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The Modern Kitchen in Korea: Design, Modernity and Transnationalism

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Introduction

Since the late 1950s, kitchen spaces and their designs have gone through the most distinctive and rapid transformation in the Korean home (Republic of Korea). This involved numerous national modern housing projects with improved provision of basic infrastructure and facilities, such as water supply, sewage systems, and energy sources of gas, electricity or oil for cooking and heating. Between the 1960s and 1980s in Korea, the kitchen was established as a space central to home life and modernized to be functional and efficient for cooking and living. The design of modern kitchen was established in the form of a fitted kitchen with modular units and furnished with new materials, facilities and utensils, which visually and materially symbolized a modern lifestyle.

The history of the modern kitchen in Europe and North America has been extensively written, charting the conceptual, ideological, visual and material changes since late-nineteenth century. The development of scientific management of home is considered central to the inception of the modern kitchen. Christine Frederick's scrutiny on housework, culminated in the seminal 1919 publication, *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home*, was based on 'a belief in the power of science to improve the human condition that constituted the decisive stimulus in changing the way people thought about kitchen routines' and 'precipitated a train of professional design thinking which became an important

factor in the development of the fitted kitchen' (Freeman 2004: 29). European modernism and functionalism, especially during the interwar period, provided the modern kitchen with distinctive visual and material forms, inscribed with efficiency of labour in the kitchen, and complemented scientific approaches to the layout of the kitchen. The concept and form of Grete Schütte-Lihotzky's canonical modern fitted Frankfurt kitchen of 1926 was a material realization of ideologically charged Modernism's utopian visions for a better living, alongside Modernist architecture's development of standardized housing projects, which left a global legacy in both temporal and geographical senses. The Kitchens of Tomorrow, developed in the United States during the 1930s and the 1950s, similarly promoted efficiency by pushing forward innovation and technology in the kitchen. The ideologically charged promotion of the American dream kitchen and consumer culture in the 1950s positioned the kitchen space and its design in the popular imagination of the modern interior (Oldenziel and Zachmann 2009).

Studies on Korean kitchens have been conducted by researchers in home economics, architecture and interiors, and ethnography. They have explored the historical evolution of kitchen spaces and facilities, focusing on traditional arrangements in different regions (ethnography), the relations between the kitchen and other spaces at home (architecture and interiors) and the design of the kitchen space and equipment for an efficient workspace for housewives (home economics) (Ham 2002: 66-67). Since the early 2000s, more comprehensive studies on the kitchen placed the evolution of the modern kitchen in the discourse of modernization and modernity in Korea during the twentieth century (Do 2017; Ham, 2002 and 2005; Jung and Kim, 2009; Kang, 2019). The social and cultural meanings of the kitchen, especially with the consideration of kitchen as a living space and lived experiences of the actors who occupied the kitchen for working and living, were explored from the disciplinary perspectives of sociology, culture, media and gender studies (Do 2017;

Joen et al. 2009; Kim and Kim 2008). These studies utilized articles and stories related to kitchens in women's magazines and newspapers and carried out interviews in order to capture the experiences of various actors, architects, housing developers, designers, academics and the users of the kitchens.

Modern housing discourses and the discussion of women's culture in women's magazines between the 1950s and the 1970s have been significant in determining how Korean women encountered and navigated the symptoms and material manifestations of modernity and dominant ideologies of modernization and national rebuilding (Kim and Kim 2008; Kang 2006). This research focuses on two women's magazines, *Yeowon* (*Women's garden*) and *Jubusaenghwal* (*Housewife's life*). *Yeowon*, published from October 1955 to April 1970, was read by a broad range of readership from young singles to housewives. It is a valuable resource for researchers because it is the only women's magazine published in the 1950s and early 1960s. *Jubusaenghwal*, first published in 1965, and still in publication, is aimed at housewives aged between 20s and 40s as its main readership (Kim and Kim 2008: 113). Photographs and drawings in these magazines are significant resources to further the understanding of designs and materials of the modern kitchen when there is little actual material evidence of kitchen from the period that has survived to show how they looked and how they were constructed. In this sense, images substitute the actual modern kitchens that were made and used. The modern kitchens on these media are also the representation of the modern kitchen de facto. The contents of magazines introduced and visualised the concept and design of the modern kitchen by showcasing newly modernized kitchens in the homes of Korean elites in photographs, advising readers on the design elements that made a kitchen modern, and how to achieve one, both conceptually and materially. The newspapers further perpetuated and popularized these ideas through texts and images amongst the public.

