

Korean Public Bathhouse: Potential of Interiority

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Abstract

This essay introduces the Korean public bathhouse, jjimjil-bang, to understand the concept of interiority from sociocultural and psychological perspectives. The author addresses interiority as a continuous process of defining the range of intimacy that changes with context, space, and time. Interiority involves individuating spatial and situational moments in the blended physical, perceived, and imaged environment. In exploring interiority, the case of jjimjil-bang suggests broad perspectives for understanding spatial circumstances as an integration of the activity, environment, and situation. The author introduces the characteristics of jjimjil-bang in terms of the program, spatial structure, and meaning of memory. To demonstrate the potential of interiority, the concepts of private-public, interiority-exteriority, inclusivity-exclusivity, closeness-openness, and the quotidian issue are discussed. Consequently, the author highlights the individual's subjectivity of spatial perception, the desire for intimacy, and the individual's engagement in shaping interiority. Thus, the range of interiority is expanded from self to outworld beyond the physical space.

Keywords: interiority, Korean public bathhouse, interior architecture, ambiguity

Introduction

During the last few decades, scholars have discussed the concept of interiority with the scope of the interior in architectural practice. Changes in technological and cultural practices (Daou et al., 2015) have affected our understanding of spatial concepts. Furthermore, the emergence of virtual environments (Nash et al., 2021) and the increased awareness of sociocultural diversity have led to ambiguity in defining spatial concepts. This essay introduces the Korean public bathhouse to illustrate the changing concept of interiority in general and the importance of diverse cultural perspectives in understanding architectural practices.

The traditional type of Korean public bathhouse, consisting of a bathhouse and a changing room, appeared in the late 1950s and became prevalent. In the 2000s, *jjimjil-bang* emerged as a combination of a traditional public bathhouse and a public sauna hall. The number of public bathhouses, including traditional bathhouses and *jjimjil-bangs*, reached 9,900 in the late 2000s (Gu, 2023). Due to the development of heating and plumbing systems and changes in user needs, during the last two decades, lots of the traditional bathhouses were closed or replaced with the large-scale *jjimjil-bang*. As of January 2023, there are 6,000 public bathhouses, including traditional bathhouses and *jjimjil-bangs*, in the nation (Gu, 2023). Although the number of public bathhouses has decreased over the decades, the scale and the quality of facilities in *jjimjil-bang* have been improved.

With an understanding of *jjimjil-bang* as an extension of the traditional public bathhouse, this essay focuses on introducing programmatic neutrality and the physical spatial structure of *jjimjil-bang*. The meaning of bathing embedded in the culture and the collective memory encompassing the traditional public bathhouse and *jjimjil-bang* are addressed in the essay. To explore the potential perspectives in understanding interiority through *jjimjil-bang*, this essay describes the generic characteristics of the *jjimjil-bang* rather than introducing a specific case of the *jjimjil-bang* building. The intention of anonymity is in the same vein as ambiguity in defining *jjimjil-bang* and interiority. I understand interiority as a continuous process of defining the subjective range of intimacy that constantly changes. Experiencing, perceiving, and reinterpreting space occurs in the blended physical, perceived, and imaged environments. In this process, we individuate spatial and situational moments to achieve a desired sense of intimacy. In this article, I address interiority associated with the nature of the human desire to deeply understand who we are by exploring the concepts of polarities that affect spatial perception.

The purpose of space and the user's activities with the concept of domestic, private, public, and social are addressed in the first part. The second part illustrates the physical environment, such as spatial organisation, scale, and spatial structure, and how it affects shaping the perceived environment. The concepts of interiority-exteriority, inclusivity-exclusivity, and closeness-openness are explored alongside the relationship between physical and perceived environment. The spatial and temporal situation of the individuals which lead them to actively engage in shaping interiority, is also addressed. Lastly, this essay highlights the meaning of memory in creating imaged environments and the significance of quotidian memory retained in the culture. As a result, through the understanding of *jjimjil-bang*, this article addresses the potential approaches to interiority and spatial concepts that affect the condition of interiority.

Programmatic Neutrality: Interiority as a Realm

From the anonymity of urban to ambiguity of bang

Over the last half-century, cities in South Korea have undergone significant changes due to rapid urbanisation with urban population growth. As a result, a unique commercialised urban landscape has emerged, characterised by the commercial concrete structures of multiple stories that host various tenants. This commercial building is defined as *GeunLinSaengWhalSiseol* (*GeunSaeng*) in Korean, which refers to a facility close to the neighbourhood providing services and products necessary for living. According to Building Act (2017), the range of programs covered by *GeunSaeng* is broader than the International Building Code (IBC) 302.1 Occupancy Classification. For example, a 15-storey *GeunSaeng* building can include a theatre, a restaurant, a public bathhouse, a bank, a daycare, a hospital, and a market under the same occupancy classification. In contrast, IBC 302.1 breaks them into the assembly, business, educational, institutional, and mercantile based on the primary purpose of each structure within the same building.

