The Aesthetic Pasts of *Space* (1960–1990)

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Imagined communities and narratives of identity rely heavily on history. Studies of South Korea, however, focus exclusively on academic historiography. Other agencies that link formal history with public culture—such as Konggan, the group created by architect Kim Sugŭn that centered on an influential magazine—need proper recounting. With popularization and cultural unification in view, *Konggan* strove to elaborate Korean identity through aesthetics and aesthetics through history. To take this rhetoric of the past seriously and identify its shifting tropes or mnemonic sites might also refine a cultural history of the Republic of Korea that was not entirely determined by clashing official and dissident cultures.

> One has a nation. It gets lost. Lost, it can be regained.
>
> —Kim Sugŭn, 1977

It was a long time coming, but nothing is as lively and original, nothing as modern though rooted deep in the past as South Korean culture at the turn of the millennium. Only forty years earlier, however, Kim Sugŭn—not yet a famous architect although already an upbeat cultural activist—was writing of a Korean "decadence" (*t'arak*), "chaos" (*hondon*), "distress" (*hwangnyang*), and "amnesia" (*kŏnmangjŭng)*.[1] As if self-confidence through a history and a culture had become unreachable.

When it comes to describing the agencies that prompted such a remarkable renaissance over four decades, cultural history might usually call in major intellectuals, state-enforced cultural policies, improved and broadening education, and a thriving counterculture. All contributed to the forming of "public" cultural assets with their competing narratives of the Korean past, present, and future.

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Less famed an actor, but eventually quite influential, was Konggan (Space), the enterprise launched by Kim Sugŭn in the early 1960s. With its own agenda that focused primarily on the arts, architecture, and folk crafts of Korea, it refined the picture of South Korean cultural nationalism while elaborating identity through aesthetics and aesthetics through history. Embedded in an educational project, this collective discourse on the past of Korea does not partake of academic historiography.

Although it certainly mirrored historical research in process and echoed dominant historical narratives in flux, Konggan rephrased them into its own rhetoric of Korean times, heralded tropes, and reinvented mnemonic sites. Such a brisk contribution to renewing and enriching the contents of South Korean historical consciousness aimed also at sustaining contemporary creation while voicing sharp criticism against governmental actions. Thus, once reformed for popularization, Korean aesthetics through history unexpectedly became a political device. Konggan used it, however, in ways that had little to do with the countercultural fights that marked South Korean history between the regimes of Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman) and Roh Tae-woo (No T'aeu). The purpose of this article is to decipher an episode in the cultural history of the Republic of Korea through a singular historical ideology.

The Konggan Project: Korean History without a Historian?

THREE DECADES OF AN ORIGINAL PROJECT

In November 1966, *Konggan*—still a living periodical nowadays—published its first monthly issue in Seoul.[2] With "architecture, urban design & art" as its subtitle, it refrained from a wordy statement of purpose, preferring instead a sequence of four large, black-and-white pictures. One was the plain, clean outline of Kim Sugŭn's recently opened Puyŏ museum. Then came an aerial view of central Seoul, exhibiting a gray and featureless magma of forms, which paralleled a photo of Hannam-dong (Seoul) with the square monotonous grid of a new housing area. Eventually displayed was a snapshot of Tonsun-dong (Seoul) showing the round, irregular order of a vernacular Korean neighborhood. Such a wordless but well arranged opening was already telltale, constructing brutal, ugly modernity against more friendly forms extracted from the past—and state-of-the-art Korean architecture.

The magazine went on with its first featured article (on "Major spaces"), mixing up full-page images and texts that posited yet another principle: the constant alternation of foreign topics and Korean topics (Notre-Dame cathedral, Pulguk-sa monastery, CBS building, Chongmyo shrine). This very first issue finally ended with a more scholarly article about "Tradition and continuity in Korean arts"[3] aimed at introducing a cross-issue series whose first release was about earthenware from the Silla kingdom ("To meditate over our

traditions").[4] A domain had thus been circumscribed (the realm of Korean forms and crafts vis-à-vis other cultures), a project settled down, albeit implicitly (contrasting the present with the past, for better or worse), and a method of exposing tested.

It took some time before *Konggan* could voice a more articulated project. On its tenth anniversary in 1975, the magazine acquired a new size and a new layout while giving way to more numerous colored pictures and redefining the initial project with a more explicit wording.

> *Konggan* turns over and revives the tradition and history of a field that covers arts, environment, architecture. Turned to the future we judge desirable, we do record, set in order and criticize what our present is made of. For the Koreans to know Korea better and better. *Konggan's* content, even when embedded in the most contemporary issues, enriches the spirit of present day Koreans and the more brilliant it is, the more it enhances the dignity of Koreans' lives. Our ambition is to bear witness of our values to the distant future.[5]

New in 1975 were not so much the broadening interests of the magazine as the temporal threads that began being more neatly woven. *Konggan* did not simply set itself in the connecting position between the past and the present. Just as crucial was its standing between the present and the future of a nation. In the 1970s, there was still room for uncertainty about the past of Korea since its recapturing remained a work in progress, whereas future targets were already "desirable" beyond any doubt.

A sense of security and self-assuredness had to wait until the 1980s to bloom fully. By then, Kim Sugŭn was content to assert that *Konggan* had played a central part in the growing up (*sŏngnyŏn'gi*) of the Korean culture. Because the magazine had called for more inner self-cultivation (*an-ŭro chihyang*) and pled for a critical reception of foreign cultures, it could stage itself as a prominent actor in the field of "national learning" (*kukhak*), as it called it.[6]

A PERSONAL STRATEGY WITHIN A CHOIR OF VOICES

To equate the history of Konggan with Kim Sugŭn's deeds and words, the crowd of many participants with the inspiring and charismatic leader is certainly reductive. It does not even do justice to Kim's own personal strategy. Born in Ch'ŏngjin in 1931 to an affluent family that had moved to the capital in 1938, he entered Seoul National University in the turmoil of the Korean War. He left the university in 1951 to resume his schooling in Japan, where he was graduated from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1960. In the meantime, he had rubbed shoulders with Yoshimura Junzō, a specialist of Japanese vernacular architecture, and with Tange Kenzō, the futuristic urban planner. When he came back to Korea upon winning a national architecture contest—the Namsan new National Assembly project that would end with Syngman Rhee's

regime—there were few clues that he would become the prominent cultural activist he later was.

