly expressed this view:

“I think it can be lonely in rural houses. It is just a house, so I don’t like to live there. When you are getting older, you need more access to hospitals and neighbours. So I don’t like such thing. Also I don’t like the house that requires lots of work...But I think we should live in Tower Palace as we are getting older. It is because you need to liven you up rather than crouch behind...When I go to restaurant in the Shinsekye department store in Gangnam station, it looks so wonderful that old grannies with white hair are very well dressed with red one-piece dress and earrings and so on, and they are having lunch together. There are lots of grannies. They look very fashionable, although they look even not 70s but 80s...so I wish to live pleasurable like that when I am getting older...I always say that we should go to Tower Palace if we are older, because it is located in the most complex area. I am not saying it because I like the Tower Palace. I mean that we should live in such a complex and a convenient place with everything...I lived in LA...I think Korea is more convenient to live, because all is so fastly developed when things get out...foreign countries are good for tourism. When I went in the USA at first, it was fantastic. It seemed bright with open space and not complex. But when I got back to Korea, I felt that Korea is better to live in complex life. It is because there was nothing to do and nowhere to go out in foreign countries.” (Banpo LG Xi)

Even a respondent who moved out of Seoul to suburban houses highlighted this point, as comparing houses to apartments based on her experiences:

“You know that there is lots of work to do. It is a lot. Houses need gardening and cleaning, well, in apartments, security guards do most of them, such as removing snow as well. It is so hard, but that is why you should live in houses when you are young. Because it is not easy work when you are old. So I think

more enjoyable life for elderly is to live in apartments as convenient. As we are young, we can do it now.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

Apart from the discourse about elderly life, the four interviews above show the dependency on apartment lifestyles even for older ages. This calls to mind the perspective of the Garden City life broadcasted in the documentary film, *The Great Estate: The Rise & Fall of the Council House* (2011). A 90 year-old resident who has lived in Letchworth as the world’s first garden city for 70 years said that “I just love it down here. I wouldn’t want to move from here now...really lovely”. The contrast between these examples seems to suggest that preferences towards housing types cannot be assumed for any particular groups. Instead, it can be seen as socially and culturally constructed ideas, which lead to taken-for-granted as rationale and comfort within the society like ‘doxa’ in Bourdieu’s term. In other words, consumer preferences become modified, inculcating legitimisation upon their choices within the institutional framework. Here, ‘modified preferences’ can be defined as socially-constructed choices, which represent a feature of contemporary economic and social institutions by their system of production and exchange. ‘Latent preferences’, on the other hand, are innate preferences that cannot be fulfilled in the dominant market culture. This is because to follow these latent preferences would incur social disadvantages and economic costs even though they have attractive or distinctive cultural features. In this sense, social conformity leads to the modified preferences rather than rational choices of revealed preferences in economic terms.

Given the concept of modified preferences, the idea of social construction also leads to the fact that the taken-for-granted perspectives can be again modified under the transformation of social and cultural contexts, although its practices take institutional changes and time over generations. In this sense, the lifestyle change from apartments towards suburban life, especially, in town-houses as recent marketisation seem to have recourse to the development of society in Korea. A resident left her decision for movement towards town-houses to the housing market condition:

“Young people, and also myself, are thinking these days that they wish to live such concepts of town houses if it is safe, and not too far and easy access from Seoul, when we are older...we can move out if there is suitable place for us

within not too far, but it will depend on how housing market will be like.”  
(Gaepo Jugong 1)

In a similar vein, the next resident highlighted the cultural barrier within the social framework:

“I have heard about town houses recently. They sound nice. Apartments will be still popular for about next 10-20 years, but people may prefer such house types because they have nostalgia about nature...so I also would live in suburbs after retiring. But it doesn’t seem so easy because it is far. Such choice can be difficult although we have that idea. However, it might be easier to choose it if a cultural change would happen in the whole system.” (Yeoksam Gumho)

As implicitly connoted from these interviews, the ideas forward to town-houses seem to stem from the contextual change in the housing market and social change as a collectivity. In relation to this, the social position of apartments is perhaps moved in some ways, which may depend on various social and institutional environments. A resident framed the future expectation as relying on the housing market and social position:

“In my opinion, apartments may be getting less favoured. They were popular because of inadequate supply in the 1990s until the beginning of 2000s. But there are so many apartments now, their value tends to be going down ... so we are thinking of not living in apartments in the future...I don’t want just detached houses in suburban, but want to live in such kind of town houses.” (Chamsil Ricentz 2)

The perspective transition from apartments to town-houses seems to transform the social meanings of apartments, which turn to the difference towards an exclusive identity. On the other hand, consumers tend to expect the collective pattern for town-houses to be realistic. This then suggests that a collectively shared identity can be powerful in the market operation as well as life perspectives. As discussed through the first and second sections, the constructed idea of a collective identity is likely to be involved in behaviours and decisions as the sociological ease of mind. The next

section therefore explores the socio-spatial effects influenced by the collective pattern of lifestyles, which leads to social inclusion and exclusion.

### **8.3 Symbolic order of social space**

A symbolic image of collective identity attached to apartments is in turn reified in everyday life, governing ideas socially, culturally and spatially. Social practices to be included in a particular group are naturally connected to the exclusive position implicitly or explicitly based on constructed orders. In other words, social exclusion is not simply based on materiality, but it involves broad meanings as a symbolic capital is shaped through social, cultural, economic and political contexts (Duffy 1995).

#### **Cultural alienation**

As a collective identity is inscribed symbolically to an apartment complex, apartment lifestyles become exclusive from other types of housing, which generates a feeling of alienation socially, culturally, and spatially in social relationships. This can sometimes have a power beyond socio-economic status, as prominently reflected to a particular pattern. In this sense, for example, even those who live in a good standard of house, thus, seem to feel deprivation as not being included in the dominant identity of society in Korea. This inferior sense can be seen, especially in communication rather than intimate relationships, simply because it is not in the boundary of social expectation. In other words, social inclusion gives comfort, but draws the line out of it at the same time. A resident shared this idea with her acquaintance based on mutual understanding of distinction:

“I know someone who has her own detached house and building. But she feels awkward when she has to answer that she lives in a house, if someone asks her “Where do you live? Do you live in here in the first complex?” When she said no, she felt that the person who asked changed face...I think, in fact, those who live in houses have some sense of inferiority complex, even though they don’t have to do that.” (Bangbae Hyundai II)

Although she indicated it as not necessary, she still has cognition of the line between apartments and houses. This is perhaps why a particular form of housing comes to



stand out conspicuously through social construction based on the different lifestyles from others. An interviewee who lives in a detached house settled in a nice area mentioned uncomfortable feelings as alienated residential environment:

“We have mum’s meetings. They tend to meet without children. I want to meet with children together because we do not live in apartments. They have many things exclusively in their complex. They can play together in their playground conveniently. But in my area, we don’t have that kind of things...so they tend to meet out between breakfast and lunch after sending their children to nursery.”  
(Seocho Detached-house)

As outlined in the last chapter, this seems to be due to the perspective that communication is made easier in an apartment complex. This idea is often transcended to children, making their aspiration to live in apartments. Children might feel culturally alienated from the different built environment as a collective form, as a resident outlined:

“I have heard that children who live in houses tend to ask “mummy, let’s move to apartments”. I don’t know why, but many people move to apartments because of their children. Maybe they can feel a sense of alienation from them living in apartments, because there is playground, and many live in there.” (Garak Ssangyong)

Such ideas of children are also reflected in their everyday activities, such as drawing. A blogger captures the difference between Swedish and Korean children in their pictures, as seen in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8. 3 Different pattern of children’s drawing

Copyright material, which has been removed for electronic publication. The original printed version of this thesis contains the full image.

(a) Sweden

(b) Korea

(Source: <http://blog.naver.com/uijeongbu4u>)

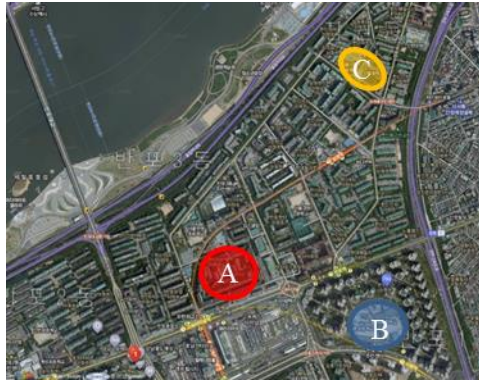
Here, how clearly different ideas can be constructed between the UK and Korea seems to be revealed, as contrasted with the idea of Paige introduced earlier chapters. Furthermore, branded apartments seem to have deepened cultural alienation according to their new lifestyles:

“Mums are OK to communicate as only one or two mums from another complex out of ten members. But they feel not good, because we use just our key for teas in the cafe but they can’t. So this circumstance makes them not feel free as they should be bought by mums living in the complex. Also, I have heard that children who live in old apartments are asking their mums to move in new apartments, as they can compare between new and old apartments.” (Banpo LG Xi)

In extreme cases, as a new complex is developed, residents in previous apartments are concerned about the difference between them, which leads them to change their children’s school. Although they should go to school more far away, it is considered as avoiding from the deprivation because of the difference, as can be seen in Figure 8.4.

“As I have heard, there is Wonchon primary and middle school in Banpo Xi, which can go both from here Hanshin apartments and those live in that apartments. It is separated, so some change their address to go other school such as Shindong. Although there is a school just next, they do not go there by transferring address to others.” (Chamwon Hanshin)

Figure 8. 4 The movement of School



Note: A: Chamwon Hanshin apartment complex, B: Wonchon Schools in Banpo LG Xi, C: Shindong schools

(Source: Author's drawing on the map from <http://local.daum.net>)

As can be seen from the resident's ideas, social exclusion is not only from others, but also themselves based on their own feeling of differences by being culturally alienated. By this mutual cognition, social relationships are likely to be confined in the boundary as a collective pattern.

### **Segregated socialisation**

From the mutually recognized boundary, socialization such as communication or community tends to be segregated between apartments and other housing types. This may be because the cultural identity brings social hierarchies and routinized power over spatial differentiation. This resonates with the perspective that symbolic and ideological underpinning is circulated over the built environment to represent the cultural status, power and authority (Lawrence and Low 1990). The idea then appears as a barrier in social space, which might prevent the development of interrelationships into more knit social relations. It is perhaps the reason why high-rise apartments came to be a cause of the broken society in public and academic discourses. It is not the solely physical and economic dimension, but also largely social and cultural construction reinforcing spatial segregation. The privileged location and own detached-house seems not enough for her to be confident in social communication, as a resident showed the complicated feelings derived from the cultural difference:

“There is a bit uncomfortable thing in relationships with other mums. They all live in apartments near here, but only me living in a house. Although it is not that I cannot invite them to my house because I live in house, there is some difficulty to invite as living together with my parents-in-law, but if I was not living with them, there is still some uncomfortable feeling because this is not an apartment. As I have visited to apartments many times, I feel withered as compared with my old house which is not refurbished yet. So, it is not comfortable to call people to my house although I live in Seocho-*dong*.”  
(Seocho Detached-house)

Likewise, friendships of children tend to be divided by the areas between apartments and others, as they are spatially differentiated and social differences are reified through apartment culture. As described in the last chapter, in the apartment complex, amenities and facilities are well equipped, and a private education centre, *hakwon* is likely to be included in them, which is more important than school. This cultural context becomes a distinctive reference in hierarchies of social space. A resident highlighted the socially and spatially segregated relationships between children through different standards of *hakwons* and play areas:

“In my area, there is a primary school that is not big and consists of four classes in each year. Half of them come from apartments near here, but the other half from house areas over the road. So there is a bit of a sense of segregation. Children in house areas usually play with friends in there, but here children in the complex get on with friends within the complex. It may be because of being closely located. Also, they tend to go to different *hakwons*. So they hardly meet, and in these days they are likely to be close with friends in the same *hakwon* than in school. So there is a kind of line to divide. Also, *hakwon* fees are different as well as location. Generally, *hakwons* in apartment areas are more expensive than in house areas.” (Chamsil Woosung)

These can draw out that social segregation underpins the collectively shared culture, which suggests that the apartment complex has not produced the broken community, but grouped a social identity as a collective form through the medium of lifestyles. This supports the idea that social inclusion comes to the fore in social practices with a

sense of belonging, logically inducing social exclusion (Jenkins 2008). Given this setting of practical ideology, the social relationships may be hierarchized from privacy, communication to community. A resident made a point clearly in this sense:

“I think that people look very individualistic. It doesn't mean not communicating with each other at all among the individual households. On the other hand, they seem to want to be included in the group of similar status. Maybe if I have higher income level, I ought to live in that standard. It seems to form like that culture...when I was sending my kid to the nursery, I felt that those who came from other better areas have their shared culture exclusively. That is, it is very exclusive between individual households, but if they make their culture within the boundary they become exclusive against other areas...”  
(Yeoksam Gumho)

As he indicated, the individualistic way of life is a basic social relationship over society due to modern ideology. However, the cultural identity encourages constructing the deeper socialisation, binding a group based on a similar social status. This probably can explain how Gangnam and Gangbuk areas have come to be spatially polarized in terms of social structure, as outlined in Chapter Three. The relationship between social structure and spatial distribution has thus reinforced the effects of social reproduction and redistribution, because of the correlation of educational background to social structure. The discourse of ‘undefeated Gangnam’ is perhaps rooted in this circulation amongst spatial, social, and educational structure, as the intention of social inclusion triggers residential movements to Gangnam.

