Layouts and Layers:
Spatial Arrangements in Japan and Korea

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to clarify spatial conceptions of Japanese and Korean aristocratic residences built during a 250-year period since 1600, in order to interpret meanings of these built forms. The first topics of discussion are the materials that surround the spaces and, second, the elements that are not only space dividers, but also reflections of social order. Finally, the layouts and spatial layers of Korean and Japanese houses are examined in terms of linguistic and ‘non-verbal’ aspects of the ‘language of architecture’ in both cultures. Throughout this interpretation, special attention is paid to the continuous space of Japanese and Korean architecture, in which of most importance are the distinctions of multipurpose rooms, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, as well as private and public areas, defined by such features as behavior and language, besides architectural expressions.

Keywords: banga, buke, gan, ken, ma, module, oku, shoin, sukiya.

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Prologue

For some time, scholars have been ‘unwrapping’ Japan and demystifying phenomena related to the cultural and ethnic ‘uniqueness’ of the Japanese. Personally, I have found the recent works of anthropologists in general, and those of Joy Hendry in particular, inspiring in ‘re-reading’ the ‘language’ of Japanese architecture—a field that, according to a widely held view, is especially unique. This sentiment, however, is to a great extent based on contrasting Japan and ‘the West,’ conducted by Japanese and Westerners alike. But if we compare Japan to other East Asian countries, the point of view changes, in a manner of speaking.

In many ways, buildings can be considered ‘packages’ or ‘boxes’ (as modern architecture is often referred to by laymen) which, like a gift and its wrapping or a locution, express such relations as politeness, power, and status between people and/or different social groups, in addition to aesthetic values. In Hendry’s words: “In the Japanese case, architectural style and the layout of domestic and religious edifices can be seen to use layers of ‘spatial wrapping’ in the way they enclose their inner sanctums, just as people use layers of ‘linguistic wrapping’ to express themselves.”¹ She also suggests that the Japanese ‘wrapping principle,’ which is a mode of indirect communication in one particular cultural milieu, could provide a model for cross-cultural comparisons, and, I would like to add, for interdisciplinary studies.

Therefore, this paper is an architect’s attempt to shed new light on the interpretations of Korean and Japanese languages of architecture from a ‘Hendryan’ perspective, in spite (or perhaps because) of many differences, as there are also similarities, above all linguistic affinity. Due to limited space, the examination does not include

¹. Hendry 1995, p. 4. That is why Joy Hendry is the only person quoted here.
China, nor city layout, gardens, palaces, temples, and farmhouses, or geomancy and other related thoughts, which are important aspects of East Asian architecture. Instead, we focus on the spatial layers and their definitions in aristocratic residences, Korean bangar and Japanese shoin-zukuri (below shoin for short), built between the early 1600s and mid-1800s.\footnote{The Japanese shoin-zukuri is a building type of samurai houses (buke), imperial residences, and abbot’s quarters in temples. This style started to develop in the twelfth century, but was more common from the seventeenth century on, when it often included sukiya style semiformal rooms and rustic soan teahouses or tearooms. To simplify, shoin, also meaning an individual shoin style formal room, indicates here the whole house analogously to bangar that are specifically the residences of Korean yangban gentry (the ban of ban-ga and yang-ban being the same ideogram for ‘nobleman’) to distinguish them from minga, or ‘peoples’ houses.’ It must also be pointed out that minga is not exactly the same as Japanese minka which refers to farmhouses, whereas Korean minga indicates houses in general, including the houses of the ‘middle classes’ (jungin and igyo) between the commoner classes (yangin and chonin) and yangban aristocracy.} Besides that, these mansions of Japanese samurai elite and Korean yangban gentry reflect aesthetic, cosmological and sociological ideologies of their times, they are good examples of ‘spatial wrapping.’ They are also elucidative objects of comparison being designed for the upper classes during the same period in neighboring countries.

**Spatial Wrapping Materials**

Most probably, any discourse on space eventually leads us dealing with the elements that surround it, in order to grasp something as abstract as the concept of space. As Hendry has pointed out, the materials of Japanese houses are much the same as in gift-wrapping, and this applies to Korea as well. The main structure is built of timber and is an *object d’art* in its own right, like the beautiful wooden boxes, in which the most precious Japanese and Korean artifacts are...
packed. However, while almost all Japanese structures until the Meiji era were built of wood, by the middle of the Korean Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) there was shortage of good quality timber on the peninsula.\textsuperscript{3} Wooden buildings such as bangsa were hence ‘status symbols.’ In Japan, where high-grade timber was available in great amounts, wealth was demonstrated, for instance, by shoin style that was restricted from the lower classes till the late Edo period (1600-1868).