From most Olympic facilities to his elegant office on Yulgong-no in Seoul, from many countryside museums (Puyŏ, Chinju, Ch'ŏngju) to Masan cathedral, Kim Sugŭn (1931–1986) is now renowned as an essential architect of modern South Korea. Since he possessed rare skills (such as urban planning) in a country under swift reconstruction, he could have satisfied himself in merely drawing inner-city highways, high-rise office buildings, and apartment complexes. He preferred instead to pursue the bolder ambition of pulling architecture out of the then purely technical field of construction engineering for transformation into an art, socially legitimate, that would be both genuinely Korean (rooted in the past) and distinctively modern (opened onto the time of the world).[7] By so doing, he not only set out to make architecture meaningful in the debates that loomed large in his society but also to address a deeper and more personal issue. After a colonial childhood at the apex of forced assimilation, after a Japanese education, he recognized himself that he hardly knew anything of Korean culture.[8]

To fulfill this twofold ambition, Kim Sugŭn could not act alone. He had to imagine, foster, and conduct a cultural group (*kŭrup*) that, as an institution, was much more than the monthly magazine. To the architecture and design office and to Konggan Publications, a small theater and a gallery that clustered around a trendy coffee shop were added in the 1970s. By this period, Konggan had managed to stretch its battlefield from an initial core relating to the plastic arts toward the then lively one of the performing arts such as music, theater, dance, and dramatic shamanic rituals. As they reflected those shifting interests over twenty-five years of activity, pages in the magazine became a tribune for a thousand contributors or so.

A large and reliable network of personal connections provided both content and institutional support—especially Korean museums and the Heritage Administration (Munhwajae Kwalliguk). Among the big names who frequently took pen to paper were, for instance, historian and art critic Yi Kyŏngsŏng, Korean heritage curator Kim Tonghyŏn, folklore and shamanism expert Chŏng Pyŏngho, and musicologist and *kayagŭm* player Hwang Pyŏnggi. In spite of constant references to Korean history and Korean culture in the magazine, however, neither academic historians nor cultural anthropologists featured prominently in this choir of voices. They were not entirely absent but gave way—numerically, at least—to the larger crowd of other writers, essayists, and freelance journalists who felt somehow entitled, too, to discourse on Korean history and identity.

A SENSITIVE APPROACH TO KOREAN HISTORY

In the project that strove to link again the past and future of Korea while appeasing its relation to the world, *Konggan* was not eager to take up scholarly

positions. To try its pedagogy of the national—and of the international—it set its narrative of history within a plan of popularization, which cannot be assessed in simple terms of circulation. Clearly enough, Kim Sugŭn certainly obtained a larger impact when he was writing shorter pieces in the *Tonga ilbo*—as he often did—than when publishing longer ones in a magazine that sold around three thousand copies each month.

In *Konggan*, a didactic plan for popularizing the past rested on a set of formal devices that do not pertain to the scholarly writing of history. The first token of it would be the importance lent to images and to the *visualization* of miscellaneous historical materials: as was suggested above, four silent pictures made sense and discourse in the sequence arranging them. The rumination (*pan-ch'uhada*) of favorite topics is another one. From one issue to another, the *repetition* of themes did more, though, than simply offering multiple intellectual standpoints as it also outlined a sensitive territory landmarked by familiar, soon-common views. They eventually opened onto a repertoire of icons of Korean culture. Thirdly, genuine papers that could be squarely composed and articulated did often escape from scholarly historical writing in its most essential feature: the regulated exhibition of sources and references. Popularization entailed the *inhibition* of scientific practices. Such a habit stamped Kim's own texts, making his intellectual genealogy uncertain to draw.[9] Finally, most articles in *Konggan* outwardly wished to get rid of any care for periodization, which often ended up in some sort of poetic *excursion* along the history and centuries of Korea. For what was pointed at above all was not *knowing* about the past but making people of the present at least *sensitive* to the past. A half-learned and half-popular history was contrived that is the very stuff mnemonic sites are made of.

Mnemonic Sites: Identity through Histories

MNEMONIC SITES AND HISTORICITY

The concept of mnemonic site, which Pierre Nora elaborated over a long decade, quickly turned into an idea as delicate to handle for the historian as it was fuzzed (even misinterpreted) in its derivative usage.[10] For its designer, obsessive commemorations and inflating debates on "memory" are like trees that conceal the forest of our present times, powerfully assailed by forces of oblivion. However self-evident it might sound, mnemonic sites are then residual. They are "rescued from a memory we do not live in/on any longer . . ., but where some kind of a symbolic life is still quivering."[11] When forgetfulness is the price to be paid for swift and constant social or economic change, memory fails to remain the natural dwelling of our minds. Since mnemonic milieus are disappearing, such sites arise as fading beacons in our social imaginations.

This notion can be linked to a moment that brought up a shift in the

modern regime of historicity. The speeding up of history—a metaphor that combines mass phenomena, globalization, and the media—altered the connection with the past. It is no longer what we are *heirs* to but coils up in the remote *strangeness* of a world gone undone day by day and lost forever. The end of peasants, the end of religious ascendancy, the end of the world order born from World War II, the end of historicism and revolutionary ideologies bear witness of a process that marked the twentieth century throughout. Echoing it is the resetting of future times now relieved from teleological prospects and their associated mysticism. Not so much the postmodern *"no future"* as another phase of our modernity which leaves us with a future without a prospect. While this twofold uncertainty about the past and the future tends to focus our representation of time on the present, it also determines our staying in it. By warding off the past and the future, it creates new habits such as the inflation of archives (data banks vs. live memory) and the "memorialization" of the past (commemoration vs. history).

