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Changes in Commerciality and Façades of Commercial Buildings in the Apgujeong Rodeo Area

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the types of commercial buildings in the Apgujeong Rodeo area by focusing on their façades and identifying relationships between those façades, urban conditions, trends of the times, and the commerciality of the area. The Apgujeong Rodeo area underwent a transformation from a grid-pattern street and plotted residential area—developed in the 1970s and 1980s owing to the growth of Gangnam, Seoul—to an entertainment and consumption hub associated with beauty and fashion. This study considered the characteristics of Korean commercial architecture, characterized by ‘superficial characteristics’ influenced by small plots and legal regulations. A total of 112 buildings that had been renovated or newly constructed were analyzed based on the type of exterior material, tracking changes in façades accordingly. Furthermore, by examining the characteristics of the buildings’ façades, the types of stores within them, and insights from the architects of newly constructed buildings, it was determined that the commercial identity of the area is expressed through its façades. For instance, there were orderly buildings related to the beauty industry, reflective and uniquely designed clothing store buildings, discreet event venue structures, disorderly restaurant buildings, and entertainment structures, among others. The commercial expressions through façades, detached from the structures of the buildings, encapsulate the historical, economic, social, and cultural significance of the area’s urbanization and industrialization, reflecting broader societal meanings. Moreover, these expressions surpass the generalizations of the superficial characteristics of Korean commercial architecture to shape the distinct landscape and atmosphere of this area, setting it apart from other commercial areas in Seoul.

Keywords: locality; commerciality; urban conditions; commercial buildings; façade of the building



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Purpose

Apgujeong Rodeo is a representative area for entertainment and cultural consumption in the Gangnam district of Seoul, Republic of Korea. Developed earnestly since the 1980s, it is recognized as an affluent Gangnam area, reflecting its high economic status in Korean society. In the 1990s, Apgujeong Rodeo gained a reputation as a luxurious and extravagant cultural consumption area that imported and consumed foreign cultures. Commercial gentrification ensued due to the area’s commercialization, and despite a decline in the 2000s, it is currently undergoing a revival. Termed the “Rodeo” area, it boasts shops specializing in luxury clothing, shoes, and accessories, as well as beauty-related industries such as dermatology, plastic surgery, hair salons, entertainment, and advertisement event companies. This study aims to analyze the types of commercial buildings, a crucial factor in shaping the landscape and atmosphere of Apgujeong Rodeo, with a focus on their façades and the relationships between these façades, urban conditions, trends of the times, and the commerciality of the area.

The target buildings encompass commercial structures engaged in daily commercial activities serving as neighborhood living facilities, falling within the categories of urban architecture, everyday architecture, and ordinary architecture. Kim [1] classified this form of Korean commercial architecture as “intermediate architecture”, where residential spaces

and neighborhood living facilities, being the most common uses, are integrated on average-sized sites in second-class general residential zones, occupying the largest area in Seoul. He asserted that changes in this architectural paradigm will significantly contribute to shaping the future identity of the city of Seoul. Consequently, these buildings give rise to the everyday landscape and atmosphere commonly observed in Korean cities. Characterized by stereotyped buildings with reinforced concrete structures, they have become prevalent in small plots on grid-pattern streets due to land compartmentalization and rearrangement projects initiated since the 1960s. These structures typically feature 2–7 story Rahmen constructions with commercial spaces stacked on top. The internal spaces of these commercial buildings are often referred to as “bangs (방, 房),” representing rooms with four walls (Figure 1). Upon identifying the services provided in these buildings, the commercial structures are composed of various “bangs,” catering to functions such as karaoke, Internet cafes, jjimjilbang (Korean dry sauna), and comic book stores, either utilizing the entire floor for commercial purposes or taking the form of residential flats above shops. These commercial buildings can be interpreted as empty shells facilitating the creation of internal spaces, or “bangs,” and are considered infrastructure that lacks consideration for visual organization, formal esthetics, and stylistic distinctions found in modern architecture [2]. In other words, they possess façades independent from structures, with the covering/exterior of buildings categorized as commercial, decorative, or superficial—differing from the ideal of modern architecture in the West, where the exterior forms a relationship with internal spaces [3]. Notably, Ferretto [4], upon observing the rapid conversion, transformation, and manipulation of such superficial architecture in Seoul, evaluated the city as “places and instances with no special value or merit.” In line with this reality, Worral [5] evaluated the Nakwon Shopping Center, a commercial and residential mixed-use building constructed over a street in the 1960s, combining a musical instrument shopping center, movie theater, and apartment building. The potential of this large, unattractive, and signless building finished with exposed concrete and cement mortar is considered a neutral container resembling the dynamic life and function of the city, serving as infrastructure that has erased the intended form and elements (Figure 2). However, despite its architectural neutrality, the building is not perceived as neutral due to Koreans recognizing its façade as part of the 1960s—a period of rapid modernization—and as part of Jongno, an old downtown area of Seoul. Paek’s study [6] emphasizes that a building reveals something as it is “intertwined” with aspects such as signboards, programs, and residents in society. He suggests that even nameless buildings operating on vulgar commercialism hold meaning based on the concept of everydayness.

This study analyzes Korean commercial buildings that have deviated from the principles of modern architecture, with a specific focus on their façades. This emphasis arises from the recognition that, despite the superficial nature of the façades, the “stereotyped” commercial buildings are distinct and are characterized by their façades. As Venturi considered signboards on commercial streets in Las Vegas as language and symbols of commercial persuasion, influencing pedestrians to make purchases through show windows and signboards [7], Korean commercial architecture serves as a window into the economic, social, and cultural life of the area. Additionally, it embodies architectural customs and practices, even if established in a hybrid form within a third-world city that enthusiastically embraced commercialism. Consequently, this study serves as a confirmation of one aspect or “dialect” of Korean urban architecture, providing a tangible manifestation of the conceptual idea of everydayness. Through the examination of the façades of commercial buildings, integral to the form of Korean urban architecture and their expressions of commercial persuasion, this study shows that the characteristics of these façades, in relation to an area’s commerce, contribute to creating a distinctive atmosphere compared to that of other areas.

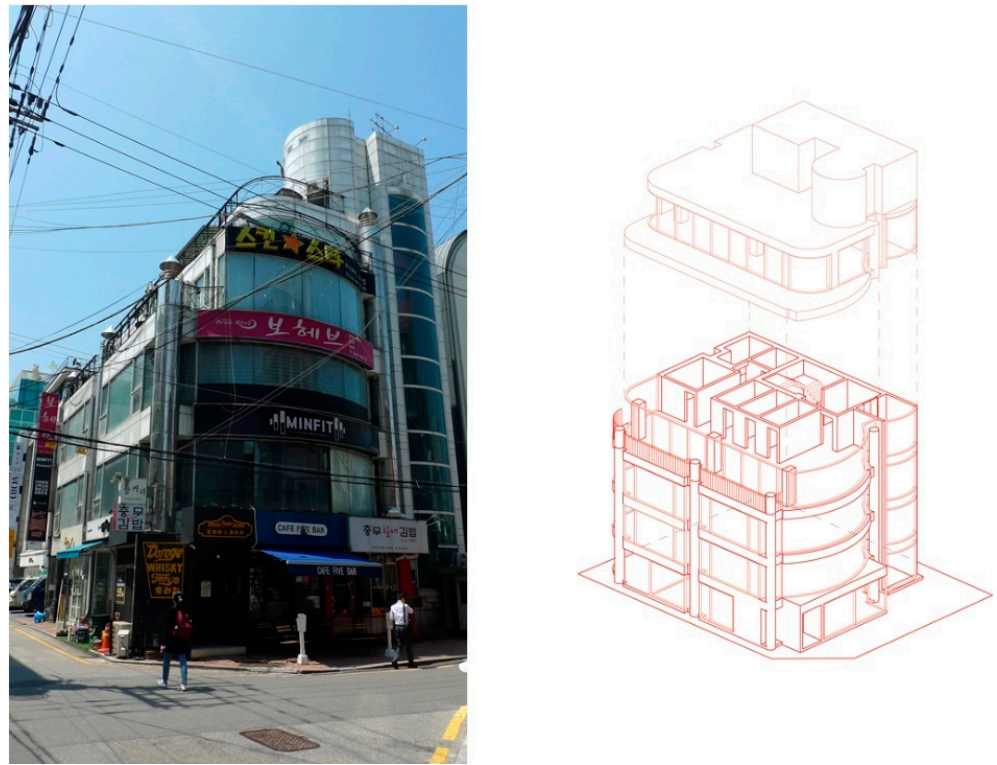


Figure 1. A skincare shop on the 4th floor, composed of “bangs”, in Building 655-5, Sinsa-dong, taken and drawn by author.