GeunSaeng is a public infrastructure built with a function-neutral status awaiting to be assigned a wide variety of programs that flexibly accommodate users' needs and trends. J. I. Kim (2021) describes *GeunSaeng* as a platform for flexible use and background to support a lively performance of everyday life. The architecture is a neutral structure that facilitates program changes as needed. The city's everyday life is behind the shell of an anonymous *GeunSaeng*. The juxtaposition of the simplicity of the concrete building structure with the chaotic commercial business signs of the façade (J. I. Kim, 2021) suspends the definition of the identity of *GeunSaeng*. Understanding

the space allows us to focus on the activities inside and the users' subjective spatial perception rather than the architectural structure.

The functional neutrality (Marlor, 2021) and the coexistence of polarities in spatial characteristics expand to interior conditions. *GeunSaeng* buildings house different commercial programs in the form of the *bang*, such as *PC-bang* (internet café), *norae-bang* (downscaled karaoke bar), and *jjimjil-bang* (public bathhouse combining entertainment program). In Korean, *bang* originally meant a space enclosed by four walls, similar to a 'room.' It has been used to refer to an individual private room in a domestic space. As *GeunSaeng* has rapidly permeated the urban landscape, the concept of *bang* has expanded to the public realm beyond the private room in the house. *Bang* became a broad concept encompassing a public venue where people gather for social, recreational, and commercial purposes. *Bang* is not yet defined in rigid ways. The scale, size, users, program, and level of privacy and publicity of a given *bang* are never defined. *Bang* hands over the autonomy in the interpretation of space to the users. *Bang* appears as a public venue but contains domestic and intimate daily life activities that would have occurred in a private space. Interiority, a desire to feel warmth in intimate relations, infiltrates the anonymous city in the form of a *bang*. A sense of intimacy would be felt when we meditate in a quiet private space and interact with friends, even in a noisy public space.

Korea Pavilion in 2004 Venice Biennale addresses the advent of *bang* culture from sociocultural perspectives ("Curatorial Statement," n.d). Ethnic homogeneity formed by Korea's geographical and historical characteristics has impacted culture for a long time and created relatively concrete mechanical solidarity compared to other multicultural countries ("Curatorial Statement," n.d). The belief that everyone else has similar values allows people to recognise others as potential companions. In this case, being in public protects individuals from the fear of isolation. It reassures individuals that they are safely nestled in such a strong homogenous society and constantly confirms a sense of relatedness with society. Consequently, individuals define themselves by being in others. *Jjimjil-bang* demonstrates an ironic desire for interiority in public and the user's subjective interpretation in defining a sense of intimacy.

Jjimjil-bang: Dialogue in the blurred realm of public and private

Jjimjil-bang emerged in the mid-1990s, emphasising "programmatically interiority" (Teston, 2020, p. 16) in public by combining various entertainment and leisure programs into the traditional Korean public bathhouse. *Jjimjil-bang* has three distinct areas: an entrance, a

gender-separated public bathhouse, and a gender-neutral communal sauna hall (Figure 1). Most of *jjimjil-bang* has a similar layout designed to follow in the order of entrance (arrival)—public bath communal sauna hall—and back to public bath entrance (departure).

