

Improving the Street through the Control of Urban Signboards

도시상업간판의 관리를 통한 거리개선방안

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국문요약

상업간판은 단순한 광고목적 외에 도시의 시각이미지를 구성하는 도시환경구성요소 중 하나이다. 또한 건축물의 주요한 구성부분이며 주민에게는 환경적 즐거움을 주어야 하는 의무가 있으며 보행자로 하여금 강제적으로 주목을 끌게 해야 하는 상업적 목적을 가지고 있다. 그러나 본래의 목적과 달리 하나의 도시환경저해요소로서 문제점을 유발하기도 한다. 이러한 문제점들을 시정하기 위한 주민과 자치단체의 상업간판 환경개선을 위한 시도와 이에 따른 결과를 살펴 보면서 환경개선을 위한 시도가 결과적으로 주민과 도시환경 모두에게 어떠한 영향을 끼쳤는지를 살펴보았다. 현재 한국의 간판설치규정은 중앙집권적 규율하의 기본규정과 비효과적인 부처간의 상이한 규정 및 하급세부규정의 미비에 기인하여 상업간판의 난립상황을 초래하였다. 아울러 살펴본 일본, 미국, 프랑스에서 적용하고 있는 기본규정도 한계가 있음을 살펴보았으며 따라서 어떠한 개선방향이 주민과 자치단체 양자에게 이익을 주고있는지를 살펴보았다. 효과적인 간판설치규정의 제정은 불가능하지만 규정은 제정하되 무엇보다 자발적인 주민들의 참여와 건축가, 사용자, 자치단체 사이의 주의로운 조화가 필요함을 살펴보았다.

Keywords : signboard, visual environment, outdoor advertising

1. Introduction

Outdoor signboards are part of the visual environment which in addition to their original purpose of advertising or providing information may create emotional and visual effects that contribute to the atmosphere of a city.¹⁾ They may even used to develop and portray the image of the city.

Even though they have positive roles, they may also impair the street scenery,²⁾ and regulation therefore tends to be universal. In this study the researcher will illustrate, through case studies, examples of local initiatives that have been successful but the researcher will also examine that regulations in Korea are particularly strict and restrictive. The researcher will also examine whether the recent street rearrangement project of Seoul City in particular will damage or enhance the urban environment.

In this study, the researcher use the word 'signboard' to mean signs exposed on the external walls of urban buildings. Outdoor signboards may be classified into

three types: outdoor advertising boards, outdoor signboards, and outdoor signs.³⁾

2. Theoretical Background of Signboards

2.1 Concept, Definition and Roll

The term 'signboard' generally refers to outdoor signboards.⁴⁾ Outdoor signboards are installations displaying advertising bulletins or billboards that target the general public⁵⁾

In these cases, outdoor signboards may be used to show names, trademarks, or brand names of buildings or lands that some individuals or organizations own or rent. They include horizontal signboards, vertical signboards, projecting signboards, rooftop signboards, or signboards on support.⁶⁾

Majour functions of a signboard as a component of a building image are as follows:

First, it should create systematic streets with order and unique characteristics giving pleasure to residents.

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Second, it should deliver the structural information on urban scenery easily and orderly.

Third, it should be recognized simply and clearly due to its form, colour, disposition, and various technologies and materials.

Fourth, it should be beautiful in harmonizing with urban buildings to beautify the urban scenery and increase the effect of the advertisement.⁷⁾

Especially, in urban scenery, signboards are installed and displayed generally on streets, where they are exposed to the public continuously and repeatedly. The street scenery is a cubic space consisting of floor spaces (roads) and vertical spaces (walls of buildings), where vertical spaces play dual roles as the exterior wall of buildings and the interior wall of roads.⁸⁾

The vertical space has the strongest visual factor in the street scenery. In fact, it determines the scenery of the street and buildings. Outdoor signboards may be considered as an image displayed against this vertical space. In other words, outdoor signboards are pictures expressing functions and characteristics of the space inside a building, and at the same time, they are pictures shown inside the street, giving fresh stimulus to the visual order of the street scenery. However, as there are so many and various signboards that may be deployed freely even though their size is small compared to other visual components, it is possible to confuse the visual order due to excessive stimulus.⁹⁾

Such outdoor signboards are fixed in a particular space, forcing people to view the advertisement. If they remain in the same spot, they come to be important landmarks, even symbolizing the region or regional characteristics. Consequently, they may be recognized as important visual resources of street scenery.

