Dongdaemun, a traditional market place wearing a modern suit: the importance of the social fabric in physical redevelopments

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Received 28 October 2002; received in revised form 10 January 2003; accepted 20 February 2003

Abstract

The loss of economic and social vitality in traditional city centers is a serious problem for many municipalities and planners. To solve this problem, many “redevelopment” policies have been established and carried out, but often these have not been effective. One case of commercial area redevelopment that is worthy of careful examination is Dongdaemun, a 100-year-old market place in Korea that has been revitalized by supporting and conserving merchant organizations instead of total redevelopment and transformation for other uses. This case demonstrates the importance of the social fabric in revitalization, and shows that total redevelopment for new uses is not necessarily the best method. Redevelopment of city centers usually concentrates too much on spatial transformation and neglects the importance of the existing social fabric; these traditional social fabrics have a latent energy that has accumulated over time. This paper attempts to show that this latent energy can be conserved and enhanced to revitalize old commercial areas.

Keywords: Redevelopment; Rehabilitation; Traditional market; Seoul; Korea

1. Introduction

As in many other Asian cities, the city center of Seoul was occupied by many traditional market places that had formed as a spontaneous aggregation of individual merchants at suitable points. The rapid modernization of cities in this developing country has caused the traditional market places to decline in importance. Traditional markets dealt primarily with goods produced or
distributed personally by the merchants themselves and were not adaptable to modern mass production and distribution systems. The appearance of chain stores and supermarkets that originated in developed western countries were a determining cause of this decline. As a result, many traditional market places disappeared, and the remaining ones showed a clear decline in economic vitality. Also, traditional markets began to disappear as the pressure toward redevelopment increased. In Korea, much of the traditional city center has been changed into office buildings or modern commercial facilities by central city redevelopment. During this redevelopment phase, the remaining large traditional markets were viewed as important targets for revitalization and thus became part of the governmental redevelopment plan.

These attempts to revitalize the old marketplaces do not appear to have been successful. But there is one exception: Dongdaemun market. Like many others, this traditional market place was losing commercial vitality. However, in contrast to the failure of other attempts at market place redevelopment, this market was not only revitalized by its redevelopment but grew to exceed its former size. In fact, it now affects the entire clothing industry of Korea, as well as the clothing markets of other Asian countries. The revitalization of this old market place has exerted a great influence on the old city center, attracting many citizens and tourists into the area.

Thus, the case of the Dongdaemun market is worthy of careful research in respect of urban issues such as redevelopment of traditional markets and revitalization of the old city center. This comprehensive study examines the revitalization of this market and considers the implications with respect to urban planning and redevelopment. An investigation of the historical background and the process of change are included. The main issues to be surveyed include the origin and growth of this market place, the change in its commercial organization, and, most importantly, the method and process of the redevelopment. Through the study of these issues, and a comparison with other traditional markets in Seoul, we hope to discover the factors that contribute to the uniqueness of this market and its successful revitalization.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section is a historical overview of the urban commercial area in Seoul; this information is useful for understanding the commercial scene in Korea. The second section is a brief history of Dongdaemun marketplace and related issues. The third section examines the main factors in the revitalization of this market.

2. The general trend of changing urban commercial areas in Korea

To bring into focus the uniqueness of Dongdaemun market, we first need to examine the meaning of the traditional market in Korean culture, and the tendency for commercial centers to form in the city center. An important factor of change in the central commercial area in Seoul is its rapid redevelopment for modern business-related uses.

2.1. Existing commercial facilities: traditional markets

Korea has experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization, and the central area of Seoul was rapidly modernized in the last 20–30 years. As in most Asian countries, commercial facilities called “traditional markets” were located in the old city center. Traditional markets in Korea generally dealt with goods made by small producers and distributed by small retailers, in contrast
to modern commercial facilities, which usually deal with the goods of large producers and distributors (Kim, 2001). Traditional markets are not wholly owned by large enterprises or merchants, but are composed of individual merchants and merchant groups. Merchants are relatively free to enter the market, choose their items, and sell their goods. In general, the differences between traditional and modern markets are not absolute, but in Korea these commercial facilities usually are clearly distinguishable; thus the distinction is useful.