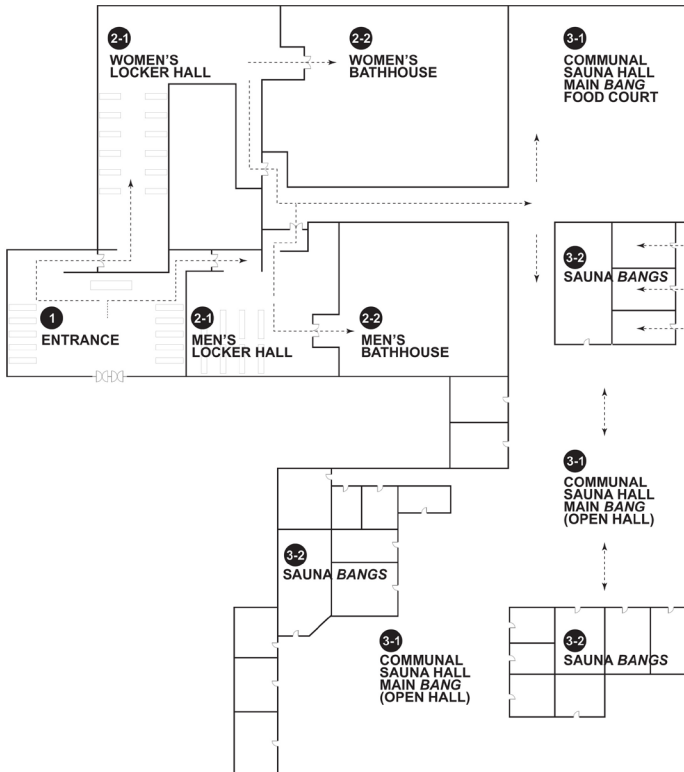
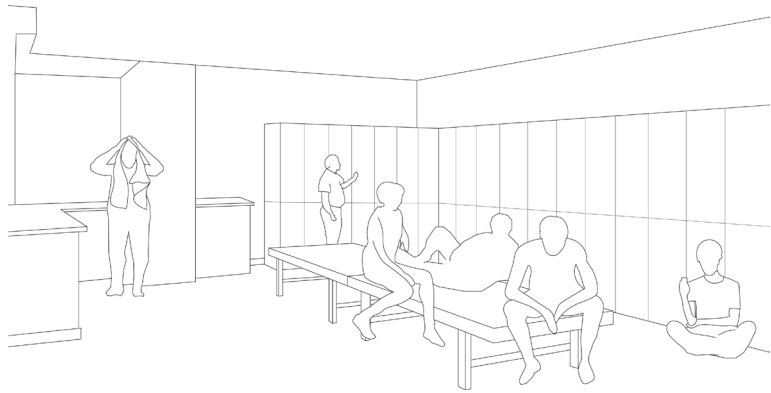


Figure 1
Diagrammatic floor
plan of *jjimjil-bangs*
(Image by author)

The entry hall is a reception area that collects entrance fees and provides an electronic locker key and a cotton pyjama set. After check-in at the reception, users are guided to a gender-separated public bath area. The public bath area is divided into a bathhouse (tubs, showers, and wet sauna) and a changing room with lockers. To enter the bathhouse, users should take off their clothes in a shared changing room. The changing room area serves as a social space beyond the purpose of housing the lockers. The public here is considered as a companion, not a stranger. As Figure 2 illustrates, it is a place where people in various conditions in terms of physics, environment, and behaviour are all mingled. A wet person who just got out of the tub, a person changing into pyjamas to go to the communal sauna hall, a person neatly changed to their own clothes to go out, a half-naked person resting on a bench, and a person chatting with a friend are all comfortably in the same space. As the door to the

bathroom opens and closes, humid air and vibrant energy from the baths fill the locker hall space.

Figure 2
A locker hall of public bath area assuring a sense of intimacy with potential companions and protective isolation (Image by author)



Doing routine activities with companions who are expected to do predictable activities promises protective isolation from the outworld—an interiority (McCarthy, 2005). The traveller's guide in introducing the culture of *jjimjil-bang* to foreigners points out that getting naked in front of strangers could be peculiar at first, but such feelings do not last long since everyone is naked and all consider being naked in *jjimjil-bang* to be normal (Berdin, 2021; Milner & Usher, 2022).

Once finished with the showers and primary bathing, users wore the provided pair of pyjamas to move to the communal sauna hall. "The form of relaxation in intimate closeness with other naked bodies in the public bath" (J. I. Kim, 2021, p. 19) amplifies in a communal sauna hall. In the communal sauna hall, the types of private acts performed in public spaces become diversified and the degree of intimacy of the acts that could be engaged is further subdivided. Centred around a square-like hall, a communal sauna hall shows the hybrid of different programs, including restaurants, entertainment (cinema room, karaoke room, library), rejuvenation (hair salon, nail salon, spa), and the saunas. The performance of personal, familiar, and intimate activities in the gaze of others blurs the boundaries between public and private (J. I. Kim, 2021), as well as between the "collective and the individual, normal and deviant behaviour, privacy and voyeurism" ("Curatorial Statement," n.d, para. 3). Gender distinctions, individual characteristics, and social status disappear in the communal sauna hall, where everyone wears the same clothes with their bare faces and comfortably acts as if they were at home (J. I. Kim, 2021). In *jjimjil-bang*, the structural and programmatic divisions are blurred. Only the sense of intimacy and togetherness, defined as interiority, exists.

The ambiguity of the programmatic identity in *jjimjil-bang* gives autonomy to users in defining the space. The concept of public and private is subjectively interpreted by individuals as a range of integrating places, people, and activities (Madanipour, 2003). Beginning with recognising the subjective inner space of consciousness, individuals expand their private realm into the public by mediating different degrees of private space, from socio-psychological personal space and institutionalised personal space (Madanipour, 2003) to virtually imagined personal space. Interiority focuses on the autonomy of individuals in attuning the range of intimacy. The projection of the self to the outer world and recognition of the self in relation to the context (Marlor, 2021) is the exploration of interiority in the private realm. It simultaneously facilitates the positioning of interiority in the public realm. Oscillating between the private and public realms, which are interpenetrating and interdependent (Madanipour, 2003), *jjimjil-bang* asks us as individuals to look at ourselves and face others to understand who we are.

