University Masterplan and Negotiated Idealism:  
On the Evolution of the Masterplan of Yonsei University throughout 20th-century Korea

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Abstract

This article explores how idealized architectural plans are negotiated in relation to the practical concerns and socio-cultural conditions of modern and contemporary Korea. As a case study, it focuses on analyzing the masterplans of Yonsei University, one of the key universities that illustrate the architectural modernity of Korea, as well as reflecting the continual interactions between different agents of power within and outside the country. Particular attention is given to the evolution of the university's masterplans at four different points in time: the plans proposed in 1917, 1925, 1957, and 1970 respectively, all of which are compared to the 2016 map. The 1917 plan is a product made by an American architect—Henry K. Murphy—who proposed a design without visiting the site. Such a process lacking tactile engagement resulted in generating an overly western-style and also an 'ideal' plan that does not adequately respond to actual site conditions.

While the 1925 and 1957 plans are updated versions that are based on Murphy's site visits, they still seem idealized to a great degree. It is rather the last two maps—1970 and 2016 plans—where one can detect how they manifest themselves for the changing conditions of modern and contemporary Korea; a number of those working at the university participated in the design process, which focused on generating more realistic strategies in response to South Korea's 'compressed modernity'. Our in-depth visual analysis of the Yonsei masterplans shows how idealized plans are negotiated and reworked, thereby reflecting realistic demands for university life in material ways.

Keywords: university masterplan; negotiated idealism; masterplan; Yonsei University; Korean modern architecture

1. Introduction

1.1 The Background and Purpose of the Research

One of the aspects that constitute the modernity of Korean architecture is an increasing number of modern educational institutions, which is intricately related to the country's modernization that took place throughout the 20th-century (Kim, 2012, 49-51, 61-62, 167-168; Joo and Jeon, 2009, 201). Those institutions appeared in varying contexts, and each illustrates peculiar formal and spatial features distinct from one another. This article investigates such a phenomenon through which to explore architectural modernity in Korea, by taking a series of masterplans of Yonsei University as a case study.

Yonsei University is one of the early missionary schools, and is the prime example in examining the interplay between missionary practices and their architectural developments, both of which shape the multiple strata of modernity in which various agents of power produce relationships with given situations and thus bring forth singular forms of modernization that are neither top-down nor bottom-up. In particular, our case shows how foreign influences have become the driving forces shaping modernity, while influencing the formation of landscapes reminiscent of 'western' architectural styles. The kind of modernity that we are examining is a religious one, which is implemented by missionary practices for the sake of modernization.

However, it is crucial to note that such forms are most often disputed due to the fact that they are brought from outside the country, and often considered 'alien' or 'inauthentic.' For instance, Choi Haeweol writes, "a common image of American missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century in Korea relates to their roles as modernizers" (Choi, 2005, 39). If her comment is rather neutral, claims Kim Yunseong, the impacts of modernization are highly debated, being treated either as "pioneers of modernization" or "agents of imperialism" (Kim, 1999, 206). Regarding architectural style, such imperialist strategies are materially found with high elaboration: for example,
early-modern Korean architecture is often defined by "neo-Baroque banks, Renaissance-style public offices and Romanesque churches," all of which are signs of modernization in architectural senses (Koehler, 2008).

Although it is beyond the scope of this article as to how crucial such practices are in forming Korean modernity overall, as Robert D. Woodberry notes, it is hardly disputed that modernity is fundamentally a complex phenomenon, one that is difficult to fully excavate by any single perspective (Woodberry, 2007, 265). Considering such diverse range of definitions of the term, we aim to explore how various agents of power related to the construction of the Yonsei campus generate complex patterns of modernity, which encourages us to conduct an in-depth formal and spatial analysis of historical records: the set of masterplans of the school.

An in-depth analysis of the Yonsei masterplan can help us to understand not only its design aspects, but also the conceptions of western missionary universities and their extension to new cultural contexts. Therefore, examining the case provides evidence in exploring modern architecture, with particular attention to ways that modern educational institutions were established and spatially dispersed in the country. In doing so, this article focuses on comparing and contrasting four different masterplans designed in 1917, 1925, 1957, and 1970 respectively. Moreover, this article will also look at the changing modes of building arrangement and design throughout the twentieth century.