Traditional markets started when individual merchants gathered around public squares, streets and major transportation hubs (Kim, 2001). In Seoul, there were two major tax-receipt locations about 100 years ago, in the Chosun dynasty period. These places, along with the neighboring streets, gradually began to be used as market places. This is how Dongdaemun market and the other market place, now called Namdaemun market (JungGu Ward Office, 2000), originated. There were also many other important market places for trading daily necessities. The traditional city center of Seoul was composed of these large market places and other official shops, and this condition continued into the early 20th century. From about the middle of the previous century, this traditional commercial area began to decline (Fig. 1).

2.2. Decline of traditional markets due to emerging modern commercial facilities

The role of traditional markets as the major trading centers for daily necessities completely changed after the industrialization of Korea. After the introduction of modern commercial facilities such as department stores, supermarkets, and shopping centers from western countries, traditional markets rapidly lost a portion of the daily necessity market.

In Fig. 2, wholesale/retail shops into traditional markets, department stores, supermarkets (only chain stores), and shopping centers are categorized. Only traditional markets show a continuous decrease in numbers, whereas the others have increased steadily. The rates of decrease and increase illustrated on the graph do not seem to be very severe, but if we consider the incompleteness of the statistics, the decline of traditional markets becomes clearer. First, supermarkets and shopping centers as considered here were the only chain stores, as private or individual stores were excluded from the statistics. It can therefore be supposed that the total

Fig. 1. A market place in the 19th Century and a current traditional market. The design of the shops and consumers’ behavior are not very different (source: http://www.namdaemun.com and author).
numbers of these two types were much higher than what is shown in Fig. 2. Furthermore, the numbers of private stores increased rapidly after the 1980s, while chain stores decreased from the late 1980s. Second, most traditional markets that remained after the fall of the central city traditional markets were small food and vegetable markets near the residential areas (Kim, 2001), and their total sales were not comparable to modern commercial facilities. In conclusion, while modern wholesale/retail markets and stores in Korea rapidly increased and became more developed from the 1970s, traditional markets gradually lost their market share, especially after the demise of the large clothing markets in the city center. Within 20 years the Dongdaemun and Namdaemun markets, large traditional markets in the city center, were recognized as failing traditional markets.

2.3. City center redevelopment

As stated above, there has not been any clear modernization of traditional commercial facilities in Korea. It was not that the traditional markets became modernized and changed into modern commercial facilities, but rather that the traditional markets gradually disappeared while modern commercial facilities grew rapidly. In other words, there was no continuous development of commercial facilities from traditional market to modern market. It is notable that the redevelopment of the old city center of Seoul was another important factor in the disappearance of the traditional market.

The redevelopment of the traditional center during the 1960s and 1970s was particularly influential. Fig. 3 is a map of the traditional city center of Seoul, which is called the “inside area of four main gates”. This area has been the center of Seoul since the establishment of the Chosun dynasty and there have been many official and unofficial markets in this area. Wide streets, such as JongRo and NamdaemunRo, were occupied by merchants and also served as market places. This commercial center tradition continued until the founding of the Republic of Korea. The

Fig. 2. Change in the number of each type of commercial facility (source: National Statistical Office, 1970–1992).
concentration of traditional markets in this area was clearly shown in an investigation made by the government in 1946. The total number of traditional markets in Seoul was 21, and 10 markets among them, about 50% of all markets, were concentrated in this area (JungGu Munhwawon, 2000) (Fig. 4).