Accordingly, there were differences in the appearance of shoin and bangsa, the most obvious being the winding wooden members of Korean houses, contrasting to the extremely straight-lined and refined Japanese carpentry. During a recent field trip, it struck me that one only has to observe Korean forests with their bush-like trees to understand why buildings have more organic details than in Japan. Naturalism, on the other hand, is considered one of the most characteristic design principles of both cultures. In this context, it is not possible to delve into the culturally variable perceptions of nature, and I only mention two examples of this phenomenon in shoin. The first is the main post of a tokonoma alcove, preferably left in a ‘natural’ state, albeit carefully selected in the repository of nature and surrounded by a perfectionist framework of other structures. Secondly, the rustic style of tearooms (sōan, ‘thatched hut’), which was inspired by humble farmhouses, ironically, became a part of highly elaborated and expensive art of the aristocrats, as ‘linguistic wrapping’ culminates in the ritualized language of tea ceremony.

Paper is another parallel between wrapping and architecture as well as between Japan and Korea. Both in shoin and bangsa, rooms are separated mainly by papered panels, but Japanese shōji doors are

\textsuperscript{3} As one result of the timber decrease in Korea, the wooden members were smaller in size than before and were used primarily in the roof structures and in the details of doors, windows, and the kind. Even in temples, palaces, and aristocrats’ residences, which had timber frames, the use of brick and stone increased and they continued to be the main building materials of thatch-roofed commoners’ houses. Kim Dong-uk 1994, p. 65.
covered with paper on the outer side of the wooden framework, whereas it is on the inner side of Korean jangji doors. (The concepts ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ will be discussed below, but here the former refers to a room and the latter to anything around it.) This creates divergent appearances, accompanied by panels that have paper on both sides, or are built of wooden planks. Generally speaking, Korean interiors are more dominated by paper, since not only are the inner surfaces of the door/windows and walls papered, but so are also the ceiling and the floor of bang rooms with ondol hypocaust (fig. 1). Because it would be uneconomic to heat wider spaces than necessary bang is a small and low room for sleeping, sojourn, and working. These rooms are, naturally, used in wintertime, though also in the summer, as ondol is not heated then and the doors are hoisted on overhead hinges and hooks, or opened sideways. When they are closed, the atmosphere is almost sealed: Only paper is visible, and one truly feels as though one were in a paper box.

In addition, Korean houses have wood-floored maru rooms (see fig. 13). Contrary to bang, maru is a high space rising all the way to visible roof rafters, sometimes including a partial wooden ceiling, and the biggest parts of the walls are possible to open; in southern banga, these areas do not always have exterior doors at all. In other words, maru functions in a similar way as Japanese verandahs or rooms that have porous tatami mats and sliding or removable wall/

4. By Western vocabulary it is rather difficult to define these sliding or pivot-ed elements, as they are either doors, windows, or walls depending on their adjustment, though in Korea and Japan there are also permanent walls and openings that are specifically windows. In general, shōji and jangji can be regarded as all of them because they do not only serve as passages when opened and partitions when closed, but also provide light and ventilation in the room and view to outside, which are the basic functions of a window.

5. In ondol method, the smoke from a fireplace either in kitchen or outside is conducted into the under-floor flues, where the warm air heats the floor until passing out the chimney. The floor is made of clay and stones that are covered by several layers of oiled paper.
door elements. Together with elevated floors and deep eaves, they create horizontal lines of the facades in both building types, except that Korean rooflines are more curved. Also, unlike the Chinese, the Koreans and Japanese continued living on the floor of these multi-purpose rooms with minimum furniture.

