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Tangible and Intangible Compliances in Korean Traditional Architecture

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of philosophy in Architecture, School of Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland 2009
A royal banquet painting of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) (Source: Pak Jeong-hye, 2000: 218)

A royal ceremony painting of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) (source: Pak Jeong-hye, 2000: 243)
A Korean genre painting by U Jin-ho (1832~ ?) (Source: Jeong Byeong-mo, 2000:145)
A Korean genre painting by an anonymous painter in the 19th c. (Source: Jeong Byeong-mo, 2000:190)

A part of the painting by Kim Hong-do (1801) (Source: Jeong Byeong-mo, 2000:319)
TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE COMPLIANCES
IN KOREAN TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

ABSTRACT

Korean traditional residential architecture exhibits compliance with nature in all aspects we can think of, which are dealt with under three main headings that form the substance of chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively, “the temporal,” “the intangible” and “the tangible.”

The thesis starts by reviewing the fundamental supposition and recognizing the model of the Great Ultimate and yin-yang theory. It also surveys the Chinese history of the unity of Heaven and humanity. Together these will constitute the philosophical basis for interpreting Korean architecture.

Chapter 2 describes compliance with human nature in relation to timing the rituals of construction of traditional Korean architecture, and related concepts of time conceived in a cyclical order as “human time”.

Chapter 3 describes compliance with nature in the intangible order. This is seen to be the most original aspect of the current research. Architecture is made in the tangible world but the influence of an intangible order that is implied in the key words of sinitic culture, Dao, Li, and Gi, which encompass both tangible and intangible orders, dictate
organisational effects in terms of auspiciousness, the layout of the house and site selection.

A critique is offered of some aspects reference to Fengshui 風水 or YiJing as they have been used without clear distinctions.

Chapter 4 describes compliance with the nature of the tangible order with regard to compositional principles of traditional Korean architecture. The description is organised on a vertical spatial axis, as roof, base and courtyard, and secondly on a horizontal axis as wall and fence. It is claimed that all of the space of the courtyard and Chae within Dam (fence) composes the natural architectural space according to the principle of Yin and Yang, which derives in turn from the Supreme Ultimate. In this composition Dam can be said to protect all the occupants and things within it. Each of these tangible components of architecture, and in particular their compositional relationships, is built in compliance with sinitic conceptions of the natural order of things.
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