The hasukjip: situation in 2020 in the Republic of Korea and abroad

El hasukjip: situación en la década de 2020 en la República de Corea y en el extranjero

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Abstract

The hasukiip (하숙집) is a form of small business in the South Korean cities. It consists of a house with a number (small hasukjip has near 10-20 rooms, but big- some dozens rooms or more) boarding rooms. Before the Coronavirus situation, any Korean and foreign students living in hasukjips and Koreans understood hasukjips only as a type of private dormitory, but if we examine the example of changes in hasukjips we can also consider trends in the Korean society. Although hasukips reflect elements and aspects of the various sides of the life in Korea, Korean and foreign scholars have not undertaken research on the situation of the hasukjip or changes in its history and this institution remains little-unknown in the Western academic world.

This work based on the sociological materials (these interviews took place in 2022). In this sociological interview for persons, who lived in the hasukjips, took part 184 Korean people and 20 foreigners. Moreover, an interview was conducted with masters of the hasukjip. In this event took part 50 persons. Lists of the interview and further information were added as attachments and some written works.

Methodological base of research consists of hermeneutic method, method of sociological survey, method of comparative analysis.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the evolving nature of hasukjips. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a significant

Resumen

El hasukjip (하숙집) es una forma de pequeña empresa en las ciudades de Corea del Sur. Consiste en una casa con varias habitaciones para huéspedes (el hasukjip pequeño tiene entre 10 y 20 habitaciones, pero el grande, algunas docenas o más). Antes de la situación del coronavirus, todos los estudiantes coreanos y extranjeros que vivían en hasukjips y los coreanos entendían los hasukjips sólo como una especie de dormitorio privado, pero si examinamos el ejemplo de los cambios en los hasukjips también podemos considerar las tendencias en la sociedad coreana. Aunque los hasukjip reflejan elementos y aspectos de los diversos aspectos de la vida en Corea, los académicos coreanos y extranjeros no han realizado investigaciones sobre la situación del hasukjip o los cambios en su historia y esta institución sigue siendo poco desconocida en el mundo académico occidental.

Este trabajo se basa en materiales sociológicos (estas entrevistas tuvieron lugar en 2022). En esta entrevista sociológica a personas que vivían en los hasukjips participaron 184 coreanos y 20 extranjeros. Además, se realizó una entrevista con maestros del hasukjip. En este evento participaron 50 personas. Se agregaron listas de la entrevista y más información como archivos adjuntos y algunos trabajos escritos.

La base metodológica de la investigación consta del método hermenéutico, el método de encuesta sociológica y el método de análisis comparativo.

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sample of residents and stakeholders to provide sociological insights into demographic shifts and housing trends. Questions in interviews were oriented not only for persons, who lived in hasukjip, because their answers in future can be useful for study of other aspects of Korean urban studies.

Comparative analysis was also undertaken to distinguish the structural and functional differences between hasukjips in Korea and similar housing models abroad.

The aim of this article is to consider modern situation of the hasukjip in Korea and abroad, its place in life of the Korean people.

Result of research are consideration of positive and negative changes in hasukjip to 2020s. under technical development, social tendencies, economic crisis and pandemic of coronavirus.

Keywords:

Korea; housing studies; economy; hasukjip; urban studies

La investigación empleó un enfoque de métodos mixtos para investigar la naturaleza evolutiva de los hasukjips. Los datos primarios se recopilaron a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con una muestra significativa de residentes y partes interesadas para proporcionar información sociológica sobre los cambios demográficos y las tendencias de vivienda. Las preguntas de las entrevistas no estaban orientadas sólo a las personas que vivían en hasukjip, porque sus respuestas en el futuro pueden ser útiles para el estudio de otros aspectos de los estudios urbanos coreanos.

También se llevó a cabo un análisis comparativo para distinguir las diferencias estructurales y funcionales entre los hasukjips en Corea y modelos de vivienda similares en el extranjero.

El objetivo de este artículo es considerar la situación actual del hasukjip en Corea y en el extranjero, y su lugar en la vida del pueblo coreano.