Figure 2. The Nakwon Shopping Center ((a) the exterior, (b) the interior), taken by author.

1.2. Methods of Research

The research target area encompasses part of the commercial district between Apgujeong Rodeo Station and Dosan Neighborhood Park. While administratively belonging to Sinsa-dong, it is known as Apgujeong-dong due to the economic and social symbolism of the Apgujeong-dong apartment complex to the north of Apgujeong-ro. This study focuses on 112 commercial buildings facing the road within the first- and second-class residential zones, excluding general commercial districts and the third-class residential zone. The selection of the research target area was based on streets connected to Exit 5 of the Apgujeong subway station, Seonjeongneung-ro, and streets affected by Dosandaero. Specifically, the area assumed to have the most diverse buildings was chosen as the target area (Figure 3). The 112 buildings were inspected by the author by visiting the site in July and August 2023, and essential data on the buildings were confirmed through the building management ledger.

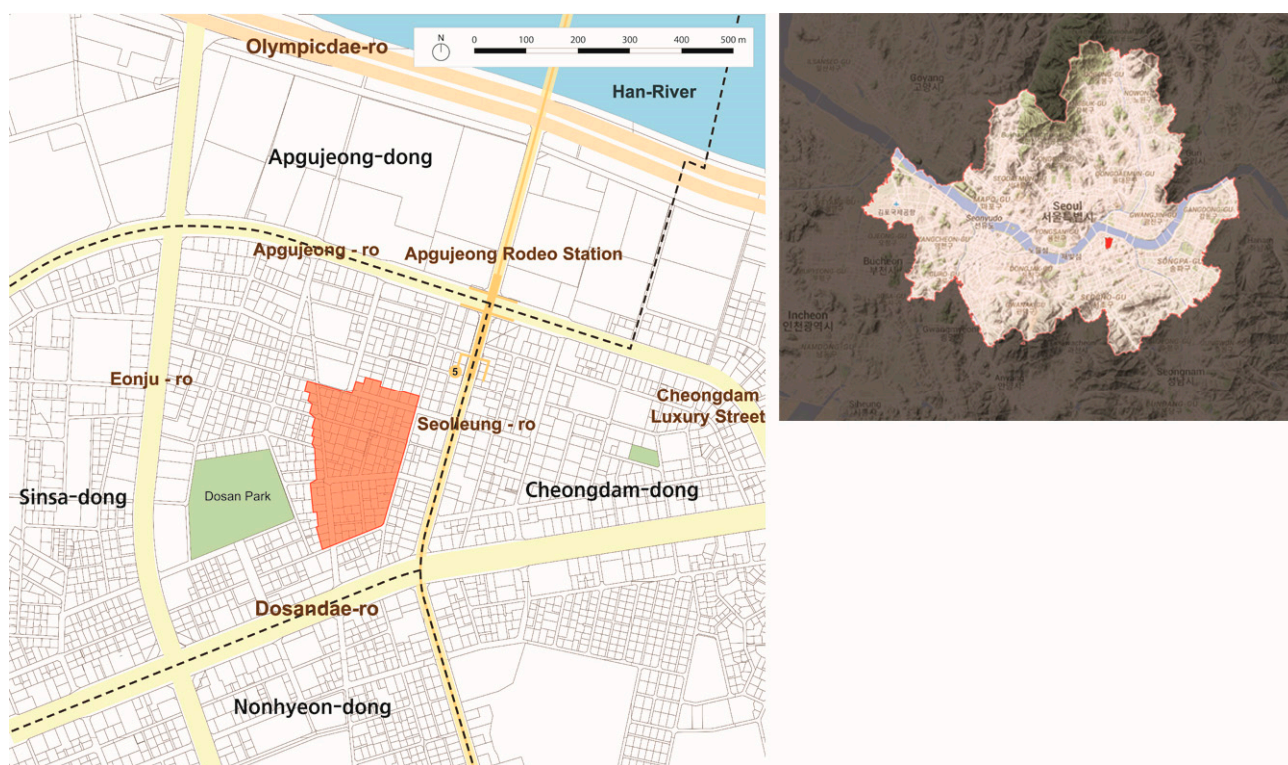


Figure 3. Study area (area bordered in red).

Section 2 of the study delves into the history of urban planning and commercial formation in Apgujeong-dong, exploring the features of streets and plots, as well as regulations and building distributions throughout history contributing to the current urban structure. This serves as a background study on the physical characteristics of buildings formed under various urban conditions. Descriptions of the history of the area's commercial development aim to examine the history of commercial activities in this area and its societal significance. This background study was conducted with reference to historical books and research papers on the Gangnam and Apgujeong areas. Additionally, this study identifies the types and distribution of shops within buildings, providing an empirical confirmation of the current commercial activities in the area and establishing relationships between commercial locality and building features. The investigation of stores in this area was conducted by the author by visiting the buildings in July and August 2023.

Section 3 scrutinizes the types of surveyed buildings, primarily classifying them based on exterior materials, a pivotal factor for determining façades. The criteria for this classification include façades facing the road and the predominant materials used. Exterior materials encapsulate the era in which they were produced and popularized in Korean society during rapid industrialization. This classification is crucial as updated façades embody commercial realities and expressions. The evaluation of façades using materials draws upon insights from two previous studies. Research findings by Kim and Park [8], as well as Han, Nam, and Park [9], involving surveys with 40 and 242 specialists, respectively, regarding the image of exterior building materials like granite, aluminum panels, and glass, were deemed consistent with general perceptions in Korean society. This research on material image includes an evaluation of general materials from the 1990s and 2000s. The rationale for relying on these studies is the impracticality of employing a research method that surveys residents, visitors, and store owners due to the affluent and private nature of the area. Additionally, recognizing that building types vary based on plot size, shape, and road conditions and considering the uniformity in plot size and shape, the study describes the type and distribution of buildings according to road conditions. The aim is to elucidate the distinctions in buildings arising from different commercial conditions along roads.

Section 4 establishes connections and analyzes the superficial characteristics of Korean commercial architecture and the commercial activities of Apgujeong-dong, building on the data analyzed in the previous section. In essence, this section investigates the relationship between the nature of fashion- and beauty-related industries with the façades of newly built and renovated buildings. Interviews with three architects provide insights into the regional features and characteristics of the buildings. Out of the 112 buildings, some belonged to the past generation, and it was impossible to interview them. These architects were excluded from the study. Among the architects of the 10 buildings newly constructed after 2016, the aforementioned three were available for interviews. These architects possess a deep understanding of the area's commerce, landscape, and the characteristics of Korean architecture. Key questions posed to them included inquiries about the building owner's demands, interpretation of the area's commercial district and local landscape, and the concept of the building form and façade plan. Based on the gathered data, the study concludes that building façades serve as commercial expressions, unveiling the everyday life and realities of the local community.