MNEMONIC SITES, HISTORY, AND THE NATION

At their outset, mnemonic sites are arguably a Western moment of this situation. They appear at this postnational juncture when the circuits that used to bind tightly together history, memory, nation, and identity have been broken. In the older regime of historicity, historians as scientists worked to authenticate transmitted memory and to secure a heritage from the past while handing it down to the future. The purpose of commemorations—centered on the nation and used by the state—was to reassert symbolically such a heritage. History and memory went hand in hand to suggest a possible *resurrection of the past.* Turn-of-the-millennium societies are in an entirely different situation. Indeed, in the newer setting of the society-state, a broader historical consciousness pervades the whole social body and endows each of its parts with its own desire for history (often ambiguously coined a "duty to memory"). Patrimony is the key word in such a scenario. For the historian also, times are ripe for growing aware of his practices and their pasts. Through self-critical historiography, he must stage his own subjectivity and his positioning in the present. What he is requested to do by his society is to join the present of historical writing with vanishing memories. That is why also commemorations tend to break up nowadays into fragments of particular memories. Estranged from the state and the nation, they strive to reestablish an emotional contact with a distant dead past through a provisional (and quickly forgotten) short cut. The resurrection of the past is illusive. We have no choice but to *hallucinate* it.

MNEMONIC SITES AND THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF NATIONALISM

As a concept and a method of inquiry, mnemonic sites can contribute to the widespread deconstruction of national histories. Once compulsive, author-

itarian, and state-centered national histories yield today to the kaleidoscopic outlooks of the memory-nation. We would thus be heading toward a nation without nationalism, replacing affirmative modes by interrogative ones, aggression by competition, and sacrifice by festivities, Pierre Nora suggests. "There used to be a national history and particular memories, there is now a national memory. Its unity, however, is made of divergent patrimonial claims constantly splitting and constantly looking for cohesion. . . . The memory-nation implies the breaking down of the nation-history."[12] Seeking to escape from the vicious circle that puts forth the nation both as a principle and as result, the notion of mnemonic site construes the nation as essentially a representation. It also grows more complex and self-referential while striving to write the scholarly history of the way historical consciousness *at large* came to be symbolized from the past until now. The method consists in historicizing the births, metamorphoses, ramifications, and swinging social meanings of those symbolic sites that recall the past. Hence, mnemonic sites have partly to do with recently invented identity sites—read national sites—and naturally unfold into networks of symbols whose underpinnings point out specific national style of nationalism.

At the blurring boundary between memory and history, mnemonic sites can report the construction and deconstruction of nationhood through self-referential history. Not the past per se but the continuous reemployment of the past, not *the* tradition but the way it was transformed and transmitted, not the exclusive remembering but the more general economy of the past into the present. Although the method applied first to reexamining European national identities, it might shed a new light on the case of Korea. Mnemonic sites can be spatial (monuments or Paektusan), social (major heroes or *minjung),* material (national archives or Kyujanggak), symbolic (national anthems or T'aegŭkki), or functional (National travelogues or common *kyokwasŏ).* What is in view is not the usually well-known history of each of those sites but *their history as signs* in the different symbolic systems of a state, of a nation (even divided), or of a cultural identity. Such a project immediately opens onto an indefinite multitude of reordered sites in tentative typologies (dominant/dominated sites, material/immaterial/ideal sites or residual/recaptured sites, for instance). It opens, too, on the possibility of constructing a specific topology of South Korean cultural nationalism.

The Pasts of Space

HISTORICAL STRATA AND SHIFTS: FROM SILLA TO CHOSŎN THROUGH YENNAL

To one of his longest texts, published two years before his death, Kim Sugŭn annexed a sketch representing the time-flow (*choryu*) of Korean cul-

ture.[13] It stands as a long cone divided into strata that stretches back four thousand years into the past. Colored in black, one of them tallies with the Japanese colonial period. Scarred by the chaos of the Korean War (*tongnan*), the final section whitens again but looks frail, with Band-Aids coming unstuck. Yet, from the core of the cone left untouched by colonization, an offshoot sprouts, which signals a new departure (*chaech'ulbal*). In this picture, a major break that did not relate to disruptive modern imperialism in general but strictly to the dark ages of Japanese occupation marked the flow of Korean time. In spite of its momentousness in the forming of a modern culture, such a gloomy period could not belong to the history of Korea and was conspicuously absent from *Konggan.* In order to reestablish a living connection with a "genuine" national past, indeed, one had to conceive of a buried, forgotten, hidden heart and peel away its illegitimate covers. To occupy the site of a renaissance, even at the expense of a major void in historical materials, implied holding up, joined, the past *before* colonization and the present recalling such a past.

The historical strata sketched by Kim Sugŭn do not raise issues. A thorough quantitative analysis of the time categories displayed in *Konggan* shows how prevalent and untouched dynastic boundaries were in most articles. Neither particular events nor historical phenomena extending beyond those political units ever surfaced in them. Dynasties or kingdoms were easy-to-handle spatial, temporal, political, and cultural blocks. Yet, a closer examination reveals high and low zones of historical pressure. In its first decade, the magazine put Silla—and its many mnemonic sites—at the top on the list of its most-favored periods. Standing in sharp contrast with it, the virtual absence of Koryŏ (and Koguryŏ) from among meaningful Korean periods is as taletell. True heir to the Yi dynasty, incipient South Korean historiography turned Koryŏ into an antimnemonic site. In truth, *Konggan* did not offer any sort of originality in this respect. Beginning with the views of the state, Silla was a must for official nationalism. As a historical legitimization of South Korean regimes, it started its career in national propaganda with Syngman Rhee's Silla festival (*Silla che*) and fully blossomed during the Park Chung-hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi) era. In this case, a twofold legacy hunting brought up benefits for both the Republic of Korea and the Kyŏngsang province man.

