

# A Research on the Public Space of the Foreign Housing in Korea

Hyun-Hee Lee, Kyungwon University

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of this research

A population of legal aliens in Korea has been increased enormously since Asian games and 88 Seoul Olympic game. The main part of the population also has been changed from military personnel, army civilian employees or diplomatic officials to various types including people residing in Korea on business reasons or tourists. Among these people, military personnel of the United States have their own town near Yongsan and they don't have much inconveniences residing in Korea. But most other foreign people are having troubles residing in Korea due to the gap of culture and environments and the lack of housing facilities. None the less, according to the recent research, Korea is the second worst country after China among Asian countries in the dwelling environments. Especially, in today's age of global competition, we are asked to improve the housing environments for legal aliens residing in Korea.

There have been two kinds of research on legal alien housing in Korea. One is on prospects, methods and legal regulations of housing rental business for foreign residents, and the other is on dwelling demands of legal aliens. In 1996, Korea National Housing Corporation studied past states regarding legal alien housing in Korea and investigated the dwelling requirements of legal aliens in Korea. However, that research has a limitation that it depends only on questionnaires which is lack of practical observations in details.

In this research, I investigated the characteristics on components and utilities of public spaces<sup>1)</sup> in foreign housing in Korea, using careful observations and interviews, for the purpose of helping develop the practical and desired housing models for legal aliens in Korea. I expected this research to be compared with the recent research on housing facilities of Koreans residing in foreign countries, which may provide foundation to build a composite modern housing culture of Korea. I interpreted the relationships between living patterns and housing spaces from the perspectives of assimilations and complications of housing culture of Korea. This research may help discover the required characteristics of the modern housing culture under development. The sample of this survey are the legal aliens who are long term residents, living in Seoul, and in the middle and upper classes. The methods of this research include literature survey, personal interviews and

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1) Public space means the space in a housing shared by whole family members such as living room, dining room and kitchen area.

observations.

## 1.2 Survey

Between September, 1997 and February, 1998, I sent questionnaires to legal aliens living in downtown or suburban of Seoul. Then I chose 40 residents for survey. In survey, I interviewed foreigners about their life style, name of rooms, frequency of guest, unsatisfaction points, family's communities and so on. And also I draw the floor plans and layout of furnitures. Pictures were taken for the analysis.




## 2. Survey Results and its Analysis

### 2.1 Overview of Survey and its Target

As the number of foreign enterprise in Korea increases, the population of legal aliens who are long term residents also increases. In May, 1996, the number of foreign enterprise amounts to 3,554, which increased by 60% compared with that of 1991, which results in the increase of legal aliens by 22.3% (Joongang Daily News, June 28, 1997). According to the records of Seoul City Hall, at the end of the year 1995, the population of Seoul legal aliens increased by 14% compared with the previous year, which amounts to 45,072. This population comprises 0.43% of whole Seoul residents. Their main residing areas were 8th Army and its vicinity such as I-Tae-Won, HanNam-Dong, and East Ichon-Dong. However, after Nam-San Foreign Housing is removed, and as the demands for foreign housing increases, their residence area spreads over to KangNam-Gu and SeoCho-Gu. Since 1992, the order of the most legal alien populated areas are YongSan-Gu, KangNam-Gu, SeoDaeMun-Gu, SeoCho-Gu, and Jung-Gu. Especially, 14.2% of whole legal aliens lives in YongSan-Gu, which amounts to 6414. And in such five areas, foreign schools are located which is very attractive points for legal aliens.

By looking into the records in the City Hall, we selected 35 households as survey target, and analyzed 33 households among them. The survey continued from August to October, 1997 and from January to March, 1998. During that period, since the ownership of real estate for legal aliens was prohibited by law in Korea, most of the housing were rented by the enterprise which employed the legal aliens. The types of housing included 10 houses (30.3%) and 23 condos/apartments (69.7%), and its average number of family members was 2.43. Their home countries included America (14 cases, 42.4%), Europe (11 cases, 33.3%), and others such as Australia, New Zeal Land and Asia (8 cases, 24.3%). The purposes of residing in Korea are various. USA legal aliens were military personnel, enterprise employees, school instructors, architects, etc. and their residing terms vary from 1 year to 12 years. On the other hand, most Europe legal aliens were employed by trading companies or insurance companies, and their residing terms were 3 to 4 years. Other legal aliens were mainly diplomatic officials, and their residing terms were 2 to 3 years.