2. Changes and Regional Features of the Apgujeong Rodeo Area

2.1. Gangnam Development and Urban Structure

The growth of Gangnam commenced in the late 1960s, driven by the promotion of large-scale collective housing for the middle class. This initiative aimed to disperse the population concentrated in the old city center to the south of the Han River [10]. The South Seoul Plan became more detailed in 1966, initiating the land compartmentalization and rearrangement project in Yeongdong District. By 1968, construction began, with the districts organized into Districts 1 and 2. The project commenced in District 1, present-day Seocho-gu, and expanded in 1971 to include District 2, now Gangnam-gu. Until the mid-1970s, housing construction and transport services to Gangnam for residents were notably slow. However, earnest development of Gangnam occurred in the 1980s with the implementation of the "Northern Seoul Area Development Control Plan". This led to the construction of crucial urban infrastructure such as Han River bridges, tunnels, roads, subways, and terminals. Prestigious middle and high schools, government offices (e.g., Supreme Court and Prosecutor's Office), and cultural facilities were relocated to Gangnam, accompanied by support measures like various tax benefits [10,11]. The development aimed to establish pleasant residential areas with urban infrastructure, wide street networks, and public service facilities, including parks, green spaces, elementary schools, and post offices, in addition to shopping facilities. These endeavors resulted in the current version of Gangnam, positioned as the center of the economy, society, culture, and education in modern Korean society. However, these development initiatives also gave rise to issues of unequal development between southern and northern Seoul.

The land compartmentalization and rearrangement in Yeongdong District are considered the foundation for Gangnam's current urban structure. During the development, a grid-pattern city was planned, featuring main roads measuring 30–70 m and large blocks set between the wide roads [12,13]. These mega-blocks span 500 m in length and width [14]. The roads in the residential district within the blocks measured 6–8 m in width, with residential plots limited to a minimum area of 165 m² [12]. The residential district primarily occupies the center of the mega-block. The plan designated the edges of the mega-block for general commercial, semi-residential, and third-class residential zones, while the first- and second-class residential zones were arranged in the center of the block. This urban structure positioned high-rise commercial buildings, such as office buildings, on the exterior of the mega-block. Following this, mid- and low-rise commercial buildings served as neighborhood living facilities inside the block, succeeded by multiplex, multi-household, and single-family houses further inward. As noted by Kim [13], the blocks in Gangnam exhibited different patterns over time, with the evolution into a commercial region resulting in the demolition of single-family houses. In their place, multiplex and multi-household houses, commercial buildings, and commercial and residential complex buildings (neigh-

neighborhood living facilities) were constructed, leading to commercial zones penetrating residential zones inside the block.

The research target area is situated in the southeast center of the block, with the smallest block measuring 350 m in length. The streets and plots adhere to grid-pattern urban structures with some variations. The buildings in the area are regulated based on land use zoning stipulated by the subclassification. Use areas within the block include Dosandaero roadside in the south, designated as a general commercial zone; areas around the block as the third-class general residential zone and areas within the block as the second-class general residential zone and the first-class general residential zone. Consequently, similar to other blocks in Gangnam, the study area's block has an urban structure with large-scale commercial buildings on the roadside and small-scale commercial buildings, multiplex and multi-household houses, and single-family houses inside the block. The use districts in the study target area are the second-class general residential zone and part of the first-class general residential zone. However, due to commercialization, entertainment, and cultural consumption, single-family houses have mostly disappeared in this area, replaced by neighborhood living facilities—commercial buildings. The average plot area of the surveyed buildings is 304.4 m². The size of each plot is constrained by regulations such as building coverage rate, floor area ratio, setback regulation from road width (before 2015), and slant line restrictions for daylight, resulting in an urban structure with buildings spanning 2–8 storeys on each plot (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Land use zoning around the study area.

2.2. Commercial Features of the Apgujeong Rodeo Area

As an administrative district, Apgujeong-dong is a residential area comprising apartment complexes located in the north of the target locality. Among them, the Hyundai apartment complex, built in the 1970s and 1980s, stood as a symbol of luxury and wealth for a certain period. Serving as an area for entertainment and cultural consumption, Apgujeong Rodeo is situated south of the apartment complex and falls administratively under Sinsa-dong. However, the area has transcended its role as merely a commercial zone associated with the residential quarter in the north, gaining recognition as a representative hub of cultural consumption in Gangnam.

The development of the food and beverage business in this area commenced in the 1970s. The Northern Seoul Area Development Control Plan played a pivotal role by regulating new permits for sales facilities and places of entertainment in the city center of northern Seoul. This induced their relocation to southern Seoul, resulting in the establishment of entertainment venues around Sinsa-dong, Nonhyeon-dong, Apgujeong-dong, and Yeoksam-dong [15]. By the mid-1980s, fashion districts and trendy cafes migrated from Myeongdong in northern Seoul to Apgujeong-dong. This relocation, coupled with the emergence of commercial culture in Apgujeong-dong, was spurred by the establishment of a beauty salon, model academy, advertising agency, show event company, model agency, and photo studio [16]. In the 1990s, the area became known as a consumption space for the affluent, with the children of the wealthy, termed “orange people” and “yata people”, enjoying exotic and glamorous restaurants and cafes and embracing foreign cultures experienced during studies abroad or travels. However, Apgujeong Rodeo Street’s business district underwent a transformation after the Seongsu Bridge collapse in 1994 and the relocation of international luxury brand stores to neighboring Cheongdam-dong following the 1998 foreign exchange crisis. Subsequently, plastic surgery clinics proliferated in Apgujeong-dong and Cheongdam-dong from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, marking a shift toward industries associated with “visibility”, such as fashion, beauty, entertainment, and events [17].

Around 1995, the commercial district shifted to Garosu-gil, Sinsa-dong, where art galleries were concentrated, avoiding the high rents of Apgujeong-dong. After the early 2000s, the commercial district in Apgujeong-dong experienced an increase in vacancies and a decline in stores. Furthermore, after the late 2010s, large corporations and franchise stores opened in Garosu-gil, resulting in higher rents and a decline of stores in the commercial district. Nevertheless, Apgujeong-dong is currently experiencing revitalization as a “hot place” visited by young people [18]. Thus, Apgujeong-dong, which retained Myeongdong’s status as a cultural consumption space in Northern Seoul before the development of Gangnam in the 1980s, has persevered through 40 years of rises and falls and is still recognized as a commercial district in affluent Gangnam, representative of fashion, beauty, plastic surgery, restaurants, pubs, and cafes.

The types of stores in the 112 surveyed buildings evince the commerciality of this area. The “visibility” industry constitutes 46.4% of the total activity, nearly half of the stores surveyed: 23.6% of stores (Type B) selling clothing, fashion accessories, perfume, jewelry, and bags; 13.8% of stores (Type C) catering to body care, including dermatologic clinics, plastic surgery clinics, beauty salons, nail salons, tattoo shops, and body shape management stores; and 9% of the industry related to image work for groomed people (Type E), such as entertainment management companies, advertising companies, video production companies, and photo studios. The next types are related to the food and beverage industry. Restaurants, pubs, and bars that serve alcohol (Type A) account for 28.6%, while stores such as cafes and bakeries for light refreshments (Type D) account for 9.2%; food businesses occupy 37.8% of all stores. Additionally, 19 stores (3.8%), such as the Impromptu photo studio, a fortune teller cafe, and a tarot card reading café (Type G), were surveyed; these have recently become popular in the entertainment and cultural consumption areas for young people. Therefore, Apgujeong-dong, unlike other areas in Seoul, is a locality where visible industries are concentrated. Moreover, simultaneously, this area has space for entertainment and cultural consumption where food and beverage stores are concentrated, as well as neighborhood living facilities such as convenience stores, real estate, retail stores, and pharmacies (Type F: 4.8%; Table 1).