Straw is the material that dominates Japanese interiors due to the tatami mats (fig. 2). Originally tatami, literally ‘to fold,’ was a foldable carpet, similar to the Korean dotjari, still in use today. The thick straw mats were first portable daises for the most important people to sit on, and started to cover the whole room areas of shoin residences only at the turn of the fifteenth century. The reason for the popularity of tatami was, undoubtedly, its suitability for the sultry climate, but because the mats were (and are) expensive, they did not become widely used in commoners’ houses until in the eighteenth century, alongside better living standards of the rising merchant
As for other wrapping materials surrounding Korean and Japanese spaces, the roofs of *banga* and *shoin* are usually covered with tiles, especially side buildings also with straw, bark or shingle, while brick and stone are used in Korean fire-resisting walls (*banghwajang*); necessary between *ondol* fireplaces and wooden structures. The Japanese hearth is also normally in the dirt-floor kitchen, but in the middle of it, or sometimes at the center of a *tatami* room, and walls are almost without exceptions made of plastered bamboo net between square pillars and beams, again, to improve ventilation. It is the method in *banga* as well, although the appearance is slightly different because the wall is of close to the same depth, if not thicker, than the frame structure, thereby providing insulation needed during the colder winters on the Korean Peninsula. For the same reason, *banga*’s openings often have two layers of sliding or pivoted elements, occasionally even a third set of framed mosquito nets, and a papered built-in case for the extra pairs of panels.

To summarize, the innermost realm of Japanese *shoin* is mainly composed of straw floors, wooden ceilings, and walls with paper doors and plastered areas, both interspersed by wooden framework, creating the famous contrast of materials and colors. The interior of Korean *banga*, on the other hand, is characterized by the interplay of class—thus, one way to demonstrate wealth.
bang and maru rooms. The former are dominated solely by paper and the latter by wood with plaster and paper between the wooden members, being reminiscent of verandahs, which are equally essential parts of shoin and bangä.

Social Wrapping Elements

Most of the above phenomena are solutions to practical considerations and climatic conditions, yet, architecture always reflects also ideological currents. In that respect, Edo Japan and Joseon Korea departed from each other substantially, even if both were feudal societies. As is well known, the Joseon dynasty with its centralized imperial rule was an ideal Confucian state that strained to banish all other thoughts, whereas Confucianism was not rooted in Japanese soil of equal depth, but Buddhism and Shintoism cohered as influential religions. In the beginning of the peaceful Edo period, when the Tokugawa shogunate established control over the court, the Japanese samurai warriors became mainly bureaucrats who constituted their own elite, comparable to the Korean yangban gentry. These were local officials, or served the administration in Seoul, while other family members provided for the household bangä in the countryside. Some scholars also built similar houses as ‘hermitages,’ where they retired (or were sentenced) to compose poems, practice calligraphy, and cultivate their mind by other activities suitable for Confucian gentlemen.

As a result of the ‘alternate attendance’ system, the Japanese samurai leaders, daimyô, had to spend years in the Tokugawa headquarters in Edo (today’s Tokyo) maintaining residences there, in addition to the mansions and castles in their own domain, and often houses even in the imperial capital Heiankyô (Kyoto). Since their lifestyle required more rooms and partition between them, the buildings incorporated new elements, as sliding panels with decorated paper on both sides and less functional ornamental details that
indicated the prestige of the house. These features became constituent parts of the sukiya style of shoin residences, along the increasing use of earlier ‘luxuries,’ like tatami mats, ceilings, tea-rooms, and tokonoma alcoves with adjoined tsukeshoin desks and tana (or chigaidana) shelves. This was also the era when most verandahs got shōji doors in the outer colonnade, making these areas parts of the indoors—or more accurately, corridor-like intermediate spaces—due to the invention of wooden screens (amado, ‘rain door’) that protected the paper and when unneeded slid into a built-in case in the outer wall.

Besides shōji and jangji panels, characteristic of both shoin and bangā are various kinds of adjustable space dividers, as folded screens (Jap. byōbu, Kor. byongpung), cloth curtains (Jap. noren, Kor. munyeomja), and bamboo or reed shutters (Jap. sudare, Kor. bal). Although the sliding elements that have paper on both sides (Jap. fusuma, Kor. maengjangji) as well as the latticed areas above the openings (Jap. ramma, Kor. gochang) are quite similar, the latticework of all types of dividers in a bangā is usually more complex, and the doors that are pivoted above are a Korean speciality; though existed in Japanese shinden residences that preceded shoin. Also, because of bangā’s high foundations most of the verandahs that do not function as entrances have railings and appear more as balconies, similar to the Japanese elevated verandahs. There are differences in the layout of the houses as well. While the rooms of a shoin are often connected cornerwise in stepped blocks, a bangā is generally composed of more rectangular buildings, but arranged much less symmetrically than the extremely axial Chinese courtyard houses (figs. 3 and 4).

