



*Three Strands of Asia*  
Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Lecture Series

# Lecture Two

**Housings of China, Japan and Korea  
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# Housings of China, Japan and Korea

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*The second lecture of the Three Strands of Asia focused on the differences of traditional housings of the three countries that reflect different family structures and world views of China, Japan and Korea. The lecture was given by Mr. Kim Kyung Eun, the editor of Kyunghyang Shinmun and the famous author of the book 'Dining Culture of Korea, China and Japan' on March 13. Through the lecture, Mr. Kim addressed that respect for cultural differences is essential to amplify the synergy for trilateral cooperation.*

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## **Finding Cultural Genes of Trilateral Architecture**

It is not too much to say that food, clothing and shelter are good indicators to understand the culture of one nation. It is because these lifestyles reflect historical and social changes, world views, and national traits. In addition, food, clothing and shelter provide concrete examples in comprehending the culture of one nation.

Food culture is least prone to change. Many parts of life in East Asia have gone through social upheaval of modernization, yet food culture has not changed much. On the other hand, housing culture well demonstrates the world view of one nation. Finally, clothing culture mirrors the nation's cultural trends and sense of beauty.

People say that Korea, China and Japan are the part of East Asian cultural sphere, sharing such commonalities as rice, chopsticks, Buddhism and Confucianism. However, the close examination of the differences in the lifestyles of food, clothing and shelter makes people wonder whether the three countries are really in the same cultural region. This article looks into housing culture that well shows the world views of the three countries. The article mainly deals with the late 18th century lifestyles that have provided the basis of the cultural identity of the three countries. Each type of traditional housing reflects unique mindsets in accordance with the physical features of the three countries; the mindset of peninsula for Korea's *hanok*, that of continent for China's *siheyuan*, and that of island for Japan's *machiya* and *nagaya*.

## House Designs

Houses of the three countries mirror different world views and family structures. Firstly, the influence of geomancy is what they share in common. However, the definition of good location to build a house differs with countries; Korea consider the site with rivers in the front and mountains at the back as a good location, while China considered a place near water that blocks the winds as propitious. On the other hand, Japanese people often avoided making a graveyard near mountain and built villages near waters due to the prevalent volcanic eruption. As for the family structure, the three countries are all influenced by Confucian thoughts, yet China's extended-family system is different from the direct-family system of Korea and Japan. Japanese traditional *ie* system makes its direct-family system distinguished from that of Korea.

In China, sons used to live in his parents' house even after he got married. It is why dozens of people sometimes lived together in one household. Chinese house thus features mainly on the design that separates different generations. Korea has long maintained a family system emphasizing the main line of descent. That is, the sons other than the eldest moved out to form a branch family. Korean house design considered the separation of gender as well as that of generation important. In Japan, people used to live in one building with rooms separated by *husma* (sliding door papered on both sides). There is no separated room for women as in the cases of Chinese and Korean houses.

## The Features of Houses

*Hanok* is nature-friendly in a sense that the center of the edifice does not correspond to the heart of the home. It is related to the traditional thought that regarded home as a part of nature. The heart of the home in *hanok* is called *an-chaе*, literally meaning 'a building located at the very inner part of the house.' There are few examples where the inner part of the house becomes the heart of the home in the world.

Moreover, *hanok* is nature-friendly in a sense that it is not a building composed of straight lines and right angles. That is, the house is not symmetrical. It is also built by natural materials without much artificial manipulation.

*Siheyuan* refers to a courtyard surrounded by buildings on all four sides. One of its main features is the symmetrical pivot line which enables the class-oriented house structure. The side houses are located around the main house, and their different sizes indicate the order of the family members.

*Siheyuan* replicates itself. The layout of the extended house is exactly the same as the original one. *Siheyuan* is the miniature of the Forbidden Palace which is the miniature of Beijing. In this sense, this self-similar *siheyuan* well illustrates the Chinese world view of round heaven and square earth.

*Nagaya* was mainly built for the practical purpose of commerce rather than ideological purpose of representing Confucian thoughts. It was originated from *goya*. In *kyokamachi*, a downtown village under the castle, houses were located along the streets in order to attract customers. These multi-unit dwellings are called *nagaya*. Gardens in *nagaya* are often filled with various symbols of nature including *bonsai* (a potted plant).

### **The Symbols of the Houses**

*Daecheong*, the main floor hall, and *ondol*, the floor heating system, shows the combination of southern and northern cultures. *Ondol* is recognized as one of the most effective floor heating systems in the world, because it utilizes all kinds of heat transmission including conduction, convection and radiation. *Daecheong* and *ondol* brought about sedentary lifestyle. The fusion of two heterogeneous cultures can be found elsewhere in Korean lifestyle as in ‘*heung* (joy) and *han* (sorrow)’, ‘*shinmyung* (having fun without keeping up appearances) and *chaemyun* (saving face)’, and ‘*eungeun* (liesurely) and *palipali* (quickly)’.