This situation changed considerably during the rapid urban development of the 1960s and 1970s, and the most important cause of this change was the government’s city center redevelopment policy (The city Hall of Seoul, 1989). A series of redevelopment plans and
subdivision controls were made, and during this period the traditional commercial area underwent great changes in both spatial and functional respects. Small commercial areas at squares and streets were removed during redevelopment and replaced by large blocks and roads. With respect to land use, nearly all the small commercial areas were changed into large business facilities. Commercial land use, which had occupied about half of the area, decreased to about 30%, and business-related uses increased from 20% to 45% (Ohn, 1999, p. 28). Such a large reduction in commercial land use, in spite of the construction of modern commercial facilities, was surely due to the disappearance of the old commercial areas. The government’s aim with respect to land use was to decentralize traditional markets. That is, the government wanted to turn the central city into a modern and new center of Seoul and get rid of the traditional markets in the central area (JungGu Munhwawon, 2000), which were considered to be out of date.

As a result of this redevelopment, the traditional city center of Seoul changed into large blocks of big office buildings (Ohn, 1999); old commercial areas located here vanished or were moved to an outer area. Two large traditional markets (Dongdaemun and Namdaemun) managed to survive this redevelopment process, but they also came under pressure from commercial area redevelopment goals. These direct governmental interventions caused traditional markets to decline more rapidly, and the remaining traditional markets seemed to disappear or change into modern shopping centers (Fig. 5).

3. A brief history of Dongdaemun market

3.1. Beginning and decline

The area occupied by Dongdaemun market is a historic commercial area dating back 100 years. After it was designated as the center for tax receipts, and as civil trading began in the late

\[\text{Relocation of traditional markets from the central city area to outer areas is a common phenomenon in many Asian countries (Chen & Tao, 1999; Apiwat, 1999).}\]
19th century, this area naturally became a large market place (JungGu Ward Office, 2000). Nevertheless, the name and the boundaries of the market were not yet fixed. The area was clearly recognized as a market place during the Korean War (1950–1953), as refugees began to gather here to do business with one another. In the 1960s, when supermarkets, chain stores, department stores and shopping centers were introduced, Dongdaemun market lost a large part of its market share and, as a result, it shrank considerably (SeoulHak Institute, 1998, p.45–47).

However, in the mid-1960s, Korea became a textile and clothing exporter and the activity of the clothing industry increased. This was an opportunity for Dongdaemun market to survive as a traditional clothing market. Due to this change, some of the market’s commercial vitality was restored. But a sudden change in the international clothing market created a crisis (Lee, 1993). As the cost for clothing imports increased, developed countries began to take back the clothing industry in the mid-1980s. This change made the Korean clothing industry turn away from the international market to the domestic market. Dongdaemun market was then mainly dealing with domestic clothing distribution and the increased competition from clothing enterprises in the domestic clothing market was a considerable setback. Dongdaemun market gradually decayed and became known only as a low-priced clothing market (Kang, 1995). Along with the city center redevelopment, this market place came under the pressure of commercial area redevelopment in the late 1960s, and was finally redeveloped from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

3.2. Revitalization after redevelopment: from the 1980s to 1990s

Dongdaemun market was redeveloped differently from other market places. Redevelopment was accomplished gradually through the late 1970s. After the redevelopment, the market place consisted of several buildings, but there were no signs of revitalization or economic growth. Some of these buildings were used as textile factories until the late 1980s (Kim, 1999). Unexpectedly, this market place began to show clear signs of revitalization after the late 1980s, and the area began to acquire an unprecedented commercial vitality. Many new market buildings were constructed, and the number of shops increased again. The merchants there began to show greater activity, since they could plan positively for the future. They began to produce their own goods (Kim, 2000). The most important development was the enlarged commercial influence of this market. The market began to expand to other commercial areas, not only into local but into foreign commercial areas as well, by both direct and indirect channels (Kim, 2000). As a result, this market place is now composed of 33 market buildings and over 30,000 shops. The goods produced and distributed by the diverse production routes here are considered to be well-fitted to changing fashion trends. The total number of visitors per day is estimated to be over 2 million. According to 1999 data, total sales from a popular market building (M market) in Dongdaemun totaled 700 billion won (about US$600 million) (Kim, 2000), close to that of the largest department store in Korea (820 billion won). The total sales from the whole market were estimated to be over 10 trillion won (US$8.5 billion), or 40 billion won (US$34 million) per day. Total exports from Dongdaemun market were estimated to be US$2 billion per year in 1999. During the same year, total exports of all other

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3 According to an interview with old merchants here, shops dealing with vegetables and foods rapidly went out of business, and clothing shops increased in the mid-1960s. In the early 1970s, this market completed its transformation into a clothing market.
clothing enterprises and markets in Korea totaled US$6.5 billion (Kim, 2000). These facts indicate not only revitalization, but also an unprecedented success as a traditional market.