1.2 The Object and Method of the Research

In order to explore the multiple strata of modernity through the analysis of Yonsei masterplans, this article offers three bodies of analysis. First, it focuses on looking at the overall features of the campus layout consisting of a set of buildings, through which to trace back its temporal development in history. Second, this article excavates the detailed conceptions of building arrangement in relation to the school's historical development. Especially related to the second, we have integrated the hands-on site investigation of Yonsei University that one of us participated in as a surveyor, which was funded and published by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea from 2000 to 2013. Third, we also focus on discussing how such conceptions are negotiated with practical concerns, and how they are reflected through architectural design.

2. A Short Historiography of Yonsei University

Before moving to an in-depth formal analysis, knowing some of the school's history will provide a useful step in setting up the relationship between missionary practices and architectural design in 20th-century Korea. Yonsei University is a school that is combined with two separate institutions: Yonhee Professional College established by missionaries from the Northern Presbyterian Church, and the Severance Medical School established by an American, L.H. Severance. In 1917, the missionary foundation, with the founder Horace G. Underwood (1859-1916), purchased the school's site at the current location that was on the outskirts of Seoul (Shin, 2006, 6). While running an office called Murphy & Dana Architects, American architect Henry K. Murphy took up the project and proposed the first masterplan of the school. After Korea's independence from Japan in 1945, the institution's name changed from 'Yonhee Professional College' to 'Yonhee University.' In addition, as the Severance Medical School and Yonhee University became integrated under the name 'Yonsei University' in 1957, the second masterplan was proposed. A number of buildings, with styles inscribed with languages of gothic architecture, were constructed within the campus after 1970. It is noticeable that three of those were nominated as national heritages in the year 1981: Stimpson Hall, Underwood Hall, and Appenzeller Hall (An, 2014; An, 2016; Paek and An, 2017). After several decades, the school underwent a major transformation in the year 2014, a reconstruction of underground galleries alongside the main vertical axis, and landscaping on the ground level.

Understanding Henry K. Murphy's role in shaping the Yonsei masterplan is crucial evidence for our study. Murphy, a successful Yale graduate, was not sufficiently familiar with Asia, but it was in 1914 that he undertook a number of Asian projects, especially ones for buildings and masterplans for universities (Cody, 2001, 28-51), including the satellite campus of Yale University in China, mostly known as 'Yale-in-China.' Visiting cities like Yokohama and Tokyo, and Changsha and Shanghai around that year, Murphy was able to take up several new projects. For instance, as Murphy scholar Jeffrey W. Cody notes, during the period between 1914 and 1918, his four projects, including campus designs for "Fukien Christian University (Fuzhou), Ginling College for Girls (Nanjing), Fudan College (Shanghai), and Chosen Christian College (Seoul, Korea)" enabled him to make money amounting to "$1,450,000," which was about 19% of his firm's entire revenue (Cody, 2001, 63).1

What is derived from Murphy's spatial trajectory is the fact that he gained a sense of Asia primarily through his visits to China and Japan, whereas he visited Korea four years later in 1918, which was one year after the first Yonsei masterplan was proposed. Hence, the lack of local site conditions led him to rethink design strategies. In particular, Cody writes that Murphy was concerned by "the hilly and wooden setting" of the Yonsei campus, which was something that Murphy was not familiar enough with, even compared to other Asian cases (Cody, 2001, 65). The solution proposed is an implementation of "symmetry and picturesqueness," ideas being derived from his 'western' architectural conception (Cody, 2001, 65). Put differently, a rather belated visit to the Yonsei campus was a moment during which Murphy was more
attentive to site conditions, thus generating a more negotiated idea. What then would be the detailed ways of negotiation that Murphy and other related agents came up with?

