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The Study of Housing-Related Taboos in Korea and Mongolia[1]

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Ⅰ. Introduction

Housing-related taboos in Korea and Mongolia reflect their long experience in their natural environment and their wisdom in overcoming adversities. Unlike proverbs or maxims, taboos represent the experiences of people themselves, believed and recognized directly in their daily lives. Therefore, housing-related taboos in Korea, which is a settled culture, and Mongolia, which is a nomadic one, vary in their expressions and symbolic systems—the two societies have different common laws, religions, politics, and sociocultural features.

Taboos are very important moral and behavioral norms in Korean and Mongolian societies. The two nations have emphasized customs since ancient times, so that they have quite often considered their behaviors in daily life in connection with lucky or unlucky signs. It is for this reason that their common laws could help each society's members recover feelings, emotions, and morals.

The underlying meanings of the common laws of both agricultural people and nomadic tribes have remained unchanged, although some of the laws' modern, current manifestations and contents have changed since historic times. Thus, taboos were aimed not at preventing dishonesty but at shoring up certain behaviors so that members of a society could live better lives. These taboos reflect the wisdom of the ancestors.

Housing-related taboos, formed based on the common laws of Korea and Mongolia, differ in their linguistic aspects according to their cultural or religious differences: Whereas Korean taboos have linguistic aspects related to settlement culture and Confucian ideas, Mongolian ones have linguistic aspects related to nomadic culture and Buddhist thoughts.

Taboos are originally related to a country's primitive beliefs or superstitions. This concept applies to Korean and Mongolian taboos as well. Historically and traditionally, Korean and Mongolian societies have been considered to have closely related seasonal customs.

Given that a society's customs reflect its inhabitants' internal concerns, the linguistic aspects of housing-related taboos in Korea and Mongolia can be said to reflect and be influenced by the ways of thinking of people in settled societies versus those of the people of nomadic societies.

This paper aims to identify Korean and Mongolian housing-related value systems by analyzing the semantic systems and expressions of housing-related taboos in Korea and Mongolia, which both retain old forms of North-eastern Asian cultures.[2]

Ⅱ. Comparison of housing-related taboo words in Korea and Mongolia

Korean and Mongolian traditional houses are in harmony with the natural environment. Korean traditional houses provide a "half-open" space (Yun, 2004, 99–106) in which their structures look open but also closed. The basic unit is the community, called a village, where families settle down and establish bonds with family members, relatives, and, furthermore, neighbors.

Mongolian traditional houses have a fence, which is also in harmony with and open to nature: it may be said to be a form of house that considers the given environment and nature.

In other words, both Korean and Mongolian traditional houses are forms of fully open houses with few boundaries, in that they have walls and doors, but they are not isolated from the outer world because the walls are low and the doors are easy to open.

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[2] For the housing-related taboos in Korea and Mongolia, this paper referred to Choi (1995); Namz'il (2005); Nyambuu, and Nacag-dorz' (1993); Zang (2005); and Lee (2005).

This section will investigate the folklore of the housing space embedded in daily life by analyzing housing-related taboos in Korea and Mongolia that seem to have a long history.

1) Taboos Related to Other People's Houses

Korean and Mongolian people have traditionally observed proper decorum when they visit other people's houses or greet visitors. Korean people tend to settle down in one place and establish strong bonds with their communities as well as with family members and relatives through community life.

On the other hand, Mongolian people lead nomadic lives in which they share lands while forming timely bonds with family members, relatives, and neighbors.

Category	Korean: *jib* (house)	Mongolian: *ail* (house)
Relationships to other people's homes	• If you pass urine in other people's houses, you are supposed to visit there again. • If you clip your nails in other people's houses, you will be their enemy in heaven. • If you block the door of other people's homes with your arms, it will bring bad luck to the house. • If a woman visits other people's houses early in the morning, it is harmful to the house. • If you borrow fire from other people's houses, it will bring bad luck to the house. • If you draw water from other people's houses after sunset, it will bring bad luck to the house. • If you draw water from other people's houses early in the morning, you will become a beggar.	• If a ceiling cover is closed in the middle of the day, you should not visit the house.[1] • You should not bring a gun, knife, or whip when you visit other people's homes.[2] • You should not fold your arms or fold your hands behind your back in other people's houses. • You should not visit other people's house with empty-handed. • If you sleep in other people's homes on New Year's Eve, your soul will be lost. • You should not visit other people's homes on New Year's Eve. • You should not take off your hat when you visit other people's houses. • You should not unbuckle your belt when you visit other people's houses.