Although the modern kitchen was a reality only for some, it carried a promise and possibility of the real for many through its representation in the media.

Built upon existing studies on the modern kitchen, and the Korean modern kitchen in particular, this chapter focuses on the historical development of the modern kitchen space and its design in Korean urban dwellings from a transnational design historical perspective. By examining photographs, diagrams and advertisements of the kitchen and kitchen furniture as well as texts in the articles from woman's magazines and newspapers discussing interiors and kitchen design, the chapter investigates agencies of different people in the making of modern kitchen design. It explores the ways in which architects, housing-planners and home economists formulated the concepts, ideals, and designs of the modern kitchen, and how the public responded to, and appropriated new ideas and products of the modern kitchen and its function as well as design, in their own lived experiences of the space. It discusses how they negotiated the idea of modernity and modern living that had been inscribed in the new kitchen space, objects and images.

Modern Kitchen in National and Transnational Contexts

As a kitchen in the domestic environment harbours the most susceptible space for new changes in design, technology and society, it is also a place where various ideologies of national and institutional policies in the making of a good home manifest implicitly and explicitly through technologies, visual and material forms, and bodily embodied experiences (Parr 2002: 660). The development of the modern kitchen in Korea is certainly closely connected with the national modernization and industrialization projects since the late 1950s. The question of what was modern and how ideas of the modern kitchen were materialized in the visual and material vocabulary of modern design and modernism, however, cannot be simply addressed within the framework of a national discourse. This chapter investigates the

ways in which the Koreans negotiated ideas of the modern within kitchen spaces through the adoption and appropriation of ‘western’ and modernist thinking of efficiency, functionalism, technology in the kitchen. Here, the concept of ‘entangled modernities’ proposed by architectural historian and theorist Duanfang Lu, is a useful interpretive frame, ‘in order to go beyond the assumption of exclusive European authorship in the making of modernity and to emphasize sites of encounter, crossing and negotiation’. Lu argues that the concept of ‘entangled modernities’ stresses the multiple meanings of the modern from their inception at different locales and their tangled relations (2012: 232). I propose that the Korean modern kitchen is a site of entangled modernities, where different actors, such as housing developers, academics, designers and consumers encounter and negotiate the idea of modernity.

Fiona Paisley and Pamela Scully attest that transnational history pays attention to ‘the significance of people, goods, technology and culture in the making of modernity’ (Paisley and Scully, 2019: 1) and ultimately aims to ‘understand ideas, things and people and practices which have crossed national boundaries’ (3). The idea of the modern kitchen is transnational, formed and developed through ideas, things and people that had crossed national boundaries. In the Korean context, it is ultimately interwoven with the idea and experience of modernity, which most closely aligned with concepts, systems, things and practices that were brought into Korea from abroad since the late-nineteenth century, and popularly ascribed as ‘western’, ‘European’ and/or ‘American’. The colonial past and the intricate relations between coloniality and modernity in Korean history complicates transnational movements between Korea and other nations. The chapter traces the historical emergence of the modern kitchen, its conceptual ideas and materialized forms as transnational border crossings between Korea, Japan and the USA.