Because urban dwellers co-exist with signboards, they are closely related to one another. Therefore, in addition to functions such as advertising or signing, signboards should also be emotional and visual components of the urban environment, harmonizing with the atmosphere of the city and delivering the image of the whole city.¹⁰⁾

Signboards cannot be discussed without a consideration of construction. Since they are a long-term, low-cost and highly effective method of advertising a building, they display and beautify unique attributes of a store and a region, and even become

landmarks. In addition, they can make buildings look more lively and beautiful.¹¹⁾ Signboards should both manifest the commercial characteristics of a shop and harmonize with the environment. Thus, signboards have different qualities from printed media because, as advertising facilities, they occupy a certain space and directly and repeatedly stimulate the visual senses of individuals.¹²⁾

The roles of signboards as a component of the urban image.¹³⁾ are: (1) to create a systematic, pleasant, orderly and unique environment in the urban street; (2) to simplify human movement by utilizing forms, colours, arrangements, and, recently, various techniques and materials; and (3) to enhance the qualities of the urban environment and to create new images through attractive signage.



<Figure 1> Simple brand images on building walls in London



<Figure 2> A chaos of signboards and rearranged signboards

3. Case Study of Urban Signboard Images

- Domestic and Overseas Regulations on Signboard Management

Current Korean law on outdoor advertisement management allows up to three signboards per shop, or up to four signboards per shop on a road adjacent to any intersection. In other words, it allows up to 60 - 80 signboards on a five-storey building with 20 shops. There is therefore the potential for a visually confusing environment. In short, there have been several regulations on signboard installation, which has caused much confusion. The current regulation cannot control the situation properly.

In general, signboards that cover buildings with various shapes and colours are out of tune with the surrounding atmosphere and are aesthetically unappealing. Even though local councils set up their own signboard regulations, they are not adequately enforced, and the result is a chaos of signboards. To prevent a chaos of signboards and promote a beautiful city, regulations on signboards should be reinforced and provide management programmes that suit the unique characteristics of each region. The current regulations make insufficient reference to local conditions.

In fact, the relevant authorities are unable to enforce the regulations strictly because of both a lack of personnel and opposition from shop owners. Installed signboards are private assets.

Recognizing that the effect of signboards on a community cannot be ignored, many nations have enacted regulations to control signboards and to discourage approaches that are not in accord with the national culture or sentiments.¹⁴⁾

Let us therefore examine the regulation of other countries first. After comparing these and learning from several cases of improvement, we will be able to formulate a better policy. America and Japan are the nations with which we have had the most exchange politically, economically, and culturally; and France is our closest partners among major European nations. Thus, city of Paris is chosen.

3.1 Korea

The system of controlling signboards and outdoor advertising in Korea may be summarized in a word: 'centralization'. The central government regulates and enforces ordinances on the majority of matters relating

to signboards¹⁵⁾ and so detailed are the national enforcement ordinances that few regulations are relegated to local self-governing bodies. Thus, the same rules apply to all signboards regardless of the characteristics of a region, resulting in a uniformity of signboards throughout the country.

Furthermore, because of the close relation with the cityscape, outdoor signboard issues have been approached at the level of city planning, albeit unsuccessfully, because of the regulations in operation. The fundamental cause is the lack of connection between The Advertisement Act of the Home Affairs Ministry and The City Planning Act of the Ministry of Construction and Transportation.¹⁶⁾

3.2 Japan

Signboard-related regulations in Japan were enacted for the first time in 1919 and were revised in 1999. Whenever the Land and Transportation Ministry improved the regulations related to outdoor advertising, it always gave powers of control to prefectures, the local self-governing bodies. The prefectures, in turn, enacted rules based on the regulations as instructed.