The ambiguity of the boundary allows the blending of the public and private realms, enabling the radical juxtaposition of distinctly different spaces. Unlike the sequential transition that gradually expands in order of room-house-street-square, *jjimjil-bang* is like a 'bedroom' appearing just next to a square (M. Kim, 2009). Unexpected juxtaposition maximises the contrast and clarifies each space's unique characteristics. The coexistence of ambiguity and clarity (Madanipour, 2003) enables the continuous dialogue between private and public, self and others, a sense of identity, and a sense of community. The range of what people perceive as a private or public realm differs depending on the individual. Different layers of culture, from family to community culture, affect individuals' perceptions in shaping the range of interiority consciously and unconsciously. Koreans tend to consider the power of the collective community as critical momentum in society based on a deeply rooted sense of togetherness in culture. Thus, the range of the public realm is broader than in other western cultures, which consequently contributed to the culture of *jjimjil-bang*.

Spatial Structure in Communal Sauna Hall: Interiority as Process

Jjimjil-bang is a neutral space that invites individuals to define a desired range of comfort and engage in building a condition suitable for intimacy. The physical environment characterised by spatial organisation and spatial structure affects the forming perceived environment as well as the shaping of interiority. We define *bang* as an integrating spatial condition that provides a sense of intimacy and closeness. *Bang* implies the various approaches to interiority,

focusing on the sentiments associated with interiority-exteriority, inclusivity-exclusivity, and closeness-openness.

Continuous process of attuning toward interiority: Hall

The communal sauna hall is a critical space in *jjimjil-bang*, derived from the traditional type of public bathhouse that prevailed before the advent of *jjimjil-bang*. In the 1950s, when having a bathtub in the house was rare, the public bathhouse was an essential place for personal and public hygiene. It also took a critical role in the community's resiliency as a place for the public to relax and create bonds. To ordinary people who could not afford leisure due to financial and time limits, the public bathhouse was a gathering venue for socialising where people could escape from all restraints of reality and focus on moments with people. More than half a century has passed, but people still visit public bathhouses primarily to hang out in the 'hall.' Bathing, which was the primary purpose of the public bathhouse in the past, became a prelude to getting to the hall. The hall, similar to a large-scale living room, is a main *bang* accommodating a wide range of programs, activities, and people (Figure 3).

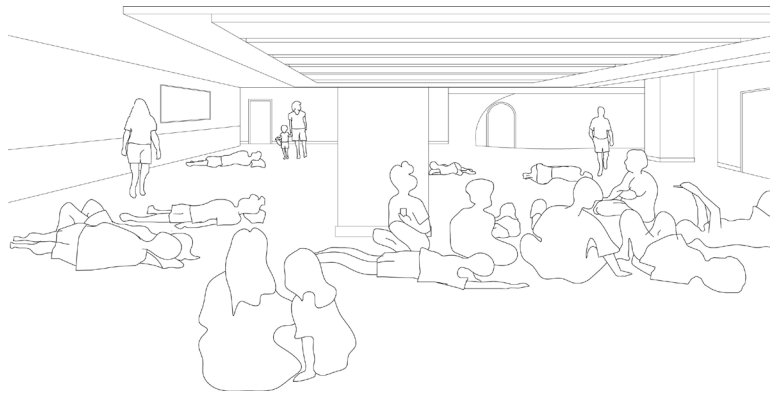


Figure 3
A communal hall as a large-scale main *bang* embracing a wide range of programs, activities, and people (Image by author)

The space configuration of the communal sauna hall area is centred around the hall featuring a type of public square without fixed furniture and wall structure. All individual sauna *bangs* are designed as an enclosed room with a door facing the hall. The hall is the absolute inside of *jjimjil-bang* and the boundary where transit and transportation to other individual *bangs* happen. It also can be interpreted as the outside from the perspectives of individuals *bangs*, which implies potential exteriority and publicity (McCarthy, 2005). The hall is either a starting point or an endpoint of traffic, at the same time, a threshold where the individuals get prepared and make decisions to move. Everyone should pass through the hall to transport

to different *bangs*. *Jjimjil-bang* proposes to settle into the intimacy of the hall and simultaneously suggests moving toward the other *bangs* to explore better spatial conditions. The hall is an inclusive space for anyone but also exclusive. People lie next to strangers as comfortably as they were at home, but since most interaction happens within the accompanied group, there is less chance to interact with others. As the depth of intimacy amplifies, the range of exclusivity becomes wider. The relationship between inclusivity and exclusivity, interiority and exteriority, are not equally balanced (McCarthy, 2005), neither stable nor permanent. The continuous act of attuning to determine where to lean is interiority. It is to manipulate window blinds to control the degree of light permeated. Interiority is shaped by the processes of physically experiencing space, unconsciously perceiving space, and consciously engaging in it.