Modern Kitchen and Consumption

This chapter also explores the modern kitchen as a site of consumption (Meah 2016). During the infamous kitchen debates between the US Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, Nixon argued that the American kitchen showcased in the American National Exhibition in Moscow symbolized luxury and comfort that was available for ordinary Americans. This signals the shift from ‘ideas to aesthetics, as the role of design changed from creating an ideal world to creating a consumer culture’ (Scanlan 2011: 342. cf. Meah 2016: 48). In regard of consumption in relation to modernity, Judy Attfield explained what she meant by modernity in her book *Bringing Modernity Home*. Based on Marshall Berman’s broad definition of modernity as a ‘body of experience’, Attfield used the term modernity to indicate ‘the way in which consumers found ways of adopting to the changing conditions of existence through consumption choices’ (2007: 146). By examining photographs and advertisements of modern kitchens, kitchen furniture and appliances, and articles from women’s magazines featuring professional advice for ideas of modern kitchen design and space organisation, the chapter charts the shifts in the discourse of the Korean modern kitchen from scientific management and efficient working space, to a site of consumption and space for living, emphasizing the well-designed and equipped modern fitted kitchen as a sign of happiness experienced by the housewife and her family.

Kitchen and Modernity/Modernization in Korea

The emergence of discourse on and the development of modern kitchen in Korea after the Korean War (1950-53) cannot be separated from the discourse on housing and the processes of nation rebuilding. A series of economic development plans and government campaigns aimed to build essential infrastructure, material bases and living environments for the people. It also promoted new ways of everyday living with slogans featuring key words such as rationalization, scientific thinking, and simplification, to improve not only material

conditions but intellectual and spiritual states (Do 2017: 161). Due to rapid post-war urbanization causing shortage in housing and producing poor housing conditions, the government kickstarted housing projects with foreign aid in 1954, producing a variety of housing stock, including housing estates and apartments. To improve hygiene and sanitation in the home, the modernization of the kitchen and toilet was the primary concern for the Korean government (Ham, 2002, 9-11). The issue was discussed in government policy documents and promoted through educational brochures and films made by governmental bodies.

A short educational film *Better Kitchen (Gaerang Buoek Mandulgi)*, made in 1959 to demonstrate how to modernize a traditional Korean kitchen, is a good example of how the government approached and promoted the modernization of the kitchen. The black and white 12-minute film, directed by Sangbong Kim, was produced by the Bureau of Public Information as part of a programme promoting the importance of hygiene and better sanitation at home, which included topics such as better kitchens, clean hygienic water from well, how to care for patients at home, and how to eliminate vermin and animal disease and so on. The archival records for the film reveal that it was ‘designed as a graphic presentation of the best and most practical idea for improvement in Korean Kitchens developed by the Home Economics progress’ (Bureau of Public Information 1959). In the film, a young female Home Economist visits the couple who live in a house with a traditional kitchen. She shows a plan and drawings for a new improved kitchen and explains how the new equipment works, especially the newly designed furnace, worktables, and a sink with a built-in water supply in the form of a big jar as a water tank, and drainage. She instructs the husband to make them according to the drawings and demonstrates how to make a simple cupboard on the wall and a cover for food. The narrative focuses on improved hygiene, efficiency and comfort of the new kitchen by reducing the time and labour involved in traveling to use water and by

working from the standing position rather than sitting or squatting. The drawings and plans used by the Home Economist represent a scientific and rational form of knowledge, juxtaposed as progress and improvement for the better, in opposition to traditional ways of cooking and working in kitchen. This juxtaposition of the modern and tradition is visible in the appearances of the female Home Economist in her modest simple dress in a western style (*yangang*), in contrast to the wife who is dressed in *hanbok*, a Korean dress, with an apron around her waist. This binary discourse of the modern versus the traditional, aligning modernization of every aspect of, not only material conditions but also culture and everyday lifestyle, towards progress and a better future of the new nation, was established and perpetuated through popular media, such as newspapers and women's magazines from the late 1950s.