As shown above, many taboos in both Korea and Mongolia strengthen bonds with neighbors and put emphasis on the common laws and norms of communities. The main difference between them is that whereas Korean taboos emphasize Confucian common law, such as the division of space between women and men and manners toward neighbors, Mongolian taboos, which are based on long nomadic traditions, emphasize manners related to clothing and etiquette towards neighbors.

2) Threshold-Related Taboos

Threshold-related taboos are prominent among data on taboos in Mongolian folklore. In both Korean and Mongolian houses, the threshold is treated with care because it is one of the most sacred spaces of the home, and it should not experience bad luck.

Category	Korean: *munjibang* (threshold)	Mongolian: *bosgo* (threshold)
Thresholds	• If you sit on the threshold on a rainy day, it will bring on the rainy season. • It is harmful to dig under the threshold. • If you have a meal sitting on the threshold, you will become a beggar.	• You should not step on the threshold.[3] • You should not sit on the threshold • You should not hang anything from the wood lintel. • If you stumble or almost stumble over the threshold, you should come back inside the house and put cow dung in the fire.

	• If you sit on the threshold, it will bring bad luck to the house. • If you use the threshold as a pillow, your mouth will be crooked. • If you step on the threshold, it will bring you bad luck. • If a woman sits on the threshold, it will bring bad luck to her husband. • If you put your bowl on the threshold, you will become deaf when you have a meal. • If you peel the threshold, you will have a rabbit-mouth. • If you look at someone from the threshold, the person will die. • If you step on the threshold in the morning, you will have bad luck. • If you step on the threshold in the evening, it will be harmful to your father. • If you sit on the threshold, the bank around a rice field will collapse. • If you chop at the threshold with a knife, it will bring bad luck.	• You should not hit the threshold with a bone or break a tree. • You should not sweep the dirt off the threshold. • If a string in front of the threshold is tied fast, you should not go inside the *ger*.[4]

Both Koreans and Mongolians have customs for respecting and worshipping the threshold and wood lintel; both nations made it a taboo to step on or sit on the threshold or hang anything from the wood lintel. The folk beliefs of the two nations about living space show sacredness and connection with the heaven of the threshold. We can see that they hold sacred the fire of a brazier and the threshold, as well as the ceilings and treat them all with care. The difference is that whereas the Korean threshold is considered the place where luck enters and exits because it is the space facing the room, the Mongolian threshold is connected with the neck of the owner of the *ger*.

3) Taboos regarding Chimneys and Pillars

Together with the ceiling, chimneys and pillars in both Korean and Mongolian homes are treated importantly because they are considered sacred and should not suffer bad luck. Throughout the ages, chimneys and pillars in both countries have been viewed as connecting the great universe and its transcendental power with the microcosm of the human world. They have also been passageways between this world and heaven: both societies believed that people went up to the sacred sky when they died.

Category	Korean: *gulttug* or *gidung*	Mongolian: *bagana* or *yandan*
Chimneys and pillars	• It is harmful to stand on a chimney or on the edges of eaves when a palanquin enters. • It brings bad luck if a chimney collapses. • Your child will die if a pillar collapses. • Misfortune will befall the family if a garden balsam's worm climbs a pillar. • You will die young if you sleep with your head toward a chimney.	• You should not lean against the *ger* or a pillar. • You should not cling to or embrace a pillar.[5] • On a day of thunder and lightning, you should open the door of the *ger* or lower the chimney of a brazier.[6]

As seen in the above taboos, pillars and chimneys in both Korean and Mongolian living spaces are considered sacred areas that should be treated carefully so they do not suffer bad luck.