3. Analyzing the Masterplans of Yonsei University

3.1 The 1917 Masterplan

There is no doubt that understanding the earliest version of the masterplan is a starting point for our exploration extended to an entire century. Overall, it is marked by two characteristics (Fig.1.): first, references to the masterplans of East-coast American and European universities; and second, the formation of a strong linear axis that links the main street and the central area in the north. Yonhee Professional College purchased the site in 1917, and asked Murphy to design the masterplan. After gaining design experience for university masterplans in Asia before coming to Korea, he was able to come up with a plan that is more or less a 'western-style' displacement, by utilizing the basic information and statistical data of the school. The site has a primary mountain (written as ‘主山’ in the kanji alphabet) in the north, and its contour features lines that gradually decrease towards the south, where the Kyunggeui Line and another main street called Sungsanro were constructed. Since Murphy was not familiar enough with the site, what he focused on was to impose an 'ideal' image of the university campus, which vaguely reflects the actual site conditions.

Given this situation, the details of Murphy's 1917 plan can be summarized by the following. First, the plan establishes an arrangement through the main axis, which starts from the lower area near Sungsanro to the northern area in which a number of key university buildings are located. It is a straightforward plan that sets up a clear separation between the south and the north, as well as illustrating an entrance and a core area. In order to emphasize a linear displacement in relation to the site conditions, the 1917 plan sets out a vertically strong axis, which is tilted slightly toward the right. Second, it makes an outer circulation of the central area, while placing the main buildings on a symmetrical layout within the circulation area, which creates a geometrically stable form. Third, the plan aims to preserve the royal tomb called Sukyungwon, a cultural heritage that is located in the east side of the campus. Fourth, dormitories for married couples are placed in the south of the outer circulation road (Sungsanro), which is, however, not fully developed because it was simply treated as part of the future plan.

3.2 The 1925 Masterplan

The 1925 masterplan is a result of Murphy's site visit in 1918: it is postulated that, through the visit, he attempted to understand the actual site conditions and other practical issues in order to initiate the project (Fig.2.). The overall layout of the masterplan is based on the 1917 plan, and this speculation is made in reference to the following: 1) the linear placement of buildings alongside the main axis; 2) the design of the central area in the north; 3) and the preservation of the east area where cultural heritages are located.

However, it is noticeable that the 1925 masterplan is distinct from the 1917 plan in several aspects. First, the 1925 plan is based on a strict north-south direction while retaining the oblique line of the main street. Although made in a subtle way, Murphy's attention to direction implies that the proposed plan is not a simple symmetrical layout, but a product reflecting the actual site conditions. Second, the 1925 plan was made in reference to topographical maps, which is another big difference from the 1917 one. Third, a road design of the campus is illustrated more clearly than in the previous case. It is particularly worth noting that the northeast area is marked with specific measurements. While the outer road connects to the main campus street (Baekyangro) in the 1917 plan, the latter has a lagoon between the two spots, which encourages a detouring movement by visitors. Fourth, the 1925
plan illustrates areas beyond the outer road, which is another evidence that the architect began paying more attention to the site's topology than before.

Both the 1917 and 1925 plans were designed to connect the outer roads to the campus through the main boulevard, which forms a strong linear axis as it is straightforwardly lined up from the south to the north. Such linearity is derived from the conception that simultaneously makes distance from and connects to the outside in flexible ways. The central campus area is shaped in a simple way, as characterized by its density that consists of a set of buildings, visual symmetry, and repeated placements. Moreover, outer circulation roads clearly show the line between the inside and the outside of the school area. These two plans thus show formal consistency, as well as making the environment highly functional.

3.3 The 1957 Masterplan

The 1957 plan was designed by another American architecture office called Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Association located in Detroit, Michigan (Fig.3.); and the agency that initiated the project was called The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. In the 1950s, universities in Korea were in the process of enlarging their school size, and the same holds true for Yonsei University. But what made the Yonsei case different from others is the fact that they integrated two interrelated entities: Yonhee University and the Severance Medical School. Integrating these two was a big task, and such an attempt greatly influenced the way that the 1957 plan is radically differentiated from the previous cases, which can be summed up by six points.