What were the primary changes instigated through the modernization of kitchen? The development of new materials and introduction of new technology, the establishment of infrastructure, increasing efficiency and rationalizing the system was the core of modernization of the kitchen and the experience of modernity for the public. Discussions from this period addressed the following issues of the traditional Korean kitchen: material and technological changes in cooking and heating energy sources and the location of kitchen in relation to other rooms, essentially levelling up the floor of the kitchen to that of other interior rooms. As the traditional kitchen furnace provided a source for both cooking and heating, the separation of the kitchen furnace from heating, and establishing it for the single purpose for cooking was the essential change in the modernization of the kitchen and reconfiguration of its location in relation to other rooms. With changes in energy sources and introduction of new innovative devices and machinery during the 1960s and the 70s, the kitchen furnace was replaced by facilities such as a gas cooker, called a gas range, and used by most homes by the 1980s (Park, n.d.). The second primary difference in the modern

kitchen was its integration into the indoor home-space by raising the level of kitchen floor to that of other rooms. As the traditional kitchen was accessible through the courtyard, it was considered as an outdoor space (including the courtyard, backyard and well) and the activities of preparation, cooking, and washing were executed outdoors. Eating occurred in the main room, costing women time and energy for shifting around food on a portable table for every mealtime. It was in the 1950s that the floor of the kitchen in the newly built housing stocks was raised closer to other indoor floor levels and was directly connected to indoor space. It was still a workspace with a relatively lower floor, where wearing a pair of shoes was often required as a symbolic marker for kitchen being still an outdoor space, which is commonly shown in photographs of women's magazines. They represent distinctive Korean habits, developed from lived experiences in the past and adapted to the new configuration of space at home. It is not until the early 1980s that most kitchens were integrated into indoor spaces with the same floor level as other rooms (Ham, 2002; Joen, 2009; Park, 2017).

Modern Kitchen: Efficiency, Productivity and Modern lifestyle

The improvement of the kitchen and the discourse of the modern kitchen employed the scientific management of the home, developed in the USA and Europe, and widely understood and accepted. In Korea, it was introduced during the 1920s and 30s through the Japanese, who had colonized Korea between 1910 and 1945. Frederick's book was translated into Japanese in 1913, and the Japanese were studying home economics in Britain and the US. The ideas of rationalization and efficiency in housework and home life were, therefore, understood and deployed in housing and lifestyle reform movements after the First World War. They intended to establish a modern standard of living based on a western style of living, functionalism, and standardization, and the modernization of kitchen was devised by Joichi Kogure, a Japanese furniture and interior designer in 1930 (Kashiwagi 2020: 50-77).

The Japanese colonial government's building of modern housing in Korea introduced the Japanese version of modern living theories and ideas to the Koreans, which was adopted and modified by Korean architects and housing reformers in Korean contexts in the 1930s, exemplified in Gil-yong Park's kitchen reform proposals. Park's recommendation for the reformation and modernization of kitchen includes the location (adjacent to the room where eating occurred and south or east facing), appropriate size (3 *pyong*), large windows for light and ventilation, facilities for washing, cooking, and servicing. Park's drawing of kitchen design shows that kitchen was connected to indoor space through corridors and equipped with a tiled cooking station, a ventilation hood over cooking station, a sink with running water and drainage, cupboard for crockery (Ham 2005: 23-4). Studies on the modern kitchen and modern housing reform during the colonial period examine the transnational crossing of the concepts and images of the modern kitchen between Europe, the U.S.A. and Japan and the specificity of the modern kitchen discourse and design in the frame of coloniality and modernity in Korea (Jung and Kim 2009; Do 2017: 81-144; Kang 2019:45-60; Park 2010:227-317).

In the (re)construction of the newly independent Korea, the very same concept of modern lifestyle with new and modern housing and kitchen resurfaced with a similar rhetoric of efficiency and rationalization. Articles published in *Yeowon* established the kitchen as the centre of housework and advised on the planning of a new kitchen to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in housewives' labour ('Gasandonggi' 1962; Lee 1964; 'Teukjib' 1966; Seo 1970). They address the size and position of the kitchen in relation to the overall size of the house and arrangement of rooms, different types of kitchens (living, dining, open style), as well as new technology and facilities. In the article 'Planning and installation of kitchen' (1962 April: 316-9), the importance of worktables is highlighted with the detailed diagram of measurements for worktables and cupboards based on a housewife's height and movement.