The success of this market became an issue of interest in Korea. First, it is remarkable that a traditional market could exceed the large department stores in total sales, given that traditional markets normally decline in the face of such competition. Second, it is remarkable that a traditional market could expand its role into international exports; the traditional markets of the past had been domestic, local markets. Currently, Dongdaemun market is not a declining traditional market but one that is recognized as the only one of its kind to be on an equal footing with modern commercial facilities, and as such it serves as a new model for advanced traditional markets.

3.3. The present features of Dongdaemun market

To examine the present features of this market place, it will be helpful to understand the cause of its revitalization. Dongdaemun market began as a traditional market, and now it is the only example of a traditional market that was successfully revitalized in Korea. As a result, Dongdaemun market now seems to be a new kind of commercial facility: neither a wholly traditional market nor a modern shopping center, but a third kind of market—a traditional market in its social and functional organization, but a modern commercial facility with respect to spatial and marketing considerations.

3.3.1. Commercial system: traditional system and marketing

Traditional markets were composed of individual merchants who freely entered the market and organized themselves into merchant organizations. As stated above, this is the distinguishing feature of a traditional market in Korea, compared to modern commercial facilities. In the case of Dongdaemun market, this feature has been well maintained (Kim, 2001). Most shops are managed by merchant organizations, which are like small companies. Goods traded here are not produced by outside enterprises but by the independent planning and production systems of the merchant organizations. These merchant organizations have long been the main body of Dongdaemun market, and they now have the ability to design their own goods (Kim, 2001, 2000). Small clothing factories and transport companies are located nearby, supporting these merchant organizations. With their support, this market place remains independent of the mass-production system of large clothing enterprises. There is no mass production or large distribution system, but the combined effect of these organizations yields a competitiveness that seems to exceed that of large enterprises (Kim, 2000). Hence, this commercial system, which consists of individual merchant organizations, is very similar to that of traditional markets (Kim, 2001) (Fig. 6).

On the basis of this traditional commercial system, a new and modern feature was added in the late 1990s. Dongdaemun market was the first to use the concept of marketing within a traditional market structure. The markets within the large buildings, constructed in the 1990s, were the first to explore this path. These new “building markets” were established by gathering merchants from the existing markets, and they maintain the basic commercial system. The difference was

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4 About nine large markets were built after 1990 and the investor companies of these markets range from local distribution companies to large enterprises.
that they adopted a marketing approach for the whole building. They advertised the building markets as if they were a “brand,” they supplied convenience facilities such as parking spaces and event places, and they began to manage their customers. The idea of “total marketing” as customer management and sales promotion had been missing from traditional markets. But Dongdaemun market seemed to overcome this problem by bringing in the investor companies, who knew how to market without disturbing the basic commercial system of the traditional market (Fig. 7).

3.3.2. Spatial features

The existing traditional markets had an “open” structure. Most shops were open to streets and squares, and there were many street stalls. The proportion of fixed structures was very low. Thus, it can be said that the traditional markets were spatially “open and non-fixed” (Kim, 1999). In contrast, modern commercial facilities such as department stores, shopping centers, and discount stores usually have a “closed and fixed” spatial type. In this type of commercial facility, all the commercial activities are done in indoor space. As a result of their continuous improvement, the market buildings in Dongdaemun are far more modern and comfortable in this spatial aspect. All the market buildings in the present Dongdaemun market are now of the closed type and, as illustrated in Fig. 8, their exterior shapes are the same as that of large department stores.