### **Education culture**

The system of education inevitably posits at the centre in relation to achieving social status and climbing the social ladder. In particular, the movement of prestigious schools to Gangnam encouraged by tax exemption and low land price (Lee 1997 cited in Gelézeau 2007) was a key point of helping a transfer of social class based on a good quality of education, leading successful development of high-rise apartment blocks (Delissen 1994 cited in Gelézeau 2007). This shows the important relationship of institutional framework between housing market and various formal and informal

institutions. Concisely, it is perhaps from here that apartments, education, and Gangnam have seen at the same position with the rigid connection. This is because attending a prestigious school is the evidence of being a member of urban middle-class in Korean contemporary society (Lett 1998). This is why the leaflet or magazine of real estate usually includes the '*hakgun*', and middle- and high-school name as well as characteristics of property (Gelézeau 2007). In addition, it seems that the legalization of private education sector to prevent from illegal private tutoring in 1990 has reinforced the importance of apartment complex. From these successive contexts, social issues came to focus on the equation of *hakgun*, *hakwon* and apartment complex, gathering the interests of middle-classes as education can be only a method for social achievement in Korea. Given this social atmosphere, the reinforcement of social segregation has produced the polarized perspective between apartment and house residents in terms of educational support for their children. A resident showed this widespread perspective not only in Gangnam but also beyond it:

“Anyway, mums living in apartments take care of children’s education more than them in houses. So, it is generally considered that *hakgun* is better in apartment clusters together wherever it is located in new cities, or newly reconstructed areas and so on. There is a clear concept that there is a difference between mums in apartments and houses. Mums in houses seem a bit not interested in education, I don’t know why. It may be related to living standard. In general, I think that those who are high in living standard tend to live in apartments. There is always a correlation between education and living standard level. That is, it may be that living standard is clearly in proportion to education level in Korea.” (Garak Ssangyong)

This seems to be reflexive of social structure. The other respondent supported this view based on the pattern of housing types and social position:

“Those who live in other types of housing or public rental apartments tend to be the joint bread-winning of husband and wife. So their children cannot be cared properly. That is why mums staying at home are reluctant them. I think there is a kind of invisible line.” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

This response is implicitly juxtaposed with the academic discourse that the increased social position of women was one of boosters in widespread apartments, as they rely on convenient lifestyles. Instead, it is seen that many women of middle class family do not work, but more commit to take care of their children for education, which generates the prejudice against others working mum living in other types of housing seen as lower-classes. This sense was echoed in a respondent, who expressed the mum's social position of middle-classes and their culture for children's education:

“Most mums here do not work... and they feel proud of themselves about caring their children...there are no bread-winners of mums, but some working mums have very nice jobs such as a ceo, a diplomat, a doctor or a director of very big company. Otherwise, they just stay at home...and have meetings often with other mums to get information about education, such as *hakwon*...” (Banpo LG Xi)

The social position of women as a carer of children's education was probably never new, but its role has come to be more important than ever, which has perhaps been reinforced through the cultural identity of built environment. As reflected this issue in the soap opera, mums are called a 'study manager', and this phenomenon is not just in Gangnam, but those who live in Gangbuk are stressed as similarly concerned with children's education. The main actress, Minju used to live in the medium-rise flat located in Gangbuk as a single working mum, but moved to Gangnam for her son's education. Her effort for son was not different, but the difficulty was the different culture in Gangnam as levelled with socio-economic status. For this reason, most lower-classes become fallen to deprivation more than actual qualities of life. This is not to say that there is no material lack of lower-classes, but to emphasise on the reality of reinforcing the everyday life as harder. Again, it is highlighted that social exclusion goes beyond material poverty. On the other hand, those who can afford move to Gangnam towards 'the better' for both education and lifestyles, which structures the housing market in terms of '*hakgun* demand', and 'tenants with ownership'. A resident observed this effect of residential movement in her complex, as school term starts in spring:

“In 23 *pyong* and 34 *pyong* here, they usually come because of school and *hakgun*, as mostly *chonsei* tenants...so it is so busy everyday because of moving in spring term. So it was 300,000,000 *won* for *chonsei* when my mum got 24 *pyong* last year, but it is now 350,000,000 *won* in a year.” (Dogok Raemian)

This is probably the reason why the rate of *chonsei* tenants is very high in Gangnam, and over 40 % of *chonsei* residents in Gangnam-*gu* and Seocho-*gu*, and over 30 % of them in Songpa-*gu* have their own housing in other areas, as outlined in Chapter Three. In this sense, a resident stressed the housing culture as equated with education culture:

“Housing culture is...I think that housing culture in Korea is formulated with relation to school or education. So I would say education culture rather than housing culture...” (Gwangju Detached-house)

In brief, a housing culture of middle-classes has a reflection into education culture representing a collective form of particular culture as socially and spatially different.

## **Discussion**

Given the understandings of cultural features in high-rise apartment complexes explored in the last chapter, this chapter has examined the symbolic and sociological mechanisms in social and spatial relationships regarding high-rise built environment in South Korea. It has focused on the conceptualisation of a housing culture as ‘collective identity’ (positioned at the top of the conceptual framework diagram in Figure 5.1). This was an attempt to show the sociological construction of high-rise apartments based on the entanglement of collective identity and social space through standardised and cultural consumption, which reinforces social ordering processes.

In section 8.1, the consumption activities based on difference (‘distinction’ in Bourdieu’s terminology) have led to a conspicuous pattern in housing choices. This can be seen as acts of securing ontological identity in the uncertainty of the modern world. Institutional practices to secure a new identity, however, are not necessarily limited to the existing ideology of home ownership (property ladder), but flexibly



developed to tenure change (psychic ladder) in the changing institutional environment of the unstable housing market. This is an example of how culture can change according to the institutional constraints or opportunities: not only are meanings of built forms constructed, but tenure patterns are also socially and culturally idealised.

Ironically, the distinctive identity is in fact achieved by a collective pattern of standardised consumption unlike the critique of modern mass production and consumption system, as explored in the section 8.2. This is because similarity (collectivity) exists inseparably on the other side of difference, giving social boundaries and conformity to be included in particular groups. Such social expectations frame the taken-for-granted perspectives, which become the contextual and cultural references constructed differently from place to place. This showed how preferences between British and Korean differ in contemporary modern society over the last half century. In addition, these ideas develop into normalising common-sensical power, which results in social ordering in residential environments (e.g. segregated socialisation or education culture in section 8.3), as inclusion inevitably entails exclusion. It demonstrated that social demarcation and socio-spatial issues are not necessarily derived from the deterministic social structure (indeed it is difficult to clearly define what it is), but rather socially and culturally perceived with a basis of lifestyles and social relationships implicitly and explicitly.

The discussion in this chapter showed how the symbolic meanings of high-rise apartments have been sociologically constructed and changed according to social, economic and political contexts. The sociologically constructed identity of built environment has come to be the symbolic and cultural structure in influencing institutional environment and practices recursively, which is explored in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In order to answer the research question, ‘How are high-rise apartments sociologically constructed, individually and collectively, and what are the effects of this?’, this chapter has explored how certain ideas about high-rise built environments are reified over social space, through the symbolic consumption and segregated socio-spatial

relationships. In the previous chapter, the value construction of high-rise apartments in Korea based on the collectively shared ideas was described, which is potentially engender the power of discourses in influencing perceptions of built environments over the wider society. In such collective pattern of ideas and its dominance, housing consumption tends to be representative of social status implicitly or explicitly, relating to symbolic meanings particularly in high-rise apartments in Korea. This derives from the different lifestyles with previous low-rise settlements, which has been largely supported by governmental policy as the important institutional environment. The reification of these ideas is shown in the socio-spatial relationships through its hierarchy of social space interpreted into the social norm, such as caring children, which is evidently expressed by some residents. The research also showed that symbolic consumption may generate distinctive behaviours about consumption and tenure patterns in the housing market, which may lead to the new normalised perceptions in longer term. These activities seem to achieve a particular social position and cultural identity as a form of social conformity.

The symbolic power relations outlined in this chapter, which is to secure social position and social conformity with predominant cultural identity, suggests that housing consumption and its outcome of built environments are actually complex and dynamic rather than rational explanations, even sometimes irrational. This again shows the limits of the more simplistic accounts of values in views of urban built environments which are calculable in universality. In this context, considering high-rise built environments as a culture entailing symbolic collective identity opens the broader understandings of the spatial and social construction of built environments and the symbolic nature of housing culture. These meanings of housing culture are however not confined to the individual ideas and practices, but embodied to institutional behaviours over the society, which have the power of governing the housing market, the whole city and the national economy. In this way, it is quite possible to see this embodiment of institutional behaviour in terms of the Bourdieusian 'doxa', or taken-for-grantedness, discussed in chapter four. Further, Elias' conceptualisations of the social 'othering' that suggests the ways and means in which symbolic capital is distributed are important questions in the study of the social and spatial consequences of housing development. This requires the understandings of

how the institutional activities operate in relation to housing culture in the construction of the city, which is explored in the next chapter.

## *Chapter Nine*

# **Institutionalised High-Rise Built Environment in Korea: Dominant Housing Culture**

### **Introduction**

Built environment conveys a symbolic and ideological culture that underlines status, power, and authority in the city (Lawrence and Low 1990). Symbolic urban culture seems then to emphasise developing city futures in the wider city, which provides the physical requirements for the society to sustain and reproduce itself, but also a symbolic reflection of cultural and political meanings and power in the built environment. This cultural and symbolic identity is neither given naturally nor determined by simple allocation, but socially constructed through the market system in modern society. However, social construction is not a neutral process, power is apparent in social and political relations (Healey 1999). As shown in the previous chapters, value constructions of built environments entail specific normative ideas and social orders on these residential environments and their neighbourhoods. Institutional behaviours in the construction and reconstruction of housing culture in Korean high-rise apartments could then be considered as a strategy in pursuit of cultural capital to configuring the social order.

Based on the research question, ‘How do institutional behaviours under a housing culture construct a high-rise built environment, socially, spatially, economically and politically?’, this chapter examines how institutional behaviours are entangled with housing culture, as everyday practices of construction and reconstruction of the high-rise built environment. In particular, the chapter focuses on the dominant power of cultural structure. High-rise apartments usually rationalise the physical and geographical constraints in Korea, which is considered as deterministic barriers in the construction of the built environment. Instead, this research aims to suggest that even though high-rise apartments were initially adopted to solve housing shortages, they have actually helped to deepen centralisation and to extend Seoul to the mega size city rather than the resultant of constraints, confounding suburbanisation process. Also, it examines housing culture in the case study neighbourhoods that is an attempt to

challenge understandings of urban built environments based on dualistic determinism, which divides housing form according to physical and spatial concepts. As the invisible mechanism of culture has been less considered in debates about urban built environments, this chapter also seeks to recognise the cultural operation which contributes largely to the construction of built environments. Given the sociological understandings of housing culture drawn from the previous chapter, this final empirical chapter focuses on social, spatial, economic, and political activities of housing culture.

The chapter consists of three sections, given the broad nature of housing culture as dominant power. The first section is focused on the power of cultural dominance reflected in decision-making process, and its concomitant irrational and marginalising effect. The cultural power then reinforces, and is reinforced by, political acts and institutional behaviours for the individual and the market in the form of culturally informed ideas and resources, which is examined in the second section. Finally, given the reinforced rationalisation and legitimisation, cultural meaning is predominantly embodied to social and spatial construction of high-rise built environment as taken-for-granted, which is discussed in the third section. To conclude the chapter, the overall aim of the thesis is briefly discussed in order to understand the construction of urban high-rise built environments in Korea through a housing culture approach and to reflect some of these findings in potential implications for discussions of the built environment.

### **9.1 Power of the dominance**

Unlike the notion of individualisation with regard to modernity, the transformation of the production system from individual building to housebuilding industry has actually taken place collectively through cultural consumption in order to seek an ontological identity. The market has thus come to be important not as places of resource distribution but as an institutionalisation of power structure (Samuels 1995). In this sense, cultural identity appears to be a reference in the construction and reinforcement of the power structure, as power comes from collective ideas that become taken-for-granted over the society.