El resultado de la investigación es la consideración de los cambios positivos y negativos en hasukjip hasta la década de 2020. bajo desarrollo técnico, tendencias sociales, crisis económica y pandemia de coronavirus.

Palabras Clave:

Corea; estudios de vivienda; economía; hasukjip; estudios urbanos

Introduction

The hasukjip is a house (or system of the houses or buildings) in which Korean and non-Korean persons can rent a room usually for a minimum of one month. The owner (masters, landlord or landlady) must maintain rules (such as a schedule) in many hasukjip and provide food in the morning and the evening at a certain time. We can consider the hasukjip not only as a form of Korean business in cities, but also for its part in the Korean life in many aspects.

Hasukjip system already moved in other states too, for example, in Canada, USA and Russia. Usually it has connection with the Korean local ethnic groups, excluding only Russia.

Modern situation

Modern Korean scholars do not undertake research on this topic; we can see only books with announcements about hasukjips, newspaper articles (Hasukjip lobby 1978; Ko 1993; Kang 2009; Korean language program 2010: 17), stories by foreigners who have lived in hasukjips, articles about hasukjip incidents or love stories, novels and other literature. Usually hasukjips located near Universities or other types of the educational institutions (like, schools).

Hasukjips have a place in modern Korean culture; we can see Korean TV programs about life in hasukjips (such as 보석 비빔밥/ Poseok Bibimpap), information in newspapers and many hasukjips have set up internet sites and so forth. The absence of official history of the hasukjip forces us to consider oral history and results of the sociological studies. The author of this article lived in several hasukjips before coronavirus incident (2005-2019) and in 2022 and has seen the social and economic influences of the Korean life reflected in the hasukjip system after coronavirus problems.

The author had a questionnaire for students and owners of hasukjips, who lived or stayed in the following districts: Sinchon (in this district the Yonsei University is located (in the opinion of many Koreans this university holds third place among Korean universities)), Ehwa Women's University (regarded as the best educational institution among women's universities in Korea), Sogang University and Hongik University (located near Sinchon district).

We already wrote article about the situation in the hasukjip in 2010 (Kim 2016). However, in 2020s. hasukjip cardinally changed.

Coronavirus and economic crisis in Korea greatly influenced to hasukjip. As a result, many owners of the hasukjips were died or had problems with health. Therefore, the number of hasukjips decreased and changed to a one room apartment houses (원룸). Moreover, according sociological information, many remaining hasukjps do not provide food (near 80% in 2022, but in 2010 situation was different –near 50%).

This was the result not only of the coronavirus, but also of economic crisis in Republic of Korea too. All owners of hasukjip insisted that prices for food (for meat and fish at first) in the Korea increased for last several years. Therefore prices for rent of the room increased too (in 2022 – near 400-500 USD, for example in 2010 the price for room was 250-350 USD (Kim 2016)), in spite of many hasukjips do not provide food.

Social aspect

Moreover, social situation in the hasukjip changed too. As we can see, in 2010 the majority of persons (hasuksaeng, 하숙생), who lived in hasukjip, was consisted of the students (BA, MA and PhD)². However, in 2022 the major of hasukseng was non-student people (104 from 204). This situation created by social influence. According to the sociologic information, among non-student people more than 50 % were pensioners (53 from 104). They arrived in the hasukiip for different reasons. Almost all of them explained their reasons of the staying in hasukjip: at first, problem of the pension (연금). They mentioned that social pension in Korea is very small – near 250 USD. It's not enough for living in apartment, but even in hasukjip too, therefore many elder people have part-time jobs. At second, in hasukjip live a number of the different people. Therefore in case of the serious disease, elder person can receive help from other hasuksaeng, because they can call to hospital or ambulance.

² In detail consideration of this situation, see Kim 2016.

It was impossible for sole living of elder people in the apartment. Clearly, we must note that almost all elder people in the hasukjip receiving social or middle pensions. However, some elder people in hasukjip have upper size pension, probably, it's enough for living in apartment, but they support their children and using for it own pension. At third, lonely elder people have physiological and social problems. Therefore, they want to talk and stay with young people in one house, like, students. Hasukjip can provide it. Almost all elder people in hasukjip are men. At forth, hasukjip with provision have rules (like, provided food in limited time, do not drink and smoking, provide silence in the night and other). It's very comfortable for elder people.