Yet, Konggan succeeded in being part of a mighty tidal wave that moved most other cultural agents of the following 1970s and 1980s. It conveyed the gradual fading of Silla and global reinstatement of Chosŏn as the major moment of Korean culture and identity. When he had published his *Yusin* pro domo in the early 1970s with political history in mind, President Park Chung-hee, for instance, had picked only King Sejong and Admiral Yi Sunsin as valuable legacies from Chosŏn.[14] The late dynasty was still badly thought of. Its rising again was somehow to be expected, however. The rich remains of a material heritage made this period more present in the archives and landscapes—leading

to lively historical research and growing awareness about a genuine world of forms. They were certainly more convincing and captivating than the congealed film set of Anapchi pond in Kyŏngju or archaeological maps proposed by *Konggan* in its early years. Moreover, the Chosŏn kingdom also offered to imaginations the more familiar and dear setting of a unified peninsula. Lastly, it came to play a decisive role for researchers and heralds of a Korean premodernity: a modernity that would have had no connection whatsoever with non-Korea.

Beside conventional periods, *Konggan* heavily used another significant category of time to express the past in general terms. In Park Chung-hee's writing of Korean history, his New Village movement (Saemaŭl Undong) takes place between King Sejong and the flower-knights (*hwarang*) of Silla. Political propaganda does not need orderly times to produce a message that combines eternal Korea with modernization. In comparison, editorials in *Konggan* and Kim's texts frequently and readily resorted to indefinite time marks such as *yennal* (in the past) or *yessaram* (people of the past). With those words, which were more *a-historian* than merely a-historical, the different periods of Korea at least retained some temporal orientation. As the following example shows, however, history and historical reasoning were clearly not at stake in this specific rhetoric of the past. The gradual downsizing of wooden pagodas in Korea after they were received from China is historical fact. According to Kim Sugŭn, who rephrased the mnemonic site of "simplicity" (*sobakham*) into environmental discourse, pagodas were meant to shrink so as to fit Korean bodies and landscapes.[15] Yet, he did not provide factual or textual evidence nor precise dates or agencies to support this curious argumentation, save for many "in the past" or vague "ancestors" (*chosang*). A revival of Korean old days could work with a simple and suggestive *evocation.*

HERITAGE, ARCHEOLOGY, AND TRADITION

Konggan used the past of Korea as raw material to sustain a project that did not aim at producing historical knowl-edge, nor at simply releasing a vague poetic emotion. It endeavored instead to locate a resource for Korea that had remained vastly undertapped, if not despised. It struggled therefore to make the past come alive in the present under three different forms of connection.

Firstly, there existed a past that needed less restoration than support. Such was the tangible and intangible heritage of Korea: what, born in the past, was surviving in the present (*residual memory*). Although the different legal categories of cultural assets (*munhwajae*) introduced in 1962 had a definite Western (and Japanese) outlook, they required comparison with older notions such as *kojŏn* (the classics, patrimony), *kojŏk* (monuments), and *yusan* (memorabilia) in mind. Moreover, since it was not necessary in South Korea to act for this cultural heritage to fall under public supervision and funding,

Konggan situated its fights on several other fronts. For one thing, the group advocated a broadening of this heritage: from arts to crafts, from famous urban monuments to underrated and vanishing rural folklore, from preserving symbolic buildings to protecting larger landscapes of memory.[16] For another thing, it considered it urgent to petition for preservation techniques to be more respectful of ancient materials and crafts, too frequently exposed to touristy or nationalistic showing off: "In Seoul, the Kanghwa gate was restored on a concrete structure. It is not a restoration."[17] "In our country, the old is faked up. This sort of desecration gives a fake idea of the past."[18]

"Archaeology" came second to make possible a *recaptured memory.* To excavate the past and find again what had been lost, or was ignored (*ijŭn ch'ae morŭgo itta)*,[19] by modernizing Korea was part of the task. So was the attempted revitalization that strove to ascribe a convincing meaning to the "unearthed" items through hermeneutic deciphering. At stake were, as will be seen below, the finding of a firm and sound foundation (*kich'o*) and the uncovering of the singularity of Korean culture (*uri-ŭi tokchasŏng*).[20] In many respects, this second form of *presenting* the past was the motor that propelled Konggan throughout its history: its ultimate concern, substance, and work in progress.

More original was undoubtedly a third way of connecting the past with the present. For *Konggan* there could be no such thing as an *established* "traditional" (*chŏnt'ongjŏk*) painting, furniture, or theater of Korea. It was not that Korea would have been without "traditions." Yet, it was strongly denied that tradition be ascribed to the *detached* domain of the past. "There is a link between heritage (*kojŏn*) and tradition (*chŏnt'ong*), but a tradition is lively whereas a heritage is dead."[21] Tradition is a trans-historical category (hence the eventual relevance of indefinite time marks such as *yennal)* or a transformation process whose justification and meaning rests in the present of creating. It stands in advance for a kind of *projected memory* whose relevant point of analysis should be the future. That was why, too, *Konggan* shunned endless debates on authenticity such as the ones constantly hammered in a (fellow) magazine like *Ppuri kip'ŭn namu* (The deep-rooted tree). When the forms were lost or remained as fail traces, imaginations should take over. Imaginings and reimaginings of the past could thus readily replace authenticating the past. Tradition was meant to authenticate the present: it could be modernized.

KONGGAN AS SOUTH KOREAN HISTORY

Firmly positioned in the present and future of South Korea, *Konggan* was also part of the troubled history of the country from the early 1960s to the late 1980s. A "cultural regime" mixing up authoritarian modernization and nationalist cultural policies set the tone for those three broadly defined decades. Throughout this period, cultural and intellectual life were subjected to and hindered by censorship, national propaganda, cultural exchange control, and limitations regarding travel abroad. How is one to locate Konggan in

this situation and, more generally, what was its position vis-à-vis political and social issues in undemocratic South Korea?