The size of housing were 150 to 300 square meters (50 to 90 pyung).

 <p>[Picture 1] They take off shoes on the entrance hall and became to use shoe cabinet. That means they use entrance hall in a different manner than they did in their home country. (Case S5)</p>	 <p>[Picture 2] They added carpets on the plastic floor partially (the lower part of the picture). Since they do not have a dividing border between living room and entrance area, the living room is easily get dirt from shoes left on the entrance. But the family were not concerned about it. (Case S2)</p>	 <p>[Picture 3] They placed carpet all over the floor, and, they sit on chairs not on floor (though not shown in this picture) without wearing shoes on the floor. In usual Korean houses, entrance area are tiled and lowered than floor by around 3 centi-meters. In this house, they use entrance area like other usual Korean houses. (Case S17)</p>
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## 2.2 An Analysis on Living Patterns

I found 10 cases in which legal aliens lived in Korea before they moved to their current residences. I found 8 cases in which legal aliens moved to Korea from their home countries. They said that they lived in houses with gardens in their home countries. They addressed that their current housing were not nature friendly due to the lack of trees, gardens, grasses, etc around their housings. I found 10 cases in which they moved to Korea from the third country. Accordingly, since their resident countries are various, I cannot assume that their living patterns are influenced by Korean culture only.

According to the survey, interestingly, their first impression on Korean housing culture were made in restaurants in Korea. They had difficulties sitting on hard floor in restaurants, but find it healthful to take off shoes indoors, and they mentioned that sitting on the floor is a good practice for spine health care. These points comprises their first impressions. I discovered only 2 cases in which they still wear shoes indoors, and all other legal aliens take off shoes inside their housings. Among them, 10 households became to take off shoes indoors for the first time in Korea, and 4 households already take off shoes indoors before they moved to Korea. However, all these people do not sit on floors (floor-sitting life), but sit on chairs (chair-sitting life). [Picture 1] to [Picture 3] show these cases.

Groups	representation	characteristics	discontented	average	contented	counts
LDK forming	L · D · K	one unit			S13 S27	2 cases(6.1%)
	L · D : K	K separated partially	S2 S18			2 cases(6.1%)
1 unit	L : D · K	Dining-Kitchen L separated partially	S21 S29 S32		S23 S25	5 cases(15.1%)
independ. L	L-D : K	independent L		S9	S4 S7	3 cases(9.1%)
independ. K	L · D-K	independent K Living-Dining	S6 S14		S28	3 cases(9.1%)
independ. LDK	L : D-K	independent K	S15 S17	S10 S11	S1 S16 S19	12 cases(36.4%)
		L separated partially	S20 S26	S12 S22 S31		
independ. LDK	L-D-K	independent L, D, K			S3 S5 S8 S24 S30 S33	6 cases(18.2%)
total			11cases(33.3%)	6cases(18.2%)	16cases(48.5%)	33 cases(100.0%)

· one unit      : separation    - independent      L: Living room D: Dining room K: Kitchen

[Table 1] Spatial characteristics and household contentment.

### 2.3 An Analysis on Public Spaces

According to [Table 1], most households prefer independent spaces for living rooms. Among the public spaces if living room(L), dining room(D) and kitchen(K) are combined or L and K are combined into one unit - which are easily shown in Korean residences - they displayed discontent, as shown in the first and the third groups in [Table 1]. However, in single member families, especially when they usually dine outside, they do not show any specific discontent. Regarding kitchens, according to their diverse living cultures, some households prefer independent kitchen spaces, but some others prefer dining areas which has both kitchen and dining room together. Overall observation implies that households under survey prefer separate living rooms, but they do not have much preference for independent dining rooms. This preference toward independent living rooms results in the furniture layout shown in [Table 2] in the next section, in which they use TVs or sofas to secure independences of living room areas.