Although pillars in Korea are emphasized as space through which good luck and both auspicious and evil energy enter and exit, in Mongolia they are emphasized as a medium that connects the world of human beings and heaven through ancestral gods that dwell in the pillars. This is why there is the Mongolian taboo that one should not cling to or embrace a pillar.

4) Taboos about Doors

Spaces for men and for women are properly balanced in traditional Korean homes. For instance, traditional Korean houses attempt to keep the harmony of *yin* and *yang* by arranging *sarangchae* (space for men) in the east and south and *anchae* (space for women) in the north and west.

In contrast, the Mongolian *ger* is divided into space to the right and to the left of the door at the south of the house. Tridimensionally, both men's and women's spaces seem to be near outer space, but when someone visits a house, the men's space is near the gate and the women's space is far from the gate. In other words, when outsiders visit a *ger*, they are supposed to start at the men's space, go through the elders' space at the north of the *ger*, and move to the women's space in the east of the *ger* to go outside. This means that the women's space is located in farther into the house than is the men's space.

Category	Korean: *mun*	Mongolian: *haalaga*
Doors	• It is harmful to hang a door in September. • You will become poor if you flourish a rice paddle toward a gate. • If you see into a room through a hole in a door, a person in the room will die. • It is harmful to place your shoes in the opposite direction of the door in a room. • If a coffin touches a door sill while it is being out, another person will die. • Your doors should remain open during the day. • You will live in poverty if your gate is closed in the middle of day. • Misfortune will befall a family if a gate is blocked. • You will have fewer offspring if you have your gate in the west. • Good luck comes in when you open your gate early in the morning. • It not good to have a gate in the north. • It is not good to build a gate in the east in spring, in the south in summer, in the west in autumn, and in the north in winter. • Sleep with your head toward the door will bring bad luck.	• A bad spirit comes in if you peek at a room through a chink in a door. • You should not lift the left side of the door in case of a felt door.[7] • Passing by the door of a house if you are not going to enter it is prohibited. • You should take a back street to get into a house. • When you travel a long distance, go from the left to the right of the *ger*. Then things will work out well for you.

The door, through which auspicious and evil spirits enter and exit the home, is a symbol of family protection. A common feature in Korean and Mongolian door-related taboos is placing the home's gate in the south. The gate is what leads to the house and thus the place through which good luck comes. People, good luck, bad luck, and even ancestors' spirits pass through gates to enter floors or rooms. Therefore, there are many taboos stating that it is better to have your door at the south of the house and to keep the gate open. The difference is that whereas while Mongolians emphasize direction (left is unlucky and right is lucky) when they enter and exit a home, Koreans distinguish between the good and the bad of all four directions based on the season.

5) Home- and Yard-Related Taboos

Korean and Mongolian taboos are related not only to the inner areas of living spaces but also the outer areas. Taboos concretely reveal living environments based on environmental and universal views, directions and bearings, and sex and status, all specific to both inner and outer areas.

Category	Korean: *jiban*	Mongolian: *geriindotor*
• Home	• You will not have good luck if you sweep a room right after a family member leaves it. • It is unlucky if you get worms in the house; you will become poor. • If you run out of matches or salt, you will not have good luck. • It is unlucky to have many spider webs in the house. • It is ominous to shoo away swallows that come into the house. • A family will suffer anxieties if there are many mice in the house. • If you sweep away dirt from the house when you sweep the yard, you will not have good luck. • It is harmful to have a royal foxglove tree in the house. • You should not bring into the house the body of someone who died away from home. • You have to make fire with straw and pass over it when you return from a funeral. • You should not throw out water in a courtyard on a memorial day. • It is harmful to give food through a window to a person in the room. • A ghost will enter if you hit bowls in a room. • It is bad to open umbrellas indoors. • You will become poor if you have a meal sitting on the edge of floor. • It is ominous to put a key on the floor. • It is harmful to sleep with your head on a warm spot. • You will lose good luck if you sweep a room after you have offered a sacrifice to spirits. • It is bad if the roots of a tree pass under the *gudeuljang* (the stone used for floor heating). • You will die young if you sleep with your head in the north. • You can avoid becoming ill if you break a large upside-down bowl outside the threshold when you remove a coffin from a room. • You should not wear a hat indoors. • You should not have two braziers or light two fires in one room.	• You should not throw garbage or dirty water away from the inside of the house. You should leave the house to discard garbage or wastewater. • You should not whistle in the house. • Don’t keep your house dark. • A person outside the house and a person inside the house should not talk to or call each other. • You should not sing or cry when you go to bed. • It is prohibited for younger people to enter a house first or for elders to exit the house first. • You should not bring water and firewood together into the house. • When relatives gather together, people on your father’s side should not have a seat first. • Someone who has buried a body should not immediately enter a house. • You should not sleep with your legs stretched toward another person’s head.