In all East Asian countries, the details and dimensions of buildings were restricted by laws according to the owner’s social rank, based on the Confucian hierarchy. The Tokugawa government, for instance, prohibited commoners from using sukiya style, but a samurai house, no matter how small, always included a tokonoma and often a tearoom. At least daimyō and shōgun should also have had a nō stage, since tea ceremony and nō drama, among many other arts,
were considered essential parts of samurai education. Even ornamental windows, such as shitaji-mado ('underground window'), imitating farmhouses' broken walls that disclosed the bamboo net structure, expressed social hierarchy because they were mainly used in tearooms, or were attached to tokonoma.

**Figure 3.** Floor plan of Katsura Imperial Villa's sukiya style main building with old shoin (upper right corner), middle shoin, and new shoin (below left). Early and middle seventeenth century, Kyoto, Japan. Nihon kenchiku shizushi 1980, p. 84.
Especially gates, the outermost limit between ‘outside’ and ‘inside,’ manifested the status of the house. The entrance of a samurai mansion had a curtain displaying the household crest, and the cusp-gabled roof (kara-hafu), reflecting the importance of a Japanese building from the twelfth century on, became prominent part of the Edo period shoin (fig. 5). A daimyō’s gateway with this kind of a roof was reserved for shōgun during his visits to the retainer, or for the reception of emperor at shogunal establishments. Needless to say, a structure associated with these social connections imparted special meaning. In Korea, too, it was the roof of a gate that depicted the

Figure 4. Floor plan of Yun Jeung’s house. Originally built in the late seventeenth century, major alterations in the mid-1800s, Nonsan, South Korea. Joo 1999, p. 61.
rank of the house and, not surprisingly, gates with elevated roof 
(*oseuldaemun*) were restricted for the *yangban*, while gates of the 
same height as the fence (*pyeongdaemun*) were used in the residences 
of lower classes, or in *bangsa’s* inner walls (fig. 6). Of particular signifi-
cance was the *jeongryeo* gate with governmental tablatures awarded 
to a virtuous wife or an obedient son.

A somewhat less tangible divider between the spatial layers is 
the modular grid of the house. From a practical point of view, a 
module brought about an order in the building, but both Korean 
and Japanese modular methods, which drew their origins from 
China, were also means to express social order. The basic unit, 
depicted by the Chinese ideogram of ‘sun’ within ‘gate’ (*jian* in Chi-
inese, *gan* in Korean, *ken*, *ma*, etc. in Japanese), was a length, square, 
and volumetric measure between two or four columns or their 
height respectively, and its dimensions varied on periods and areas,
even in a building.\textsuperscript{6} Moreover, it distinguished the owner’s social rank, as not only was the amount of units, but also the size of the unit itself controlled. For example, the length of gan was different for different social groups: for commoners 6-7 cheok, for yangban 8-9 (sometimes up to 11), and for the royal family 11-12 cheok.\textsuperscript{7} (1 cheok is ca. 30 cm.) This, in turn, means that the maximum of 10 ‘square gan’

\textsuperscript{6} There was also another Chinese module, cai (literally ‘material’), a ratio of 15 by 10 between the longer and shorter side of bracket arm timber. In the Northern Song dynasty, it had eight, by the Qing dynasty eleven grades with different dimensions (though the same ratio) according to the importance of the building and the rank of the owner. As that type of bracket sets were not used in shoin and bunga, this module is not dealt with here. More about the East Asian modules in my Ph.D. thesis, Sarvimäki 2000, pp. 161-185.

\textsuperscript{7} Courtesy of Dr. Kim Do-Kyoung (personal discussion).
(about 45 m²) in commoners’ houses was much less than one third of the 30 gan (at least 170 m²) allowed for the lowest yangban rank.

The Japanese modular system, to which it developed during the Edo period and as we know it today, is more reminiscent of the contemporary method, though it must be pointed out that ken also had various dimensions, and still there are four main sizes of tatami mats that are intrinsically connected to the column distance. In simplified terms, all horizontal and vertical measures depend on a particular ken that is a multiple of shaku units (ca. 30 cm) and on its fractions into smaller intervals, as pillar section of 4 sun (0,4 shaku). Gradually this structural order was used in all residences, mainly due to the increasing popularity of shoin type buildings and the rising living standards in the late Edo period, when Japan, indeed, developed into a more egalitarian society than Joseon Korea. Yet the dimensions of tokonoma, tsukeshoin and tana were, and are, defined by the kiwari module, which is predominantly based on aesthetic ratios and was originally the proportioning method of samurai mansions, palaces, and temples.

