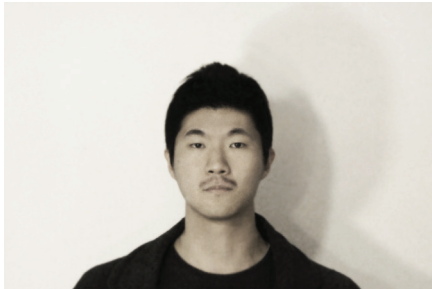


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abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine visual stimulation and function of Korean signboard design during Japanese colonial period (1910~1945).

The Korean word "Gan-pan" (signboard) was introduced from Japan and started to be used in the early twentieth century and was widely used during the colonial period until today. In that period, signboard gave people powerful visual impression to attract them with its exaggerated formative characteristics.

However, Korean traditional signboard didn't have the feature before the Japanese occupation. The basic role and function of the conventional signboard was not stimulating customer but informing about the purpose of the place.

Moreover, Japanese colonization brought not only the changes of shape and function of signboard but also transition of people's perception about signboard. In other words, people started to think about signboard as a symbolic icon of temptation that caused only vanity.

From such context, in this study, the researcher focuses on the difference of the signboard introduced from foreign countries and Korean traditional signboard such as "Pyeon-ae" and the visual feature of signboard during the Japanese colonial period.

keywords

Korean signboard, Japanese colonial period, visual stimulation.

The stimulation of Korean signboard design in the Japanese colonial period



Figure 1.
Korean traditional signboard "Pyeon-ae" on the Kwanghwamun which is the main gate of the Kyeongbokgung, Pulgasari (2010), Kwanghwamun.

Figure 2.
Pyeonganbuk-do store in the Joseon Local Products Expo (1915), in *The report of Joseon Local Products Expo*.

Figure 3.
Jongro tailor shop (1937), in *The photo album of great Kyeong-sung*.



Introduction

Recently, signboard provides visual stimulus to pedestrians with its various colors, forms and illuminations. A similar phenomenon was in “*Kyeong-sung*”¹ (Seoul) during the Japanese colonial period (1910~1945). People were not used to see big, fast, shiny objects such as huge building, car, lighting and even signboard which were not easily found at that time. In other words, signboard was more stimulating than today's due to people's unfamiliarity with visual newness. For that reason, this article pays attention to the nature of stimulation of signboard during the occupation. To examine the detail, this paper traces the path of the introduction and expansion of Korean signboard and confirms the design, formative characteristic and function of it during the occupation period.

The first inflow of signboard in the early 20th century

From advanced researches, the author could suppose that there was no concept of the “Signboard” and even the word until the late 19th century.² However there were “*Pyeon-aek*”³, “*Ju-ryun*”⁴ and “*Po-ryeom*”⁵ which have similar function with now day's signboard. Especially “*Pyeon-aek*” was frequently used for public buildings such as gate of palace more than private buildings (Fig. 1). Therefore it had functions, which were not only announcing information of sites but also giving authority to buildings. After the opening of a port, new kinds of signboards were introduced by Japanese and other foreign merchants and also expanded. And even the word “*Gan-pan*” (signboard) started to be used from that period.

The signboard in the early stage of the Japanese colonial period looks very different from the latter Joseon Dynasty⁶. For example, a signboard installed on the “*Pyeonganbuk-do*” store in the “Joseon Local Products Expo” which was held in 1915 looks like “*Po-ryeom*” that is Japanese style (Fig. 2). The fact that Japanese signboard installed on the Korean local store means foreign style signboard was generally used at that period. At the same period, there was another

widely used signboard that looked like Korean traditional signboard, “*Pyeon-aek*”. In the Joseon Dynasty, original “*Pyeon-aek*” installed on the eaves of the huge buildings which slanting toward ground to be seen well by pedestrians. During Japanese colonial period, despite most of signboards were placed in lower position of buildings, they were still slanted conventionally.

Decorative feature of signboard design during 1920~1930s

At the beginning of 1920s, the Imperial Japan changed their strategy of ruling from ‘forced ruling’ to so-called ‘cultural ruling’. In this context, colonial government relaxed economic regulations, therefore many new company and also signboard increased rapidly. In 1926, even the newspaper called Chosunilbo sponsored an event about the selection of outstanding signboard.⁷ It is possible to assume that signboard's visual stimulation was powerful through a fact that many newspapers pointed out overflow of signboard in the middle of 1930s. In general, Korean signboard in 1920~1930s was very decorative and also has powerful visual stimulation. Before the Japanese colonial period, Korean traditional signboard follows size, form and structure of building to be used as function of the signboard. On the contrary, in this period, some signboards didn't consider design of the building and expand their size over the building to be stand out. In other words, those signboards didn't focus on the function of signboard but visual stimulation of it. Furthermore, a few signboards started to use images that illustrate products and the trademark. This kind of signboards could be used to inform intuitively about the merchandise of the store. However we can find that signboard with image was used to make a decorative signboard from the fact that some of them were installed just beside of window display (Fig. 3). After the electricity comes out, neon sign and electric illumination appeared for the first time in Korea and it reinforced the effect of visual stimulation of signboard. Additionally glass and metallic material strengthened this effect with its reflective nature.

During the colonial period, a lot of newspapers and magazines wrote articles about the visual stimulation of decorative signboards. Those articles commonly criticized the dazzling street view caused by signboards with only focusing on a color and brightness of it. In other words, signboard was made to a visual impression to gather people's attention. From such a context, the researcher can discover the fact that the signboard was recognized as a symbolic icon of lure, which caused material vanities and impotent feeling.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Korean signboard in the Japanese colonial period went toward making stimulation with decorative visual compare to Korean traditional signboard that carried out the fundamental role of signboard, which is informing people the purpose of building. As a result, these signboards brought the change of street view and of course the consumer's living with its characteristic of stimulation.

Footnotes

¹ Kyeong-sung was a name of Seoul during the Japanese colonial period.

² The researcher agrees with Kwak, Myeong-hee's claim that Korean word “*Gan-pan*” (signboard) came from Japan. She also claimed that there was absolutely no Korean word “*Gan-pan*” before 1925. However on 1909, a newspaper advertisement in the Dae-han Maeil Sinbo (Korea Daily News) mentioned the word and some other newspapers also did around the same time. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the word “*Gan-pan*” existed from the early 1900s. Kwak, M.H. (2004) ‘The Research of Character of the Signboard Culture in Korea at Japanese Colonial Period’, *Korean Society of Outdoor Advertising Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 17.

³ “*Pyeon-aek*” is a kind of Korean traditional signboard and usually made of wood board.

⁴ “*Ju-ryun*” is about good poem or news for announcing to people and usually attached on the wall or column of buildings.

⁵ “*Po-ryeom*” is a kind of door blind and consists of beads, strings and fabric.

⁶ Joseon(Chosun) Dynasty was former Korean state that lasted from 1392 to 1897.

⁷ Shin, I.S. & Seo, B.S. (2011) *The history of Korean*

advertisement, Seoul: Nanam, p.124.

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