However, the basic feature of the traditional market’s spatial context has been retained within the building. The inner spatial pattern of these market buildings reflects their heritage in the traditional markets of the past. The average plot for shops in the market buildings in Dongdaemun is small (less than 5 m²), as in the existing traditional markets, and hundreds of

![Diagram of the commercial system of the new markets established in the early 1990s](source: author)
small shops are densely concentrated in each story of the building. The overall distribution pattern of the shops also reflects the heritage of the past traditional markets. The shops are arranged on both sides of narrow, closed passages (Kim, 1999) and overall behavior of clerks and customers is almost the same as in the traditional markets of the past. In other words, inside the modern
high-rise, closed buildings are open shops arranged linearly, as in traditional markets: a combination of the old and the new.

Table 1 shows both features of this market; the old and the new. The remarkable point is that this market’s traditional social features, like the commercial system, have been conserved well, and this makes the market a combination of the old and the new. The traditional market’s social features are still alive in a modern physical suit, using some new commercial techniques.

4. Factors in revitalization

As stated above, many redevelopment plans were initiated to revitalize the old market places, but among these, only Dongdaemun market seems to have been genuinely revitalized, even though other market places seemed more promising at first. These other market places are not considered to be successful. They remained traditional market places or were transformed for other uses. What was the difference between the redevelopment of Dongdaemun and other markets?

4.1. The main factor in the revitalization: a unique commercial system

Because so few revitalization plans have been successful, the case of Dongdaemun market has been the subject of various studies over the past few years to discover the effects of this revitalization. Some researchers consider the success of this market to parallel the success of modern commercial facilities. Dongdaemun market seems to be another kind of a modern commercial facility or urban manufacturing system (Kim, 1999). However, this view concentrates mostly on the modern aspects of Dongdaemun, such as the modern shape of the market buildings, marketing methods, and total sales, and misses the essential difference between Dongdaemun market and a modern department store: the basic commercial system that is the essential feature of traditional markets.

Many other views and research that do consider the historic aspects of Dongdaemun take into account the commercial system, which can generate great commercial diversity. They insist that the unique commercial system in Dongdaemun market was highly flexible, which enabled the customers to have a wide diversity of goods to choose from. This fact became clear after the late
1980s. Kim (2000) emphasized the fact that Dongdaemun market is not merely a selling place, but an aggregation of groups of merchants. These units are the merchant organizations that can afford to plan, produce, and sell their own goods. He insisted that Dongdaemun market is essentially composed of small commercial units, which have the advantage of being adaptable to market trends, having a very rapid and flexible process, from decision-making and production to final sale. This advantage cannot be copied by large enterprises, which have long decision-making processes. The commercial system in Dongdaemun market had the strengths of small units, and at the same time, overcame the disadvantage of small units by gathering into a single marketplace. Kim (2000) concentrated on the effects generated by the large-scale aggregation of these small commercial units, and adopted the concept of the “learning region” to explain the effects. Such large-scale concentration encourages organization and changes the participants into a “learning group” that can own jointly the newest information about the clothing market. Concentrated merchants are not a single enterprise or united group, but the learning effect among them lets them act like a large commercial system. Kim (2001) investigated the role of these merchant organizations in Dongdaemun and showed their historic development phases. Merchants began to organize themselves after the late 1960s, and developed from “simple groups of merchants in the same market” to “merchant associations” that have their own planning, production, and selling systems. He also emphasized the fact that the organization of merchants happened mainly in Dongdaemun, but not in other market places.

To summarize, the unique commercial system, composed of many merchant organizations, has been commonly thought to be the primary factor in the revitalization of this market place. This unique commercial system was not created recently but has its origins in the traditional markets of the past and has evolved over a long period of time. Why is it that this unique commercial system has been maintained only in Dongdaemun market, and not in other redeveloped markets? The answer can be found by investigating the redevelopment plan of traditional market places in the 1960s and its influence.

4.2. The modernization plan of traditional markets in the 1960s

Nearly all of the large market places were redeveloped in accord with a government plan and the Dongdaemun market was no exception. But why was only Dongdaemun market revitalized? What was the difference between the redevelopment of this market place and others?