First, the 1957 plan emphasizes neither a linearity of roads nor the straight-up northern direction. Instead, it considers the longest part of the campus to be the standard north-south axis. This emphasis represents an attempt to actively use the entire school area and to make 'negotiations' with the strong axis of the campus. Second, a new area was designed in the southeast part within the campus, in which medical schools were placed. The new plan was proposed for functional reasons, as it was to place buildings in relationship to the expanding medical school area. It was also an experiment to place buildings apart from the outer road, which separates the campus from the outside and thus makes the campus autonomous.

Third, each section of the plan is clearly marked by circulating roads and bypasses, which illustrate the relationship between buildings and their surroundings, as well as implementing a layout that can efficiently work in daily life. In addition, both sides of the boulevard were left unplanned, and a road accessing the main boulevard was visually highlighted. Fourth, buildings that are located in the north and northeast areas show decorative patterns that look similar to each other, thereby illustrating an ideal image of the masterplan, although quite simplified. Five different buildings in the far north are unusually large and thus not in complete harmony with nearby environments. Hence, such an idealized plan shows evidence of the architects' lack of understanding concerning the site. Fifth, the plan placed the Medical School on the east side of the boulevard, which was intended to protect the cultural heritage site where Sukyungwon and a building are located. Sixth, the plan also placed a symmetrical building with extended wings alongside the central axis, which is another aspect showing the architects' effort to expand the central area. However, the building's shape greatly differs from nearby ones and thus gives an alien feel.

Another interesting thing to note in the 1957 plan is that there are a series of horizontally long buildings in the far north, which marks a visual difference from the rest and implements the variety of campus design in an architectural sense. Taking all these into consideration, we claim that the 1957 masterplan is an attempt to preserve design aspects of the previous plans, while also proposing new ways to resonate with various changing aspects around the university.

3.4 The 1970 Masterplan

The 1970 masterplan was made under two initiatives (Fig.4.): first, a committee for a long-term university development was established in 1967; and second, another long-term development plan was developed for the period between 1970 and 1985. The most critical thing to note is that professors and staffs working at the school actually participated in the design.
process, particularly faculty members working at the Department of Architecture. South Korea's 1970s was a period of social and political turmoil, since establishing a democratic system was the key driving force that influenced every sector of the society. Another feature that marks the 1970s is that the number of undergraduate students noticeably increased, which naturally likewise influenced the increase of university buildings to a large degree.

Such unstable, but unprecedentedly dynamic social conditions greatly affected the 1970 masterplan of Yonsei University, and such transitional aspects can be summarized by the following six points. First, similar to the 1957 case, the 1970 plan establishes the longest part of the campus as the main axis instead of other considerations. This strategy is also found in historical records, which articulate specific ways of grouping buildings for each college that could help in utilizing the campus area with maximum efficiency. Second, a number of buildings were placed at the areas contiguous to the outer road, and the direction of each building was set toward the south instead of the north. This is crucial to note, because constructing buildings in the south means trying to respond to the increasing need of making the university as a city center. Third, outer circulation roads were clearly differentiated from the ones within the campus, which helped them to implement a layout in a much clearer way than before. The spatial division between buildings and roads was a result of the fifteen-years-long endeavor, which is also of practical concern. Fourth, many buildings were constructed in the area where Sukyungwon, the aforementioned on-campus heritage, is located. This makes the 1970 plan quite different from previous ones, since the heritage site was considered not just something to be preserved but rather a field for active development. This changing attitude concerning siting reflects the nationwide atmosphere that the country experienced through the drive for industrial modernization led by Park Chung-hee, the leader of the military regime who had taken up his presidency between 1963 and 1979. He is best known for the phrase "the miracle of the Han," which implicates his strong leadership in developing South Korea into a new industrial country. Fifth, the plan of the central area was much more specified than before. It is interesting to note that three buildings and a courtyard in that area make a picturesque harmony, which brings forth visual consistency and also functions in relation to nearby milieus. Sixth, the west-side area where a playground was located was redesigned, and a few large-scale buildings were added; this addition resulted in deemphasizing the gymnastic nature of space, instead highlighting the image of the campus with renovated buildings that are marked with modern design.