The Japanese outdoor advertising act contains articles on its purpose, definitions, restrictions on advertising materials, follow-up measures for violation, reporting of outdoor advertising businesses, instructions and advice for outdoor advertising businesses, exceptional regulations on special zones and metropolitan cities, penalties, cautions on application, and so on. Details on each article are left to the regulations and enforcement rules of the prefectures.¹⁷⁾

Outdoor advertising regulations in Japan are very similar to those of Korea, but an analysis of the systematic structure in the primary articles reveals that in Korea, the majority of regulations are embodied in acts and enforcement ordinances of the central government, while in Japan, they consist mostly of rules concerning aspects like shape, size and colour, in ordinances enforced by local self-governing bodies.¹⁸⁾

3.3 United States of America

The most important characteristic of American outdoor advertising regulations is that the management system for outdoor advertisements is a part of the regulations for city planning.¹⁹⁾ Outdoor advertising regulations in America vary

each state and divide signboards into two categories basically: advertisements for the shops and advertisements for promotion. The related restrictions are based on the total area of a shop instead of detailed matters such as the number or the length of advertising materials.

Overall, they are focused on protecting the housing environment, allowing only one signboard for each shop, restricting the largest size to 0.2 square metres, and imposing constraints on moving or blinking advertisements.²⁰⁾ It is common to designate a special zone for outdoor advertising in connection with special locations specified by city planning. The regulations vary between states, but the specified aim of outdoor advertising regulations in America is "Harmony with local residents".

For instance, in Boston, USA, signboards are regulated according to district zoning classifications, such as residential and non-residential. For example, neon signs and pictorial advertisements are allowed only in amusement areas for adults.

3.4 France

The new law was enacted in 1979 after heated discussions in the National Assembly on freedom of expression.²¹⁾ The characteristics of the Act are as follows. First, outdoor advertisements regulated by the Act are classified into three categories, each of which has unique restrictions. Second, the punishment for violation has been strengthened and includes compulsory penalties, authorized enforcement, and compulsory judicial enforcement. Third, citizens and non-government organizations are allowed to agitate to correct any violation. Finally, France strictly protects its cultural assets.²²⁾

The management policy for signboards in France focuses on harmony with the surrounding architecture and streetscape. Colours are limited to achromatic hues such as white and grey. On the Champs-Elysees in Paris, there are no signboards with colours such as gold lettering on a red background in order not to spoil the urban landscape with its many cultural assets.



<Figure 3> Brand shops on the Champs-Elysees in Paris

As mentioned, every country has its own regulations on the installation of signboards, based on its own culture. Korea has strict, centralized regulations for convenient administrative management by the central government. Japan entrusts the details to local self-governing bodies. America has a range of regulations that focus on protecting residential districts.

However, no matter how carefully these regulations may be formulated, all regulations have limits. These nations have recognized issues concerning discord between signboards and the urban environment. Let us consider the benefits of actively managing streetscapes, for resolving such issues for residents. We can see this clearly in the case of Korea, where projecting signboards that impair the cityscape are prevalent despite the nationally uniform regulations and the strict and absolute application of the standard.

In order to provide a better policy that will be adopted by both authorities and local communities, let us examine a number of cases from several countries and see how more effective management of the streetscape can benefit both residents and local authorities.

4. Case Study of Urban Signboard Images

- Examples of Domestic and Foreign Improvement to Signboard Images

4.1 Korea

For a number of years, local media repeatedly criticized certain signboard installations, and many residents of Seoul and local councils regularly expressed similar opinions. Finally, in 2001, the Seoul Metropolitan Council launched a project to improve the condition of the street and its shops, and signboards. This is one of the projects for improving the street environment that have been enforced by the Seoul Metropolitan Council.

1) Noyu Street rearrangement

Although it is just seven meters wide, Noyu Street A street in east Seoul, its name means "pleasure place for old men" now gives a feeling of openness. There were a multitude of huge signboards and banners hanging above the stores in a disorderly fashion, and electricity and communication cables were strung haphazardly like cobwebs in the air. Now, all the unsightly electricity poles and distribution boards have been removed, and street stalls have disappeared.

The Noyu Street project began in 2001. Each store in

Noyu Street was restricted to only one wall signboard and one projecting signboard, and red signboards were prohibited. Letters were to be no larger than three-eighths of the size of the signboard. From the planning stage, the project controlled the distance between signboards, colours, size of characters, and so on.

According to a recent survey, only 11.6% of stores had "over 80 customers a day on weekdays" before the street arrangement. After the improvements, the percentage greatly increased to 52%, and on weekends, it increased to 70% from the previous 30%. The effectiveness of the project can be seen in the case of 'Shim', a shop specializing in women's clothes. In 2003, sales in the branch shops on the high street in Munjungdong and Mokdong decreased by 10 per cent and 25% respectively compared to the sales in 2002. However, the branch shop on Noyu Street saw an increase. The value of real estate on the street has now doubled.