Perceived environment in relations between users and physical environment

The hall in *jjimjil-bang* can be explained with the concept of *madang* in traditional Korean architecture. *Madang* is an outdoor space surrounded by *bangs*, similar to a courtyard. But *madang* is perceived as inside space by implying a strong level of interiority based on its spatial organisation, intimate atmosphere, and activities happening. It is not a hidden and reserved garden featuring a decorative landscape. Although *madang* is legally a part of an individual's private property placed in the middle of domestic space, it is designed to be occupied by visitors. It is somewhere between domestic space, institutionalised private property, and public square. *Madang* is transparent, both visually and physically open to anyone. It is designed to be empty without the physical spatial structure inside, like the hall in *jjimjil-bang*. *Madang* is defined depending on activities happening in it and people, thus continuously changing. Performing different levels of interior-related activities, such as playing active sports, socialising, and doing essential domestic activities, in the exterior realm can be defined as a programmatic interiority (Teston, 2020). When people gather, *madang* becomes a space and ends up as a place. The journey toward interiority begins here and interiority is amplified and expanded through interaction with people and environments. Finally, it is terminated as a sense of intimacy and the memory of the moment sharing the warmth.

The emptiness of the *madang* and the hall grants users the initiative to fill the space with their vibrant energy and diverse activities. The physical spatial environment, such as space organisation, the layout of furniture, and circulation affects the perceived environment. Individuals unconsciously recall previous experiences or common

sense in similar spatial structures to perceive space while experiencing physical space. The perceived space affects the user's behaviour, which in turn affects spatial perception. The emptiness of the hall is derived from the neutrality of *bang* and the floor-sitting culture in Korea. In the past, most domestic activities of daily living, such as eating, playing, studying, and even sleeping, took place on the heated floor in the *bang*. Though now the interior space has been modernised with functional fixtures and furniture, Koreans are still familiar with sitting on the floor and aware of it as an inherent culture. The heated floor of the hall in *jjimjil-bang* makes users unconsciously perceive the space as a domestic realm and invites them to sit or lie down as being at home. The comfortable posture facilitates a variety of interior-related activities and prolongs the stay. Interiority is produced from the interrelationships of the physical-spatial structure, the activities, and the given situation. When these conditions are built up based on the understanding of cultures, the perceived environment becomes more impactful. Interiority actualises in a dynamic and ongoing network of relations (Nash et al., 2021) between users and environments—physical, perceived, and imaged.

From structural closeness to situational openness: Multi-individualised sauna bangs

Jjimjil-bang literally means 'heated'-*bangs*. The back-to-back individual sauna *bangs* are placed on the perimeter of the building and face the hall. Here, a *bang* is interpreted with the concept of a generic room, an intimate-sized enclosed space. Each *bang* is designed differently in terms of its temperature, themes, and materials. The variety of programs and the unique design of each *bang* becomes critical in the competitive differentiation of *jjimjil-bangs*. To facilitate the users' engagement in individuating experiences, various design strategies are emerging, such as diversifying the zones by segmenting the public sauna hall space, integrating outdoor spaces, and varying interior designs in terms of style and atmosphere.

While the combination of programs is diversified, the geometry of each sauna *bang* simply focuses on spatial closeness. It implies an explicit interiority. Compared to a square-like *bang* of the hall, this room-like *bang* implies complete enclosures and an intense level of intimacy. The spatial sense of an individual sauna *bang* is similar to a private room of domestic space in terms of size, scale, and structure. The difference between a private room and a sauna *bang* is that the sauna *bang* usually does not have a window. And since the sauna *bang* is not a reserved private room, it still has an external gaze though the intensity is lower than the public hall. The act of relaxation with a companion in the enclosed room maximises the sense of closeness

with a companion. The warmth comes from enclosures of spatial structure, intimate activities, and inevitably the humid and intense atmosphere of the sauna.