### **Bandwagon effect: mass movement**

The power of cultural consumption has presumably recourse to the link between mass-production and mass-consumption. Their mutual relationship is necessary to maintain the housing market, which is constructed by various institutions and power allocation, such as policy, organisations, and social media rather than an automatic relationship between supply and demand. Production and consumption has not arisen from itself, but is mediated by a variety of institutional practices. High-rise apartments were not favoured in the first place, but their success came from the perspective change towards apartment lifestyles. Some initial developments, such as Yeoido or Dongbu Ichon-*dong* project, promoted new modern lifestyle and a new image of middle class housing. In addition, a remarkable inspiration unexpectedly came from the incident of privileged provision in Hyundai Apgujung as the power structure of allocation in the development process, inscribing the symbolic ideas of rich and luxury residential settlements. This became a notion of social aspiration in broad society, and fostered a sense of collectivity to be included in a particular lifestyle. In this social context, the cultural shift from the detached-houses to apartments took place in exchange for the mass movement for affluent middle-classes. A developer highlighted the popular trend of apartments in the early period of the developments:

“The apartments we provided were one of the favourites and this here was a first-class complex in the beginning of the 1980s. Because there were not many apartments yet, and it was located in the riverside of Hangang. In addition, it was big complex with several thousand units and the units were mostly large of 60, 50, 40 *pyongs* as well as 20 *pyong*. At the time, very high ranking people, say, moved to apartments of new trend. So this area still has that reputation as they are settled down until now...” (Shindong-a)

This process of cultural movement was boosted by social relationships, such as visiting or listening to friends and acquaintances during the mass-production in the 1980s-90s. Similar lifestyles were sought and preferences were modified in the context of socially constructed ideas. A respondent who had a relatively affluent life in a house showed the following movements of her neighbours:

“There was a boom of apartments ... and my neighbours were getting to move out there to Yeoido Sibum apartments by ones and twos. The Yeoido was an empty field and the Sibum apartments were firstly built there. So when I visited there, I felt that it was so nice because it was warm and very convenient. That is why I also wanted to live in apartments.” (Dogok Raemian)

Not only did the affluent middle-classes move to apartments, but apartment lifestyles were also the social aspiration over a whole society. A resident who was inspired from her friend towards apartment lifestyles in her 20s remarked about the initial motive of her life in apartments since marriage in the 1970s:

“There were some large apartments at that time. For example, in Yeoido, my friend had it when she got married...there was not many but some apartments that were sold for the rich...well, living in apartments was a kind of ‘romance’ by the time ...and considered better-off like now...” (Gaepo Jugong 2)

In her case, although she seemed not very affluent, both her husband and herself graduated from university and had secure occupations. When she married at first, a retirement allowance from her job was used to buy a public rental apartment in Gangbuk that could be owned after five years monthly rent, whilst they could save for housing accounts. Several years later, the couple sold the rental apartment and moved to Gaepo Jugong built in 1983 in Gangnam, as they had an opportunity based on the occupation of her husband that some portions of development were given to civil servants with the saving scheme in priority. This shows an example of policy support to encourage the consumption of apartments. The structure of production and allocation system was, however, not initially prepared, but incrementally developed according to the social requirements. A developer highlighted how the framework of policy interacted with the social and cultural contexts during the mass movement:

“There was no supply method such as housing savings previously. So it was based on ‘first come, first served’. That means that first come is the order of knowing the information. So there was a social issue of privileged selling, when Hyundai apartments in Apgujung were sold in 1978...it was because there was lots of demand but they were distributed to only those who knew the

information...at that time, apartment price was 1,000,000 won (about 500 pounds) per *pyong*. That is, if 60 *pyong*, 60,000,000 won, and if 30 *pyong*, 30,000,000 won. I remember as I sold many of them. It was 33,000,000 won for 33 *pyong*. However, it went up 80,000,000 or 50,000,000 won because there was no balance between supply and demand. It was thus traded with premium...there was too much unbalance, so the regime of Noh Taewoo intended more supply, which led to the Two Million Units of Housing in new city developments.” (Shindong-a)

Although the government started to intervene in the apartment provision since 1973 due to the dramatic increase of apartment prices (Baek 2007), the ‘first come, first served’ system or the lottery method (Figure 9.1) was prevalent in the 1970s as the supply system was not fully institutionalized (Jung 2011a). The housing saving scheme enacted in 1977 was adopted to the provision by the public institutes, and extended to the private supply in February, 1978 (Baek 2007). In spite of the policy framework, in October, 1978, as the interviewee above indicated, the social issues induced from the incident in Apgujung Hyundai of privileged provision, which was actually planned to build for first-time buyer of employees, shows the salient meanings of apartments in terms of high-ranking position and the explosive demand with premium value, not just confined to the basic needs. This led to not only the reinforcement of policy for supply system, but also for housebuilding industry based on the mass-provision scheme, such as the Two Million project. In this context, a developer remarked how their company has grown from the background:

“We previously used to be involved in construction of Siyoung apartments supplied by Jugong, which didn’t have our name. We just constructed at that time, but we in earnest started to supply from the Two Million Project by the regime of Taewoo Noh. It started in 1989, so we were involved in Five New Cities on a full scale...although we still did housing business before, it was not big as the ratio of housing supply was very low...and it was said that housing industry will be getting grown in the future. Also, the government encouraged actively in that way, so we activated it more.” (Samsung 2)



Figure 9. 1 The crowd in applying for apartments



(Source: re-adapted from Jeon et al. 2009)

This extension of provision and housebuilding industry can be seen as fulfilled with the cultural satisfaction as well as the initial aim of solving the housing shortage. On the other hand, detached-houses have been degraded in their cultural identity according to the mass movement of middle-classes, becoming old-fashioned and inconvenient, as described in Chapter Seven. This has come to rationalise the redevelopment or reconstruction of houses into high-rise apartments. For their family's movement to apartments in the 1990s, a resident saw the lost meaning of houses, which was a big and luxury detached-house built in the beginning of 1970s along with the initial Gangnam development, and the area turned into mostly apartments:

“Those areas of houses were mostly reconstructed to luxury villas or apartments. There was no reason firmly to live in the house, so my parents sold it at that time and moved to the apartment after we grew up.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

This contrasts with the demolition of high-rise buildings in many other countries. Here, the importance of cultural structure is seen in the built environment, governing urban and housing policy. The rationale is perhaps derived from the dominant cultural pattern, rather than calculable factors. The rationalised motivation from cultural identity then leads to culturally dominant development pattern and process, influencing the built environment physically and spatially, and also the construction of housing market socially, economically and politically.

### **Cultural dominance**

Housing is a particular product that has exchange value unlike other goods. It can be hardly seen that high-rise buildings have exchange values, but only a niche market in the limited place in many western countries where the favoured lifestyles are based on the suburbs. On the contrary, in Korea, high-rise apartments have been the most reliable assets that have potential to increase values in exchange, which has been the justification of gentrifying house areas into apartment blocks over the last decades. These juxtaposed phenomena seem to stress the lack of mainstream economics, and instead the importance of housing culture as collectively shared values. In other words, the predominant pattern of housing can be a reference to make values and power structure in terms of social, cultural, economic and political discourses. In this sense, apartments have come to be as a measure of expanding wealth. A resident as *chonsei* tenant described the property value of apartments compared to houses in order to increase his asset:

“To be honest, it is reluctant to have house as an asset, because apartments have more values than houses later on...we would buy an apartment, and so we can sell it to use when my kids get married. Then, when we both are only left, we can live in smaller apartment or suburban house. That is our plan. In fact, you know that there is no other way to extend your wealth in Korea... although housing market is getting down at the moment, people still stick to the investment to property...” (Yeoksam Gumho)

In a practical sense, this also relates to everyday practices in the housing market. Given the mass production and consumption, apartments are open to a variety of options and opportunities, whereas other types of housing are limited in the market. This may be a practical level of social conformity as well as generating its social and cultural meanings. Based on practical and economic values, *chonsei* apartments seem to be preferred to ownership of other types of housing. Although *chonsei* tenants are not supposed to gain the investment value, it seems to be practical as well as social and cultural identity in symbolic meanings rather than to own others without asset values. This is probably the reason why most young couples of the middle-class start living in *chonsei* apartments with the expectation of property ladder moves

afterwards. A resident rationalised the choice of apartments over other housing types as practically easier:

“In fact, it is active for apartments whatever to buy and sell and also to rent *chonsei* compared to other housing types. That is, if I moved in such as town-houses as I wanted, it could be very difficult to sell it again when it is urgent situation to sell. So it depends on it, and that is the problem unless you live forever there. However, in case of apartments, it is very competitive to get *chonsei*...” (Banpo Raemian)

In a similar vein, branded apartments came to the fore in restructuring the housing market based on its newly constructed social and cultural values. This is why only renaming with big brand to old apartments increases their prices remarkably, and some apartments built just one year before adopting new brand name tend to have more difficulty in increasing their value and in trading than them with new name despite the provision by the same company in the same area (Park 2005). In this sense, it is irresistible to prefer branded apartments, even though there is cognition that brand name is not always linked to the qualities, as a resident stressed:

“Well, can I say I prefer brands? I think it is twofold. I don’t like them because they are brands, but it cannot be ignorable because of their services being better. That is, it is more reliable. So it is considerable factor, even though it is said that they are not always good. It is well known that branded apartments are not necessarily well built because they are all the same in terms of a subcontract construction. But we cannot ignore them still because there is the difference in terms of brand name and price. So I don’t think I will buy a non-branded apartment, as we might sell it later on.” (Chamsil Ricentz 1)

In fact, the dependency on the brand value is partly attributable to the unstable economic condition through the period of IMF and recent global economic crisis. A resident remarked on the relationship between brand value and economic condition:

“I don’t think that the branded apartments have increased their qualities. But it increased the values of apartments. For example, the most preferred apartments

are here such as Samsung Raemian, Lotte Castle, or Hyundai Hillstate, etc. These branded apartments can use better qualities of building materials compared to previous Hyundai or Samsung apartments. But I think that it is the result of advancement according to the time. I don't think that qualities of apartments increased remarkably. However, in our circumstances, once the brand names are attached, the values of apartments rise enormously...it may be because it is inevitable for people to prefer big companies in various aspects when the building economy is not very good like now." (Banpo Samho Garden III)

The success of the branding strategy seems to come from this social effect, which has become a new norm to make people feel safer and secure in the housing market, as discussed in the last chapter in relation to seeking an ontological identity. It is thus considered that big branded companies are more secure in the face of uncertainty and crisis, even though some big companies have gone bankrupt. This is also related to the irrationality of institutional behaviours. Buying branded housing, thus, provides a social comfort for consumers in insecure circumstances, where the norms of economic safety hardly exist. Social and cultural symbols then seem to compensate for its economic values. This coincides with the emphasis of symbolic consumption rather than the basic fulfilment of use values (Baudrillard 1981). This accordingly results in the polarised structure of the housebuilding industry according to the value of brand name. This demonstrates the point that the economy is more than the market (Samuels 1995), and culture precedes economy rather than the other way round (Warde 2002). A developer highlighted their secure position in an economic downturn:

"I think one of the reasons we could make more growth was a stability of the company during the IMF. That is, consumers can trust Samsung that we are not going to breakdown. This is because there were many companies gone bankrupt. So we could do more stable business at that time because of its trust." (Samsung 1)

The construction of the housebuilding structure is thus seen to rely on the cultural dominance in large part as an impetus in the operation of housing market. This highlights the closely correlated relationship between consumers and developers in

terms of shaping the market beyond the simple mechanism of economy like a factory line. In fact, as already noted several times in this thesis, the branding marketing has contributed to revive the housing market out of the economic downturn at the end of the 1990s. This may be a clear example of a cultural effect to restructure the housing market in accord with the new value of social and cultural identity based on the brand name. As cultural identity has innately psychic and symbolic aspects, however, the market mechanism and institutional practices of agency can bring unexpected behaviours and unintended consequences against constraints or opportunities. This can take place in the speculated activities at the expense of social equity, which becomes blurred between right and wrong in social practices.

### **Speculation or investment?**

As apartments became culturally predominant with higher exchange values compared to others, the acquisition of apartments came to represent the status of wealth to be an urban middle-class household during the period of economic growth. Based on this idea, housing price has explosively risen as demand went up increasingly, which could make enormous profits. This has thus caused the simple logic that buying apartments are a means of earning more money easily. Given this background, the boundary between speculation and investment has been blurred, and the speculated investment has become not unusual at all. This has also brought out various irrational mechanisms in the housing market, which seems to be difficult to understand by a simple theory, such as demand and supply equation.

#### *Speculated investment*

The origin of the speculation was due to the ground-breaking ceremony of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hangang Bridge in 1966 introduced in Chapter Three, which was mainly intrigued by women called '*bokbuin*' with meaning of 'women making money through estates' (Son 2003b). Initially, most of them, though not many at the time, were highly educated in foreigner countries, especially in Japan, which could thus have future prospect of development after a full development of Gangbuk, and bought the cheap land in Gangnam, as informed by an interview. This came to be soon widespread according to the initiative of Gangnam development (Son 2003b). The speculation has accordingly connected from the land to apartments in Gangnam, which further

advanced to a new city development, redevelopment and reconstruction wherever apartments are developed. A resident who moved from Gangbuk to Gangnam was encouraged to invest in reconstruction apartments, recognising herself as non-knowledgeable about investment:

“I was foolish. I just realised since moving here that women living in Gangnam is called ‘*bokbuin*’...as I can see here, they are used to buy and resell reconstruction apartments...and I met a women here who encouraged me to do it like that. I was not interested at all in Gaepo-*dong* reconstruction, but she said to me ‘you should buy it’. So I bought one of them with all money I gathered even from my son’s earning, which was 400 million *won* (about 200 thousand pounds) for 13 *pyong*. Since then, it is increasingly rising up to about 700 million *won*...so we bought another one, 15 *pyong* for my daughter. But we did it when it was expensive, because it was 500 million *won* for 15 *pyong* when my son bought it 400 million *won*. But my daughter bought it for 700 million *won*.”