<Figure 4> Improved signboards in Seoul
Before Arrangement After Arrangement

This result shows that one of the best effects of the project is that shopkeepers themselves are happy and proud of making such a street as Noyu Street and thus improving the quality of life of the residents of Seoul. Stimulated by the success story of Noyu Street, shopkeepers in the restaurant street nearby and in another narrow street in front of the district office of Kwang-jin-gu have requested their own signboard arrangement projects.

2) Jongno Upgrade project

The case of Jongno-gu The main street of Seoul, capital city of Korea is another example of the 'Beautiful Signboard' project. The Seoul Metropolitan Council and the Joongang Daily newspaper started the 'Jongno Upgrade' project on March 24, 2004. The project aims to beautify signboards and to renovate the appearances of old buildings so that the section from Jongno 1-ga to Jongno 6-ga (2.8 km) will become the representative 'street to walk on' in Seoul. The Jongno Upgrade project centres around signboard replacement, and the organizers

plan to replace all the signboards of the 1362 stores of 306 buildings on both sides of Jongno Street and reduce the number of signboards from 4.8 to two per shop.

In replacing signboards, the Seoul metropolitan council's goal is to give unity to each block in colours and letter styles, while at the same time preserving the characteristics of each store. The current colour of signboards centred on red and yellow will be changed into colours that are neat and inconspicuous. The letter size will be restricted to within three-eighths of the signboard. Signboards installed on the wall over a second floor will be in three-dimensional forms, if possible.

To facilitate the process, the Seoul Metropolitan Council organized a project conference. However, enforcing the project has not been easy, as many store owners remain hesitant about replacing signboards. Thus, in November 2003, the Council selected 10 buildings (from two to seven-storeys) that were offered for use as models to convince building owners and store owners of the effectiveness of signboard replacement. This was done successfully, and the project is still in progress. Jongno Street is considered to be the main street of Seoul. Most of the tourists and residents in Seoul now see the improved roadside daily.

4.2 Japan

The Ginza in Tokyo, the best entertainment area in Japan, is densely crowded with thousands of 'clubs'. However, colourful illuminating neon lights or flashing light signboards are non-existent on the street. Only projecting signboards in similar colours and of a uniform size hang on the walls of buildings. The well-arranged signboards do not tire the eyes of pedestrians. There are no standing signboards to hamper passage, nor placards to obstruct vision. The reason becomes clear when we consider how the improvement was carried out: the district office did not impose regulations on colours and sizes of signboards; rather, 20 years ago, the residents themselves took the initiative to beautify the street.



<Figure 5> Night on Ginza, best entertainment street in Japan

Each street has a self-governing body, such as the 'Miyuki Street Beautification Body' that belongs to the store conference. Each self-governing body decides on signboard-related rules and willingly observes them. Amusement centres like Shinjuku in other regions also have their own regulations on signboards. Store owners have no complaints but, on the contrary, think it desirable. Thus, the voluntary participation and restrictions are considered to provide a successful model.

Now, let us consider the case of Ishigawa City in Kanazawa Province Adjacent to the Sea of Korea(East Sea) in the central part of Japan, which also improved its image because of a changed approach to signboards. Kanazawa Province is a rich grain district with the flourishing traditional culture of Kimono. Kanazawa Province was the envy of other cities because it was undamaged in World War II and has had little earthquake damage. However, it had fallen behind in the competition for development because it placed more value on 'conserving old things.' Torn between conservation and development, Kanazawa Province sought answers in signboards.²³⁾ In an attempt to inculcate a culture of attractive signboards, in 1988 it initiated the 'Advertisement Scenery Awards', which each year attract approximately 100 applicants of whom 13 receive prizes. Every prize-winner benefits from increased sales because of the advertising effect of the prize, which invited voluntary participation in signboard replacements.

In addition, in April 1996, Kanazawa Province strengthened the signboard-related regulations. The height of signboards installed on rooftops was reduced from 10 metres to four metres and the width of projecting signboards had to be within 1.5 metres. In particular, the city can request shopkeepers to remove ugly signboards or signboards that do not match the surroundings even if they do not violate the regulations, and will subsidize them with half of the expense up to one million yen (about 10 million won).