Already in the beginning of the Edo period, however, wealthy merchants (the lowest Confucian social class of ‘citizens’) built large residences, such as the Nakamura House in modern Osaka, with formal tatami rooms and tokonoma alcoves. Also, even if the style of gates was limited and the guardrooms of lower daimyō ranks were to have single sloping roofs, they tended to ignore the prohibition and had curved kara-hafu constructions in their houses. And in Korea, where such details as round pillars and dancheong multicolor paint-

8. Particularly after the devastating fire of Edo in 1657, residences like the so-called row houses (nagaya) were controlled because of the scant resources caused by the rebuilding of the entire city. The compendium of regulations and etiquette for the members of the samurai class, issued by the Tokugawa shogunate, restricted the styles of houses and gates, among other rules. They also limited the width of the houses of the highest-ranking daimyō into three bays, whereas lower samurai leaders were required to reduce their nagaya into two and a half bays. Coaldrake 1996, pp. 193-207.
ings were permitted only in temples and palaces, some aristocrats, who were not as humble as Confucian scholars were supposed to be, did show off by having these forbidden elements in their bangas. In many cases, their residences also exceeded the permitted size, simply, by not including the servants’ quarters (haengangchae) in the house area.9

Furthermore, due to the Neo-Confucian ideology that emphasized strict separation of genders—as it was interpreted by the yang-ban scholars—the Korean mansions had to be divided into men’s and women’s quarters, sarangchae and anchae, by high walls with a middle gate (jungmun) and some lesser passages in between. In reality, many bangas have interesting unofficial routes or ‘grey zones,’ which connect the enclosures. Take the Yangjindang in Hahoe Village, where everything, at first, looks like the rules were followed (figs. 7 and 8). Had I prior to my visit not seen the floor plan, it would have been impossible to guess that a pair of doors veils an adjunctive maru, since the usual places for a visitor to examine the house are the courtyard or reception rooms of sarangchae. On the same trip in Andong, I spent four nights in a bangas, where I experienced an analogous arrangement that observes the moral principles, but maximizes the functional efficiency. It was only in the evening,

9. For example, the Kim residence in Chongup had 87 gan, but was reported to the authorities to be 40 gan in size, which was the maximum amount of gan for the rank of the owner of this house and the total of only the main buildings. In principle, non-titled citizens were not allowed more than 10 gan, ‘middle classes’ 20 gan, third class aristocrats 30 gan, second class 40 gan, princes and princesses of kings’ secondary wives 50 gan, and so on, ending in the 99 gan palaces. Chun et al. 1999, pp. 37-41. (Here, too, it must be taken into account that the size of a gan was bigger the higher the status of the owner.) By the late Joseon period, when the scrutiny of regulations became more lax, even rich farmers adopted features of bangas in their residences and especially the ‘middle class’ citizens had soseuldaemun gates. Therefore, some yangban aristocrats opposed this decline of social order by not having soseuldaemun gates and rebuilt a pyeongdaemun main gate in their houses. Courtesy of Dr. Kim Seong-Do (personal discussion).
while getting the bedding out from the cupboard, when I found a ‘secret door’ to anchae in the rear wall of the fixture and realized that it, in fact, made the space more a corridor than a storage (fig. 9).  

Figure 7. Floor plan of Yangjindang house with an adjunctive maru between anchae (lower left square) and sarangchae (upper right rectangle). Mid-Joseon period, Andong, South Korea. Contemporary Architecture 2000-1, p. 222.

10. During my stay in this bangja (Jichonjongtaek, Cultural Properties Material No. 44), I also realized that a plan that allows privacy to the family and, at the same time, has separate area for the guests, is why the house works so well in its modern function as an inn. Because I was conducting research on traditional Korean architecture the hosts, Mrs. and Mr. Kim Won-Kil, kindly let me enter the anchae too. On that side, there was a highboy in front of the ‘secret door’ to block the passage that, naturally, is not meant to be used by the customers of the inn, since the owners live in the anchae.
These types of informal passageways were, of course, needed for women or servants to serve the men entertaining their guests in the evening, when the middle gate was locked.