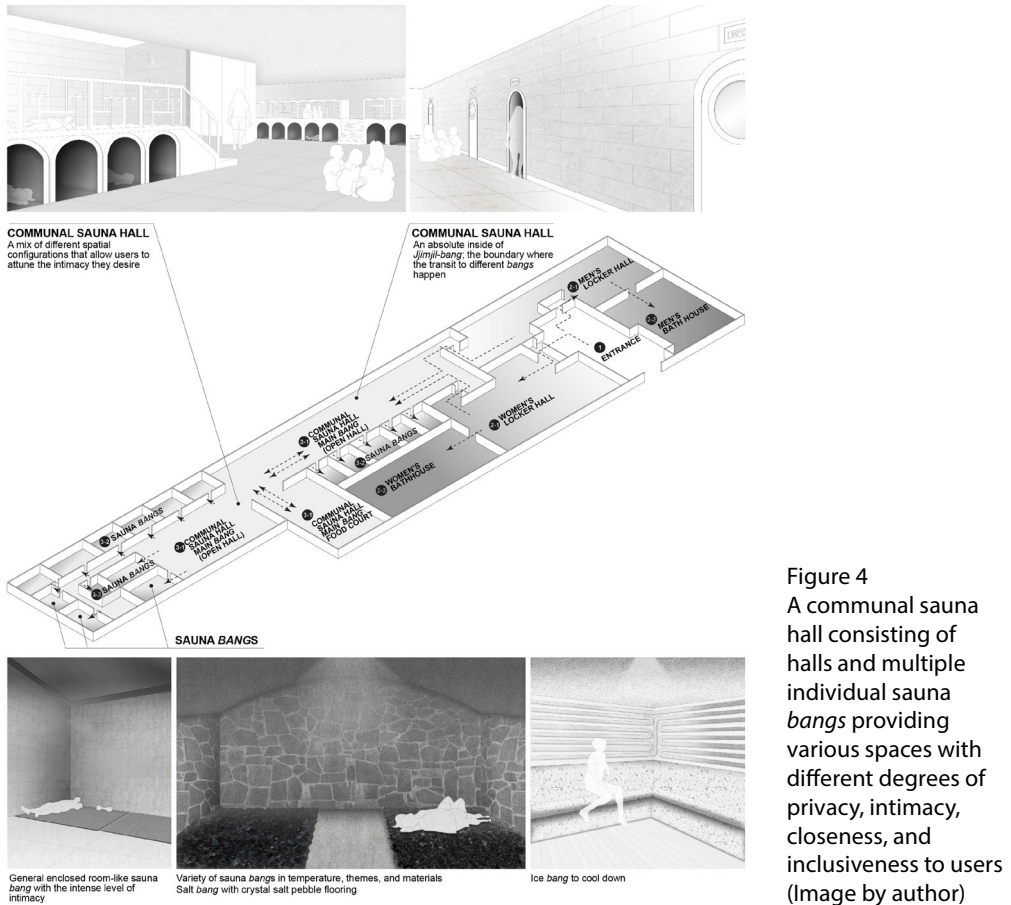


Figure 4
A communal sauna hall consisting of halls and multiple individual sauna *bangs* providing various spaces with different degrees of privacy, intimacy, closeness, and inclusiveness to users (Image by author)

As *jjimjil-bang* is composed of combinations of different *bangs*, the act of opening the door takes a critical role in the transition of both user's perception and spatial sequence. We never know what is inside before opening the door. A door is an explicit way of transition that intuitively lets us know what to do. From the street to the inside of sauna *bang*, a user meets at least six doors: an entrance door to the building, a door to the entry hall in *jjimjil-bang*, a door to the changing room in the same gender-only bath area, a door to the public bathhouse, a door to the communal sauna hall, and a door to the sauna *bang*. When the users get to the communal sauna hall, they start exploring more *bangs*. All sauna *bangs* differ in noise levels, interior finishes, temperatures, and ambience. The doors lead people

to different spaces. It could be a salt *bang* finished with salt-plastered walls and salt pebble flooring. It could be an ice *bang* covered with ice all around it with an arch-shaped ceiling like an igloo. It is interesting to think about how many doors are closed and opened. Multiple doors facing the hall intrigue the users' curiosity. The door implies a desire to enter (McCarthy, 2005) even though they do not actually enter. While sitting inside a sauna *bang*, users think about where they will go next after this *bang*.

Interiority is a desire to occupy (McCarthy, 2005) and an ambition to explore the potential interiority. When the door closes, the *bang* is a private interior space that is excluded from the outside hall, but at the same time, it is a semi-private space shared with strangers. It is also a potential public space that anyone can access as an extension of the hall. *Bang* is no longer a space occupied for specific use by a particular person. *Bang* is no longer the realm of the individual or everyone. It can be either or somewhere between them. But a given experience will never last. It is the continuous process of exploring the relations. People enter *bang* and meet the world. *Bang* is an alternative network to bridge urbanism and interiority (J. I. Kim, 2021). As shown in Figure 4, *jjimjil-bang* is like a department store with various spaces with different degrees of privacy, intimacy, closeness, and inclusiveness. The relationship between the hall and individual sauna *bangs* demonstrates different perspectives on what *bang* implies and consequently, the potential for different approaches in interpretations of interiority.