Table 1. Types and number of shops in surveyed buildings.

Types of Shops	Number of Shops
Type A: Restaurant, pub, and bar	143
Type B: Clothing store, jewelry shop, perfume shop, optical store, bag store, fashion general store, shoe store, florist shop	118
Type C: Dermatologic clinic, plastic surgery clinic, beauty salon, nail salon, tattoo shop, massage, skin and body care shop, health club, Pilates	69
Type D: Cafe, bakery, ice cream shop, snack shop, chocolate shop	46
Type E: Entertainment management company, advertising company, video production company, and photo studio	45
Type F: Convenience store, real estate, retail store, pawn shop, karaoke, and pharmacy	24
Type G: Impromptu photo studio, fortune teller cafe, and tarot card reading café	19
Type H: Office and atelier	18
Type I: Language institute, actor's academy, dance and ballet academy, golf practice room, and boxing gym	13
Others	5
Total	500

3. Types of Target Building Cases

3.1. Building Types by Period and Exterior Materials

The 112 surveyed buildings range from those built in the 1970s to new 2023 constructions. Among the surveyed buildings built in the 1970s and 1980s, 1–2 story houses were repurposed as neighborhood living facilities, and several buildings were expanded and renovated. In addition, the buildings constructed after the 1980s mainly consist of 3–7 story commercial buildings or commercial and residential complex buildings. The distribution of years of new construction for the surveyed buildings underpins the fact that the development of Gangnam began in the 1970s and has been ongoing since the mid-1980s. Indeed, no new buildings were constructed during the period spanning 2009–2015. The commercial district began to decline in the early 2000s due to higher rents, following which its revitalization started in the late 2010s; considering this, it is assumed that new buildings were not constructed during the period of the decline (Figures 5 and 6).

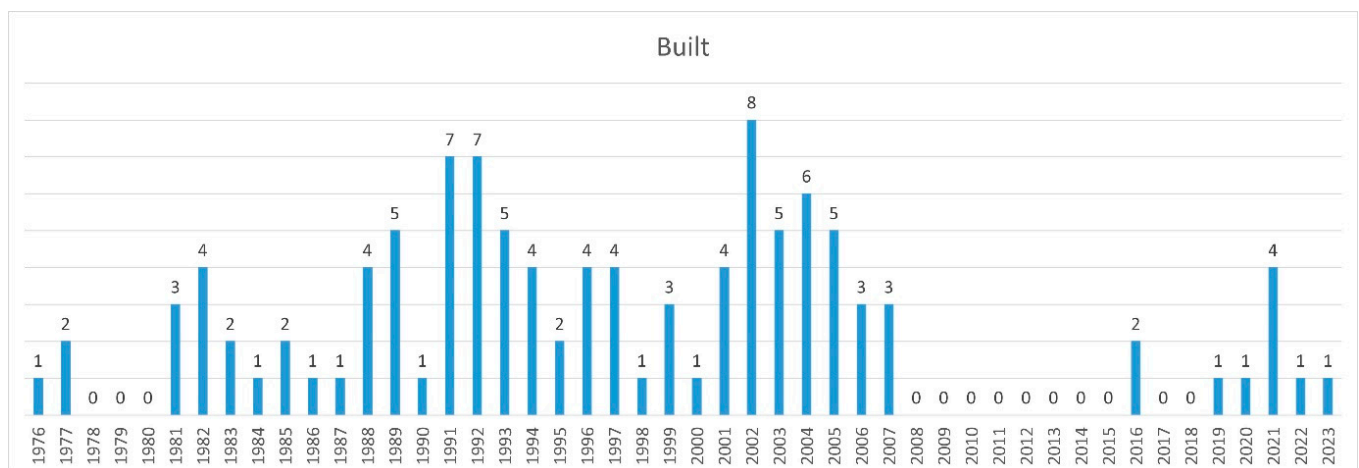
**Figure 5.** Distribution of years of new construction of the surveyed buildings (vertical axis: number).



Figure 6. Distribution of the surveyed buildings in the area.

The only building that retains its original appearance is Building 646-21—a residential facility constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. It was built in 1977 and shows traces of how the residential area was before it was commercialized. The building is located in the first-class general residential area and, in terms of housing type, was called a “French House” in the 1970s (in fact, this type of housing has an unidentified form irrelevant to French architecture). Yoon [19] stated the following in relation to this housing type: “Most houses of the petite bourgeoisie liked to use red brick as a decorative material, but it is difficult to understand that only the south façade has granite stones attached to it as if it were a religious belief, that concrete railings around roof tiles are attached as decorations, that clunky concrete railings around the roof tiles are attached as decorations, and that crude concrete parapets surround the roof tiles...”. Building 646-21 also shows the residential building style of its period: brick, granite stonework, concrete railings, and concrete parapets under a pitched roof. The inside of the building has been renovated and is now used as a brunch cafe. The building’s old-fashioned courtyard is used for commercial activities; this differs from the crowded atmosphere in the neighborhood. However, other residential buildings constructed at that time have been extended, and other exterior materials have been added, making it difficult to recognize their original forms. Building 657-4, which was constructed in 1987, is a brick house but has a different front façade from the initial form thanks to the addition of a box-type space at the front. The spaces are divided and used as a fortune teller cafe, a clothing store, a jewelry store, and a restaurant. The building illustrates that the area is characterized by entertainment and cultural consumption. There were 13 cases in which the original form was a single-family house and three cases in which multi-household houses built in the 1980s and 1990s were converted into commercial buildings (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 7. Residential building constructed in the 1970s–1980s and subsequently renovated into a commercial building ((a) 646-21, (b) 657-4), taken by author.

Altogether, 96 buildings out of a total of 112 were initially constructed as commercial buildings. (There are several flats with shops whose top floor was used for housing.) These commercial buildings do not exhibit much difference when it comes to methods of space composition. The floor surface consists of spaces for movement, such as staircases and elevators, and other spaces for commercial purposes. However, there are various forms depending on the conditions of the location of the site, the size of the plot, the trend of exterior materials according to the times, and the architect's method. In the late 1980s and 1990s, granite was frequently used as an exterior material and continued to be used in the 2000s. Forty-three buildings among the 96 commercial buildings used stone, which is the most common finish material among the surveyed materials. It was also determined that 33 buildings used grey granite (Table 2). This finding is consistent with the following fact: from the 1960s, brick or tile was commonly used as an exterior material for commercial buildings, which are the neighborhood living facilities, and during the period spanning from the late 1980s to the 1990s, granite was commonly utilized as an exterior material [9]. There exist diverse cases: a case in which granite was used as an exterior material, and walls were ornamented with classical architectural styles, and another case of unadorned walls with long horizontal windows. Buildings 663-14 (1992) and 653-20 (1996) have reinforced concrete structures with granite walls, while the openings are decorated with columns, pediments, arches, corbels, and lintels to generate a sense of luxury. Building 654 (1991) has a curtain wall at its center, as well as a symmetrical and monumental façade. It is possible to find numerous buildings with partial curtain walls and granite finishes in the 1990s; 12 buildings among 33 buildings using granite have granite finishes, as well as glass curtain walls as an exterior finish. (The survey focused on buildings constructed between 1989 and 2004.) The aforementioned details indicate that this finish style was popular from approximately the 1990s to the early 2000s. However, Building 656-20 (2001) is a typical building that can be easily found on the roadside, sporting an unadorned granite finish (Figures 6 and 8).