Almostallelderpeople, who live in the hasukjip, receiving the social pension from state for several reasons. All interviewers noted problems of the pension system in Korea. According them, many companies avoided to give severance payment to elder people and search reasons for this. Part of elder interviewers in hasukjip mentioned problem of the contract system of work. For example, in the case of 2 years work contract the companies do not pay pension payments in state pension system. However, after the end of contract many companies fired many workers from staff and present 2-years contract again. Therefore, many elder people, who living in hasukjip after 65 years old, can receive only social pension. Moreover, the part of elder interviewers is persons with disabilities. However, we must note that all elder people in hasukjip are considered by young people (students) as "losers" (because these elder people did not have good pension, apartments to 65 years old, support from children and other). Clearly, sometimes we can see conflicts of the generations in the hasukjip.

Young and elder generations noted that they have problems with connections and misunderstandings between each other. In the process of contact young generation marked that older generation has problem with obsession and arrogance, but many elder people do not like unwillingness to communicate among young persons.

Moreover, 10 % of students (Koreans and foreigners) tell about conflicts (they were participants or eyewitnesses) with elder people in hasukjip. Almost all from it were oral conflicts. Young people tell that some older people swore and abused (usually in the places without video camera control and eyewitnesses), when young people abused or tried to fight as answer, older people threatened to call police and demanded money from opposite side. Therefore, some students believed that elder people stayed in the hasukjips to provoke conflicts and demanding money as result of it.

However, we checked situation and found that these incidents had several conditions. At first, these hasukips are small and did not have video cameras (which confirm the starting of the conflicts), at second, these hasukjips did not provide food or provided partially (therefore owners of these hasukjips did not know about situation in their houses. They only receiving rent from people, but did not have many contacts with them. If hasukjip provides food for breakfast and dinner, owners know all hasuksaengs, talk with them many times in the periods of breakfast and dinner, can understand what they can do. Therefore all people who can make problems or do not hold rules of hasukjip can receive problems from owners very quickly. Usually owners asked these people go out from their houses). In big hasukjips these conflicts did not exist (because owners of hasukjip controlled situation and stopped all conflicts before it can be developed). At third, the number of these conflicts is very small.

Clearly, the young generation could not understand that among elder people some persons can have psychological problems. Almost all the elder people stay in hasukjip because they did not have another choice. They don't have good financial support and must search cheap living conditions in which they can receive support in the case of serious disease. Clearly, these persons have many social and psychological problems. However, we must note that usually elder people, who lived in hasukjips, do not received good pension. Persons, who are receiving good pensions, do not live in hasukjip. They live in apartments or nursing homes.

Remained near 50 % non-students persons in hasukjip (51 from 104 non-students hasuksaengs) are workers or staff of the private Korean companies. They are very busy, did not have much free time and have salary, which can be considered as low than middle size. Therefore they prefer to live in hasukjip because it's cheaper than rent of the apartment, do not spend time for preparation of the food. Usually these people don't have conflict situations with other groups of the hasuksaengs because they don't have many contacts with them. Because Korean style of working in the private Korean companies has rules, according it, many official workers must spend much time in the work place, as results, they work from the morning to the evening and have contacts with other persons (including masters) in the hasukjips only in the periods of the breakfast and dinner. Therefore they don't have common interests and place for conflicts with other people in hasukjips.

Moreover, the number of foreign students in the hasukjips was decreased too. It was possible as results of the epidemic of the coronavirus, South Korea was under quarantine and foreign students cannot come in Korea during two years. However, economic crisis had important place in this situation too, because development of the prices in Korea influenced to hasukjip.