Memory in Bathhouse: Interiority as Attitude

Collective memory of intimacy

Teston (2020) introduces psychological interiority focusing on the subjective phenomenal condition, which integrates human perception, time, and senses. As a phenomenon, space exists in temporal, cultural, and mental dimensions beyond the physical reality of the spatial and material (Pallasmaa, 2009). The individuals' memories and experiences in space affect the structuring of a lived existential space. Space desires to remain as a place that settles in the individual's mind in the form of meaningful images and specific feelings (Lyndon, 2009). In *jjimjil-bang*, the familiarity with activities, the memory of similar sociocultural and spatial structures, and a sense of intimacy are combined with the user's intention of exploring the desired interiority. The memory of the past, the actual experience of the present, the expectation of upcoming sequences, and the potential image that will be determined in the future are all blended and, as a result, affect the shaping of interiority.

Memory is the most intimate level of interiority that an individual builds; shaped by experience, emotion, behaviour, spatiotemporal situation, and sociocultural context. In the process of experiencing, perceiving, and reinterpreting the space, the individual expands the range of interiority from memory, which is the "ground of self-identity" (Pallasmaa, 2009, p. 18). A (potential and already made) memory of 'what we do, with whom, in what kind of space' is both input and output in the process of shaping interiority. From the perspective of the subject who forms interiority, the act of bathing itself takes a critical role in perceiving the *jjimjil-bang* as an intimate space.

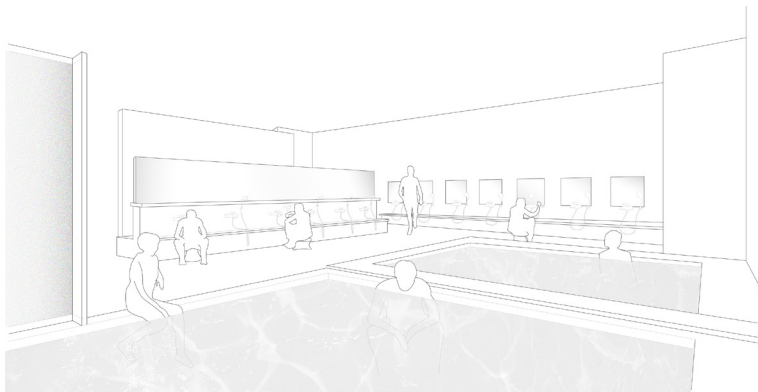


Figure 5
A public bathhouse
implying a sense of
intimacy derived
from a quotidian
moment (Image by
author)

Bathing has been performed differently in terms of purpose, fashion, and meaning depending on the history of periods and cultures. Understanding the role of bathing facilitates comprehending how individuals and their lives have been considered within social and cultural differences (Giedion, 1948). In Korean history, water has been considered divine through the legend and myth passed down (Y. Kim, 2021). The belief in the holiness of water can be found in the traditional ritual custom of praying on clean water every morning. The ceremonial purpose of bathing that was originally prevalent in India expanded to East Asia with the spread of Buddhism (Schafer, 1956). In Buddhism, bathing is considered a sacred ritual for inner purification by cleansing sins. With Buddhism combined with indigenous customs, bathing culture became widespread in Korea around the 10th century. Bathing was also performed for cleanliness, prevention, and curing of diseases (Y. Kim, 2021). Depending on social status, bathing occurred differently in rivers, natural springs, public baths in temples, and separated baths in noble houses. The ceremonial meaning of the bath extended to the Joseon dynasty in the 14th–18th century, which considered Confucianism as a critical value. In Confucianism, keeping individuals' bodies neat and clean daily is as critical as caring for the inner being. Under Confucianism's

influence, bathing was required before all kinds of ceremonies and formalities in ancient China, implying a prelude to a ritual act (Schafer, 1956). Similarly, bathing to purify the inner scape to avoid misfortune before performing important tasks or sacred ceremonies became deeply embedded in Korean culture. The state of being washed and immersed in the water means rejecting all externality and focusing on the individual's inner being (Figure 5).

The unique implication of bathing expands to the bathing space. A bathhouse is where individuals can be detached from the outer world and hide in the blurry atmosphere. By immersing the body in the tub, the memories of the past, the alive senses of the present, and the desire for the future all mingle, which tells who we are. In a place where ultimate interiority begins (Betsky, 1997), bathing consequently leads to constructing an individual's identity. Returning to the body for bathing is a quotidian act. This ordinary act also implies a ceremonial act preparing and shaping the world of tomorrow. Due to the uniqueness of an act that requires a specific facility, bathing is an act and simultaneously a sense of place. Thereby, the boundary between the act of bathing and the space for bathing is blurred. With quotidian and ritual meanings, bathing at the bathhouse implies the infinite process of exploring interiority and the pleasure resulting from the process.