Table 2. Distribution of commercial buildings' exterior materials.

	81	83	84	85	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	16	19	20	21	22	23	Sum
Tile	1	1				1		1			1																1					6
Masonry (Red, Black)						1													1										1		1	4
Stone (Gray granite, Brown granite, Black stone, Sandstone, Artificial stone, and Marble)						2		6	7	4	2	1	1	1	1		1	3	3	2	1	2	2		1				1	1		43
Metal							1			1			2						1			2										7
Glass (Curtain wall)														1		2		1	3		2		2		1	1						13
Cement (Exposed concrete, Cement panel)																				1		2	1	1	1				1			7
EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finish System)					1						1																	1	1			4
Not identified			1	1	2	1								1			1	2		1		1			1							12
Sum	1	1	1	1	3	5	1	7	7	5	4	1	3	3	1	3	1	4	8	5	4	6	5	3	3	2	1	1	4	1	1	96



Figure 8. Buildings with granite exterior finishes ((a) 663-14, (b) 653-20, (c) 654, (d) 656-20), taken by author.

In addition to stone, metal, glass, and cement are the most common façade materials. Buildings having a metal exterior are constructed via the structural method of attaching metal or plastic panels. There exist buildings from the early 1990s that used metal panels (e.g., aluminum), as well as other buildings constructed from the mid-2000s onwards. After stone, the most surveyed material is glass, that is, in cases where the entire façade is designed with glass via the curtain wall structural method. Previously, curtain walls were partially used in the 1990s along with stone, but cases of glass facades were found from the late 1990s to the mid-2010s (Table 2). The first building with curtain walls in Korea was Myeongdong St. Mary's Hospital, which was constructed in 1963 [20]. The building was erected manually using aluminum mullions in the absence of a standardized building material production system at the time. Curtain walls of high-rise buildings were constructed using imported materials in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 1990s, they began to be constructed with systematically produced materials in Korea [21]. Therefore, the proliferation of curtain walls in the neighborhood living facility, that is, the commercial buildings, occurred in the 1990s. The buildings with curtain walls applied to the entire façade in the research target area were also found to be constructed in the late 1990s after stones became popular as exterior materials. Buildings 654-5 (1999) and 655-8 (2002), which utilized curtain walls on the façade, are relatively large buildings serving as neighborhood living facilities with commercial activities, such as clothing stores, shoe stores, dermatologic clinics, beauty salons, wine bars, and advertising agencies. By conducting a survey regarding exterior materials in 1998, Kim and Park [8] determined that granite was perceived as static and dignified, while aluminum panels were perceived as modern, cheerful, and flashy. Additionally, Han, Nam, and Park [9] surveyed images of exterior materials in 2004 and found that glass had a modern and cool image compared to other materials. As such, glass curtain walls began to be commonly used and were applied as the main finish material in the 2000s, becoming synonymous with the image of updated buildings (Figures 6 and 9).

Exterior use of exposed concrete or cement panels has been used since the early 2000s, while exposed concrete has been utilized since the 1990s owing to the introduction of exposed concrete architecture by Japanese architect Ando Tadao. The plasticity of concrete allows buildings to be formative, and despite the negative aspects of its cold and desolate appearance, it has benefits such as authenticity and economic feasibility [22]. Building 657-34 (2005) has a formative function, with a single exposed concrete color and a different configuration of openings than the surrounding buildings, while Building 656-21 (2021) uses the plasticity of concrete to reveal formative features through diagonal walls. These buildings are home to bars, restaurants, and dessert cafes (Figures 6 and 10).



Figure 9. Buildings using glass curtain walls ((a) 654-5, (b) 655-8), taken by author.

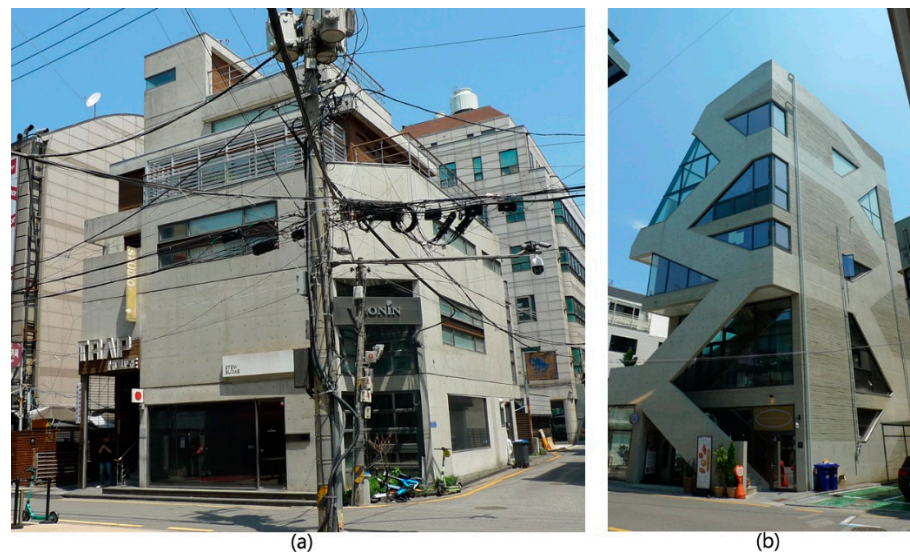


Figure 10. Buildings with exposed concrete finishes ((a) 657-34, (b) 656-21), taken by author.

There are numerous cases where exterior materials were often used in combination, but the main materials employed, in chronological order, are stone, metal, glass, and cement. Stone, which was widely utilized from the 1990s, was often used in the 2000s, but metal panels started to be employed after the early 1990s, glass curtain walls after the late 1990s, and exposed concrete after the 2000s. Other materials, such as tile, brick, and EIFS, were also used, but after the late 2010s, a variety of exterior materials were applied, showing the diversity of building forms and façade designs. There were also buildings that used face bricks and marble (646-20 (2023) and 656-13 (2021)). Building 654-12 (2016) comprises a stair-like stack of smaller boxes on each floor from the north due to the slant line restriction for daylight and is finished with metal panels to reveal the building's formative feature. Building 655-1 (2021) contains a grid of red bricks on an exposed concrete base to create the front façade. Its architect mentioned that the pattern was inspired by the brick facade of a baseball stadium [23], but it is, in fact, similar to commercial buildings with brick

structures and grid façades on roadsides that were popular in the late 1950s in Korea [24]. The vintage look from the brick was used, and the other facade facing the parking lot comprises various elements (e.g., gable roof, iron stairs, balcony, fireplace, and chimney) that show a look different from the facade, showcasing the overall postmodern trend. This is one of the cases of various façade expressions from the late 2010s (Figures 6, 11 and 12).



Figure 11. Buildings using different exterior materials since the mid-2010s ((a) 646-20, (b) 656-13, (c) 655-1), taken by author.