And we must note that rules in hasukijp were changed. For example, in 2010 many owners of the hasukjip had mobile numbers of the parents of the students (if student was Korean. However, sometimes the owners had contacts with parents (if they can speak Korean) of the foreign students too. At first, it had dealt with question for payment for rent of the room). It was very important because owners (almost all from them are elder women -하숙집아줌마, hasukjip ajumma) controlled activity of the young hasuksaengs, at first, in education fields. If student did not study, did not come in his room for sleep in the night, drinking alcohol and had bad grades in the school, hasukjip ajumma reported about it to parents of the student. After it, parents can use several measures about activity of their children. It's very important because usually Korean students, who live in the hasukjip, arrived in Seoul from other cities or provinces, therefore parents can meet them only in period of the vacation (of course, if student arrived in that period to home. However, many students can stay in Seoul in the period of vacation for pleasure or part time job. In these cases the role of hasukjip ajumma for parents of the students became very important as sole informant about activity of the students for parents). Clearly, situation with elder generation in the hasukjip is different – almost all of them worked in Seoul before.

Moreover, many hasukjip changed rules about women and man floors- in 2010 many hasukjips divided women and man floors, but recently we can see mixed floors, in which women and men can live in different rooms, but in the same floor use common restroom and other. But hasukjips only for female are existing.

However, in 2022 situation was cardinally changed. Recently, almost all owners of the hasukjip did not have contacts with parents of the Korean students. Therefore, parents did not have actual information about activity of their children the period of study and vacation. Hasukjip ajumma told that control for activity of students for their parents is spent time and care. Therefore this function of the owners of the hasukjip is disappearing.

Hasukjip abroad

However, this problem (absence of the contacts between masters of hasukjip and parents of the students) already started in hasukjip in USA and Canada before coronavirus problem. American hasukjips oriented to South Korean students, but the price for room was very high- for example in 2017 it was near 800-1000 USD without food. If hasukjips in Korea located near Universities or other educational institutions, in USA or Canada situation is very different -hasukjips can be located very far (near 2-10 km) from educational structures. Therefore Korean students in America must have car. Moreover, Canadian or American students did not want to stay in hasukjips in their states³.

In American hasukjip did not exist connections between hasukjip ajumma and parents of the Korean students. Therefore when Korean student had problem with study, in some cases his parents blamed hasukjip ajumma in America, they believed that master of hasukjip must report them about such problems, because in 2010-2016 this agreement existed in Korea⁴. We believe that it was very subjective because hasukjip ajumma in America did not have agreement with Korean parents about it. They believe that if parents believed that master of the hasukjip must control

³ This information was received from Mr. Mathew Negru in 2017, his wife was master of the hasukjips in Canada and USA.

⁴ This information was received from Mr. Mathew Negru in 2018.

activity of their children without agreement, like in Korea, it is private problem of the parents. Clearly, Korean parents sent their children in hasukjip in America, because they believed that hasukjip in the Korea and America are similar and did not clarify information about it. Moreover, we must note that usually hasukjip ajummas in the America did not experience of the management of the hasukjip in Korea and did not know many specifics. Clearly, she receiving payment for rent of the room monthly and can provide some support for Korean students, but not as in Korea. And connection between both sides which located in the different states is not easy, must be noted temporal difference.

Situation with Russian hasukjip is different from Korea and America. If owners of the Korean, Canadian and American hasukjips usually asked about payment of the rent of the room monthly, hasukjip in Russia can support for living by several days. Because hasukjip in Russia are not oriented only for students, but for Korean people⁵. Therefore in the hasukjip in Russia we can meet students, tourists, businessmen and other, but almost all from them are South Korean people. It's very comfortable for citizens of the Republic of Korea, because in Russia they can talk in Korean, eat Korean food and receive information from Korean people. Price for rent of the room for one day is near 50-100 USD (it's depended of the living conditions - with food or not). All hasukjips in Russia located only in or near Moscow, but not near educational institutions. We don't see any information about hasukijps in the other cities in Russia.

Changes in hasukjip in 2010-2020s

Clearly, corona virus situation had negative tendencies in the foreign hasukjibs too. Closing of the borders was reason for decreasing the number of hasukjip not only in Korea. However, we can't say that 2020s. give only negative results for hasukjips.