(Dogok Raemian)

In the phase of redevelopment or reconstruction, those who cannot afford to pay for new apartments sell their rights of *jibun* to investors who intend to make profits later on after developments like she did. ‘*Jibun*’ is the right as an amount of land allocation in the process of redevelopment or reconstruction. For example, those who live in 5 units of housing built in 100 *pyong* of land are allocated twice more *jibun* as 20 *pyong* than someone settling in one of 10 units of housing in the same land as turned into 10 *pyong* of *jibun*. In addition, there is usually some portion of free *jibun* according to the amount of profits given by the construction company conducting the development. Hence, those who have 10 *pyong* of *jibun* and are given 150% of free *jibun* can be allocated to 15 *pyong* of new developed apartments without any payments unless they want bigger units. According to this, development process is likely to depend on the issue of *jibun* that has a correlation to density, housing price, the ratio of selling units to others than original residents and so forth, and that is thus sensible to both developers and consumers about how much they gain from the development. Previously, the extra *jibun* to be paid for new apartments was little, and usually covered with *chonsei* tenants and loans, which was why a multi-buyer system was possible. Since apartment prices have gone up too high due to branding phenomena as

well as various regulation and limits on reconstruction, however, the development has not been easier to access than before according to the increased amount of money households should pay for the *jibun*. Nevertheless, the investment of middle-class households seems to remain with intention of extending their values in terms of bigger and more luxurious apartments, as a resident wishes reconstruction of her apartments:

“Most people would do reconstruction, but housing price is now at very high and we need to pay for the *jibun*. So it is not like previous. But it is still easier to earn the money through the property. Although you pay for the *jibun*, if you can get profit of several 10 million *won* and also size of *pyong* can get bigger, so many want to do that according to how much the *jibun* is and capacity...”  
(Gaepo Jugong 2)

Not only are investments involved in old apartments, but houses also give opportunities of investment as abandoned by the mass movement of middle-classes to apartments. This development is compared to other countries, which means that only a new building of detached-house is not always valued than apartments in Korea. For instance, the British investment tends to be achieved by buying old houses at cheaper price and selling them at higher through the individual renovation, which can be seen in a popular TV series in the UK called ‘Homes Under the Hammer’. This may be due to broadly two reasons: houses are more valued rather than high-rise buildings in the UK; also, despite some recent consolidation the structure of housing provision in both new supply and redevelopment is relatively dependent on the local/regional housing market rather than conglomerated housebuilding industry (Ball 2003). On the other hand, in Korea, houses seem to have only land value, whereas apartments are socially, culturally and economically preferred and accordingly more valued. The interviewee who was quoted above explained how the house he used to live in was redeveloped with much increased values:

“Houses are not sold. Their values of 20 or 30 year-old houses are actually zero. The only way to sell them is just to sell the land and demolish the building. However, apartments are not zero although they are 20 or 30 years old. This is because all values such as exchange value, easy trade, convenience and

management are reflected in apartment buildings. But there is no such thing in houses...That area changed completely to apartments or luxury villas...it was because it can make much profitable for the land. For example, the house where we lived was on the land of about 140 *pyong* excluding roads, which over half was garden and it was a detached-house with two floors. So if it is cleared, you can build 4 units of 100 *pyong* of villa by 4 floors of building with garden in the 130pyong of land. And the house was situated in the end of around alleys, so the company bought the road together to be included in the land and built lots of apartments or luxury villas. I heard that they made lots of profit, as they sold them to 20 million won (approximately 10 thousand pounds) per *pyong* at that time.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

Along with the development of house areas, there is a speculative phenomenon to increase values as a middle stage of apartment development. Given the prediction of development, a house owner builds it into multi households of flats, which can make more holdings of *jibuns* to have more apartments when it is redeveloped. This is in fact based on the deregulated law to build multi-housing as a solution of housing shortage in the city centre. It is however often manipulated in the phase of apartment development, which makes the residential environment worse as making much denser without appropriate facilities, such as parking and enough space between buildings. This is how house areas have become poor areas until they are redeveloped to apartments as usually taking over 10 years. The interviewee above showed his current investment to such area:

“That area is limited in construction at the moment. So it is supposed not to build further from several years ago. It was because of the prevention of splitting up the *jibuns*, by Seoul city and local (*gu*) council. On the contrary, however, it means that there is meant to be developed and so do not split up. Investors can think like that. So it can be a signal that it will be developed some time. Therefore, the market responds like so, and the value of *jibuns* are getting increased...this is because they can have eight units of apartment if the owner of detached-house change into multi floors of housing with eight units. So it is the prevalence to split-up the *jibun*.” (Apgujung Hanyang)



Based on this development process, vast areas of old low-rise settlements have been gentrified to high-rise apartment blocks, and this kind of investment has been seen as normal for middle-classes to own housing and to increase the wealth. This is perhaps the rationale for why the area over the mountain hill as shown in the introductory chapter has turned into high-rise apartment blocks. These speculated developments have not been confined to Gangnam areas, but widely adopted over the society, which led to enormous effects of an unstable housing market.

### *Domino effect*

As apartments have dispersed from Gangnam to over other areas, the behaviour of the housing market has also had similar effects based on the social and cultural expectancy. The domino effect in apartment prices, for example, became active as starting from Gangnam to Gangbuk, new cities and local markets. A resident noticed this as irrational:

“Housing price in the local area is stable, and there are not many variables. But, in fact, even local housing price also increased quite a lot compared to ten years ago...In my view, it should not have gone up like that, but it was like domino effect, for example, as Gangnam goes up then Gangbuk goes up, and Gangbuk goes up then satellite cities go up, and satellite cities go up then local areas go up....” (Banpo Samho Garden III)

This may be due to the idea that cultural identity apartments embody is probably similar regardless of location, as based on the collectively shared values in apartment lifestyles. Housing policy is then reflexive of this domino effect adopted as an exceptional variable. A policymaker indicated this effect in practice:

“Gangnam is like an antecedent indicator. That is, Gangnam leads to wave over the bubble seven areas, satellite cities and nation, so we are very sensible about it. This is because Gangnam goes up then others such as bubble seven can go up accordingly, as psychological expectation is also an important variable...” (Policymaker 2)

However, this effect not only affects in case of prices going up, but it also reflects more seriously in price falls. In particular, this can bring more serious results to local areas when the housing market is frozen by the regulation of housing policy. This has led to change in housing policy to become effective from universality of all areas to speciality of some areas. Areas are divided by housing price and demand patterns. For example, there are 'bubble seven' regions including all three *-gus* of Gangnam, which had the explosion of housing price. These areas are thus dealt with by more cautious measures, and especially, Gangnam is considered as the most sensible indicator. A policymaker highlighted the role of Gangnam and policy practices based on the domino effect:

“Housing price of Gangnam is the most influential. So sometimes I think that Gangnam should be approved as the richest area, because housing policy based on the price of such area can influence up to satellite cities. Well, it may be ok in satellite cities, but it influences local areas. That is, such policy to control Gangnam can make local areas knocked down if the same policy is effective. So now policy is in general confined to the metropolitan city.” (Policymaker 3)

Given these effects, the equilibrium logic of supply and demand does not imply the irrational behaviour in the housing market. On the contrary, for instance, more supply has led to higher price in the last decade in relation to the second phase of new cities and New Town developments. A policymaker remarked on the trigger effect of supply leading to higher price:

“It is inevitable to keep observation on Gangnam, because it leads to a chain reaction to others....because housing price is like psychological game...that is, if one does price at 100 million *won*, then next one that used to be 90 million *won* increase to the same price at 100million *won* as seeing the one. This is because housing value is not gone down as it is a bit old. Like that, if others do at 100 million *won*, although it seems reliable at 50 million *won*, then all goes up to 100 million *won*...there are lots of such psychological effects...there were many developments under the regime of Noh Muhyun. So money came out suddenly. In that circumstance, apartment price was fluctuated according to the regulation of reconstruction. In the similar period, there was Pangyo

development that priced at 90 percent of market price of the neighbourhood Bundang, and then Eunpyong new town that also set high price, and then Unjung. In that sequence, psychological effect led that people run into buying housing competitively as price goes up. That is, in fact, it should have been down if new cities are developed, but it was like firing because it was getting higher as built more in psychological sense.” (Policymaker 1)

Such psychic effects may be due to the predominantly collective pattern of development based on the constructed meanings of high-rise apartments. Moreover, the domino effect has come to be reflected in the unjustified behaviour, such as price cartels during the mass developments.

#### *Price cartel*

The collective power based on dominance can lead to the disorder of housing market by improper activities. Price cartel has become a big issue over the last decade, which is usually led by women’s community or regular meetings such as *Bansanghoe*. As the domino effect, this was initially limited in Gangnam areas, but came to be widespread to other areas in the mid-2000s (Chosun 2005). The extension of such phenomena was encouraged by the New Town development in Gangbuk (Hankyoreh 2005). This was followed by the rise of price of new developments, which stimulated residents to increase their apartments as similarly valued. One interviewee experienced this in her previous apartments located in out of Gangnam:

“Apartment price tends to go up by residents...they set up higher price...about three or four years ago, there was a price cartel by women’s community, such as, ‘don’t sell under certain price’. There were many cases like that. The complex located in just next of the complex I used to live in was big with 5300 units including public rental, while mine was 2100 households. But there was well organised women’s community in that complex. So they increased the price.” (Chamsil Ricentz 3)

This behaviour thus seems to have partly contributed to the dramatic increase of price as well as branding strategy based on the collective provision at the time, which made

enormous social disorder. This was accordingly seen as unjustified collective behaviour, not only because of market disturbance but also its informal pressure on residents who want to sell quickly at cheaper price. As a policymaker remarked, supply was a trigger of this effect:

“It was very disordered when women in apartments made a price cartel at that time. In women’s communities, it was set not to sell, for instance, under 40 million *won* as they set their price over 50 million *won*. So we were hard to catch and find out that...it led to big confusion. Even in one day, it went up by several 10 million *won*, so people couldn’t concentrate on their work but tried to buy housing. It has such effect...as expected psychologically that housing price is going up, it was considered that the higher price of apartments will be out if there is more supply. In fact, thus, new supply had higher price, so next apartments were led to higher as well. Anyway, it was psychological effect rather than economy at that time.” (Policymaker 1)

As can be seen from some examples, the collective power can make abnormal behaviours in the housing market, which cannot be understood by just economic explanations, but also psychic and symbolic operations. Such dominant power has further implications, marginalising other cultures than the dominant.

### **Marginalising effect**

Given the predominant pattern of apartments, other types of housing settlements are often thrown to the insecure position according to the rationalisation towards apartments in terms of social, cultural and economic values. Even though apartments became a social norm for many, there still exists in favour of other ways of life against apartments. As seen in the last chapter, the residents in detached-houses are often socially and culturally segregated. Moreover, they become spatially isolated from the neighbourhoods as mostly transformed to apartments, which might threaten their ontological security. The interviewee below shows that their neighbourhoods are becoming changed and they are often encouraged to reconstruct by developers. As the area was settled down for the affluent middle-class in the beginning of Gangnam development, they have been satisfied with their residential environment:

“Here is no reconstruction, because they don’t have any intention to sell house as they are rich enough. But apartment developers sometimes come to buy land. They look around all the area, and try to negotiate with us to sell, but it is not preferred at all...only three blocks including us are left.” (Seochon Detached-house)

In a similar vein, the Green Villa, which is known as the first town-houses built in 1983, faced the conflicts between advocates and opponents of reconstruction. The interviewee below does not agree with reconstruction because his family moved when it was built as favoured by a different lifestyle. Now it has been over 25 years, and there has been an issue about reconstruction in the village. It is reported that some of the households have moved to the Green Villa in recent years, expecting reconstruction, which led to the conflicts between those who favour town-house lifestyles and those who are interested in making profit from reconstruction. Although it has stopped currently as its agreement was not arrived at enough rate, it can be reissued at any time if there are more advocates. He insisted on the speculated investment as the reason for reconstruction:

“Those who oppose reconstruction know the value of town houses...they are not concerned about making profit from reconstruction, as they are rich enough. That is, on the contrary, this means that those who agree with reconstruction want to do that for making profit. I think those who really want apartments rather than town houses are less than two percent of advocates for reconstruction. They are only one or two of them. It is because they can sell this and move to nicer apartments. That is, the reason of reconstruction to build apartments is only for other purpose...About half of advocates have lived only three or four years here.” (Green Villa)

This marginalization effect is basically originated from the dominant structure of the housebuilding industry centred on apartment developments. Since the governmental endeavour to boost apartment developments, the housebuilding industry has been structured mostly by the leading conglomerates. As they have adapted to the large projects, other types of housing, such as town-houses seem to be not suitable for their

current system. A developer clearly remarked on their current position of a supply system for apartments rather than small projects:

“I think that it may be suitable for small specialised companies. In some sense, we are a factory rather than manual craft based on individual supply. That is, we are meant to produce mass products quickly. But they are not possible for the economy of scale, as they require same conditions despite small scale...in addition, as we are a big company, there is extra management cost in general compared to small companies. This is because headquarters should operate apart from the direct cost for construction. This is big portion, so it is not easy. If we specialised them, it could be possible. But, for now, we do not seem to do it.”  
(Hyundai 1)

Given this development structure, the development process has often generated physical conflicts to evict residents, and many victims were reported. As apartments have dominant power, however, legitimacy is more given to the development side than to the evictees in the incidents. There is not necessarily sympathy with the victims, but most agreed to the development. There is a tendency in public perspective that the development of apartments can make better environment as well as profits. In addition, there has been misapplication of development process. Some is not voluntarily moved out until they get more compensation, which sometimes leads to the physical conflicts. This phenomenon leads to the difficulty in terms of social inequity. A resident expressed this false implication as immoral:

“In case of Jindalae apartments, most of them moved out this spring, but only two households didn't. Then, it is loss for those who already moved out individually, and said that construction company is much more loss. But such people always exist in the reconstruction development. So construction company compensate more to them. That is, they are aimed at it. They are so bad, but always one or two exists. In the law, the heating can be off even in this cold, but the water cannot be cut off. Because people cannot do anything without water. But they live in that cold...” (Dogok Raemian)

In this sense, the tragic incident, which happened in the New Town development several years ago, was not justified, but turned out to be illegal behaviour of demonstration to resist against the eviction. This resulted in the fierce debates between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Party.

As discussed through this section, the dominant power is incredibly permeated in everyday life and institutional practices, which also influences the institutional structure. Its effects are not simple, but complex and remarkable as irrational and symbolic operation are deeply involved, reaching out to a whole society socially, spatially, culturally, economically and politically. The dominant power of cultural identity then takes the form of structural constraints as taken-for-granted, which become institutionalised in everyday practices, and which give references to political governance. The next section discusses how the cultural structure governs society and how it is manipulated to the politics.