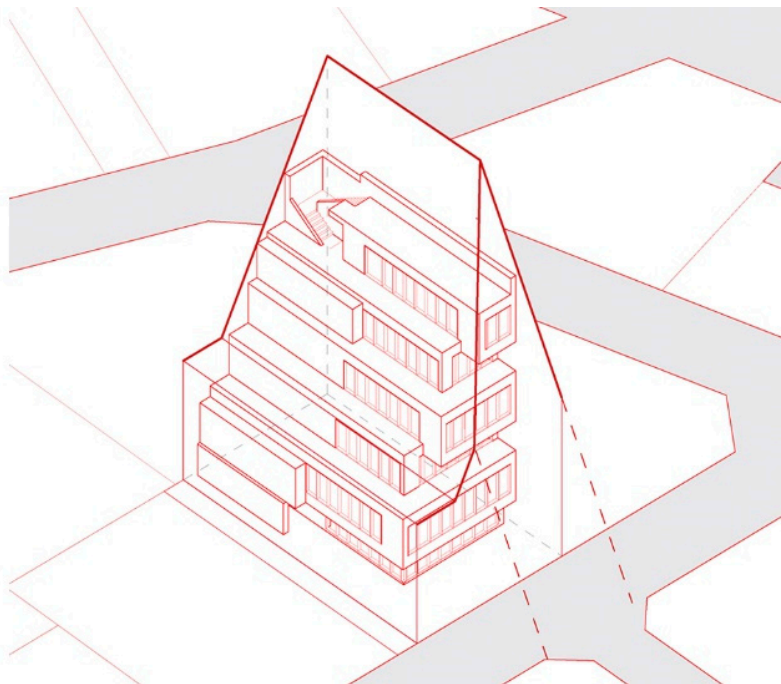


Figure 12. The form of Building 654-12, regulated by the slant line for daylight and for facing road, taken and drawn by author.

3.2. Building Types according to Road Conditions

Buildings have different characteristics based on the conditions of the roads they are facing, namely, the location and hierarchy of the roads. Within the research target area, the widest roadsides were found to have numerous buildings with high floors and colorful facades. The roads in the target area are 4 m, 6 m, and 12 m wide. Dosandaero 49-gil and Seolleung-ro 157-gil are 12 m wide and are the main roads entering the area from wide roads and boulevards such as Dosandaero and Seolleung-ro. These roads have the most

traffic flow and a large transient population in the area and, thus, have the highest commercial potential. As such, the buildings facing these roads are often tall, with flamboyant façades. Additionally, commercial viability from road width and its legal regulations make a difference in buildings. Setback regulation on road width has limited the height of buildings based on the road width. Thus, it is possible to construct tall buildings facing wide roads. (Note: this restriction is not applied to buildings constructed after 2015, as it was only in effect until 2015). Seolleung-ro 157-gil is the main road entering the mega-block from Exit 5 of Apgujeong Rodeo subway station. The buildings on the north side of this road have façades made with reflective materials, including Buildings 663-15 and 663-23 (Figures 4 and 10). These six-storey buildings were built in 1992 with granite as the exterior material, but their exterior façades were renovated in 2018 and 2022, respectively. Curtain wall façades using reflective materials, such as glass, metal, and plastic, have a modern and current image. The buildings are home to typical commercial activities in the area, including a general fashion store, clothing store, bag store, restaurant, bara beauty salona dermatologic clinic, and plastic surgery clinic (Figures 13 and 14).

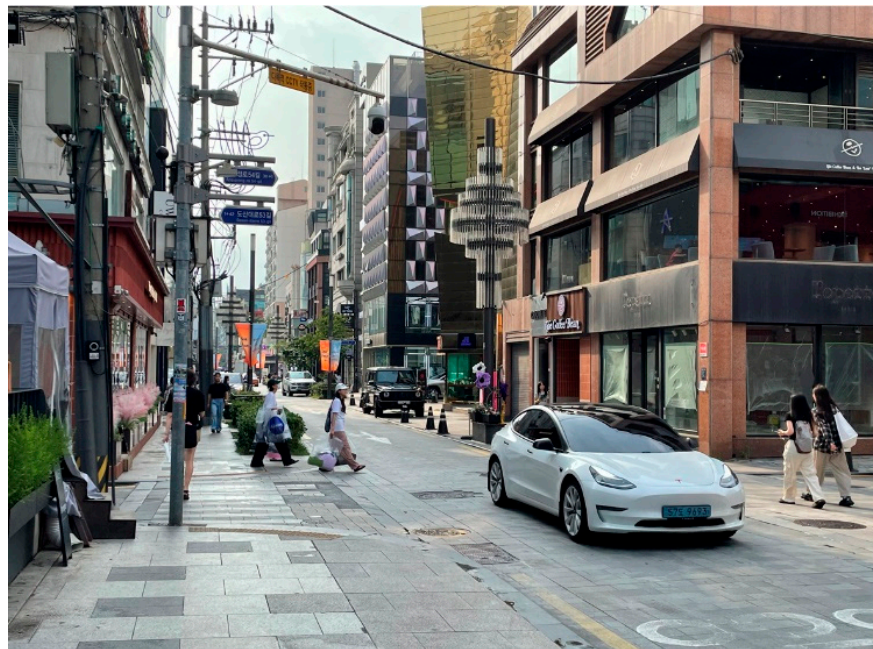


Figure 13. The view in Seolleung-ro 157-gil, taken by author.



Figure 14. Buildings with reflective façades in Seolleung-ro 157-gil ((a) pre-, (b) post-renovation at 663-15; (c) pre-, (d) post-renovation at 663-23); found in daum roadview (www.daum.net (accessed on 26 October 2023)) and taken by author.

The buildings on Dosandaero 49-gil in the south also have various façades and are connected to Dosandaero, a wide road to the south. In particular, the buildings on the western side of the road show various façades and indicate that they are another entrance to the Apgujeong Rodeo area. Although these buildings are located in the first-class residential zone and face a wide road with a width of 12 m, they have low floor area ratios and 3–4 floors. In each building, the façades are expressed with various materials, such as granite, glass, metal panels, EIFS, exposed concrete, and tile. These buildings are also home to clothing stores, cosmetics stores, perfume shops, restaurants, bars, cafés, dermatologic clinics, plastic surgery clinics, beauty salons, photo studios, and advertising agencies. In contrast, as the buildings on the eastern side are located in the second-class residential zone with larger floor area ratios than the first-class residential zone, most buildings have five to eight floors. Building 653-20 has eight floors, which is possible due to the fact that it has a larger plot area (644.8 m) compared to the other plots. The section of Dosandaero 49-gil connected to Seolleung-ro is also a 12 m wide road, with mostly five- to six-storey buildings on both sides. Building 654, a building with a granite exterior, and Buildings 654-5 and 655-8, buildings with glass curtain wall façades, which were described earlier, also face this road. The buildings facing this road comprise façades designed using granite, metal panels, and glass curtain walls (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Buildings with various façades in the first-class residential zone on Dosandaero 49-gil, taken by author.

Buildings facing roads that are 4–6 m wide and are connected to a 12 m road, as well as being located deep inside the area, have relatively low floors. Building 656-2 (2005) comprises five floors but is subject to setback regulation as it faces a 6 m road; a height of 9 m and a maximum of three floors are allowed on the front, but above that height, the main part of the building is stacked like a staircase, and the side part containing the stairs is raised in diagonal steps. This building is home to restaurants, beauty salons, and a language institute. Building 655-5 (1996), facing a 6 m road, contains a façade with staircase patterns from the third floor to the fifth floor. This building, which has a metal panel finish, comprises restaurants, cafes, bars, health clubs, clothing stores, beauty salons, and skin and body care shops. In this manner, buildings facing a lane are equipped with restaurants, bars, beauty salons, skincare shops, and clothing stores, but not with clinics such as dermatologic clinics and plastic surgery clinics. There is a difference in the commercial

hierarchy and the scale and diversity of the buildings in the inner part of the block with a 4 or 6 m road when compared to those facing a 12 m road (Figures 16 and 17).