Konggan was apparently on the side of established culture. Since he had come back to Seoul in 1960, Kim Sugŭn was obviously a member of the modernizing cultural élite that had been called up by Park Chung-hee's regime with Kim Chŏngp'il as a mediator. Public construction orders sustained the architectural office. The architectural office sustained Konggan's activities. Moreover, the magazine itself enjoyed a de facto privileged position: for twenty years, it was the only general publication about the arts available at main bookshops. As for the people who made up the group and its network of allies, whether in academia, cultural life, or public administration, they were also members of a specific élite in which generation effects and university acquaintance played key roles. In truth, *Konggan* never obtained the kind of intellectual, social, and political appeal and aura that other prominent forums such as *Ch'angjak-kwa pipy'ŏng* (Creation and criticism) and *Munhak-kwa chisŏng* (Literature and intelligence) enjoyed for better or worse. Those were famous for overtly, and not at little risk, challenging the political powers.

Yet, Konggan does not befit the usual grid of analysis forcibly contrasting established culture and dissident counterculture. Undoubtedly, Konggan was not part of the latter. Its constant avoidance of immediate political and social struggles—especially on the question of democracy—was remarkable in the way it offered a castrated reading of the word *minjung.* Kim Sugŭn pushed the notion, dragged away from its expected social and political hot content, toward gentler cultural hermeneutics: *minjung* would be this inner spirit whose outer form is the *minjok* (nation).[22] The way *Konggan* also silenced *minjung* movement-related forms of art and crucial debates on the political functions of social realism is still more revealing. In short, Konggan was not a cultural movement (*undong)* in the usual sense.[23]

It cannot be situated on the side of official culture either. One could highlight the 1970s as a period of parting from support to the state. They were certainly lean times financially speaking but also prosperous times in terms of research, discoveries, and inventiveness.[24] Already in 1969, Kim Sugŭn had quit his job as an official expert heading a public corporation (Han'guk Chonghap Kisul Kaebal Kongsa, or Korea Engineering Consultation Corporation) and was ready to voice sharper critiques about authoritarian modernization. The new Yusin autocratic regime and the Saemaŭl movement only reinforced this pattern of estrangement. Konggan—which became a group in those years—withdrew into the "archaeology" of Korea to broaden its repertoire toward rural heritage, popular cultures, and the performing arts.

Moreover, a critical posture was taken which, albeit nondirectly political—critiques were addressed at vague "authorities" (*tangguk*) or indistinct "technocrats" (*chŏnmun'ga*)[25]—was not necessarily smooth-tongued. Visibly inspired by the parallel recovery of the rich world of the past, it indicted the seizure of

future Korea by the state. Most salient, although inexplicit in those critiques, was the idea that, because of a too rapid and authoritarian modernization, the course of Korean history was being disrupted again. A world was collapsing—particularly agrarian Korea—to be replaced by poor forms of modernity. In short, on top of wasting present times and signing away the future, contemporary modernization and official cultural policies were being as harmful, if not more, to the pasts of Korea as the colonial period under the Japanese had been. The miracle on the Han was also injurious to the unity of the self (*chach'e*).[26]

From *Han'gug-ŭi kŏt* to a National Aesthetics

HAN'GUG-ŬI KŎT VS. HAN'GUKSŎNG

In Kim Sugŭn's above-mentioned sketch, one can find a tangle of circles next to the cone of Korean times. It designs contemporary Korean culture as intersecting with Chinese culture (*Han munhwa*), Japanese culture (*Ilbon munhwa*), and Western culture (*sŏyang munhwa*). To overcome this heterogeneity (*ijil munhwa*),[27] a twofold strategy was pursued that targeted a more critical reception of foreign cultures on the one hand and set out to reestablish the unity of the Korean self on the other hand.

During his lifetime, Kim Sugŭn, and *Konggan* with him, never thought of the cultural identity of Korea as closed onto itself and impenetrable to others. Just as the architect avoided the word "traditional," he refrained also from speaking of "Koreanness."[28] Instead of *Han'guksŏng* he used *Han'gug-ŭi kŏt*, which he translated into English as "Something Korean." Unascribable to either Confucianism or shamanism, for instance, Korean identity could be assigned to no single cultural site that would be the unique and ultimate key to its interpretation.[29] The underpinnings of such an elaboration stemmed from historical conditions, not from some sophisticated conception of social identities. Uneasiness in overcoming the colonial episode and the persisting national division implied that Korean unity was something that remained in progress. As long as Korea had not recaptured its past and unified its future, it was preposterous to think in terms of Koreanness.

With this more flexible wording, what is more, Korean culture was not being estranged from other cultures of the world and was ready to play a significant part in it. In actuality, *Konggan* did not embark only to explain Korea to the Koreans; it was its ceaseless wish, too, to explain Korea to other countries. That established "major civilizations" recognize Korea as a cultural peer was a constant ambition, aiming at cultural power; that might explain the discrepancies between Korean and English versions of the same texts. It explains why Chinese culture was used for leverage in Kim Sugŭn's speeches meant for an American audience—assuming that listeners would already consider China as a major culture. Conversely, Chinese influence was more than toned

down in the "same" texts targeted to fellow citizens or *Konggan* readers.[30] While propounding that Korea had something more than China or Japan, this device made it possible to incorporate Korea into major cultures as well as situate it within a dynamic of exchange with the outside world. Thus, what had first been thought of as obnoxious—because forced and endured—cultural heterogeneity in the past or evil modernization in the present could be replaced by worthwhile—because agreed upon and sovereign—*cultural hybridization* for the future.[31]

Han'gug-ŭi kŏt recounts better than *Han'guksŏng* would do the content of the magazine: the expanding realm of "things Korean," be they arts or crafts, produced by "archaeological" work in progress. For thirty years, *Konggan* unfolded a sense of Korean culture thanks to many items that were, each, nodes in a meaningful network of identity icons or potential mnemonic sites. This plurality was multifaceted. "Korean things" or items that possessed "something Korean" could be, for instance, roof shapes and tile patterns[32] or a translation into modern Korean of painter Cho Yŏngsŏk's *Memoirs* illustrated with his pictures.[33] Likewise, a sequence of articles joining an essay on "new national music" and debates on ancient mask-dance theater (*t'alch'um*)[34] and the subordination of a shamanic ritual (*kut*) "ethnographed" by Chŏng Pyŏngho to a photographed *kut* with star-shamaness Kim Kŭmhwa[35] all testified for tentative reconnections and reorderings of the Korean culture.