Since Qin dynasty, China suffered nationwide war in once in every three years. Natural disasters causing the death of thousands of people were also common. Under these circumstances, one of the best ways to protect oneself from such hazards was to build up a wall. Chinese people used to cultivate crops inside a fortress. Chinese character ‘*Guan*’ refers to the opening gate of the fortress, and ‘*Xi*’ indicates the road that connects castles. Thus, the relationship in China, or *guanxi* represents a close ties built inside a wall.

*Tatamize* is a French word for ‘Japanize’. The cultural symbols of Japan including *Samurai*, *Geisha*, *Shamisen*, *Kimono* and *Sado* all become ‘Japanese’ only when they are harmonized with *tatami*.

Transformation, or creative emulation is the central feature of Japanese culture. *Tatami* is a transformation of *zabuton* cushion. It later changed into *oki-tatami*, and finally transformed into *tatami*. In fact, *tatami* also goes in hand in hand with *Samurai* spirit, the spiritual essence of Japanese culture.

## Q&A

1. I heard that you wrote a book about the food cultures of China, Japan and Korea. What do you think are the differences in food cultures among China, Japan and Korea?

I started to write the book about the food culture because it well reflects the essence of one nation. I personally think Chinese food culture has ‘creativity in diversity’. The best example can be Manchu Han Imperial Feast, a grand meal with diverse Manchurian and Han Chinese dishes. The feast was intended for the emperors of Qing Dynasty and lasted for three days, which well illustrates the large land size and ethnic diversity of China. The diversity within this large country allowed the development of diverse local foods.

On the other hand, Japanese food culture features on ‘adaptation’, whose best example can be *sushi*. It initially started from a fermented food and transformed into what it is now. The case of *sushi* indicates that Japanese people newly develop their culture through continuous adaptation.

2. You said that the cultures of China, Japan and Korea is so diverse and different that it is sometimes difficult to imagine that the three countries are under one common cultural sphere. Do you think the three countries can cooperate to form one regional entity as EU does?

I think the commonality that China, Japan and Korea share are different from that of Europe. As for Europe, it has more than 2000 year history of Roman Empire. Thus the cultural connectedness is much stronger than that of China, Japan and Korea. People simply think that the three countries share many similarities in culture because they share such common cultures as rice, chopstick and Buddhism. Yet the details of such cultures vary from country to country. In fact, I strongly believe that respect to and understanding of such cultural uniqueness is the key for the three countries to amplify the synergy for the trilateral cooperation. If people understand one another through frequent and good communication, new culture can engender. In this sense, if the three countries continuously communicate and make exchanges with one another, they will create another culture of commonality.

## Lecture Two at a Glance

	<b>Korea</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>Japan</b>
<b>Type of House</b>	<i>Hanok</i>	<i>Siheyuan</i>	<i>Machiya</i> and <i>Nagaya</i>
<b>(Good) Location</b>	Influenced by Geomancy		
	Rivers in the front and mountains at the back	Place near water that blocks winds	Place near water, away from volcanic mountains
<b>House Designs</b>	Reflecting the family structure based on Confucian thoughts		
	Emphasis on main line of descent → Housing with distinction of gender and generation	Branch families living in one household → Single housing that separates different generations	One building separated by sliding doors → No separated room for women
<b>Feature of Houses</b>	Nature-friendliness	Self-similarity	Serve practical purpose of commerce
<b>Symbols of Houses</b>	<i>Daechong</i> and <i>Ondol</i> → Fusion of two heterogeneous lifestyles	<i>Guan</i> and <i>Xi</i> → close ties built inside the wall ( <i>Guanxi</i> )	<i>Tatamize</i> → Creative emulation



Mr. Kim Kyung Eun is the author of ‘The Dining Cultures of Korea, China and Japan’ which won 2012 honor award by Publication Industry Promotion Agency of Korea. Mr. Kim has written an in-depth news articles on cultures among China, Japan and Korea at Kyunghyang Shinmun. His interest in life cultures of the three countries started from his annual report on ‘Korean Food and Korean Wave’ at Kyunghyang Weekly. He had long been worked as a reporter at Younghan Daily, and currently is the editor of Kyunghayng Shinmun

### Three Strands of Asia Overview

	Date	Theme	Speaker
Lecture One	2014.2.13	Written Scripts	Professor Emmanuel Pastreich Kyung Hee University
Lecture Two	2014.3.13	Housings	Mr. Kim Kyung Eun Editor of Kyunghayng Shinmun
Special Lecture	2014.4.14	The Making of Northeast Asia	Professor Kent Calder Johns Hopkins University
Lecture Three	2014.5.20	Court Music	Professor Song Hye Jin Sookmyung Womens' University
Lecture Four	2014.6.25	Implication of Confucianism	Professor Shing Jung Geun, Sunkyunkwan University
Lecture Five	2014.7.17	Tea Cultures	Ms. Muramatsu Kanako Chief Representative, Urasenke Seoul Branch
Lecture Six	2014.9.23	Calligraphy	Mr. Ye Xin Board member, Chinese Culture Center at Seoul



Three Strands of Asia is the monthly lecture series by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) started from February, 2014. This lecture series brings together experts of China, Japan and Korea to explain various aspects of the cultures and societies of the three countries from a comparative perspective. This event is aimed at encouraging balanced and thoughtful understanding of the three countries by investigating similarities and differences.

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