	• Misfortune befalls a family if a person in the main room and a person in the opposite room sleep one after another. • You should not sleep with your legs stretched toward another person's head.	

Both inside and outside of homes in Korea and Mongolia, living spaces are where life happens, microcosms where life and death, pleasure and sadness are mixed. This is to say, they are places where not only living people but also the dead coexist. The difference between those of Korea and those of Mongolia is that whereas Korean homes are complex living spaces where various house deities exist in harmony with each function and space, Mongolian living spaces is arranged mainly based on Buddhist gods.

6) Livestock-Related Taboos

Traditionally, Korean and Mongolian societies have special totemic beliefs related to livestock. Korean people believe that a bear is their ancestral god, as shown in Dangun mythology, and Mongolian people believe that a blue wolf and a white doe are their ancestral gods, as shown in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. Under the influence of these totemic beliefs, old customs and taboos still remain in daily life that regard and protect livestock as sacred things and symbols of good luck.

Each nomadic family in Mongolia usually raises more than two dogs, and each Korean farm raises more than one dog. Dogs bark at and attack visitors, but the visitors cannot wield a whip because it would be regarded as hitting the owner of the house. Hitting livestock is prohibited in both countries. A visitor who hits livestock will receive inhospitable treatment from the owner of the house.

In both countries, livestock can be given or traded. However, when a horse is given or sold, the owner is sure to remove a bit from the horse; the belief is that if you put a bit in your livestock, it will not reproduce. There is also an old custom in Mongolia that those who encounter horses or a flock of sheep on the road should make a detour so that those livestock will not be surprised.

Category	Korean: *gachuk*	Mongolian: *mal*
Livestock	• If another person's dog enters your house, misfortune follows. • If a dog digs under the floor, a bad crop follows. • It is harmful to a housewife if a dog digs in the floor of a kitchen. • A cow will be born if you put a stone with a hole in a barn. • If a family dog leaves a house, the family's misfortune will be cancelled out.	• It is prohibited to dismount from a horse in front of or to the left (east) of the *ger*, because the left is considered the owner's direction and the right is visitor's direction. • You should not pass the front of a gate on horseback. • It is prohibited to pass between two houses on horseback. • Dead sheep from a wolf bite or livestock being struck dead from lightning are considered ominous. Except for those in extreme poverty, people never eat these animals.

As seen above, livestock-related taboos are about dogs in Korea and horses in Mongolia. This is because these animals represent settlement culture and nomadic culture, respectively. Another difference is that whereas Mongolian taboos emphasize the direction of an animal, for instance, to the left (east) or the right (west), Korean taboos refer to being inside or outside of a house, that is, exiting and entering.

III. Conclusion: Comparison of the Consciousness Structures of the Housing-Related Taboos of the Two Countries

We have examined the similarities and differences between Mongolian and Korean superstitious idioms while referring to the sentence structure features of the Mongolian idioms. The basic and universal sentence structure of Mongolian taboos features the instructions, "Do not…or …will happen." In contrast, the basic structure of Korean taboos is that, "If…, you will…. "

The analysis of the consciousness structure of both countries' housing-related taboos are shown in the following table.