For example, in 2022 in the comparison with 2010 the technical situation in big hasukjips in Korea with food is improved. Recently, all big hasukjips have system of the cameras control, the connection of Wi-Fi and wired Internet. It is very

important for safe living in hasukjips. Moreover, many big hasukjips have internet resources and contacts. Unfortunately, all information only in Korean language, therefore usually it can be searched by Koreans or foreigners, who can read and speak Korean. Therefore hasukjip as comfortable and cheap place for living in the Korea does not have popularity in the non-Korean speaking world. Same situation was in 2010 too, but the number of internet resources of the hasukjip was small.

Clearly, technical support in hasukjip depended of the size of this structure. Big hasukjip with 40 or more rooms can give good profits. For example, this big hasukjip can give near 10.000 USD to owner every month. Therefore, hasukjip ajumma can buy video camera system, pay to internet master for technical support. However, owner of small hasukjip (near 5-10 rooms) receives near 1500 – 3000 USD per month and could not provide easy and quickly video control in his house and stable internet.

This situation influenced to food support in the hasukjip. Master of big hasukjip can buy a great number of the products by wholesale, it's cheaper. Moreover, big hasukjip collects materials for recycle paper, glass bottles, plastic items from people, who lived that. Clearly, it can't give big material profit, but more than 40 hasuksaengs can provide good financial support for hasukjip ajumma. Small hasukjip did not have financial possibility for these trade operations and needs to buy products more expensive. Moreover, in 2021-2022 price for food in Korea is increased. As result, many small hasukjips refused from provision of the food. However, these masters did not note that food in hasukjip is very important. Because many people in the case of living in the hasukjip always asked about food. Absence of the food decreased price for rent of the room in hasukjip, moreover, many people (Korean and non-Korean) did not want to live in hasukjip without food provision. As result, some rooms were without hasuksaengs and this situation does not give profits for hasukjip ajumma.

According to information of the sociological interviews in 2022, near 90% of the respondents considered food provision in hasukjip as important element of the living conditions in the

⁵ This information was received from Mr. Kiriil Ermakov in 2018. He is specialist in Korean studies in Moscow (Russian Federation).

hasukjip. Usually, owners of big hasukjips asked 100 thousands won (near 80 USD) as payment for food per month. Food provision exists for two times per day- for breakfast and dinner. In spite of many hasukjip do not provide food in weekends, we can see that it is more than 40 times of food time per month. Recently, cost for breakfast or dinner in Seoul dining room of café is near 5 thousands to 10 thousands won (4-8 USD). It is very good for people who have limited financial conditions, in spite of time for breakfast and dinner is limited too – from near one and half to two hours.

Many big hasukjips in Korea started to use digital receipts for payments of the rent of the room in 2020s. It's very comfortable for both sides.

Conclusion

Thus, as we can see, hasukjip system in 2020s. changed under economic and social influences. However, it was not only negative tendencies, but some positive elements had places too.

For example, technical development influenced to internet connection, payment methods and system of cameras in hasukjip, but social tendencies changed demographic situation, economic crisis influenced to prices of room and pandemic of coronavirus decreased the number of hasukjip.

Clearly, hasukjip system has crisis at modern time. In addition, probably it needs reforms and support from Korean government agencies. Because hasukjip is a part of Korean culture, giving possibility for cheap living conditions for young and old generation, plays role in cultural and social life in the Republic of Korea. It is comfortable for Koreans and foreigners, hasukjip can be part of "soft power" of Korea and item for adaptation in other states.

Moreover, we believe that deep search of social changes (including demographic and other) in hasukjip will give new materials and fields for study.

Appendix 1

하숙생 조사 (The list of questions for people living in hasukjip) (2022)

1. 남성(men)

여성 (women)