Imaged environment: Not yet defined interiority

Japan has a similarity with Korean culture in understanding bathing as a quotidian and ceremonial act. It has been continuously addressed through literature and media. *Sunshine Sento-Sake* (2016), a Japanese drama series based on a manga by Masayuki Kusumi, describes the importance of the quotidian act, focusing on the bathing process in exploring the value of life. The series is about a salesman who is inevitably attracted to *Sento* (a public bathhouse in Japan), so he goes to the public bathhouse during work hours (Saito & Igawa, 2016). Each episode similarly shows a close-up of his satisfied face immersing himself in the bathtub and dramatic attitude changes after bathing. Every episode ends with the scene of the main character drinking *sake* (an alcoholic drink in Japanese) in the daytime rather than going back to work after bathing. From *Sento* to *sake*, he is in a utopia where the physical reality is dissolved and only the sense of intimate pleasure is left.

Interiority, a continuous process of defining the desired level of range of intimacy and attuning the relations to achieve it, is in the same vein as bathing in terms of acting to explore the realm of 'not yet determined.' Interiority is not created by being indoors but by doing

action. Interiority is to refuse the polarities and decide to stay in a blurred realm. The belief that there will be a warmer intimacy, the desire to achieve it, and the ambition to move forward is interiority. Interiority is an attitude to explore the sense of intimacy behind the physical structure and an effort to discover the meaning beyond visible materiality. In his poem, *Having a Coke with You*, O'Hara (1974) addresses the pleasure of doing a quotidian act, such as consuming a common commodity with a beloved. Similarly, in Korean films, the scene of the family sipping banana-flavoured milk on the way out of the public bathhouse has been widely used for decades as an epitome of the precious moment with beloved ones. Banana-flavoured milk, which has deeply embedded in Korean culture, is not simply a drink but implies the ultimate warmth in moments with the beloved. Memory is selectively shaped from the actual experience of the past and unconsciously mixed up with the memories of different situations. It also can be created indirectly through the media, education, and culture. Even younger generations, who are more familiar with the entertainment purpose of *jjimjil-bang* rather than traditional public bathhouse usage, understand the meaning of the banana-flavoured milk within the culture. In the future, banana-flavoured milk could be replaced with another common commodity. However, the collective memory of sharing quotidian moments with the beloved will last as a form of imaged memory.

Since the 1990s, the advent of the *jjimjil-bang* and changes in cultural trends have weakened the need for actual bathing in public. However, the symbolic meaning of bathing embedded in the culture, the collective memories in public bathhouses, and the recollection evoked by images in media (Lyndon, 2009) make both bathing and the public bathhouse still alive in a sense of interiority. Interiority is beyond the actual interior-related activity and the spatial structure of being-interior feeling. The collective memories embedded in culture contribute to shaping an imaged environment. Regardless of whether it is actually experienced or not, the image deeply rooted in culture is impactful interiority that affects individuals' spatial perception.

Conclusion

This essay began with my personal experiences and memories. I wrote it as an individual raised in Korea and educated in the US from the perspective of an interior architecture scholar who celebrates the potential of interiority. While writing this essay, I feel myself of that time in that place. This feeling of interiority is a fantasy, but it exists as a spatial and situational lived experience. The memory in *jjimjil-bang*, which has stayed quiet as a small dot somewhere inside me, meets the longing for my hometown and the past left there and

brings me somewhere between, neither exactly here nor there. I feel the moments of intimacy across the physical limitation of time and space. Beyond time and spatial reality, interiority exists as timeless and shapeless. In the process of attuning the sense of interiority in the present based on a desire to move toward better and a memory of the past, a space settles in us as the place. Space is experienced by our senses, perceived as imaged, and reinterpreted into place by us, the subject. Interiority is the most intimate realm that an individual builds and the potentially infinite realm that can be expanded into a sociocultural scale.

In introducing the Korean public bathhouse, *jjimjil-bang*, this essay addresses the issues of program, activity, spatial structure, and—actual, potential, and educated—memories of sense and experience. Thus, this essay suggests different perspectives to understand interiority and consequently highlights the role of the individual and culture in shaping interiority. With the understanding of interiority, I argue that the goal of interior architecture is to design the condition that stimulates the desire for a utopian feeling and leads to active participation in relationships. As the study of *jjimjil-bang* refers to, interiority is the condition for a spatiotemporal moment where the user wants to stay but, at the same time, to leave to explore more. Interiority is a realm, not contradictory of polarities. Interiority is an interdependent process of understanding the self, us, and our surroundings. Interiority is an attitude toward potential.

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