In a shopping street with old-fashioned signboards built in the late 19th century, the street image was improved and the property value was increased by preserving traditional structures and installing tidy signboards. This was a successful result accepted by both the government and the private sector.²⁴⁾

The city's consistent policy encouraged foreign corporations to participate. For instance, in October

2003 Vodafone, a British cell phone company, voluntarily changed their company logo. The original logo had white letters on a red background but the company reversed this to red letters on a white background. The city has succeeded in establishing a culture of attractive signboards.



<Figure 6> Vodafone's changed logo(right)²⁵⁾

4.3 United States of America

The influence of beautiful signboards is clearly evident in Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, which is in the middle of a signboard improvement project. This street, which was crowded with signboards with colourful letters, began to change from January 1999 when the residents agreed to the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project (MARP) with the motto 'Clean Street, Pretty Signboard'.²⁶⁾



<Figure 7> A shop on Myrtle Avenue with an improved signboard

First, New York City and the Brooklyn Borough laid new sidewalks, cleaned graffiti from mailboxes and the walls of buildings, and replaced street facilities at bus stops and the like. Retailers believe that improving and streamlining signboards and projecting objects increases sales and are thus motivated to act. One representative example is Connecticut Muffin, which sells coffee and muffins in the middle of the street. In 2002, after it erected glass walls and a smaller and

more sophisticated signboard, its sales soared.

In this way, one quarter of about 150 stores at the corner of the Pratt Institute, a well-known college of fine arts, rejuvenated their sites. As a result, the volume of daily trade increased with increased pedestrian traffic following the improvements to signboards and street management. This kind of management is not temporary, but continues with support. In the US, MARP is regarded as a successful model.

We reviewed Seoul Metropolitan Council's routine centrally controlled regulations, and they showed disorder and inappropriateness in various cases. While we reviewed two successful recent rearrangements, the Jongno upgrade project and the Noyu Street rearrangement, we saw the importance of harmony between the council and residents. Similar results were found in foreign countries through street rearrangement. The Ginza project led to similar colours and a uniform size of exterior displays with no standing signboards allowed. Kanazawa Province's case showed how a self-governing body made their own rules and the importance of voluntary participation. New York's Myrtle Avenue project showed a better signboard environment from colourful letters to pretty signboards.

5. Conclusion

In cities, the style of signboards is a language of the environment and a barometer of the culture of a country. As seen in a number of cases of improvement, the removal of disorderly signage from a city's business district benefits its image and helps to restore the unique identity, pride and dignity of its people.

Conversely, the concern of local self-governing bodies and the cooperation and voluntary participation of local sellers in signboard improvement and management can result in the enhancement of a city's image and the creation of well-organized signage.

To sum up, the general issues concerning ways that signboards may detract from the urban landscape are:

- (1) they may be monotonously rectangular,
- (2) their sizes may be inappropriate,
- (3) their colours may be irritating,
- (4) too many contrasting signboards may be installed on one building, and
- (5) too many letters are used.

As can be seen in number of cases in each country,

although advertising is intended to make each individual trader stand out from the rest, harmonious signage can, paradoxically, increase business for all, and based on the cases examined, signboard improvement can:

- (1) produce a cleaner image and a better-kept environment,
- (2) provide a clearer thoroughfare for pedestrians,
- (3) generate an opportunity for the construction of a new street theme, and
- (4) provide an attractive visual environment for shoppers by complementary beautification of the streetscape,
- (5) increase business.

In this study, the researcher have analysed the Seoul Metropolitan Council's standards for signboards, which have caused many problems of disorder and inappropriateness in various cases and some success cases. The researcher have also compared a number of case studies in order to plan and establish a signboard culture that befits our environment, and my conclusions are as follow.

First, careful management of public places, including the redesign of street signboards, is good for business and for the environment.

Second, It is impossible to formulate perfect regulations with which the government, shop owners and local authorities will agree unanimously. Therefore, councils should formulate some regulations, provide some relevant guidance and training, and lead the way by voluntary participation.

Third, local initiatives, like self-governing bodies through which building owners take an active role in conjunction with administrative cooperation from authorities, can be successful.

A clean and orderly street environment enhances our enjoyment of an attractive urban environment. To develop such an environment, constructors, users, and enforcing authorities should combine careful research with close cooperation and continuous monitoring.

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