## **9.2 Nature of housing culture**

The dominant power of cultural identity is routinised and becomes taken-for-granted, as human beings are undoubtedly creatures of habit as the cognitive basis of institutionalisation (Jenkins 2008). Institutional practices are habitually turned to structural constraints. As housing is a form of symbolic capital, it often comes to be references for the politics and for the public in their institutionalised activities.

### **Politics of housing**

As housing can be a symbolic capital, apartments have been good resources to implement political performance alongside with the economic growth in Korea. This has been, in particular, based on the developmentalism of the government by structuring housebuilding industries and creating a middle-class lifestyle of apartments. Ideologically, the historical context of an adversarial relationship with North Korea has complemented the strategy of apartment developments to achieve an aim of purely economic development (Gelézeau 2007). In this insecure background of society, apartments seem to have essentially been connected to secure the citizen's and country's identity in ontological sense. Given this collective identity of apartments, social unrest or economic crisis has thus been major references for

politicians to change housing policy, which can empower their political position and govern the national economy. For instance, social incidents tend to ignite further supply of apartments in order to prevent political unrest, as a policymaker highlighted:

“If some incidents happen in informal housing such as *jjokbang* (informally settled habitat with a small room) and so poor people get worse, such affairs influence governmental policy. That is, for example, there was the incident that some people committed suicide because of a sudden rise of *chonsei* after the 88 Seoul Olympics, then policy changed suddenly. This is because people die. Whatever it is, policy should change enormously if people die. That is why the supply project of Four million or Five million households emerged when Taewoo Noh was the president. It is because people died. Therefore, new cities started to be built, otherwise there might have been political protests.”  
(Policymaker 1)

The recent example is notoriously based on the Bogeumzari project built on the Green Belt, which is carried out by the current government. In the last government, the scheme of public rental housing was planned to supply one million households from 2003 to 2012 by 100 thousands units every year. However, this has been diminished to 40 thousands, as a new plan of Bogeumzari has been set up to build 150 thousand per annum from 2009 to 2018. Although these two schemes are aimed at the lower class, they have actually different characteristics reflecting the political position of the governments, as outlined in Chapter Three. Unlike the last government’s ideology towards social class, the Bogeumzari scheme of the current government serves wide social groups, for example, new married couples or families with plural children, and is also encouraged by a developmentalist idea, which extends to Green Belt areas. A policymaker indicated this political act as a governor’s strategy with somewhat risky idea beyond the policy structure:

“There is a tendency that housing has an advantage in governmental decisions, in my opinion. For example, my view is that Green Belt is a valuable resource in our country, but it is getting deregulated because of housing. Also, Bogeumzari is now dealt with as precious in policy, and it is popular. But, in



some sense, it is opposed to the urban planning, but it is loosened because of housing supply.” (Policymaker 3)

In this way, apartments have been an important resource for political discourse, which governments have adopted to their political strategy onto apartments according to the political interests of specific groups. This appears often as barriers in policy practices to carry out the plans already made, as a policymaker stressed:

“In some sense, for instance, just comparing the current government and the last government, the last government tended to be somewhat on the side of low class. Although the current government states their interest in the low class, they are actually not about the low class compared to the last government. This government is more focused on housing policy that is more beneficial for developers. If you want to do better for low class, you should get housing prices down. This was what had been tried in the last government by strong regulation, such as price cap policy, which is still effective even though this government want to deregulate this. All other regulations were alleviated, but the price cap policy is only left. That is, it is very different according to the governments...it is in fact an awkward situation that sometimes housing policy, which has been carried on for five years, is changed in 180 degree by new governments. That is, it becomes suddenly wrong and changes totally, despite I have carried because I thought it is right.” (Policymaker 3)

Furthermore, this politics of housing frequently brings about inefficient institutional practices. For example, housing provision sometimes depends on the political aim rather than its actual need, which makes unbalance between demand and supply. A respondent in public institute, the Korea Land and Housing Corporation (LH: previous KNHC) remarked on the unbalance between demand and supply induced by the political aim:

“There is some unsold public rental housing. This is because the housing provision is carried out without the analysis of demand, which is just to achieve the annual aim of public housing policy. That is, as the supply is planned, there

have been some housing just built on the housing plot already secured to achieve its aim rather than based on the demand...” (LH)

Not only does the political strategy have an influence on the public sector, but it is also enormously influential on the private development according to change in the political contexts. A developer highlighted the unstable housing market due to political change:

“Policy changed a lot. It is so confusing, and directly influencing business. That is, it is not possible to judge subjectively how to make business... There will be election for Mayor of local council in May. So it may be difficult because the market depends on it. It is not sure how it changes before and after election. Also, if there is election for president, how policy can change is not sure according to whom to be president. It is very difficult as it always changes like a rhythm.” (Hyundai 1)

Overall, housing policy becomes not reliable, because it is not a continuous effect, but temporary measure based on a political aim. This may be why housing policy is not effective, but irrational effects operate. A policymaker framed the lost trust in the governmental policy, instead relying on a cultural effect:

“In the position of the government, housing policy can be regulated and deregulated repetitively according to the condition of the economy because housing is influenced by the economy. But, for the public, this can be a lost of trust in the government. The thought that ‘although policy is strengthened, it will be soon deregulated’ can make less expectation about the effectiveness of policy regulation. Based on this negative effect, even though the governments try to decrease housing price by regulation, it is not going to be down as much as expected, just not increase more. This is because there are still many people to buy as they think it may be better to buy when it is a bit cheaper. In the public sense, that is it, because housing price is not well settled down.” (Policymaker 3)

A resident also highlighted the negative view against the governmental policy:

“I don’t know about housing policy, in fact. Don’t know, but I don’t trust the government. They go their way, and we just go our own way.” (Gaepo Jugong 1)

As indicated by these responses, there seems to be a shared reference for people and the government, but in opposite ways. Apartments are a means in the politics, whereas they are an end in the public. It is perhaps the ‘culture’ that directs the ideas and practices, and that bridges the gap between the politics and the public. In this sense, built environment is not just a visible physical entity, but also an invisible identity.

### **Invisible wall: against culture?**

A particular culture is the embodiment of distinctive ideas and values, which is shaped by various institutional activities over time. Culture has thus legitimacy to be empowered over specific social groups. It becomes taken-for-granted, which can bear rule over the whole society. A resident expressed her choice of apartments like a norm that should follow:

“It was not a matter about how I chose to live in apartments, but I thought I must live in apartments...because, maybe since the 1980s, apartments increased enormously, and most house areas are poor except very rich areas. In house areas usually where low income households live in, it is not safe and some areas have high crime rates...however, at that time, apartment blocks are well managed by good level of people and such good life standard...because people strongly want to live together in a similar group.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

Moreover, culture is the dominance, which means the privileged power. This dominant power is thus difficult to change innovatively, and can make actors keep their behaviours within the cultural framework. This has been deepened in the inner city in Seoul as many people want to be included in. The respondent above showed this invisible structure to influence everyday life:

“If you live in inner urban areas, you can feel very sad about that, for instance, you should follow *hakgun*. But if you cannot be included in that *hakgun*, you can feel relative deprivation as not capable of living in that neighbourhood. It is so big. But if you can ignore it, it doesn’t matter like so. However, if you are in there, you just see it. It is not easy to escape from it.” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

Because of this cultural structure, she still lived in Gangnam apartments for the first six months and commuted to the alternative school over one hour away even after moving to the suburbs as deciding an alternative education for her son. The cultural legitimacy is thus given as lower risk for the individual practices. This further affects the predictable demand for the market, and the stable growth for the governors (Giddens 1991). In this sense, culture is not forced, but irresistible. A developer outlined the future as may remain further as it is now:

“Although we can be wrong in analysis, we think that it can carry on still for the time being. You can see old houses such as detached-houses over the Google satellite map. But they need to consider profit and exchange value. So it is simple. In case of detached-houses, its capacity is 50% if you build 50 *pyong* of housing in 100 *pyong* of plot. But if it is redeveloped by 200% of capacity, you can build 200 *pyong*. This means that it can increase values in the same site without decreasing land value. It is thus clear that people go for it as increasing values...therefore, our company judges that apartments keep going still for now in Korea. Although it cannot be sure, population will increase by 2018 and decrease after 2019. Also, in statistics, the number of households will increase by 2030. So we consider it will be ok by then and make the direction based on the analysis. Because we do business we cannot go for it if no profit.” (Samsung 2)

Moreover, the predominance can become the irrationalised logic, which does not match between causes and results, or which results can become to replace causes. This is to say that apartments have resulted in accommodating dense population in a compact area. Yet it cannot be sure to say that dense population has necessarily brought about apartment culture, because there might have been alternative choices

before apartment development and more centralisation to Seoul in the beginning of the 1970s. As outlined in Chapter Three, population density was much lower at 9,013 people per km<sup>2</sup> in 1970 than at 13,774 in 1980 and 17,532 in 1990 in Seoul, despite the area of Seoul being extended in 1973. In other words, apartments may have been a method to accept population rather than to solve the dense population and centralisation, which ended up with more extreme centralisation. Even though new cities were planned from the end of 1980s to solve the centralisation of Seoul, it has actually resulted in the extension of Seoul rather than decentralisation. These results, however, operate as causes for apartment culture over the society, which play a role in legitimising more development of apartments. This legitimacy of impetus towards apartment developments is perhaps a major cause in the construction of the mega city of Seoul. The next section discusses how the city has grown based on the cultural ideas and values of apartment lifestyles.

### **9.3 Domination of high-rise living**

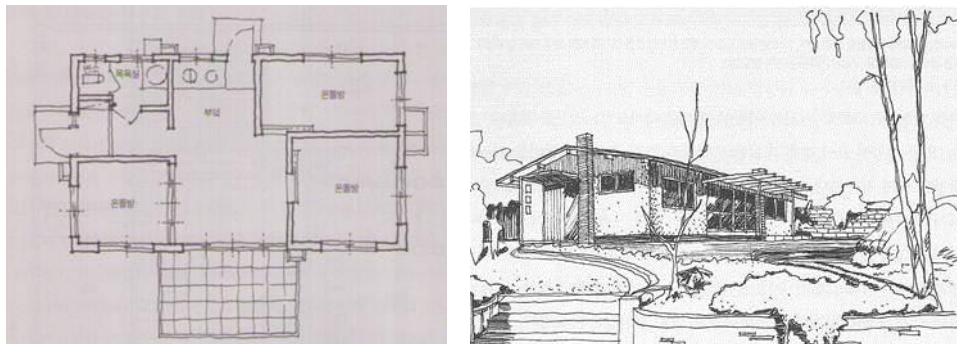
The rationalisation and discourses that high-rise apartments are favoured in Korea have predominantly been based on the physical and geographical barriers: Korea is a country with small and mountainous land; housing shortages are very serious because of population concentration in the small area. This seems, however, not the causes, but the results in some sense. Apartment developments beyond central urban areas, such as rural sides or the holiday island of Jeju are not exactly congruent with the rationalised ideas. In addition, as outlined in Chapter Three, the population density has not been reduced, even though Seoul was enormously expanded in spatial terms and the apartment supply has been dramatic unprecedentedly. This section questions these prevalent rationales, and explores how these are circulated in perspectives.

### **Apartment complex, village, town, city and nation**

Unlike other western countries which experienced suburbanisation processes to escape extreme condition of urban density, suburban areas have become urbanised, which resulted in the mega size of Seoul in Korea. In fact, however, there was a kind of suburbanization process in Seoul in the 1960s-70s before the dominance of apartments. Prior to apartment developments in Gangnam, the government extended the residential settlements to surrounding areas out of city centre in the 1960s, with

the measure of mainly the ‘Land Readjustment Scheme (LRS)’ as mentioned in Chapter Two. While local builders used to supply the UTH (Urban Traditional Housing) in the city centre as well as the extended areas, the westernised style of detached-houses were promoted by the governmental institutes, KNHC, such as Gookmin juteak (house). Even competition of architects for the ideal design of houses was held by the government (Figure 9.2).

Figure 9. 2 Gookmin juteak: Ideal home for middle-class in the 1960s



(Source: Jeon et al. 2009)

A resident who was quoted to move into apartments to follow up her neighbours in the first section used to live in a Gookmin juteak and described her life as stable with similar status of neighbours:

“I used to live in Gookmin juteak. It was built by the government to about 20 *pyong* in the 80 *pyong* of land like foreigner’s style. It is called Gookmin juteak, but there is no more like that now. It was a type of detached-house and they were lined up in the area. It was in Hwagok-*dong*. So the garden was spacious, and we had grass. And it was appropriate to live as house was 20s *pyong*. There were many salary men, who just got married. And many of our neighbours worked for the bank curiously, so we had similar status. Also, the academic background of mums was similar as higher than high school graduates. So I enjoyed my life there at that time...” (Dogok Raemian)

The other interviewee supports the suburban life in the memory of her husband in Sangkye-*dong* in Nowon-*gu*, which is now one of the most dense apartment regions:

“I used to live in a house before marriage, although it was not a house with a big garden. I started to live in apartments when I got married, but my husband has lived there since high school. But he said that he used to live in detached house with garden before that. It was like rural nearby stream in Sangkye-*dong*. So he is saying that he has a very nice memory of his childhood that was spent in such a place...” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

Later on in the 1970s-80s, as Gangnam also became one of the areas to extend residential areas situated in out of city centre, the housing plot by the LRS was supplied and detached houses were settled for the affluent middle-classes. From this, Gangnam is not only consisted of apartments, but also massive areas of houses unlike people’s perspectives.