Different worktable units for washing, preparation, cooking and plating food, were defined and arranged to minimize movements between different worktables. Various layouts of worktable units were drawn up depending on the size, shape and location of the kitchen and its relation to the eating space. (Figure 11.1) (Figure 11.1 here) The article further advises on the materials suitable for the units, floor, walls and ceiling, with detailed instructions for installation. Another article, 'Simple Worktable', suggests making a worktable to work in a standing position, rather than bending or sitting, and provides a how-to guide with a diagram (1962 February: 296-8), which is similar to the one shown in the 1959 *Better Kitchen*.

A worktable is a new object which was instrumental in the transformation to modern kitchen and enabling housewives to work in standing position. This western lifestyle using furniture and chair to sit down was called *ipsik saenghwal* and considered to be modern and healthier in comparison to the traditional *joasik saenghwal*, sitting on the floor. A report series of 'My Clothes, Food and House' in *Yeowon* in 1963 featured the house and the lifestyle of a well-established professional family. Byeongwoo Gong, ophthalmologist, told that after his visit to the US, he decided to change and *improve* his family lifestyle by denouncing traditional Korean ways of living. He made a dining table, chairs, and beds, furnished the kitchen with new worktables and cupboards, wore shoes in the house and only western style of clothing and even changed his and his family's diet (1963 March: 345-53) Another professional couple who lived in an apartment also listed the benefits of a modern lifestyle:

Because the *ondol* (Korean traditional floor with underfloor heating) is warm, ... you easily take a nap and get lazy. Lying down on the floor, the husband order around the wife to fetch an ashtray or a wash bucket. Since using chairs, it is not at all a chore to move around, and I became more active. So [modern lifestyle of using chairs] helps people to get rid of temptation for a nap, to be more diligent and active and enhance intellectual and spiritual capacity for living. ('My Clothes' 1963 May: 392)

The modern lifestyle of *ipsik saehwang* was inspired and encouraged by the encounter with ‘the western’ lifestyle and embraced for efficiency, productivity, and economical saving for better future. A couple of newspaper articles written by Hyewon Kim, a housewife married to a poet, shared similar ideas of modern kitchens and changes in everyday life, which were inspired by her experiences of living in Britain. Instead of following the American kitchen with many ‘automated facilities’, she chose to look to kitchens in Britain and France for her kitchen renovation and sought her sister’s advice, who had gained much knowledge on the topic in the US (1962). Her article demonstrates how modern kitchens from Euro-America were considered and appropriated for her needs and conditions in Korean life. Kim’s endeavour to make a modern kitchen is reflective of the development of modern kitchen design by the academics in home economics and science, and planners in housing associations since the late 1950s (Do 2017: 158-165). During the 1960s, models of modern kitchens were exhibited on various occasions to show how ideals of modern kitchen could be actualized in a Korean house and were popularly featured in newspaper articles. The ideal of the modern kitchen as an efficient and a clean working space, and as a space for the whole family as well as the housewife, was unequivocally supported by writers and reporters for the magazines and newspapers. As seen in Kim’s case, however, the actual realization of the ideal was the outcome of a woman’s own making, utilizing what was available, affordable, and practical.

The detailed guides and instruction for kitchen design, facilities, and decorations indicate that kitchen modernization was to be arranged and overseen by a housewife. An article featuring a newspaper editor’s family house explained that the kitchen and bathroom were costly and thorough consideration needed to be given in their design and installation (Figure 11.2). The photograph shows a worktable and cupboard unit marked as ‘preparation station’ and the accompanied caption reveals how it was constructed:

[The owners themselves] planned [the unit] after reading many reference documents. It is assembled together from parts and can be dismantled into four parts. The wall covering to hang kitchen utensils is a hardboard imported from the US and a temporary replacement of one made of stainless steel, which was very hard to find. The table is used as dining table in the morning and a bar at night. ('Following the house' 1965 October)

With careful study and research, the housewife produced her own version of modern kitchen units and used for the purposes that meet her needs (Figure 11.2)

(Figure 11.2 here)