The widely used translation ‘men’s and women’s area,’ nonetheless, is not quite accurate, as the Korean terms do not refer to sexes. Anchae could be better interpreted as an ‘inner house’ and sarangchae as an ‘outer house’; in other words, the former is the private and the latter the public part of bangsa. The male family members were allowed to enter anchae, though preferably with a permit of the household head (or in the night, when the servants did not see them), but sarangchae’s courtyard and reception rooms were the furthest a visitor could get. Often there was a commanding view from sarangchae to the middle gate, which allowed the control. No wonder, the official quarters for the household heir and his sons took on symbolic significance as the entire family her-

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11. The ideogram sa means ‘housing’ and rang ‘corridor,’ whereas chae is a suffix indicating an independent building or group of them. It should also be noted that in, meaning ‘inner,’ is a Korean word and is not written by the Chinese ideogram in for ‘safe,’ ‘peace,’ etc., depicted by ‘woman’ under the ‘roof,’ although the etymology and connotation might lead to this concept.
itage and authority of the patriarch—ideally receiving his guests by sitting in numaru, a pavilion-type maru that is erected even higher than the other rooms of sarangchae (fig. 10).\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Professor Joo Nam-Chull brought to my attention that sometimes the smoke from ondol fireplace is conducted to the holes in the podium, from where it fills the surface of the courtyard. Then, the sarangchae looks like it was ‘floating on a cloud,’ metaphorically indicating the superiority of the family patriarch. Professor Kim Dong-Uk, for his part, pointed out that many bangsa are also preserved till our days because the owners are so
In spite of the differences in the layouts and appearances of *banga* and *shoin*, there are similar perceptions. Also Japanese houses are clearly divided into private and public areas in the way people circulate in them. Just as Neo-Confucian ideology was not as notable in Japan as in Korea, nor was gender segregation. Consequently (along other possible reasons), *shoin* did not part into men’s and women’s quarters to the same extent as did *banga*. Even more obvious is that social hierarchy was indicated by the architecture of *shoin* and *banga*, as was the inside/outside distinction, though not always visually. Let us, therefore, proceed by ‘looking at’ what is less visible in the light of Hendry’s statement of the tea ceremony: “The actual speech used is very sparse, extremely restricted, and we would learn very little if we looked only at the words.”  

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proud of their *yangban* ancestry (personal discussions).
Unfolding Spatial Layers

Without being “overly concerned with ‘unwrapping,’ with revealing the perceived essence of things,”14 as Hendry warns us, it is useful to consider the stages of entering a bangla or a shoin. In many respects, it is reminiscent of opening a gift, which includes the element of surprise—real or pretended. All the way from the gate, the first transactional space between the ‘very outside’ and the first layer of ‘inside,’ the houses and routes in them are carefully designed by opening new views and revealing others. Between the entrance courtyard and the main buildings, there might be additional yards or gardens; in Japan, usually separated by hedges or fences made of wood, bamboo or other ‘light’ materials, whereas bangla are dominated by split-levelled masonry or stone walls that have tile cover, creating an almost castle-like atmosphere. The buildings also have removable ‘covers,’ like bamboo or reed blinds, and the appearance of the facades greatly depends on whether the wooden shutters and other outer panels are closed or open.15 Actually, the Korean doors pivoted above, even better than the sliding ones, correspond to the ‘unfolding’ metaphor because first they are folded horizontally and then hoisted up vertically.

When entering a Japanese house, a split cloth curtain (noren) often partly conceals the entrance, and accompanied by formal greetings, one arrives in the porch (genkan) removing the shoes. While ‘climbing up’ (agaru or nobori) into the building, the host usually offers slippers to be worn in the corridors and other wood-floored areas, except for toilets and bathrooms, where special slippers are needed. No footwear is used in the following stage of the tatami-matted areas, of which the first is either ozen, meaning ‘front room,’ or a more elaborate zashiki reception room with tokonoma

15. For more examples of Japanese dividers and transactional spaces, see Nitschke 1993, pp. 49-93.
alcove. Seldom is a visitor allowed any further. If one is, the relationship has become intimate enough that one is not regarded as a complete outsider anymore. At the same time, many of the linguistic honorifics are dropped, which Hendry points out: “Just as with language, layers of polite formality conceal (and occasionally reveal) an inner sanctum, and the nearer the outside one finds oneself, the more formal is the expected behaviour.”16

A classy shoin house has several zashiki rooms, and the significance of a particular space is indicated by the height and treatment of the ceiling and the tiers of the floor from the lower level (gedan) to the middle level (chūdan), ending in the highest dais (jōdan) for the master of the house, or a more important visitor. If there are no different levels, the most honorable place is the tatami mat in front of the tokonoma. From this public area, a guest may get glimpses deeper into the house through the dividing elements, which ‘wrap’ the inner areas, oroku, having connotations of ‘heart,’ ‘interior,’ or ‘depth.’ Similarly to the phrases used, the movable elements concealoku, when closed, and momentarily reveal it, when family members or servants pass the openings. Then, one possibly sees a next set of sliding panels, behind one more, and so on, creating the impression of depth. Besides, even when the panels are closed, the translucent paper does not completely separate a room from another—especially not acoustically—nor the interior from the exterior, although the amount of layers and thickness of paper allows the interplay of light and shade and/or transparency and opaqueness.