Figure 9. 3 Gangnam development based on the LRS

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(a) Plots by the LRS with some settled houses in Gangnam in the 1980s (b) Landscape of houses in Gangnam developed since the 1970s

(Source: Kim 1994)

A resident who moved into the next apartment block, Apgujung Hanyang also used to live in a big detached-house with well over 100 *pyong* of land mentioned above, according to the Gangnam developments:

“My age was about seven years, maybe in 1977, when we moved to Gangnam. Before that, my parents used to live in Myunmok-*dong*, and had me and my brother. And then my dad bought the housing land, when the Gangnam development was started. So he built on his own, and we moved in Cheongdam-*dong*.” (Apgujung Hanyang)

Gangnam was the suburbs that the land was cheap and no infrastructure was prepared in the beginning of Gangnam development. Although apartment developments were

commenced in a similar period as detached-house settlements, the urban infrastructure was not set up and land was not valued as much as it is now, as the residents remember:

“My parents-in-law bought us 13 *pyong* of apartment in Chamsil...although Chamsil is so busy an area now, it was not very good in its transport system because Gangbuk was the centre at that time...so there was only apartments, and not good neighbourhoods, even without proper road condition...” (Samsung Flat)

“I have lived for about 24-5 years in Gangnam. As we live so long time, price has increased naturally now, but Gangnam was not significant in its status at that time...land price was very cheap in Gangnam. So it rose a lot, as bought cheap land...” (Gaepo Jugong 2)

However, as massive apartment blocks were supplied, it became a part of urban centre as the second CBD and public transportation has been widely expanded. Moreover, as preferences have been moved on apartments, detached-house areas have increasingly changed to apartment blocks or luxury villas. As apartments have become a dominant pattern of residential form, they have also dispersed beyond Gangnam. All surrounding areas out of original city centre came to parts of the city as an urban lifestyle. This seems to have moved the geographical centre of Seoul from Gangbuk to Hangang. This has taken place in exchange for apartment developments initially in the line of Hangang riverside, and ended up the landscape view of Hangang full of apartment buildings even as a sightseeing monument. A resident portrayed the landscape as metaphorically:

“When I went on the ferry in Hangang, my friend said that historical monuments were told when she had a trip to foreigner ferry, but we are told all about apartments, for example, here is Apgujung apartments, or when and whose regime this was built, something like that. I didn’t used to carefully listen to the explanation in the ferry, but I felt that it is true as she told me like that...” (Dogok Rexle)



This has further been linked to the satellite cities established by new cities full of apartment blocks. Half of the population, thus, is now living in this metropolitan city. This has become the collective power in terms of social, cultural, economic and political field. In this sense, many people believe that Korea may have a different history with other countries having problems of urban slum and suburbanisation. A developer suggested this perspective:

“Other countries tend to be slum in the centre and suburbanised. But it may not be the case in Korea, because we are building apartments even in suburbs.”  
(Hyundai 2)

Moreover, this cultural power has stretched over the nation wherever in rural areas, industrial regions and even in the holiday island. The developer stressed the unexpected local market in the industrial areas, which have become business strategy.

“There are some local areas where is sold well, for instance, Geoje island. Contrary to expectation, Geoje is quite a good market to sell. Although it is not continuous selling, it went very well when we sold on October last year...because there are all heavy industries such as Samsung, Hyundai and Daewoo. That is, there was not enough housing supply, although there are many riches...that is a strategical approach. Also, you may think Dangjin is a very rural area, but it is a good marketing area because there are steel mills.”  
(Hyundai 1)

Even more seriously, the Green Belt areas are now a hot spot for apartment supply, as they are situated in between Seoul and the new cities. That is, their sites are closer to the city than new cities, and apartments are being supplied at cheaper price as a political agenda to supply lower income households. Seoul is continuously filling up with apartments, becoming a mega size of city.

### **Heavy Seoul**

Beyond the initiative of apartment developments as a solution of housing shortages, it seems that apartments are operating as a magnetic attraction in the city Seoul in terms

of lifestyles and housing values, becoming the city's identity. This symbolic built environment underpins social status and power based on cultural identity in which the city is not just a place, but an impetus to develop our ontological position. In this sense, there is a tendency that not only are residential movements made from local to Seoul towards Gangnam eventually, but Gangnam is also expanded by linking to new cities, such as, Bundang as a second Gangnam in the near Gangnam and Pangyo as the next to Bundang, which has made a gigantic metropolitan city Seoul. A resident framed this phenomenon as the city's identity and its opportunities:

“There is more incoming to Seoul than going out to other local areas. This is because all development or else is confined to Seoul. So there is a big gap between Seoul and other local areas, well, how can I say, maybe in terms of culture or living standard. Anyway, all people realise that there is much benefit to live in Seoul because of the big gap. So I think this residential environment can be kept for the time being.” (Chamsil Woosung)

Inevitably, the housing market has become polarised due to centralisation, which leads to local markets as not competitive. A resident highlighted the housing value in Seoul based on the importance of cultural capital, such as the distribution of school and power elites:

“We are developed in only a confined place in a small land area. Only Seoul has been developed. Half of housing price in Seoul is the housing price in Busan, and also in Incheon. This is because Seoul is only developed. All elites and even schools are only in Seoul. As people are too much concerned about education, they are thus gathered for school in only Seoul. My mum thus used to say that housing should be owned in Seoul as an asset...in fact, it must be ostentation, and the interest in property asset is also to be included in Seoul. In addition, many come up to Seoul because of good *hakgun* and education...” (Chamsil Ricentz 3)

Based on this pattern of residential choice, the housing market in Seoul is not likely to decline, although there have been various barriers due to economic crisis and policy regulation. A developer indicated the better condition of business despite constraints:

“When the government regulated on financial policy, there has been a bit of tendency to avoid bigger apartments, and in general decrease of demand. So it is not sold very well. However, metropolitan city, Seoul is kept with continuous demand basically.” (Hyundai 2)

This tendency is not followed by the traditional statement that the advancement of public transportation has expanded the life boundary with the links to be away. On the contrary, it seems that the developed infrastructure of the super express railway, called KTX in Korea, has helped more concentration in Seoul, as it enables a day travel from local areas to the city. This tends to take place in exchange for local decline, because everyday life is based on the city. A developer indicated this as an unexpected barrier for local markets:

“We did predict wrong that advanced transportation, KTX can make local areas better to live in. Adversely, as it makes day-travel possible, people tend to settle here after working in local areas. Also, in holiday and weekend, they come here where their housing is settled in. So, it causes problems of local city decline that business is not good because people do not spend money there as not staying and sleeping, which makes lower GNP there. Like this, population keeps centralised...This is because of infrastructure for living condition.” (Samsung 2)

The city is clearly seen as a vital space of consumption and economic opportunity, serving lifestyle choices and the formation of identity through everyday practices, rather than the depressed industrial urban space as seen in earlier sites of industrialised urban centres. Seoul is such a place. People want to come, rather than to go out.

### **Chicken and egg: small land?**

A predominant argument has been made on the geographical condition of small land that made inevitable conditions for high-rise apartments. From the discussion made in this thesis, however, it seems questionable what comes first, small land or apartments. Although apartments have been encouraged as a solution of housing shortages, the

resultant seems to be beyond the initiative achievement. In addition, high-rise apartments were initially not built in a small space of the city centre, but mostly in a vast land in Gangnam where there was nothing and even luxury suburban house areas in Gangnam have changed to apartments. Nevertheless, the idea seems to be limited to the mainstream economics, which is based on the space-access model. Unlike western countries that are more suitable pattern for the model, apartment developments in Korea were not commenced in the same contexts and patterns. However, its power of such discourses made in academic and policy arenas has been remarkable to influence the public, and rationalise apartment provision, which has successfully been achieved by the accordance with preferences of apartment lifestyles. A resident saw apartment lifestyles in this way:

“As we live in a small area, high-rise building is general in residential form in Korea, especially in Seoul. This may be its convenience as lived in small space. So land price goes up, and accordingly floors of buildings should be increased.”  
(Chamsil Woosung)

The other resident also supported this point in a similar way that apartments are a way of convenient life in a small land area such as centralised in Seoul:

“It is said that Korea is only country, which likes apartments abnormally...we are too much concentrated on metropolitan city...so there is no land. There is plenty of land, but all want to live in the boundary of the metropolitan city, so no land. This may be why apartments are preferred as convenient in small land...so there cannot be alternative form of housing as all want to live in small place...” (Gwangju, former Gangnam resident)

Often, the rationale is made on the comparison with other countries, such as the USA or European countries. It is perhaps reasonable to compare with the USA superficially, but not the truth with most other countries. In the UK, for instance, the British lifestyles are not towards apartments, despite the similar size of nation and population and also majority of green field, which may be equivalent to mountain in Korea in terms of habitable land. Apart from the facts, such idea is not limited in the public, but also prevalent in the perspectives of policy making. A policymaker made a

point that the continuous provision of apartments is necessary in the city based on the geographical constraint compared to America:

“We still need to supply in quantity terms, because there is still not enough, which is why we have built apartments. It is because of its limits. If the land was big enough like America, then we could do build low-rise such as town houses. But our country is small land, especially in the metropolitan city, which 20 million live. So in that circumstance, it is inevitable to satisfy them.”  
(Policymaker 1)

Given these rationalisations, urban planning tends to be legitimized to change according to housing policy. A policymaker framed this as an illogical policy process:

“In principle, urban planning should be priority, and housing policy should be part of it. But, in my opinion, housing is priority and city planning is following. That is, they are reversed. I mean that how to plan the city is established at first, and then how to supply housing is next to come. But it tends to be deregulated in urban planning to put more housing. So urban planning is influenced by housing circumstances. This may be because of housing price. As housing price becomes problematic, housing supply needs to be extended. But it should be in the city centre because demand is actually within the centre. Therefore, it is necessary to deregulate or amend urban planning as centre area is already framed.” (Policymaker 3)

In this context, the release of the Green Belt is legitimised for the provision of apartments by the current government. This may be that apartments represent the citizen’s identity in the city. Conversely, it means that the cultural change can bring about transforming social position of apartments, as built environments have a symbolic status. This possibility seems to be actually put to the test in the current market environment, as town-houses came to be an issue over the last decade. However, it also should be noted that this can take another impacts, such as the degraded high-rise housing, which leads to the issue of urban governance as a whole rather than a piecemeal of development. Some residents suggested the imagination of the future for the city and the country, by changing cultural identities, such as

education system or new lifestyles. As housing culture tends to have a direct correlation with education culture outlined in the last chapter, a resident insisted the reform of education to make different lifestyles and current urban problems as more relaxed pattern of the city based on the decentralisation:

“Everything is sorted out only in here because the land is very small...this is because of bringing up children. If it was not, we do not need to live in this way, such as living in Gangnam. Then there may be more even development in local areas. All cognition of people is only for education and to be the best. Because of this, we are doing like that. So it is the root of everything...so it should be changed in education, which can make spread to other areas to solve the uneven development.” (Chamsil Ricentz 1)

On the contrary, the other resident imagined the new identity of Seoul city based on the new lifestyles, such as town-houses:

“I am interested in town houses. But I do not want to go and live in local areas such as Gyunggi-*do*, but I can think it’s a possibility if town houses are in the city centre of Seoul. When I heard about town houses, it was mostly in Gyunggi-*do* such as Yongin. I didn’t have any intention to live there. But recently, there is going to be planned around Namsan, such as Hannam-*dong*, or Yongsan where may be redeveloped to town houses, although it is not sure yet.” (Bangbae Apt)

Another political discourse has been on the centralisation and decentralisation. As half of the population, which is about 25 million, lives in the metropolitan city Seoul within the radius of 50 km, the last government has tried to decentralise. On the other hand, the current government has focused on the development within the city centre of Seoul based on the idea of a competitive globalised city Seoul. This emphasises the importance of international differences in institutional frameworks (see also Ball 2003). It can be seen that the New Town scheme has emerged from this recent recentralisation idea.

“We are tempted to make business within the metropolitan city. This has been more stressed by the current government. This is because it is thought as competitiveness. That is, Seoul should have competitive power in a global sense. But the president Muhyun Noh did decentralisation. That is, it is somewhat changed to the thought of global competitiveness although decentralisation can be good...so it was regulated in the past, but now it is more tried to alleviate the regulation. So it is influential. Also, in this sense, it seems that the Mayor of Oh insists the issue of Seoul Renaissance based on the idea that Seoul should have competitive power to be a global city. That is, it seems to say that the competitiveness of Seoul can become the competitiveness of Korea. In that sense, it is led that the idea of Gangbuk development in the city centre of Seoul using the infrastructure of Seoul can be better than that of new cities out of Seoul. This is possible because there are 10 million of population in the city centre of Seoul. As you can see, the areas have become obsolescent if you just go to Gangbuk only three or four km away. So they are going to be developed into apartments, and it is going to be more systematic and extended development. That is the New Town...” (Shindong-a)

All these ideas relate to the cultural identity of built environment as structuring citizen's everyday life in the city, which gives opportunity or constraints. High-rise apartments have been a constraint in our imagination, but they have also undoubtedly been an opportunity or goal to construct our cultural identity in the modern urban life, which absorbed a half of the population in a small land area.

## **Discussion**

The main focus of the discussion in this chapter has been on how high-rise apartment culture, with the particular sociological and symbolic meanings explored in the Chapter Eight, operates as a cultural structure socially, spatially, economically and politically over institutional environments and practices. (This is the analytical focus represented by the outer arrows in Figure 5.1.) In particular, it intended to examine the cultural structure of apartment culture as a trigger to expand the urban lifestyle by socially and culturally as well as the capital city of Seoul spatially, rather than just a simple response to the urban contexts during the economic growth.