### 2.4 An Analysis on Furniture Layout in Living Rooms

According to the furniture layout of <Group A> in [Table 2], they placed sofa and tea table in the center of living room, and decoration cabinets and side tables in the circumferences, which make rooms for family chats in the living room. In this group, they do not prepare any specific walking paths around living rooms. On the other hand, in <Group B>, they placed console and TV on it next to a wall, and they placed sofa and tea table forming U, L, I shapes around walls. They use space

Group	Layout Pattern	Target Household	Example
<Group A>		S4 S10 S13 S20 S3 S30 S33 S12	
<Group B>		S1 S7 S9 S11 S15 S18 S14 S22 S25 S28 S5 S16 S17 S8 S19 S31 S2 S23 S26 S29 S6 S27 S32	
<Group C>		S21 S24	

sofa layout   
 window direction   
 ----- walking path

[Table 2] Layout Pattern of legal alien's Living Area in Korea

between sofa and decoration cabinets as walking paths. In <Group C>, which is the mixture of <Group A> and <Group B>, they placed sofa facing decoration cabinets and TVs.

Most living rooms under survey are hall-typed, and <Group A> has 6 cases(18.2%) and <Group B> has 20 cases(60.6%), which means that they prefer placing furniture near walls and make rooms as much as possible. In <Group A>, they layout furniture with the purpose of hosting guests and family chats, and they also have private spaces such as family rooms for family uses only. On the other hand, in <Group B>, they do not have separate private spaces for families, but use living room for both hosting guests and family rooms.

Regarding sofa layout, they prefer O or U shape (21 cases, 63.6%), which results from their preferences for independent living rooms. For example, in S1, they placed sofa set forming U shape, and placed console behind the center sofa, which improve independence of living room from other space. Another point observed in this survey is that the location of window does not have much effects on furniture

layout as the preference for independent living rooms. Windows usually have two functions, one is view and the other is light. They sacrifice the function of view to improve independence of living rooms.

In summary, legal aliens made much efforts to make as much room as possible given limited spaces, and to make living room area separate from other places such as dining areas or walking paths. From these observations, I suggest that design should be made using alcove or transformable space, etc, which may improve the utility and the independence of living rooms.

### 3. Conclusions

In this research, I surveyed and analyzed legal alien housing from the perspectives of living patterns and housing spaces in Korea. I observed several important points and list them as follows.

(1) legal aliens in Korea are taking off shoes indoors, which is influenced by Korean culture. But they still abide by chair-sitting life, which reveals their complications with Korean housing space designs.

(2) legal aliens in Korea prefer public spaces such as living room, dining room and kitchen to be separated from each other. However, in the circumstances of limited space in which these public spaces cannot be built independently, they still wanted at least kitchen to be separated from living room and dining areas, to hide the kitchen view from other spaces and to keep various kitchen smells from spreading over to other public spaces. Also, they wanted larger kitchen space to store a variety of things sent from their home country.

(3) legal aliens in Korea seem to prefer living room independent from other public spaces, by observing their furniture layouts. Therefore, to avoid usual designs in Korea in which living rooms and dining areas are facing each other, I suggest that design should be made using alcove or transformable space, etc, which may improve the utility and the independence of living rooms.

Public space in Korea tends to be a sharable space by whole family members for both individual and common family activities. On the other hand, public space in western countries tends to be used as a mean to protect individual activities and private spaces. This tendency can be found in western house designs in which every bed room has its own shower facility. I can infer that this tendency has influenced on the above observed living patterns and furniture layout patterns which improve each space's own functionality.

In this research, I analyzed mainly the public spaces of legal aliens. Based on this, the future research needs to be made on various life styles of legal aliens in Korea to improve housing environments for legal aliens residing in Korea and to develop a desired modern housing culture in Korea.

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