A feature article in *Yeowon* (1966, April) provides further useful design ideas and devices for the kitchen with accompanying photographs: a hanger board on the wall where kitchen utensils could be conveniently stored and displayed; a cupboard with spinning shelves for condiments and sources; a worktable with a built-in pullout work surface which could be used for cooking preparation, eating or as an ironing board; a built-in stainless steel waste bin which was connected to outdoor bin and a fitted rice container under the worktable. Although the ideas and designs are relatable to modern kitchens in Europe and the USA, the ideas and designs were deliberately developed to provide good solutions for problems and needs arising in the modern Korean kitchen with contributions made by an eclectic mix of professionals, including professional chefs, a high school teacher, architects, a businessman, lawyer, and a reader, as acknowledged in the article. The designs and ideas were incorporated, firstly, in individual kitchen renovation projects, but more importantly, into the development of fitted kitchen products, designed, and branded for mass consumption.

Modern Kitchen: A Transnational Consumer Product

The key design item and term in the development of the fitted kitchen and subsequent development of the modern kitchen as a consumer product is a stainless-steel sink. A sink with an integrated water supply and sewage system was one of the key features of the modern kitchen, and during the 1950s and the 60s, several design modifications using materials such

as tiles, porcelain, and cement were made. It was with the installation of the fitted kitchen *with* the stainless-steel sink in mass housing development of apartments in the 1970s that the fully integrated stainless-steel sink became widely accepted as a synonym of the modern fitted kitchen. Stainless steel was a new material developed in the USA, but its use in the sink in the Korean kitchen occurred through the encounter with the Japanese, who used the material in the production of sinks, pioneered by companies such as Sunwave during the 1950s (Do 2017: 173-177). Yu-jae Park, the founder of Oripyo, a Korean company in 1971, produced a stainless-steel sink from 1968. He explained how he developed products and manufacturing factories after his visit to the Sunwave factory in the late 1960s ('Oripyo' 2006). During the 1970s, the stainless-steel sink was promoted as the most advanced item and essential component of the modern fitted kitchen. An advertisement of Oripyo sink in 1977 (Figure 11.3) emphasized the brand of the stainless-steel sink product in its title and demonstrated identifiable features such as the company logo, the sign for KS (Korean Standard Mark) and a design feature of the double groove around the edge which acquired the national design patent and became the sink archetype in Korea. (Figure 11.3 here)

Companies such as Oripyo and Hanssem (founded in 1970 as kitchen furniture company) began to standardize and manufacture fitted kitchens and promoted the modern fitted kitchen designed in various layouts and components which were promised to meet the needs of modern lifestyles for housewives and their families. 'Sweet Home: the kitchen in my home where the work is a joy' series featured in *Jubusaenghwal* in 1975, was sponsored by Oripyo and represents the modern kitchen of sweet home, a clean, cosy, and convenient space making housework joyous (Figure 11.4). This was achieved by the consumption of the fitted kitchen with its well-design workspaces, cupboards, and well-appointed facilities, which provided proper organization of and adequate spaces for the ever-increasing essential kitchen items of crockery, utensils, and appliances. (Figure 11.4 here)

Conclusion

In the study of modern kitchen design and shopping for the modern kitchen, June Freeman discusses that the history of the fitted modern kitchen included how professional designers managed to sell new design ideas and principles of fitted kitchens to most of the population and how the public resisted them or selectively adopted them with their own ideas or preferences (2004: 26). The Korean example of the process of manufacturing and standardization of the modern kitchen shows a selective adoption of ideas of the modern kitchen and its development into fitted kitchen products, pioneered by non-professional designers. It demonstrates how modernity and modernism were brought into Korean homes through the consumption of these branded products and designs of the fitted kitchen, later developed by architects and designers. The modern kitchen was a product of controlled consumption with a desire to generate a transformation of everyday life in the home. The very nature of the materiality of the kitchen environment: the things and spaces in everyday life, helps us recognise the transnational nature of the concepts and ideals of the modern kitchen, and its understanding, translation and appropriation in the specific time and place. The history of Korean modern kitchen design helps us to further the legitimacy of different forms of knowledge in the production of modernism (produced by architects and professionals in various fields), which may be subtle and nuanced in its use of conceptual vocabulary and the specific terminology of modernism but produced from lived experiences of modernity.

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