Section 9.1 showed how high-rise apartments have dominated the development of housing and the city. As developed in the conceptual framework of culture in Chapter Five, high-rise apartment complexes deliver a cultural identity, giving them power in the development process, and their dominance has brought or enabled the various institutional behaviours, even if irrationally or unjustifiably. In this, there have been clear evidences of conflicts between the dominant culture and others, which resulted in marginalising effects over the social and spatial environments. Contrary to the replacement of high rise with low rise typologies in many western contexts, low-rise settlements have largely been cleared to build up high-rise apartments in Korea over the decades. This contrast seems to suggest that the social and spatial problems may generate from the cultural dominance and its power distribution rather than their essential physical and spatial features.

From this dominant power, high-rise apartments have been not only a major reference in politics, but also an informal guidance in decision-making for developers and residents (section 9.2). This shows how culture bridges between structure and agency in the production and reproduction of built environments, by influencing institutional environment and practices. In this sense, the symbolic and cultural identity of high-rise apartments has operated as a magnet to attract people becoming citizens of inner city living and developers catching opportunities of business, resulting in the massive extension of Seoul (section 9.3). In this process, political contexts have been continuously changed, and housing and urban policies have also been significantly restructured. Because of the cultural dominance, however, not only was irrationality not seen, but causal relations were also not clearly acknowledged in the development process and the expansion of the city. Here is the clear sign of cultural structure operating over social and spatial development, which has not been explained in the dominant discourses of built environment and housing studies.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored natures of housing culture, based on the research question, ‘How do institutional behaviours under a housing culture construct high-rise built environment, socially, spatially, economically and politically?’. How housing culture



constructs dominant power in social, spatial, economic and political practices was thus explored, which shows high-rise built environments as a means of configuring social order. This relates to the cultural identity and its concomitant social conflicts in order to secure ontological position in the city. In these institutional activities, housing culture operates as structural constraints or opportunities, in which the cultural identity of the built environment is shaped and reshaped, defining the future of the city. On the other hand, housing culture can also be seen as part of manipulating or obscuring the actual position of high-rise built environments in Korea, which seem to easily justify the irrational ideas and behaviours. This shows that ideological or cultural constraints is sometimes more powerful than physical built environments.

This is not to overlook the physical and social structure or individual ideas as influential discussions in urban built environments, but rather to emphasise the cultural operation that leads to the collective decision of social members in the construction of city's identity as much as physical and spatial environments. This is not seen in the deterministic discussion as simple indicators, such as distance, space and price, or simple logics, such as equilibrium equation of supply and demand. Nor the collective pattern of behaviours is revealed in the discussion of subjective meanings. By emphasising the complex and dynamic nature of residential settlements, a housing culture approach to high-rise built environments therefore provides complementary views to the subjective viewpoint as emotional and idealised, and the deterministic dualism that entails 'ideal' and 'slum' built environment of dominant discourses according to the built forms.

The 'housing culture', which are institutionalised collective forms of built environment as taken-for-granted over the city and furthermore over the country discussed in this chapter, is thus the essential nature of symbolic, economic and political activities in shaping and reshaping the culture. A housing culture approach therefore provides a new way of thinking about urban built environments, focusing on cultural identity of housing, which may emphasise the complex relations and processes of the built forms rather than deterministic values of them. This is to suggest that built form itself does not have the innate characteristics to suit for specific social groups, but its meanings are created and constructed into the cultural framework through the institutional environment and practices. Uncovering the

cultural structure then enables to renew ideas and perspectives of built environments in the city and to reframe the social and spatial problems, which may come from social, spatial, economic and political resources rather than simple physical determinants.

## *Chapter Ten*

### **Conclusion**

Dominant discourses tend to influence the conceptualisation of urban built environments in deterministic ways. This has been influential on dualistic thinking with relation to built forms, in terms of theoretical conceptions as well as practical involvement in the development of cities. They are frequently seen by dualistic terms of ‘ideal home’ and ‘slum area’ linked to built forms as suburban houses and urban high-rise buildings respectively, which infers that they are essentially different, instead of considering diversity of residential culture or contextual and institutional differences. Furthermore, this separation of analytical framework tends to be connected to a normative point that ‘high-rise buildings’ are usually seen as contaminated with family breakdown, delinquency, and dysfunctional social relations, beyond normal components consisting urban built environments. This setting of ideology seems to boost social and spatial segregation between their residents and refuse their validity to be the urban identity, which leads to the justification of demolishing policies of certain built environments.

Unlike this binary conceptualisation, residential environments in fact encompass complex and dynamic mechanisms in delivering their particular meanings of housing, as comprised by cultural and institutional processes rather than fixed classifications. Given this understanding, this thesis has attempted to show the misguided nature of preconceived discourses of ‘high-rise buildings’ on urban built environments. The research has therefore aimed to critically investigate understandings of urban built environments, in order to suggest a new way of thinking about different residential settlements by dissolving prevailing assumptions. Beyond a categorisation of ‘built forms’, the contribution is to suggest an innovative approach in the form of housing culture based on the different perspectives from the existing ideas about urban built environments, which allows a reconsideration of particular concerns, and enlightenment of other potential issues. In this thesis, a cultural approach was sought in order to contribute to debates in urban built environments, exploring contextual relations away from discourses and their preconceived understandings on certain neighbourhoods.

To do so, 'housing culture' was used as an analytical lens, which emphasised cultural perspectives in the hybrid framework of culture and institution. This has been explored in a particular neighbourhood, Gangnam in Seoul, with historical background of high-rise built environments, based on looking at residents' everyday experiences, developers' and policymakers' perspectives, and interpreting these meanings supported by other sources such as visual and archival records or formal and informal documents. It has led to the drawing out of the value construction of high-rise apartments with a basis of sociological understandings and its dynamic operation through collectively shared ideas empowered by various institutional environments and practices. As the formal and informal institutions have become entangled over time, 'housing culture' is understood as the institutionalised built form, identity and power, generating a symbolic capital which constructs them as meaningful in the form of 'collective identity'. This culture, importantly, serves as a very strong constraint on the way actors, such as residents and developers, think and act. This renewed understanding of urban built environments is sought in the sense that any built forms have the capacity to be complex, diverse and dynamic in the formation of the city. As the objective of this thesis, these ideas were explored in the context of high-rise apartments in Korea.

In this final chapter, the next three sections offer conclusions to come back to the issues outlined in the introductory chapter. The aim of this chapter is not to offer a statistical generalisation, but to offer a theoretical position for further debates on urban built environments. The first section explores how this research has met the research aim through the research findings, to unsettle the binary settings of built environments with regard to built forms. Given the new understandings of high-rise buildings based on cultural discourses, secondly, the importance of cultural structure is discussed in the construction of urban built environments, and how it can be better understood through the concept of housing culture is also suggested. Then, the possible implications for policy or our imagination for the city are offered in relation to built forms and socio-spatial problems, which enable rethinking their relationships by cultural aspects, not deterministic conceptions. To conclude the chapter, some suggestions for further research are discussed, with the aim of continued interest in cultural dimension and its power in our perspectives and practices.

## **10.1 The construction of built environment**

By questioning ‘the same built environment, but the different world’, this thesis has aimed to find an answer to this simple intuitive issue. It is ‘housing culture’. Simple answer, maybe, but not so simple to understand, then, how they become so different, which cannot be described with an equation of universalist models. Despite similar starting points of modern ideology and practical housing shortages, high-rise buildings have had a quite different life in Korea unlike many other developed countries. To this point, the main question to conduct the research was ‘How does a particular housing culture as an institutionalised collective form of built environment arise in high-rise apartments in South Korea? What does this add to our understandings of the development of high-rise built environment, particularly in academic and policy discourses?’. The conceptualisation of ‘housing culture’ has proposed a different focus of methodological and analytical approach to look into urban built environments, especially in high-rise built environments, which is often posited on the edge by dominant discourses. Given this theoretical framework, following three subsequent questions have been explored through the research findings in each empirical chapter, which is briefly discussed in this section.

Firstly, Chapter Seven looked at lifestyles in high-rise apartments as a form of housing culture, using data mainly collected from interviews, with support from other sources of visual, archival and documentary evidence, examined by the research question, ‘How are high-rise apartments particularly constructed as culture in Korea?’. The research findings revealed that:

Urban high-rise built environments are constructed by ‘collectively shared ideas and values’ including transition of lifestyles, attachment of social ideology and acceptance of demerits, which can be synthesised to a collective name, ‘apartment culture’ as a form of housing culture.

Based on the value constructions of high-rise apartments in Korea, a number of features with a name of lifestyles, such as convenience with well systemised management, safe and secure for family life with children, and more advanced lifestyle services, supports the idea of better-off housing in the contemporary society, in which more than 50 per cent of the city’s population live in the metropolitan city

Seoul. A modern ideology of private space inspired by western societies is also inscribed into high-rise apartment lifestyles, as confounded by the deterministic notion that suburban houses are idealised for privacy from the urbanised public space. In the apartment complex, not only is privacy often protected by the developed social relationship of communication, but the concept of community is also advanced in response to the social contexts within the support of private life. These apartment lifestyles are completed with trade-off values of demerits such as noise, standardised appearance and high maintenance cost, which are overcome by the approved advantages and symbolic meanings in apartment complex. This is perhaps equivalent to the idea of the Muthian 'space-access' model, in which the suburbanised lifestyles is more valued on space or private garden (not literally meaning 'privacy' though, perhaps more ideological) by trade-off distance. This research showed that the model should be one of many possibilities in the construction of built environment, because ideas of high-rise buildings in Korea are almost the reverse of the circulated discourses in many western societies based on deterministic notion as the normal and ideal homes.

Apartment culture is not representative of a 'perfect life', but a 'symbolic image' idealised in the physical boundary of the 'apartment complex'. The modernised and westernised ideology reified in high-rise built environments in Korea can be seen in the description of high-rise apartments as collective ideas, not all coincident with the actual and factual sense. This leads to the idea that high-rise residents live better-off contemporary lifestyles compared to other neighbourhoods in the city, in terms of physical arrangement as well as social and cultural requirements with symbolic image. However, this dominant ideology is not always congruent with ideas of those who live in other neighbourhoods. Although they seek the same ideas of modern and private life, it is achieved in different ways, but still under influences of the dominance to feel inferior. This suggests how everyday life is constructed ideologically and symbolically over the majority of society as well as policy and academic opinion through the power of wider discourses.

Given the symbolic ideology, these high-rise built environments in Korea have been constructed as a middle-class lifestyle linked to sociological meanings as collective identity, and generating symbolic order over social space, which was explored in

Chapter Eight, followed by the second sub-question ‘How are high-rise apartments sociologically constructed, individually and collectively, and what are the effects of this?’. The research showed the importance of culture as representing identity and social order in the market-driven society:

The collectively constructed ideas are reified as a symbolic capital of collective identity through the cultural consumption in the standardised market context, having potentially a various form of socio-spatial effects over social space.

Given the collectively shared ideas, the apartment complexes and their residents are assumed to represent normal family life carrying out the appropriate social function, which often leads to social and spatial segregation between apartment residents and other neighbourhoods. This can also cut across the socio-economic structure under the mutual understandings of cultural differences and social assumptions. For example, a resident in a detached-house expressed her reluctance to invite others over despite her middle class socio-economic status, and there was also the view of children’s that would be alienated in other than in apartments. The root of difference is based on lifestyles as a point of reference, informing the ‘collective identity’, which is sought for the ontological security in the uncertain and insecure modern system of capitalist society. These informal strategies of symbolic consumption indicate the complex nature of the built environments, which is diverse and flexible.

The research showed that various activities of the market and consumers were focused on creating and seeking the different and superior position. Any physical built form or tenure pattern could be used to represent the symbolic meanings of certain identity or social status. The symbolised identity can be gained and secured in a sense of the collective through the standardised consumption pattern, unlike the accusation of consumer society. This means that social inclusion is not only from the difference but also similarity as socially identified and collectively shared values, reflecting and reinforcing the normalised ideas over the society, which connects to other social and institutional environments such as education. In this logic, social exclusion, such as segregation and deprivation, is not parallel with and separated from the dominant pattern, but intersected with and stems from the idea of inclusiveness like a coin. In Korea, this reification of sociological ideas from wider discourses at the academic and

policy level as well as public consensus was revealed in areas where residences are not high-rise apartment complex, which is opposed to the western thinking. As evident in the research findings, social boundary was invisibly lined around apartment complex separated from other housing type areas, granting social conformity and developing the segregated social relationships within the boundary. This suggests that social problems are not just innate to the physical form or poverty line, but generative of power distribution towards the dominant ideas.

How institutional behaviours interact with these perceptions of housing culture within the wider city framework of urban developments was then examined in Chapter Nine, based on the last research question, ‘How do institutional behaviours under a housing culture construct high-rise built environment, socially, spatially, economically and politically?’.

Institutional behaviours to construct high-rise built environments can be seen as strategic activities to secure cultural identity and capital, which recursively becomes cultural structure to institutional environment. This shows the complex and dynamic nature of built environments, and its limitation to describe them in terms of universal understandings.

The housing market is not just a formula of supply and demand, where supply meets demand, or vice versa until its equilibrium. But, in fact, housing can be a source of urban development, an active symbolic agent for the further growth of the city. Through the cultural references as collectively shared values, high-rise apartments are sought after to follow a particular lifestyle, and then constructed as having more exchange values and being more vibrant objects in the housing market. Furthermore, on the basis of a predominant cultural position and institutional process, the research showed that abnormal behaviours and phenomena such as speculative investment, price cartels or domino effects become penetrated within and institutionalised over society and simultaneously bring marginalising effects on those out of the dominant structure socially, spatially, economically and politically. This means that the cultural reference and structure play an important role in decision-making process not only as constraints but also as opportunities, which become rationalised and legitimised, and often obscures the facts. The idea of small land was powerful to widespread the high-



rise built environments all over the society even where it does not rationalise, obscuring the fact whether it is a cause or result. Here, the role of housing culture was a kind of ‘lubricant’ to help smooth the mechanistic system of supply and demand, and reduce the friction during the development process. In this sense, housing culture has the effect of reinforcing institutional structure and practices not just in physical terms of built environments as determinants, but in the social, spatial, economic and political construction of a culture as power distribution, in the context of the wider city.