3.5 The 2016 Map

It is not surprising to find that the 2016 map is widely different from the 1970 plan, but much of it still remains the same, except the fact that a few
more buildings were added around the campus border (Fig.5.). As noted above, three symmetrical buildings and the courtyard located at the center, mark the 1970 plan and, the 2016 map extends the same formula in the north but with minor variations. In other words, the same way of designing, consisting of a set of buildings and a courtyard, repeats twice, and the repetition constructs the image of the campus in a consistent manner.

Meanwhile, the northeast area was not developed further, which is a sign of strategy in making the campus unique compared to other universities that were rather obsessive concerning over-construction, which most often resulted in making the campuses generic. In other words, an underdeveloped area is itself the crucial constituent that constructs the identity of a university campus in modern Korea, and the Yonsei masterplan represents such an aspect. A satellite site located in the far north also characterizes the 2016 map; moreover, the underground space was recently completed, which evidences the negotiation of a spatial expansion under given circumstances.

4. Negotiating the Masterplans of Yonsei University throughout 20th-century Korea

4.1 1925 and 1957: Formal Adjustment

Investigating the evolution of the Yonsei masterplan throughout the century thus encourages us to rethink the complex layers comprising the campus, where no linear progress of imposing ideas and their applications are at work. Although the earlier versions still rely on images derived from a foreign architect's mind, starting from the 1957 plan, moments of negotiation at varying situations shape the actual campus space. Hence, it is our aim to look at these disparate masterplans in an integrated and comparative manner, which will enable us to consider such negotiations as the key that defines the modernity of Korean architecture as evinced by the Yonsei case. In this sense, we offer three different kinds of negotiation based on our case study.

The first kind of negotiation is formal adjustment. In this respect, the serial masterplans, especially the ones proposed in 1925 and 1957, are crucial evidences illustrating how the plans were negotiated in relation to practical concerns, thereby doing away with overly idealized campus plans. The 1917 masterplan is thus a point of departure, a moment of imbrication from which further variations could unfold, fuse themselves with the existing bodies of work, and bring forth new events. It is marked by a vertically long axis with complete symmetry that consists of geometrically harmonious buildings, which widely contrasts with the rest that is outstandingly asymmetrical (Fig.6.). Bachelors' dormitories are located in the south, and each of them is characterized by an ideal placement, which consists of a square in the north and buildings in the south.

Meanwhile, the idealization of the 1957 plan is characterized by the grouping of two different building types. The first group includes buildings that were either completed or at near completion, while the second comprises a set of rough sketches illustrating buildings only as rectangles and having no details. However, it is notable that the 1957 plan is much more 'realistic' than before for the following reasons. First, it has an addition of the Severance Medical School, so the campus was 'comprehensively redesigned.' Second, the plan illustrates a building with extended wings in the north with great detail, which evidences that the plan was already in progress. This building is similar to the College of Engineering located in the southwest of the campus, and this similarity encourages one to speculate about the 'mimetic' process of design, which generates an image of the university in a stronger and more consistent way. However, the 1957 plan was not fully matured and rather marked as a gesture towards idealization, which can be evidenced by the emphasis of the grid system in the placement of buildings in the north, and other minute design aspects. Although not realized, these buildings are evidence illustrating that the responsible architects made a twofold strategy, implementing a long-term design, as well as leaving possibilities that can be further employed in the near future.

4.2 1970: Negotiating through Multiple Agencies

In the meantime, the 1970 masterplan is an updated version of the 1957 plan. Initially it emphasized constructing buildings alongside the main boulevard, in a way that the axial road was used not just as a passageway but also as a nodal point to all of the subdivided zones. Furthermore, the 'inverse triangle'
(Fig.4.) reflects the high density of the south. What resulted is that the northern area was relatively underdeveloped and the natural environments were well preserved instead. This is how the 1970 plan is differentiated from the 1957 one: while the latter aimed to develop the inner area within the campus, the former was executed in a reverse manner, highlighting how the campus connects itself to the outside. This change is related to the rapid urbanization of the nearby area. The Sinchon commercial district in the 1960s, where Yonsei University is located, was in the development process with funds provided by the school, which includes the construction of roads and railways.