TOWARD A NATIONAL AESTHETICS THROUGH MŎT

In the arts, the disclosure of *Han'gug-ŭi kŏt* naturally led to bringing about a national aesthetics. It made up for what was set from the start as a plurality of mnemonic sites by reworking them into a unitary narrative.[36] Kim Sugŭn began with the idea of an underlying *Han'gug-ŭi maŭm,* which could translate as a "Korean sensibility."[37] In the heart of unearthed past Korean things there would be a unifying force, which, embodied in various expressive forms, bore witness for each different period of Korean history. Therefore, when wishing to recapture and truly understand the past, outer forms should be discarded in order to seize their inner spirit (*chŏngsin*) and transform it within the forms of the present. True tradition is a tribute to the past, not its sanctified repetition. That is why *Konggan* criticized nothing as fiercely as formal architectural quotations from the past in contemporary Korean buildings (what is more, at frequently appalling scales). "Is it really reasonable to name 'traditional' a piece of work that consists of a tiered, tiled roof, taken from a monastery, atop a concrete terrace (*kidan*)?"[38]

The secret force that unified Korean aesthetics was *mŏt,* a mnemonic word Kim Sugŭn constantly hammered. The idiom, which resists translation into English, was feverishly debated during the late 1950s when texts evidenced its gradual parting from the word *mat* at the turn of the twentieth

century. The former deals with a sensibility, the latter with a sensation. Echoing it, and just as frequently harped on in *Konggan*, were other idioms of a national aesthetics suggesting simplicity, freshness, spontaneity, or well-being (*sobakham, tansunham, siwŏnham, pudŭrŏum*).[39]

While defining *mŏt*, thanks to the teachings received from his friend Ch'oe Sunu (1916–1984), a revered art historian and director of the Central National Museum, Kim could resort to examples that had little to do with the formal arts. *Mŏt* is extra cloth in a dress that makes it rustle on the ground without dragging, the surplus of rice in the bowl intended to honor a guest, or the floor space of *maru* both open and closed in domestic Korean architecture. As a sensation of well-being, *mŏt* relates to *yŏyu:* white margin, ease of surplus, or possible reserve. From it could be born not so much permanent beauty —a piece of art—as some sort of a more subtle and mobile aesthetic "happening" imbued with a social or moral value.[40]

Whatever its frequent—and unavoidable—fuzziness, discourse on *mŏt* in *Konggan* made sense in a double strategy of unification. For one thing, it pointed at overcoming divisions in the Korean arts—disciplines as well as cliques—and struggled to exhibit a communality that would link folk paintings, *yangban* gardens, and moving bodies in a shamanic *kut.* Space/space was the locus of this gathering that succeeded in defining Korean architecture as environmental expertise and practice, while finally turning it into a legitimate art, socially and aesthetically speaking. Scornful of construction engineering, Kim Sugŭn proposed that *mŏt* be retained in urban modernity as a moral of building. For another thing, Konggan unified the aesthetic pasts of Korea through turning them into one national culture. Away from South-North issues of the day, it projected back on history a unifying light that was quite oblivious of Ernst Gellner's now-famous distinctions between high and low cultures.

A UNIFIED BUT TRUNCATED HISTORY: THE MAGNIFICENT CHOSŎN

What kind of consciousness of Korean identity could ordinary readers of *Konggan* have had after years of cursory browsing of its arts and crafts? They could see side by side articles on and pictures of aristocratic furniture, underrated Buddhist monasteries, *samul nori* performers (their first shows in Seoul were at the small theater located at Konggan headquarters), Kim Hongdo's genre painting, and shamaness Kim Kŭmhwa's highly dramatized *kut.* In truth, however, such a kaleidoscopic view of Korean aesthetics was not as neutral to the past as individual contributors to the magazine could have thought. Beyond the global impression conveyed by casual reading, indeed, debates and editorials in *Konggan* also pointed to a compulsory unitary vision encapsulating once fairly separated cultural forms and practices. They set out to project a nation, in the modern sense, back on periods when those arts might certainly have been Korean, but not necessarily national.

Along with many other cultural actors of this period, *Konggan* was

instrumental in legitimizing Korean "low" cultural forms of art by making them national. Because they were now perceived as little sinicized, readily debased by the official or intellectual modernizing stances, and less altered by modern change for peripheral, they were now ripe for incorporation into Koreanness and "high" national culture. Just as crucial, however, was the gradual reinstatement of the Chosŏn elite ("high") culture as worthy of nationhood. For, sinicized in its outlook but Korean in its privacy, it was relegitimized through a new perception that unveiled its familiar exoticism while eluding previous social critiques of it. Such a shift induced by popularization eventually led to television shows from the 1990s that turned *yangban* culture into "low" commodified culture. In the matter, to indulge in mere, colorful images was a safe way to keep other historical realities at bay.