It was these thoughts and practices that allowed a particular housing culture, namely, ‘apartment culture’ to arise, based on the contextual background in terms of historical reference and resource, and political initiatives for the growth of housing market, the city, and the nation. The constructed ideas and practices then seem to reflect and reproduce narratives of social ideologies as well as wider academic and policy discourses, which reinforce an ideal world of built environments rather than physical construction. These findings suggest that different and more dynamic understandings of urban built environments are needed. The example of high-rise built environments in Korea has evidently shown this, confronting the meanings to the dominant academic and policy discourses until recently, perhaps still, in which some might think a case of Korea as peculiar, but there are in fact many examples as briefly explored in Chapter Four. To uncover this vagueness, a concept of housing culture offers a means for this, as well as for critically examining existing understandings.

## **10.2 Discourses of housing culture**

High-rise apartments are special for Korean people, just as much as suburban houses are for many other societies. The particular housing culture is an ideology governing Korean society, and an identity representing the individual as well as the collective where they are included. This is a guidance for what to do, who to be or where to go in the uncertainty and insecurity of the world. The fact that such cultural structure is constructed by ourselves, however, means that structural power is innate to our activities that construct the culture. Because of this, housing culture becomes a powerful discourse over the society. Social members are hardly atomic constituents, but mostly involved in societal relationships. This is how we come to have different

aspiration than Paige's dream in the *Poor Kids* (2011) as opposed to the one for many Korean children, as shown in the introductory chapter. Also, this is how the informal settlement as introduced in the chapter was redeveloped to high-rise apartments for middle-class unlike the demolition of them in other societies. Only a minority doubts these ideas and practices, because it is taken-for-granted over our mind as a member of the society. This is the difficulty we cannot see them, as we are what it is. This is a problem, in which we face the future as well as the present. As an analytical lens, housing culture can help this in some ways.

Firstly, the idea of housing culture enables a different way of conceptualising institutional activities and outcomes in urban built environments as a form of identity construction, which is often overlooked in academic and policy discourses, rather than views which focus on physical or deterministic categories such as class or economic factors, and beyond the exclusive and normative categories. It is in this sense that institutional behaviours can be seen as a strategy to aim for the construction of cultural identity for meaningful position in the city. This gives the way for different understandings of the same built environments, by uncovering the cultural identity revealed through the process of value construction and its symbolic meanings. Physical built forms are manipulated as a means to represent a certain identity. This means that despite the same built forms, they cannot be same meanings, but differently adopted and constructed according to the contexts in terms of historical background, social system and political initiatives as well as the market's operation.

In this sense, secondly, a different focus departing from existing understandings of urban built environments can be given through housing culture. The consideration of 'culture as institutionalised collective form' enables seeing the particular development processes, which is often not seen by fixed or numerical categorisations. This can be revealed through the focus on a housing culture in ways which it comes to be the particularly institutionalised ideas and practices within the market, and over social spaces of neighbourhood and the city. This research suggested that a normalised view of high-rise apartments based on collectively shared ideas governs institutional behaviours, which become dominant and taken-for-granted as culture. As this relates to a reference of the collective decision, housing culture shows the possibility of complementary explanation to the solely rational or individual decision.

Moreover, seeing 'culture' from a cultural and institutional perspective as a collective entity means focusing on the power through which certain built environments are privileged, and who are involved in the process. Economic activities and political interests towards particular form of developments seem to be aimed at stability of housing market and the economy through managing housing production and consumption as well as making better built environments. The government is involved in constructing the housing market condition through formal institutions related to certain interests, and often including the interest of particular actors. This tends to lead to the dominant culture of certain built environment positing in the formal institutional framework. However, the way policy can be seen as a form of institutional power always entails minorities for those who are not included in the dominant structure, as inclusion and exclusion are like a coin. An example of this is eviction, as being eliminated in the development process.

Therefore, housing culture, as an analytical lens, highlights the interaction between institutional framework and culture, and acknowledges a reconsidering of what the particular culture means for the people and the city, how it is constructed in social, cultural, spatial, economic and political terms, and how it structures social and spatial orders. Urban built environments are often ideologically or deterministically obscured and framed in certain ways from the lack of humanistic views but more relying economic or quantifiable factors, which leads to the assumptions of the extreme and normative categorisation. A housing culture approach aims to avoid the deterministic view of urban built environments, but to see the complex and dynamic construction of them.

### **10.3 Built form and socio-spatial segregation: policy implications**

It really annoys me because some people bully you because your house isn't all fancy like theirs...when I was staying in here [high-rise flats] I was embarrassed to take my friends around my house because it would make me feel so poor, I've got nothing. Now when I stay in that house I think I've got everything. (Paige in 'Poor Kids')

To unsettle deterministic discourses about built forms means that socio-spatial problems are not entirely attached to their physical aspects, but instead they are potentially preconceptualised by ideological structure. After her rehousing, in the above quote, Paige expressed the ultimate change of her life from 'nothing' to 'everything' to show others because of their discrimination, although her family's socio-economic status might remain as it was. This research also revealed this point that the socially constructed ideas led to the effects of social and cultural alienation and segregation over social space. Because of cultural differences, a resident in a detached house had to feel the inferiority from her old fashioned house, despite her socio-economic status of middle-class in the research findings. This indicates the potential power of ideas which circulate in public discourses and have tangible socio-spatial effects for urban residents. This is not to deny the residential environments constrained by physical and economic factors at the neighbourhood and city level, like the damp infested high-rise flat Paige used to live in, but to keep a consciousness of power relations regarding housing culture which might 'generate' or 'reinforce' social inequity more than as it is and spatial manipulation in terms of economic and political means and ends.

In this sense, through the idea of housing culture, the research revealed new understandings of certain issues, such as the segregation between high-rise apartments and other types of housing areas beyond socio-economic status in urban built environments, as well as the concept of privacy as not deriving from entirely physical entity of housing. Here, this research argues that apart from the physical and economic conditions, socio-spatial problems might be generated from the dominant structure more than residential environment itself. In other words, it can be said that discourses around built forms are not simple descriptions of urban built environments, but shape the ideas how they are identified. Given the dominant culture, cultural differences entail social barriers between high-rise apartments and other neighbourhoods, marginalising and intimidating them. This is exactly opposed to the phenomena in many other western societies as high-rise settlements are segregated from the dominant discourses of normal family life. This shows that power distribution attached to built forms as a form of culture rather than the buildings themselves entails socio-spatial problems such as segregation or deprivation by marginalising other neighbourhoods out of the dominant boundary. From this point, it

cannot be assumed that built form itself has deterministic meanings, but that the same built environment may be constructing different cultural meanings according to institutional activities and framework constructing housing culture.

Based on the research findings, the current theories of 'high-rise buildings' (but of 'others' in Korea) seem not only inadequate, but also potentially detrimental, as built forms themselves are neither ideal nor slums. Nevertheless, the tendency of using ideas about built forms as deterministic elements seems to be a fashionable narrative in the development process, which appears to the contradictory development pattern that on the one hand, the marginalisation of high-rise housing areas in the urban context leading to the demolition of them; on the other hand, the future 'urban renaissance' reviving high-rise living; seemingly that both arguments are centrally aimed for sustainable urban developments towards 'new urbanism', but in opposite ways in relation to built forms. Certainly, these highly contestable conflicts of urban development through built forms signifies that there is a vital need to better understand how and why these built environments are generated and operate. For instance, in the UK, the demolition of social housing accompanies with rehousing from high-rise buildings to low-rise houses, while high-rise buildings to be revived are considered as economic objects for the middle-class. On the contrary, this goes in other direction in Korea, as the middle-class seem to intend moving out high-rise apartments to town-houses in long-term, whereas the current governmental projects towards lower-income households are centred to more supply of high-rise buildings. These policies and practices might only change the landscape and spatial structure, but deeper social concerns may remain. This is to say that it perhaps requires a more rigorous approach to using the discourse of built forms in transforming the city, not to remove the vital aspects of them as they cannot disappear in shaping built environments.

The research has revealed that high-rise built environments are not only a lifestyle of the city as much as suburban houses, but also generate the similar socio-spatial problems which should be noted in mind. It seems then essential to rethink or reimagine the city as an entity to have organic life not limited to spatial or administrative boundary, with the aim of moving beyond deterministic dualisms in relation to urban built environments.

In this thesis, it has been alternated to raise a more dynamic discussion about the issue of urban built environments. Deterministic categorisation and normalisation of built environments is less required, but more dynamic understandings are needed in a sense of the complexity of urban built environments. From a focus on housing culture, it revealed that the same built environment are understood so differently as different cultural meanings and processes. This may help comprehending the often inconsistent and contradictory accounts of these neighbourhoods in the city. As more globalised economic and political activities, built environments are also at stake in their developments and their identity, which may be more complex and diverse, but also may be more homogenised. These are neither good nor bad, but we need to know what is going on in our lives, because our future is what we do now.

#### **10.4 Further research**

This thesis was originally motivated by personal questions about the difference between the UK and Korea related to high-rise built environments. Although a comparative study was not possible due to the limited time and resources in this project, it would augment more deep understandings for future research about built forms and built environments. According to the current upsurge of research on high-rise urban living emerging from the UK, and, for example, New Urbanism in the USA, the rise of garden city and the fall of high-rise estates over the last century is needed for a renewal of interest in terms of the cultural meanings of these built forms. This may enable a continued focus on the cultural understandings in built environments for future research, which perhaps leads to different focus related to built forms or social and spatial concerns. With regard to this cultural focus, more qualitative research seems to be helpful in understanding the relations between discourses and their effects in the residential environments as well as the developments of the city, which could offer a fertile ground of future understandings of the globalised world. Also, research on planning policy should be concerned with the cultural dimension regarding the power structure between dominant frameworks and marginalised neighbourhoods seen, for example, through indiscriminate demolition as well as gentrifying regeneration with richer, more valuable residences as shown in research findings.

In the connection to focus on 'culture generating discourses', a discourse analysis through the media, academic and policy documents and their effects on lives should also be a suggestion to give more discursive understandings of cultural phenomena. For instance, in the documentary film 'Poor Kids', 10 year-old Paige's comment that "The housing association must be bad people to let you live in a place like this" appears to depict the extreme poverty of 'poor kids' with less justice through her damp infested high-rise flat, which was finally demolished. This assumption from particular examples of built environments can lead to generalise them in deterministic ways, which tends to stimulate the emotional appeal to social inequity or justice. These visual and symbolic images may be powerful to reify reality as particular discourses, which may prevent understanding the diverse and complex contexts and imagining other potential future as well as reinforcing the harmful effects for their neighbourhoods. On the other hand, such extreme illustration in academic and policy discourses as well as the media might have helped to reinforce the ideal home in suburban location in many western societies. Likewise, but on the contrary, in Korea, the poorest people or households are often publicised by showing the living condition in other type housing areas described as less capacity of caring children or dirty and dangerous neighbourhoods, as compared to advertising of luxury high-rise apartments. These practices, although it intended to support them, might actually have the deepening effects between their lives, reinforcing and normalising a dominant housing culture. This is perhaps a source of binary conceptions around built environments, for example, ideal and slum, normal and abnormal, or functional and dysfunctional. Unlike the western dualism, the first half of these conceptions appears in urban high-rise apartment complex, as a safe and secure neighbourhood, or well managed for convenience based on the collective management system. These contrasting effects need to be somewhat neutralised in our imagination to understand urban built environments more evenly.

Another direction of future research on urban built environments might involve the role of planning and planner's idealism, which seems to need new ways of urban governance and planning approaches beyond physical and spatial manipulation. It seems that urban planning is like making a toy of 'Lego' block, building and rebuilding the country from urbanisation to suburbanisation, again to urbanisation, and maybe returns to suburbanisation a hundred year later. Whilst the success of high-

rise living in Korea is being praised as a 'hopeful example' (Kunzig 2011), city dwellers in Seoul are perhaps already dreaming and aspiring to the greenery of suburban lifestyles as if they have already forgotten their excuses, such as the burden of gardening, and housing policy has commenced to give the opportunity to them in Korea. Such obsession of discourses around built forms in academic and policy arena might encourage a kind of 'Lego' approach to cities, squeezing out and throwing away the unfit pieces into new ideals. To avoid this, there should be a critical assessment in terms of every aspect about lives around the built environments, which might include the new perspectives of segregation as the research findings show that socio-spatial problems are not solely limited to built forms. In addition, it would be added to interests that the Korean example is not approved yet about sustainability of urban high-rise living for social, economic and environmental issues as many problems are perceived, such as a big gap of socio-spatial segregation, or the massively long hours it takes to get to destinations within Seoul, even within Gangnam (quite unlike the expectation that high-rise urban lifestyles leads to walkable cities). This is not to deny the positive sides of unprecedented dramatic growth in Seoul, Korea, but to be wary of the romanticised view of 'everything all right' based on only quantifiable appearance. It is because uncritical ideas can cause unimaginable side effects, when academics, such as Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, advise the developing cities, for instance, China and India where people are still flooding into cities, car sales are booming, "it would be a lot better for the planet, if people in those countries end up in dense cities built around the elevator, rather than in sprawling areas built around the car" (cited in Kunzig 2011). More humanistic and holistic approaches to urban planning and governance are needed. The planet is not as easy to fix as the Lego board. The problems of organic lives are more painful to cure.



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