There were large-scale redevelopment projects of the city center in the 1960s and 1970s, and as a part of this, The Modernization Plan of Traditional Markets (1968) was established. The Modernization Plan greatly influenced traditional markets in both spatial and social terms. Here, the method of applying this Modernization Plan to Dongdaemun market and other market places is examined.

4.2.1. The modernization plan in 1968

In the late 1960s, the government of Korea began to redevelop traditional market places, which seemed to be in decline, as a part of city center redevelopment projects. A total of eight market places in Seoul were included in this project, and Dongdaemun and Namdaemun markets, located in the city center, were considered to be significant targets. This project, the Modernization Plan
of Major Traditional Markets in Seoul, was applied to these eight markets (The Association of Distribution Industry in Korea, 1998).

The first market place to which this plan was applied was Namdaemun market. The modernization plan for this market was published as a report by the City Hall of Seoul and was used as a model for other market redevelopment (The City Hall of Seoul, 1968). According to this report, “the physical falling behind” and “jumbling up of petty merchants” of traditional markets were defined as the most serious problems threatening revitalization. This recognition had something in common with the city center redevelopment policy in those days. The name “modernization plan” also reflected the Government’s intention to “clear the declined and outdated relics” and “build a new and modern urban environment.” It was connected to two prior aims in the “modernization plan of Namdaemun market”: (1) Spatial transformation into a tall, modern commercial center, and (2) developing a system of control over merchants by establishing a central management company.

Fig. 9 shows the character of this plan, which aimed at a large, modern, and interconnected market building, a spatial transformation into a tall, megastructure building. This redevelopment also strongly influenced its social transformation. In accord with objective 2, a central management company was established. However, this office was not just a supporting facility, but a union of landlords of the marketplace. The purpose of this management system was to make an association between the landlords and the governor. Remarkably, no individual merchant or merchant organization was included here. This was the first step to clear the petty merchants from the marketplace.

This plan was applied, with some modifications. The central management company was established before redevelopment, and as expected, many small merchants were expelled; this gave rise to merchant demonstrations and caused many related problems (ChoSun IlBo, 1968). When the redevelopment was completed, Namdaemun market was a centralized market, where the central management office controlled all the shops. As a result of the change, free merchant commercial activity was curtailed. Interviews with old merchants in this market revealed that at
this point many merchants moved to Dongdaemun market, where commercial activity was less controlled, even right after this redevelopment. Other large traditional markets included in the modernization plan had gone through a similar process to that undergone by Namdaemun market. Large traditional markets in the city center were completely redeveloped, which brought the collapse or relocation of the existing merchants of each market.

4.2.2. The redevelopment of Dongdaemun market

Dongdaemun market was not redeveloped in the same way as the other markets. It was included in the modernization plan in the beginning, but was later excluded (Kim, 2001). The most important reason was the high level of independence of each market in this market place; Dongdaemun market was not a concentrated market, but was scattered around the Dongdaemun area. Thus, redeveloping this market into one large market building, as in Namdaemun, was difficult. Besides, Dongdaemun was independently managed, and changing it into a centralized market was difficult. Consequently, the government eventually excluded Dongdaemun market from its list of eight major traditional markets to be redeveloped in the modernization plan and reluctantly searched for a new way to redevelop Dongdaemun (The Annual Record of Namdaemun Market, no date).

Eventually, the government decided to redevelop each market independently, on a small scale, in a step-by-step process. This was considered to be the second-best policy, and was not carried out as officially as the policy for Namdaemun market. No report was published, and the government did not officially announce the redevelopment aims and process. But two clear features can be found in this redevelopment (Kim, 2001): (1) gradual redevelopment, and (2) participation of the existing merchants and merchant organizations. This second feature was very unusual, considering the past dislike of the government for the small merchants in the traditional market. The government apparently saw this participation as necessary for accomplishing the redevelopment of the distributed markets, and it could only allow the merchants in each market to organize themselves and let them lead the redevelopment of their own market. We can also suppose that the resistance and merchant demonstrations in Namdaemun market must have influenced the government’s attitude. Thus, unlike Namdaemun, Dongdaemun market was not centralized, and even small merchants would join the redevelopment process as a part of the merchant organizations (Kim, 2001). The project was a long and gradual process. Having begun with the construction of PyungHwa market, the redevelopment of Dongdaemun market continued until the 1970s. By the mid-1970s, nearly all the markets had moved into newly constructed buildings, but the construction of new market buildings continued even into the 1990s.