Thus, in Kim Sugŭn's texts as well as in *Konggan,* all that real history (and geography) had largely separated was again reunified. The Magnificent Chosŏn was born. The architect's depiction of splendid, lavish, old Hanyang (Seoul) from the unity-providing panorama of Mount Namsan is a case in point. The old capital city becomes a remarkably harmonious whole where nature and buildings, forms, scales, and colors all match one another (so much for modern Seoul).[41] Ascribed to the wonderful world of an ideal and unified aesthetics, true faces from the past, slaves and workers, poor people and women have deserted this unmanned scenery. For the price of making the past beautiful and harmonious and unified was forgetfulness of bad looks, social tensions, and cultural divides; of real people that are the very boon of scholarly history.[42]

Shortly before he died, Kim Sugŭn had visibly anticipated both the national and aesthetic shortcomings of his initial project. To design *mŏt*-inspired elevated highways was not easy, if possible; as for national obligations and obliged reverence for Korean history, they proved to be cumbersome to genuine architectural creation. In a 1984 talk with his friend and Japanese counterpart Arata Isozaki, he was longing for more freedom,[43] while sharpening his philosophy of *mŏt* from its moral side. For someone who was leaving aesthetics for ethics, people and arts of the Korean past were no longer at stake. Faceless Korean people from the future were his new obsession.

Conclusion

Although the celebrations that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the ROK pinpointed Kim Sugŭn as one of the fifty personalities that formed new Korea, *Konggan* has lost much of its influence and luster in the 1990s. For the very little liberal conditions that framed South Korean cultural life for decades yielded to democratization, claims for a more varied cultural environment, and the "reappropriation" of the North. A period came to a close that made all the strength, agenda, methods, and political contortions of Konggan.

In the general picture offered by South Korean cultural nationalism from

the early 1960s until the late 1980s, *Konggan* had a realm of its own, neither mainstream nor marginal, neither official culture nor counter-culture. Yet, the general apparatus of popularization it set up, the sites it relentlessly explored, and the little scholarly ways it used the pasts of Korea are good indicators of a more general historical consciousness that in turn it helped to reshape, and then expand.

It is clear that licensed historians of Silla or Chosŏn from today might at times feel uneasy with little historical obsessions like founding origins, unifying narratives, and too elusive social agencies. Were not the Konggan project also aimed at action in the present and creation for the future, they could also indict the blatant shortcomings—however necessary to a national pedagogy—of its "aesthetizing" the pasts of Korea.

Nevertheless, no sooner are the questionings conventionally addressed to "historical objects" shifted to the contemporary symbolic sphere in which they now live that they take on new meanings, ready for new historical readings. The concept of mnemonic site offered the possibility to take seriously narratives of the past that do not partake of academic history, as well as to identify the tropes that marked the rhetoric unfolded in *Konggan*. It also made it possible to scout specific mnemonic sites entrenched in aesthetics that, as icons or logos of identity, loom large in the South Korean imaginations of today. In its own imaged way, Konggan was a locus of their invention: a mnemonic site in itself?

NOTES

1. Kim Sugŭn, "Kŏnch'ukka" [Architect] (1968), in *Chohŭn kir-ŭn chobŭlsurok chok'o nappŭn kir-ŭn nŏlbŭlsurok chot'a* (Seoul: Konggan-sa, 1989), 206–9 (hereafter *CKNK* plus the original date of the reference in parentheses).

2. For the developments in this section, see Alain Delissen, "Séoul, Kim Sugŭn et le groupe Espace (Konggan): Identité nationale et paysages urbains," Ph.D. diss., Ecole des hautes études sciences sociales, 1994. See also Chŏng Inha, *Kim Sugŭn kŏnch'ungnon: Han'guk kŏnch'ug-ŭi saeroun inyŏmhyŏng* [Kim Sugŭn's theory of architecture: A new conception of Korean architecture] (Séoul: Migŏnsa, 1996).

3. Chin Hongsŏp, "Han'guk misur-ŭi chŏnt'ong-gwa chŏnsŏng" [Tradition and continuity in the Korean arts], *Konggan*, no. 1 (November 1966): 76–78.

4. Kim Ch'ŏlsun, "Uri chŏnt'ong-ŭi panch'u (1) Han'guk t'oki-ŭi kujojŏk t'ŭksaek" [To ruminate over our Korean tradition—Structural characteristics of Korean earthenware], *Konggan*, no. 1 (November 1966): 79–82.

5. Next to this in-house English rendering was a slightly different Korean version. At given periods, *Konggan* also included a table of contents and summaries in English.

6. Kim Sugŭn, "Sŏngnyŏn'gi-ŭi Han'guk munhwa-rŭl parabomyŏnsŏ" [Korean culture growing mature . . .] (1981), *CKNK*, 291–93.

7. Alain Delissen, "A la recherche d'une architecture nationale en Corée du sud," *Histoire de l'Art*, no. 40-41 (May 1998): 99–111.

8. "Ilbon-gwa Han'gug-ŭi chŏnt'ong-gwa ch'angjo" [Tradition and creation in Japan and Korea] (1986), *CKNK*, 307.

9. One drifts to a conventional history of ideas drawing on risky similarities. This is true of both architectural references (Wright? Kahn? Aalto?) and theoretical references (Ruskin? Dilthey? Kuki? Yanagi?). After a fierce public outcry in 1966 when the Puyŏ museum was opened, self-censorship regarding Japanese influences was crucial.

10. "Mnemonic site" is a translation of the French "lieux de mémoire." It is borrowed from Takashi Fujitani's rendering. See Takashi Fujitani, "Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering: Toward a Historical Ethnography of the Nation-State," in *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity,* ed. Harumi Befu (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993), 77–106. See Pierre Nora's introductions and epilogues: "La nation mémoire," 2: 2207–16 (1986), "Comment écrire l'histoire de France?" 2: 2219–35 (1992), "L'ère de la commemoration," 3: 4687–4719 (1992), in Pierre Nora, dir., *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard/Quarto, 1997).

11. Pierre Nora, "Entre Mémoire et Histoire, la problématique des lieux," in Pierre Nora, dir., *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard/Quarto, 1997), 1: 23–43, for the quotation, 35 (1984).