Housing-related taboo	Consciousness Structure			
	Korea	Mongolia	Similarities	Differences
Other people's homes	– mutual etiquette among neighbors – division of space between men and women – emphasis of confucian manners and norms	– clothing etiquette education – emphasis on etiquette among neighbors – emphasis on nomadic manners and norms	emphasis on mutual etiquette among neighbors	**Korea**: division of men's and women's spaces; emphasis on Confucian manners and norms **Mongolia**: emphasis on nomadic custom and norms
Thresholds	– etiquette education – prevention of carelessness – respect for shamanistic life	– residential life education – prevention of carelessness – emphasis on human dignity	– wish for blessings – prevention of carelessness – respect for life	**Korea**: Confucian respect for life **Mongolia**: shamanistic respect for life
Chimneys and pillars	– wishes for blessing – prevention of disasters	– etiquette education – prevention of disasters	– prevention of disasters	**Korea**: emphasis on health, wealth, gospel, and superstitions based on folk beliefs **Mongolia**: emphasis on superstitions based on shamanism
Doors	– wishes for blessing	– respect for common law	none	**Korea**: wishes for blessing **Mongolia**: respect for common laws and norms
Home and yard	– instillation of diligence – prevention of disasters – prevention of property loss	– etiquette education	none	**Korea**: prevention of disasters by emphasizing space **Mongolia**: respect for etiquette
Livestock	– respect for dwelling space – prevention of disasters	– prevention of disasters	– prevention of disaster	**Korea**: livestock is considered filthy and ominous **Mongolia**: farming is worshipped

In order to compare housing cultures between Korea and Mongolia, various detailed and regional approaches and comparisons detail are required. Among them, housing-related taboos, which are shared by individuals, families, and relatives, and which also constitute components of psychological culture, are essential areas for analysis when studying the two cultures.

Korea and Mongolia have different natural environments; they have developed the most suitable and refined taboos in the process of adjusting themselves to their environments through challenges and trial and error. Their folk cultures have been created in the process of understanding their natural environments, and the order of their respective nature and housing-related taboos constitute their cultures.

In terms of contents, Mongolian taboos reflect the Mongolian lifestyle and also provide a clue to identify what their lives are like. Therefore, this study meaningfully adopted a cognitive-linguistic approach to the analysis of

Korean and Mongolian taboos from the broader perspective of everyday rituals. This study will be the foundation for further discussion.

From this point of view, this study of Korean and Mongolian taboos, which show more diversity than any other country's taboos in their number and expressions, will enrich the study of Mongolian nomadic culture at a time when the concept of nomadic culture is being emphasized. This study is also expected to facilitate improvement-oriented exchanges between settlement culture and nomadic culture.

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(Footnotes)

1 If a ceiling cover is closed in the middle of the day, it means that someone died. Thus only relatives who are there for the funeral may visit the house.

2 Bringing weapons may be considered threatening to other people, so you should leave them on the ger outside the door.

3 Mongolians have avoided stepping on the threshold throughout the ages. Travelers who visited Mongolia in the Middle Ages made it a taboo to step on the threshold of a ger, particularly a khan's or commander's threshold. A legend says that stepping on the threshold is the same as stepping on the neck of the owner of the hous*e.*

4 This means that a dying person is taking a last comfortable rest, so you should not disturb the person. The string in front of the threshold also means infectious disease (Byambasu'ren, 2006).

5 Mongolians have a custom of respecting and worshipping pillars. They believe, in particular, that ancestor spirits dwells in pillars to which horses are chained.

6 Thunder and lightning represent the authority or anger of the heavenly gods in Mongolian shamanism. In particular, the death of livestock from being struck by lightning is regarded as an evil omen and rituals are conducted to remove bad luck. Dagur tribe shamans in inner Mongolia in the east sometimes raise the souls of animals who died from lightning and transmit their messages (Park, 1996).

7 Entering through the left side of a door was interpreted as having severed or intending to sever relations with the owner of the ge*r*.