In the course of entering a Korean bang, one even more literally ‘climbs up’ (oreuda), as not only are the floors elevated, but the buildings are placed on podiums above the courtyards that themselves have terraces at several levels. The shoes are left on the podium’s stepping stone, from which one climbs on a verandah, and a visitor ends either in the great maru hall (daecheong), numaru, or outer bang rooms of sarangchae. Like in Japan, through the layers of openings

one gets an impression of continuous space; in banga, by glimpses of the master’s bedroom (chim-bang) and other sarangchae’s inner areas, while an outsider sees only the roofs of anchae behind the high walls (fig. 11). Hence, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to consider anchae, with an meaning ‘inner,’ the Korean equivalence to oku, and vice versa. The same is suggested by the words for ‘wife,’ which both in Korean and Japanese have connotations of ‘inside person.’

Regarding Japan, the concept of ‘empty center’ has been widely speculated, and some scholars have been contemplating where the center of a Japanese house is—by the hearth or the tokonoma—though I do not find it necessary, or possible, to locate oku, the ‘center of emptiness.’ In a banga, the ‘very inside’ might be somewhere around the first lady’s room (anbang),

Figure 11. A view through the sarangchae of Yun Jeung’s house: in front sarangbang, then marubang (in between interesting angojigi doors that are both horizontally pivoted and sliding), and furthest behind the backyard is the wall of anchae (see also the floor plan in fig. 4). Late seventeenth century, Nonsan, South Korea.

17. In my opinion, and corresponding to the phenomena discussed in this paper, oku definitely is ‘deeper’ in the house than in the tokonoma of a reception room.
her sleeping room (witbang, ‘upper room’) and the daughter-in-law’s room (geonneonbang, ‘opposite room’) that is on the opposite side of anchae’s daecheong. Rather than enclosed by permanent elements, the layers surrounding these ‘centers’ are defined by behavior like abandonment of shoes, the ‘dirt of outside,’ before entering the ‘clean inside,’ and the further borders are indicated by some sort of a step and/or change of flooring material when moving from one spatial level to another. Similar kind of temporal expressions are the East Asian terms for module, since the Chinese ideogram for the column distance also means both ‘space’ and ‘time’—one more architectural perception that is usually regarded as uniquely Japanese, famous for the concept ma.

From our Hendryan approach, ‘linguistic wrapping’ is an alternative means in interpreting the spatial layers and their definitions, as discussed above. In that respect, Japanese residences have an interesting detail, the frieze rail (uchi-nori-nageshi) in the so-called ‘honest wall’ (shin-kabe), meaning that the construction system is genuinely exposed (fig. 12). Paradoxically, since the invention of concealed horizontal ties (nuki), it had no tectonic function except above the openings (even there only to strengthen the kamoi sliding track), but continued also to be used on the solid walls of high-class shoin, though disappeared in many houses of commoners and lower ranking samurai; among the latter, partly due to the appreciation of the semiformal sukiya style, associated with the ‘way of tea’ (chadō), the ‘way of warriors’ (bushidō), and other ‘arts’ (dō). This ‘beam’—like a ribbon of a gift—could well be considered corresponding to the Japanese ‘beautification language’ (keigo), in indicating aesthetic values and status of the house. Similarly, public or ‘formal’ (hare) areas are defined by the formal tatemae speech, comparable to ‘front’ (omote) and ‘outside’ (soto), as opposing to private or ‘informal’ (ke), ‘rear’ (ura), ‘inside’ (uchi), and the real opinion, or honne. In short, calling the wall ‘honest’ is tatemae, while mentioning that the frieze rail is not a structural but an ornamental member is honne.18

The view from ‘inside’ to ‘outside’ is of equal importance,
though the perspective shifts in the cases of shoin and bang. Since the latter is ideally located on a hillside, the openings from sarangchae provide a wide command of the entrance courtyard (sarangmadang or haengnungmadang) and far-away mountains, while anchae opens to the inner yard (anmadang) and the rear garden (dwtmadang). That is probably why the Koreans pay so much atten-