Such a process also resulted in making the south area of the campus a sub-center, thereby fusing the boundary between the campus and the city. In this respect, it is fair to claim that the reverse growth of the Yonsei campus is a response to the changing urban conditions. Second, the country’s population growth impacted the increasing number of students attending the school. While it is true that more facilities were required to meet the expectations concerning incoming students, accessibility was also a key consideration. Since the campus was not able to provide all the necessary facilities, students were encouraged to go outside the campus for everyday life.

4.3 2016: Branding the Campus

The negotiation between idealization and realization becomes much more prominent in the 2016 map. What is at stake is the maintenance and expansion of the campus, in particular the three symmetrical buildings (Stimpson Hall, Underwood Hall, and Appenzeller Hall), and a courtyard mentioned above (Fig.8.). They were originally planned in 1917 and constructed in 1920, and they have symbolized the university since then. While a symmetry-based symbolism has been widely maintained, what is also worth noticing is that such symbolism has also been reproduced in different areas through renewals of the masterplan, although with slight variations (such as span differentiation and size). Harmonization with the surroundings was highly considered, but encountering them always results in differing feelings, which is why the Yonsei campus is a case beyond simple reproduction of western exemplars.
College (located in the Boston area) (Jung, 2005, 20). Appenzeller's dream was unachieved, although a building named after her still stands in the Yonsei campus (Appenzeller Hall) as one of the cores. As historian Eric Hobbsbawn noted, such an aspiration brings forth an 'invented tradition,' in the sense that represented historical traces inherent in a certain cultural domain are transported to another without fully grasping its subtle nuances and cultural implications (Hobbsbawn, 1983, 1).

Taken overall, the 2016 map is a result illustrating how the school has persistently aspired to enhance its brand value, while simultaneously preserving the historic pasts and strategically expanding the territory within the campus and beyond. Preservation matters, and those protected can be detected at several points within the campus. For instance, the royal tombs in the east from the main boulevard were markedly well protected in both the 1917 and 1925 plans. In addition, the Medical School in the Far East was also carefully considered in relation to Sukyungwon, which is another heritage within the campus area. Although the 2016 map illustrates a rather reduced degree of preservation compared to earlier versions, important places are still protected despite the comprehensive renovation of the campus, which has undertaken a noticeable renewal in the past few years. The construction of satellite campuses, located in an international city named Incheon, is another point to consider, which evidences the school's long-term development strategies. Put differently, Yonsei University has expanded in a 'centrifugal' way (as opposed to 'centripetal') through continual expansions.

5. Conclusion

In sum, this article has explored the relationship between idealization and its negotiation through a case study: analyzing the masterplans of Yonsei University. In doing so, it has focused on investigating how the plans have evolved over time in relationship to various human and non-human agencies, including the invited American architects, professors and staff members, and other considerations such as the civil war and rapid urbanization processes in the later half of the century. Instead of making the article as a case for exploring how such variants and historical events are condensed formally and spatially, we have conducted an in-depth visual analysis of the Yonsei masterplans, which enable us to look at the details and subtle nuances in how the school has responded to changing situations without presupposing an idealized image as to what a university masterplan should be. There is no doubt that Murphy's plans are central in shaping the overall structure of the school, but modifications after his belated visit, and the continual adaptations by other agencies make the campus a heterogeneous kind, in which no single, absolute standard exists. Lastly, while our study shows a case as to how missionary practices have influenced shaping university masterplans, we also claim that, in order to read the dynamics and tensions between idealization and negotiation, one needs to activate the historical pasts in a more critical way, which would always renew the interrelationship between the built environments and those agencies involved in them in varying situations.

Note
1 The 'Chosen Christian College' that Cody refers to in the above-mentioned book is in fact Yonsei University, but he does not correlate these two with each other. An inability to correlate them is presumably due to his inability of identifying those two according to the terms written Korean language and kanji alphabet, as well as the emphasis of his research made more on China and Japan than on Korea.

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