An example of a market that was not finished in a single phase is illustrated in Fig. 10. The market building, constructed in the 1960s, has been improved and upgraded even after the redevelopment. These are the characteristics of the redevelopment of Dongdaemun market—continual and gradual improvement, as opposed to that of Namdaemun market, which was redeveloped in a single grand project. Furthermore, the merchants of Dongdaemun were not dispersed during the redevelopment process. Rather, they activated and organized themselves to gain political power (Kim, 2001). Merchant organizations in Dongdaemun market maintained full commercial control during the redevelopment, thanks to the government’s policy of admitting the participation of all merchants. As a result of this participation, Dongdaemun has been
managed by a self-governing system of merchants. One result was that the main body of this market was not much changed before and after the redevelopment. It can be surmised that the unique commercial system of Dongdaemun market originated in the merchant organizations that were formed before and during the redevelopment period.

4.3. Comparison of the two markets’ redevelopment and the results

In terms of housing or community redevelopment, a kind of “gentrification” was applied to the case of Namdaemun market, and “rehabilitation” to Dongdaemun market. To be sure, the physical aspect of Dongdaemun was also redeveloped, but the social pattern of this market, was well protected as in rehabilitation. This difference influenced merchants’ behavior and had profound effects. As stated above, this commercial system, made by the concentration of diverse merchant organizations, was a major factor in the success of this market place, and it was already latent in the choice of redevelopment methods. The merchants in Dongdaemun were given a chance to improve their commercial system, whereas merchants in Namdaemun were not. In addition, the modernization plan for Namdaemun was not very effective in accomplishing the original purpose; it is rather Dongdaemun market that was successful in modernization and revitalization (Table 2).

How this difference influenced the growth of each market is also clear in the comparison of the change in total floor area. As shown in Fig. 11, Namdaemun market’s spatial growth nearly stopped after the late 1960s, when the redevelopment was finished, whereas Dongdaemun market has been continuously growing.5 These different growth trends are the result of

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5 Because traditional markets are not “official,” there are no exact economical growth data. But the difference of spatial growth can be an indirect evidence of the two markets’ economic growth.
different methods of redevelopment. Namdaemun market was totally redeveloped all at once and was spatially fixed afterward. On the other hand, Dongdaemun market continuously grew due to the partial and gradual redevelopment method. Second, this also shows clear revitalization of Dongdaemun market and the concentration of merchant organizations into this market afterwards. This change happened exactly after the completion of the redevelopment plan (1968–1970).

As a final point, we can see the irony in comparing the two markets after the redevelopment. Namdaemun market, which was redeveloped by a large revitalization project conceived by the government, did not seem to be revitalized or modernized. In contrast, although Dongdaemun market was dealt with through a second-best policy, it seems to be both revitalized and modernized. The irony lies in the disparity between the aim of the plan and its results. What is important is that, albeit by the second-best policy, the redevelopment of Dongdaemun maintained the latent merits of traditional markets, and it did not destroy the worthy part of the social fabric. Dongdaemun’s success can be a good lesson to the Korean redevelopment policy, which has been too much inclined to physical reformation. Redevelopment plans without careful consideration of social aspect, can be mere ineffective transformations of buildings.