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18. With regard to distinguishing spatial layers by movable and translucent elements, particularly interesting is psychiatrist Takeo Doi’s view, to which Hendry refers: “Japanese people very often know precisely what the honne is in any situation, despite the formal expressions of tatemae. [...] so that when people look at omote they see also the ura through it.” Hendry 1995, p. 163. She discusses these levels of Japanese language in depth; regarding the usage of different types of keigo, translated in various ways (in the context of a structural element that is actually an ornament, I prefer the term ‘beautification language’), see especially Hendry 1995, pp. 52-69, about honne/ura and tatemae/omote, pp. 145, 167-8.
tion to the windows and their sills, on which one can rest one’s elbow when admiring the scenery. Although Korean yards that have very little vegetation are not, as the Japanese gardens, considered to be viewed from indoors, I would argue that at least the ‘flower stairs’ (hwagye) in the garden definitely are (fig. 13). The general setting of the house surrounded by high walls and a forested hill in the background, in turn, is eyed from the direction of approach.

Japanese shoin is usually on a flat lot and the view from the rooms to the ground level appears to be more significant; an extreme example are the doors that have vertically sliding lower part allowing a scene solely to the surface of the garden, preferably recently covered with snow, which the doors’ name yukimi (‘snow viewing’) shōji implies. Moreover, the deep and straight eaves greatly block out the upward vista, and Japanese openings that are specifically windows most often have latticework, so that even when the papered panels are open they provide more or less ventilation and illumination, but only glimpses of the surroundings. However, exceptions like Katsura Villa’s elevated areas and shoin’s corner rooms for moon viewing and other admiration of nature function quite similarly to Korean pavilions and numaru

Figure 13. Anchae’s great maru hall in Yun Jeung’s house with a view to the rear garden and its ‘flower stairs’ and the stand for kimchi jars. Late seventeenth century, Nonsan, South Korea.
(always in the corner of sarangchae), from where one sees a pond that is important element of both bangsa and shoin. The ‘borrowed landscape’ technique in Japanese gardens is also reminiscent of the Korean and Chinese way to use the wider panorama as part of the courtyards.

It is difficult to say where these houses ‘end.’ The Japanese verandahs that have colonnades on both sides (wood-floored hiro-en or tatami-matted irikawa), to some extent also the outer tatami rooms, as well as Korean maru rooms and porches (aptoe or toetmaru) can be seen as outdoors—not outside—when the doors are open, and indoors—literally—when closed. The outer verandahs that are normally narrower and on a lower level (Jap. ochi-en, Kor. jjokmaru) and various kinds of stepping stones are more clearly extensions of the garden, but even the ground level spaces under the eaves, in addition to courtyards, are regarded as part of the house. To put it otherwise, although not yet in the buildings, one is already either in ‘open-air insides’ or ‘roofed outdoors.’ And further in the garden there are side buildings, as teahouses that are integral parts of shoin, whereas bangsa has many types of annexes, like pavilions and separate houses (byeoldang or ansarangchae) for retired parents, married first son’s family, or secondary wife/s (figs. 14 and 15). Since Confucian ancestral worship (jaesa) was constituent part of yangban life, there is also a primogenitors’ shrine (sadang) or several of them in the rear end of the lot backed by pine trees.

From here we could, and should, proceed to geomancy and other relevant cosmological ideologies, though it is not possible to extend the scope of this paper to these interwoven topics, such as city layout reflecting the society at large. To just, once again, quote Hendry: “In Japan, the whole country was from 1600 to the middle of the nineteenth century closed off from the outside world so that the nation virtually wrapped itself entirely.” The same applies to Korea, the so-called Hermit Kingdom, even a few decades longer.

Figure 14. Shōkintei teahouse in the garden of Katsura Imperial Villa. Seventeenth century, Kyoto, Japan.

Figure 15. Hwallaejeon garden pavilion by the lotus pond of Seongyojang house. 1816, Gangneung, South Korea.
This is one more reason why juxtaposition of Jeoson Korea and Edo Japan is elucidative, as both were closed societies, in which very distinct cultures evolved. Indeed, I am not claiming that Japanese and Korean architectural expressions would always correlate, nor that the phenomena discussed above (especially division of houses into public and private areas, or connection between time and space) were something unique for Japan and Korea. What I do tend to argue is that the divergent appearances of shoin and bangæ are more a question of differences in architectural idioms than meanings—idiom itself being a linguistic term for a phrase that is typical for a dialect or a language, in this context, the language of architecture, including its ‘non-verbal’ modes.

References


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