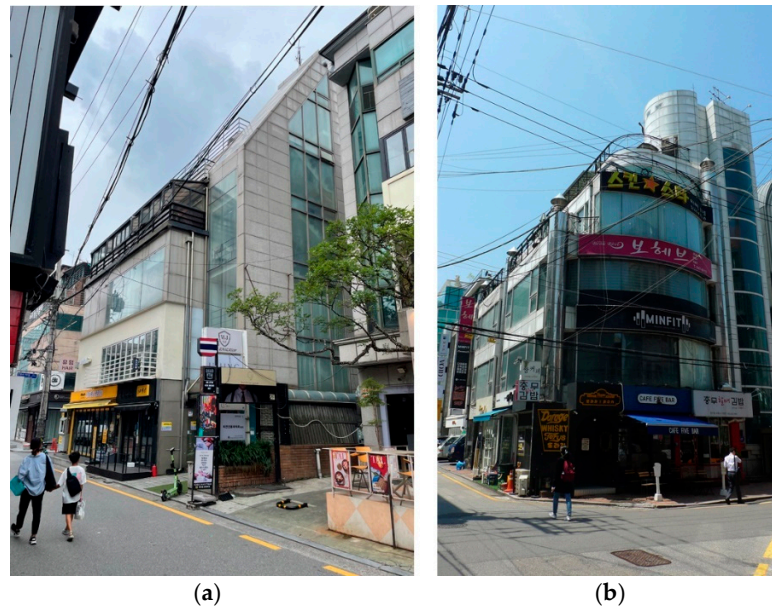


Figure 16. Cases where building height is regulated by road width ((a) 656-2, (b) 655-5), taken by author.

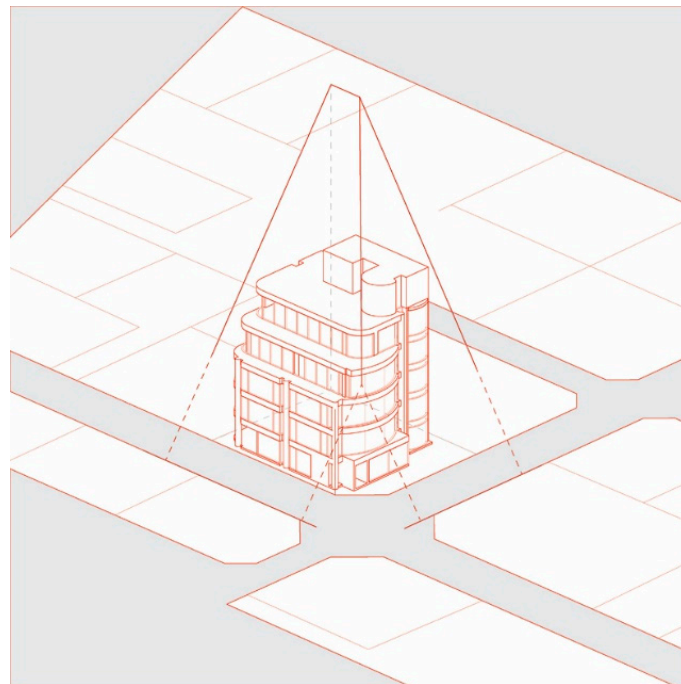


Figure 17. The form of Building 655-5, regulated by the slant line for facing road, drawn by author.

4. The Changing Facade and Commerciality of the Area

Changes to the exterior façades of buildings indicate the trends in materials, construction methods, and design over time. The changes in façades since the 1980s reveal the features of each period while also creating the landscapes and atmospheres of the streets. Along with changes in the architectural production system and designs during these times, the ongoing commercial viability of Apgujeong-dong since the 1980s creates a feature that is unique when compared to other areas. In commercial buildings, it is possible to find at-

tempts to secure internal commercial spaces while differentiating themselves through the building exterior. Building owners carry out new construction or renovate buildings to increase rents, and lessees of store owners remodel the buildings' façades to advertise and create promotional effects. Jeong indicated that such frequent and rapid façade changes in Korean commercial buildings are one-offs, like "wrapping paper [25]". He particularly highlighted several 1980s- and 1990s-style buildings in Apgujeong-ro, the so-called buildings in Rodeo Street: "Façades that are more sophisticated, cleaner, and generate curiosity, are for being matched with those who use such buildings, specifically, the taste of potential consumers" [25]. It is true that flagship stores of foreign luxury brands and high-end beauty salons and clinics were relocated from Apgujeong-dong to Cheongdam-dong after the 2000s. However, the commercial characteristics of Apgujeong-dong, that is, the "visibility industries" such as clothing, beauty, clinics (e.g., dermatologic clinics and plastic surgery clinics), and entertainment advertising, are still concentrated, and the façades of the buildings reveal their commercial viability.

The relationship between the area's commerciality and newly constructed buildings is revealed in interviews with the architects. The owner and architect of Building 656-21 (constructed in 2021) stated the following:

"This area is a place where a residential area changed into a commercial area, and the street in front of the building is busy with cars and people. I tried to draw the busy traffic into the building (through the exterior stairs of the building). I selected exposed concrete, which makes it possible to form geometric shapes when the plot conditions make it difficult to install the temporary materials that are needed to attach exterior materials. I receive many rental inquiries along with comments that the building feels unfamiliar when compared to its surroundings. And recently, there are newly constructed buildings with a greater variety of floor heights than in the past."

The architect of Building 654-12 (constructed in 2016) testified to changes in the building following commercial changes in the area:

"It was initially planned to be the headquarters of an entertainment agency. Since it is a place where celebrities come and dress up to be filmed, I tried to make the entire building look like a gigantic closet. The form of the building was almost all determined by building regulations (slant line restriction for daylight due north), so there was not much room for change, and the building was planned to look 'indifferent' by using black bricks as the exterior material. At the time, the area's commercial district was dead, so the alley did not have a flashy atmosphere, and I tried to match the façade to the atmosphere. However, at the request of the constructor and building owner, it was finished with glossy black granite, and it was later renovated with glossy panels when the building owner changed. This change in façade shows a rapid change in the area's commercial district and its change into a flashy landscape."

In addition, the architect of Building 654-8 (constructed in 2021) in Sinsa-dong stated that the building was designed by taking into account the surrounding buildings and the commerciality of the area.

"The building owner was a dermatologist, and they wanted to have their dermatology clinic, a pharmacy, and skin-related stores such as a tattoo shop in the building; they also wanted a brightly colored building. We also planned a white building with a pure image that represents the epidermis of the skin. When it was designed, we looked at the street that was becoming rapidly commercialized and we planned a more simple and sustainable façade rather than a flashy and complex façade on a street with different façades (with renovations, new constructions, etc.). Also, we considered the convenience of renovating the façade someday and did not structurally combine the façade with the building's Rahmen structure. After its completion, the building owner received many rental

inquiries and rented the building out to other stores instead of their clinic to collect rent: a clothing store, photo studio, beauty salon, and an ice cream store.

The landscape of this area is complex. Even though there are many expensive buildings like in Cheongdam-dong, unlike the neat façades of Cheongdam-dong buildings, the buildings here are neat in some places and messy with signboards in other places.”

Through the words of architects who designed buildings in the late 2010s, when the commercial district of Apgujeong-dong started to revitalize again, it was possible to confirm that the streetscape grew more complex with the growth of the area’s commercial district; furthermore, they show that the architect of Building 654-8 sought an alternative to the superficial façade of Korean commercial architecture.