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Table 2
Comparison of the redevelopment methods and results of the two markets

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<th>Namdaemun market</th>
<th>Dongdaemun market</th>
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<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Complete, total redevelopment</td>
<td>Partial, gradual redevelopment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>Physically, socially centralized market</td>
<td>Combined market of individual markets</td>
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<td>Main groups</td>
<td>Government, landowners</td>
<td>Merchant associations of each market</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gentrification</td>
<td>Rehabilitation</td>
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<td>Centralized market</td>
<td>Combined market</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interruption in the continuous growth of existing merchants</td>
<td>Continuous growth of existing merchant organizations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No further spatial reformation</td>
<td>Continuous spatial reformation</td>
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Fig. 11. The change of the total floor area in each market (source: Son, 2001).
5. Conclusions

This study has investigated the historical background and the main aspects of revitalization of a successful traditional market. Remarkably, the traditional commercial system of Dongdaemun market place, composed of the merchant community, has not been eliminated but maintained, and it has even evolved to adopt modern forms, such as a grand architectural structure and a marketing system. This maintenance of the commercial system became the main factor in revitalization. The uniqueness of Dongdaemun market lies here, and that is why we call this market “a traditional market wearing a modern suit”. This was possible because the redevelopment of this market was not carried out in the same way as the redevelopment of other traditional markets. The essential cause of the success of this market was that the spatial changes have been carried out without harming the existing social pattern—the commercial organizations of the merchants.

There are several important implications of this investigation. The first concerns the need for balance between past conditions and future aims in redevelopment planning or policy for revitalization of an old area. Numerous cities have undertaken a redevelopment policy to revitalize their declining city centers or commercial areas but many have not been very successful. This failure is usually a result of a badly conceived plan, with insufficient attention given to the balance between the existing environment and future aims. Such plans attempt to turn the declining area into a completely new and revitalized environment without securing and preserving its essential energy, such as found in its social structure and economic situation, to enhance the area. At worst, this attempt at revitalization can even destroy an existing urban fabric or social community without any fruitful results (Cohen, 1999, p. 15). The results of this failure are neither a future as planned nor the maintenance of the past condition but a useless status between these. To emphasize, it is not necessary always to orient ourselves to the future at the expense of the past. Sometimes successful revitalization can be achieved by conservation of the past or in a combination of the past and the future. Revitalization does not need to be a total conversion of the past status into a new one. In fact, if we can find something of continuing value in an existing situation, it can be a safe and effective way to adapt the latent power of the past within the framework of modern development. Dongdaemun market place, where the conservation of the traditional commercial system served as the key to revitalization, is an example of this.

Second, how important is the social context for revitalization? The urban physical environment cannot be differentiated from the social environment, and every environment has a social context. But sometimes redevelopment policies are so focused on physical aspects that the social aspect of the redevelopment is often forgotten. Valuable social constituents can even be destroyed by the policies. Policies of redevelopment and revitalization deal with existing areas, and are not creations of a completely new area. Thus, in making a policy or plan, it is highly important to understand the existing social constituents and deal with them appropriately. Although it was a result of the second-best policy, which was not thought to be pertinent at that time, Dongdaemun succeeded in maintaining the favorable social resources and could be revitalized through them. This unexpected success suggests that redevelopment policy should not be focused only on physical reformation, but be sensitive to the existing social context and the latent merits of it.

Third, it is necessary to improve the models and methods of redevelopment. In particular, it is necessary to develop a methodology for matching valuable social constituents such as historical
activity, commercial systems, and community with the framework of new development. In this respect, it can be said that the case of Dongdaemun, “physically, it is a redevelopment, but socially, it is rehabilitation” (Choi and Na, 1999, p. 47).

Certainly, it is improper to judge the case of Dongdaemun as a success or a failure of a redevelopment policy. Nevertheless, the success of this unintended policy shows the subtlety of the issues surrounding redevelopment and revitalization projects, and much can learned from it. It is necessary to learn to deal with this subtlety, which can be done by examining the whole situation, including not only the physical but also the social aspects of the redevelopment area. There are many subtle, and even invisible, things that need to be taken into account when planning a site within an existing historic area, and strategies should developed to deal with them.

Acknowledgements

The research in this paper was supported by the BK21 (Brain Korea 21) program. The authors acknowledge the helpful comments of the two referees.

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**Further reading**

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