- 2. 나이 (age)
- 3. 어느 대학교에서 공부하고 계십니까(공부했습니까)? (What is the name of your university? If you have graduated from university, which university did you graduate from?)
- 4. 어디에서 살고 계십니까? (하숙집, 원룸, 기숙사, 고시원 기타) (Where are you living? Hasukjip, one room apartment, dormitory, private dormitory etc.)
- 5. 하숙집에 살지 않으면 왜 다른 숙소를 골랐습니까? (If you don't live in a hasukjip, why did you choose another place to live?)
- 6. 하숙집에 살아 본 적이 있습니까? 있으면 얼마 동안 살았습니까? (Do you live in a hasukjip? If so, how long have you lived in it?)
- 7. 살고 있는 숙소의 좋은 점 (Good points of the place where you are living at)
- 8. 살고 있는 숙소의 부정한 점 (Bad points of the place where you are living at)
- 9. 하숙집생활에 대해 어떻게 생각합니까? (What do you think about hasukjip life?)
- 10. 서울에서 태어났습니까? 아니면 다른 도시에서 왔습니까? (Were you were born in Seoul? If not, where are you from?)
- 11. 한국에서 어떤 숙소가 가장 싸고 편합니까? (What is the most cheap and comfortable place for living in Korea?)
- 12. 하숙집에 살면 한 달에 얼마 내야 됩니까? 계약을 했습니까? (If you have lived in hasukjip for a period of one month, how much have you paid the owner of the hasukjip? Do you have a hasukjip contract?)
- Note. In this sociological study took part one hundred students (Korean and non-Korean), who lived in hasukjip near Sinchon and Pongwonsa districts in Seoul. Among one handred persons, who took part in study, 20 foreigners (2 Russians, 9 Japanese, 2 Chinese, 2 Americans, 1 Polish, 2 Arabs, 2 persons from African states) and 80 Korean citizens (in this number included undergradute, MA, PhD students). All foreigners lived in hasukjips.

Appendix 2

하숙집 주인 (하숙집 아주머니) 조사 (The list of questions for the owner of the hasukjip) (2022)

- 1. 얼마 동안 하숙집주인이 되었습니까? (How long have you been the owner of a hasukjip?)
- 2. 하숙집에 규칙이 있습니까? 있으면 무슨 사항이 있습니까? (Does your hasukjip have rules? If have what are these rules?)
- 3. 하숙집규칙이 바꿀 겁니까? 외요? (Do you intend to change the rules of the hasukjip? If yes, why?)
- 4. 하숙집에 식사 포함됩니까? 언제 됩니까?(Does your hasukjip provide food for students? When do you provide food?)
- 5. 10년, 20년 비해서 하숙집들이 많아졌습니까? 아니면 없어졌습니까? (What are your views if we compare the current situation with the situation 10 or 20 years ago has the number of hasukjip in your districts has increased or decreased?)
- 6. 왜 많은 분들은 하숙집에 살지 않고 원룸이나 고시원에 살고 있습니까? (하숙집주인 생각으로) (Why do you think many people don't live in a hasukjip and live in other places such as a one room apartment or private dormitory? Private opinion of the owner of the hasukjip)
- 7. 하숙집에 한국인들은 많이 살고 있습니까? 아니면 외국사람들이 또 많이 살고 있습니까? 몇 명 살고 계십니까? (In your hasukjip is the number of Koreans more than the number of foreigners? How many people live in your hasukjip?)
- 8. 어느 나라에서 온 하숙생들이 가장 좋습니까? (하숙집주인 생각으로) (How do foreign students benefit your hasukjip? Private opinion of the owner of the hasukjip).
- 9. 다음에도 계속 하숙집주인 있겠습니까? (In future will you be an owner of a hasukjip for a long time?)
- 10. 아이들도 하숙집주인 되고 싶습니까? (Do you think your children will become owners of a hasukjip?)
- 11.옛날 하숙집과 현대하숙집은 무슨 차이가 있습니까? (What do you think are differences between older and new hasukjips?)
- Note. In this sociological study participated 50 masters (owners) of the hasukjips, which located near Sinchon and Pongwonsa districts in Seoul.

Appendix 3

Information about Koreans, who took part in the study in 2022.

In 2022, 40 from Yonsei University, 25 from Ehwa Women's University, 10 from Sogang University, 5 from Hongik University and 104 peoples who were not students.

Appendix 4. Prices for room in hasukjips in different districts of Seoul (2022)

Sinchon – near 400 USD (with food). Ponwongsa- near 450 USD (with food) Annam – 500 USD (with food) Eastern part of USA - 800-1000 USD (without food) (2017). Russia (Moscow) - 1500-3000 USD (with food) (2018)

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TV movies

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