Renovation changes the streetscape, along with new construction. Buildings made of tile, brick, and granite are “updated” to create a new trend of striking façades. The aforementioned Buildings 663-23 and 663-15 are good examples (Figure 10). The businesses in these buildings belong to the visibility industry. Clothing stores, accessory stores, and shoe stores on the first and second floors present their products to people on the street through show windows; however, the reflective façades of the upper floors are closed and secret. The signboards are also restrained, which is particularly common for newly renovated and constructed buildings with numerous visibility industries. The facades in such buildings are not just facades that have lost their meaning due to the signboards but, in their entirety, become “signboards” for commercial persuasion.

The façades as signboards are partially renovated. Owners of stores that rise and fall rapidly remodel the facades based on the rent locations to reveal their commercial value whenever they open new stores. Another façade takes the place of, or is added on top of, the existing façade. If “outdated” buildings become home to many stores, then a mixture of partially different façades and signboards cover the buildings. Additionally, the changed façades become “other signboards”, serving as the background of the signboards.

Among the façades showing the identities of stores after renovation, there are closed façades. For instance, there are several clothing stores that reveal their interior through an open show window, while other clothing stores hide their interior through a closed façade. Stores with closed façades limitedly target those who have particular tastes and high economic power. These stores are similar to exclusive luxury consumption spaces in Cheongdam-dong, where invisible mechanisms such as membership-based stores and valet parking operate [17]. Building 654-11, renovated with plastic panels, sells “funk style” clothes, targeting customers with specific tastes, and has a closed facade and muted signboard. Building 653-4, which was renovated with a unique facade using wire mesh, has its entrance hidden behind the left side of the building without openings facing the road. This building is rented for a certain period as an event venue, and a signboard is temporarily installed for that time. During the survey period, a pool party pop-up store was opened to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Arena, and only guests with reservations were allowed entry. Such limited visibility can also be found in new buildings. Building 656-13, which was constructed in 2021, has a reinforced concrete structure with an exterior marble finish in a Western classical style, showing a “dignified look”. There are also narrow openings of black glass that do not show the interior, and no signboard is found. This building has one high-end skincare shop on the first floor and one high-end massage shop on the second, third and fourth floors. The façade of this building showcases the secret aspect of the visibility industry in this area (Figure 18).

The fact that the façades of buildings reveal commercial viability is evidence that commercial expression is achieved through them. Here, as indicated by Wigley, building façades almost become like clothing in fashion [26]. It is not an honest exposure and expression of the structure and a space of modern architecture but a new expressive system independent of those structures and spaces. The façades of Korean commercial architecture are “much more free” from the “discipline” of modern European architecture, in which façades that are “free” from structures must be an honest exposure and expres-

sion of internal spaces and functions. This is similar to the commercial architecture of Las Vegas, which expresses commerciality with signboards. In this way, building façades as a commercial expression of Apgujeong-dong become “disciplined” or “undisciplined” expressions that create symbols of Korean history and society and indicate regional industries in dignified buildings related to the beauty industry, reflective and unique clothing store buildings, secretive event venue buildings, disorderly restaurant buildings and entertainment buildings, and so on. Korea’s commercial buildings, which generally have similar forms of Rahmen structure and superficial surfaces, are characterized as “decorated sheds” with external decoration independently applied to “conventional shelters”, as stated by Venturi [7]. Just as the signboard as a decoration of the shed is an expression of commercial everyday life or a characteristic expression of Korean modernity [3,27], the façade as a decoration of the shed is also utilized as an expression that contains various social and cultural aspects of Korean society as well as the realities of commerce.

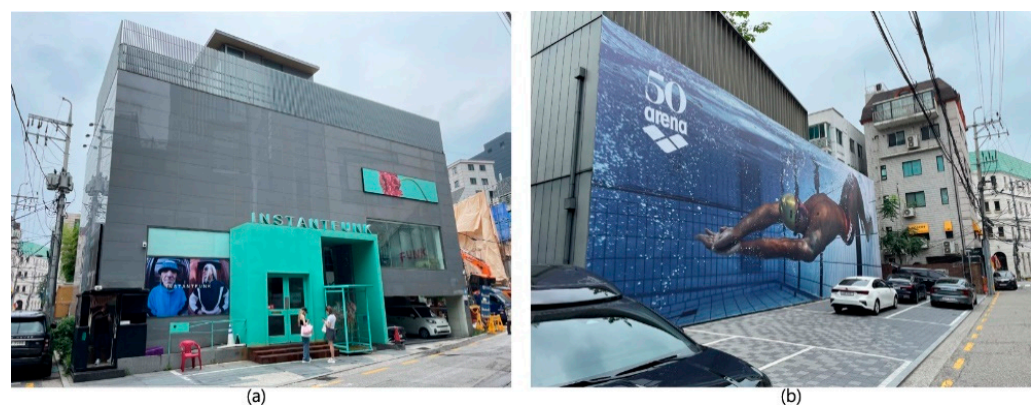


Figure 18. Buildings with closed façades and limited or temporary signboards ((a) 654-11, (b) 653-4), taken by author.

5. Conclusions

Apgujeong-dong, which is a representative commercial area in Seoul, has a specific history. This quarter has been known for entertainment and cultural consumption among areas in Gangnam—an affluent part of Korean society that has experienced rapid modernization and economic development. After the 1980s, the zone was home to fashion-related stores, as well as enterprises linked to the beauty, food and beverage, and entertainment and advertising industries. This commercial specificity, along with the general characteristics of Korean commercial architecture, is embodied in the buildings and landscape of this area.

A general characteristic of Korean commercial architecture is that the building forms are limited by the streets, plots, and regulations. Architectural forms that maximize the floor area ratio amid the grid-pattern streets and small plots resulting from land readjustment projects, as well as the legal application of regulations such as land use zoning, slant line restriction for daylight, or setback regulation from road width, do not lead to significant differences in the overall building forms. In these circumstances, Korean commercial architecture expresses itself through its exterior surface or façade. Architectural façades play a role through commercial expression or commercial persuasion. The commercial architecture of Apgujeong-dong also falls within this overall framework.

Nevertheless, distinct characteristics of the Apgujeong-dong area are revealed through the exterior surface of its architecture. This is because the exterior surfaces are related to the everyday commercial life of the area. First, when changes in façades were examined, it was found that materials such as granite, metal panels, glass curtain walls, and exposed concrete were popular at different periods and utilized sequentially amid the changing process of the Korean building material production system. This means that the trend of Korean industrialization was quickly applied to the façades of buildings, and it shows that the active process of Apgujeong-dong’s commercialization in the past served as the

background for the rapidly updated changes in façades. Furthermore, the characteristics of beauty and fashion-related industries in the area are expressed through dignified, modern, cool, or unique façades, and together with the disorderly façades of restaurants and entertainment facilities, show a complex landscape. The atmosphere of Apgujeong-dong is formed by the commercial activities in the area as well as by the landscape of the buildings.

As neighborhood living facilities in Korea, commercial architecture is an important part of the everyday urban landscape. In particular, changes in commercial architecture in areas that have undergone gentrification can be said to be another expression of modern Korean society. In addition, the architecture has different characteristics depending on the area. Garosu-gil of the southern Seoul region is distinct from Apgujeong-dong; Seongsu-dong is a semi-industrial area that underwent gentrification; in the northern Seoul region, Yeonnam-dong, a lower-class residential area, underwent gentrification due to the influence of the Hongdae area [28], an area of cultural consumption by the youth. The areas of Seochon and Samcheong-dong, which are commercialized areas within a traditional historic district, all of them have different landscapes and atmospheres. This is due to differences in the types of streets, sizes of plots, surrounding building structures, as well as the economic and cultural differences within the areas. In the future, comprehensive research on the commercial architecture of these areas, including Apgujeong-dong, will help us to understand regional Korean architecture, which still has distinct characteristics while embracing modern architecture.

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