12. Pierre Nora, "L'ère de la commémoration" (1992), *in Les Lieux de mémoire,* 3: 4713–14.

13. "Munhwa-wa Konggan" [Culture and space] (1984), *CKNK,* 227.

14. Park Chung Hee, *La voie du renouveau de la nation* (Paris: Stock, 1979).

15. "Chŏnt'ong-gwa minjung kŭrigo chakka-ŭi samgak kwan'gye" [Tradition, *minjung* and the artist: A triangular relationship] (1977), *CKNK,* 130–31.

16. Alain Delissen, "Le patrimoine urbain séoulite, impermanence et simulacres," *Asies,* no. 2, Aménager l'espace (1994): 219–13.

17. "Kwan'gwang munhwa tosi Kyŏngju-sŏ chŏnbottae-rŭl ppobara" [Down with electric posts in cultural Kyŏngju] (1972), *CKNK,* 159.

18. "Munhwajae-wa pujŏngjŏk sago" [Cultural assets and negativism] (1984), *CKNK,* 134.

19. "Chilchŏk konggan sŏlgye-rŭl wihan parŭi" [A proposal for the quality of space] (1978), *CKNK,* 120.

20. *CKNK,* "Ilbon-gwa Han'gug-ŭi chŏnt'ong-gwa ch'angjo" [Tradition and creation in Japan and Korea] (1986), 304, and "Chŏnt'ong-gwa minjung kŭrigo chakka-ŭi samgak kwan'gye" [Tradition, *minjung* and the artist: A triangular relationship] (1977), 130.

21. Kim Sugŭn, *Konggan,* no. 3 (1967): 6.

22. "Kŏnch'uk ch'angjo munhwa-ŭi maegae munje" [Cultural mediation in architectural creating] (1978), *CKNK,* 252.

23. Konggan is totally absent from the history of aesthetic "movements" as written from a *minjung* standpoint such as Ch'oe Yŏl, *Han'guk hyŏndae misul undong sa* (Séoul: Tolbegae, 1990).

24. From 1965 on, he had been the president of a public board, the Han'guk Chonghap Kisul Kaebal Kongsa (Korea Engineering Consultant Corporation). See Chŏng Inha, *Kim Sugŭn kŏnch'ungnon,* 79–105.

25. See his "Yi kisa-ŭi haru" [One day in the life of Engineer Yi] (1979), *CKNK,* 57–59, which recalls something of Solzhenitsyn.

26. Chŏnt'ong-gwa minjung kŭrigo chakka-ŭi samgak kwan'gye" (1977), *CKNK,* 130.

27. Chŏnt'ong-gwa minjung kŭrigo chakka-ŭi samgak kwan'gye" (1977), *CKNK,* 130.

28. The betrayal of this tenet came right after his death with a roundtable on "Koreanness in architecture." See *Konggan,* no. 241 (September 1987): 27–38, and no. 243 (November 1987): 69–101.

29. One can recall the hot debates ignited in the early 1960s by Cornelius Osgood's *The People and Culture of Korea,* which ascribed Korean culture to shamanic residence.

30. Those strategies of discourse are developed in Alain Delissen, "A la recherche d'une architecture nationale en Corée du sud," *Histoire de l'Art,* no. 40-41 (May 1998): 99–111.

31. A few months before he died, Kim had a long interview with his Japanese counterpart, Arata Isozaki, which opened on newer and more explicit positions. "Ilbongwa Han'gug-ŭi chŏnt'ong-gwa ch'angjo" (1986), *CKNK,* 303–8.

32. Sin Yonghun and Kim Tonghyŏn, "Han'guk ko kŏnch'uk tanjang/okkae" [Fragments of ancient Korean architecture/Roofs], *Konggan,* no. 22 (August 1968): 78–84.

33. "Kwanajaegyo ch'oyŏk" [Translated excerpts from *Kwanajaegyo*] (trad. Yi Kwangho), *Konggan,* no. 211 (January 1985): 50–58.

34. Sŏng Kyŏngnin, "Sin Kugak sanch'aek" [A promenade in new national music], and Kim Paekpong, "Pongsan t'alch'um mubohwa-ŭi ŭimi" [Meaning and genealogy of the Pongsan mask-dance theater], *Konggan*, no. 105 (March 1976): 44–45 et 46–47.

35. Chŏng Pyŏngho, "Tongyŏng ogu saenam kut" [*Kut* for the drowned dead of Tongyŏng], and Kim Suik (photograph), "Hwanghae naerim kut" [*Kut* of descent in the Hwanghae style], *Konggan*, no. 185 (November 1982): 184–89 et 66–88.

36. See "Han'guk misur-ŭi chae kusŏng-ŭl k'aemp'ein. 1. Han'guksŏng-ŭi mosaek-kwa sanghwang-ŭi nolli" [A campaign for the reconstruction of Korean arts. 1. Approaches of Koreanness in its present logic], *Konggan*, no. 251 (July 1988): 29–47.

37. See Yi Hŭngu's long serial, "Han'gug-ŭi maŭm" [Korean sensibility], *Konggan*, no. 123–133 (1977–1978).

38. *CKNK,* 1977, 127. One can identify the Museum of Anthropology, designed by Kang Pongjin in the late sixties and situated in the rear of the Kyŏngbok palace compounds.

39. Zozayong [Cho Chayong], "Folk paintings and Folk Aestheticals," *Korea Journal* (February 1977): 4–11. Zozayong was a frequent contributor to *Konggan.*

40. "Munhwa-wa Konggan" [Culture and space] (1984), *CKNK,* 228–29.

41. "Tosi-nŭn 24 sigan-ŭi yesul" [The city: 24 hours of art a day] (1983), *CKNK,* 152.

42. For a comparison, see Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shuzŏ and the Rise of National Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

43. *CKNK,* 1984, 308.