

# Research on the Design Concept and Design Method at the PODO HOTEL by Jun Itami

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## Abstract

This study seeks the essence of the concept of ‘architecture as an intermediary’ of architect Jun Itami (1937–2011) through an analysis of his work PODO HOTEL (2001).

Jun Itami was a second-generation Korean born in Japan. According to our surveys, he designed 123 architectural works, including unbuilt works. He won the Togo Murano Prize in 2010. In addition to his architectural works, he explained his concepts through many articles. His concepts, which transcend the boundaries of country, era, architecture, and art, are partly due to his own identity and the influence of the artists who led ‘Mono-ha’ in Japan.

Thus far, we have analyzed his design concepts through discourse. In this research, we analyzed his design concepts and methods, taking into account the scale, materials, and surrounding environment of his works, through his articles, drawings, and photographs. The development from discourse analysis to spatial analysis is significant in terms of clarifying the application and practice of design concepts.

The analysis target PODO HOTEL was completed on Jeju Island in 2001. ‘Podo’ means grape in Korean. The analysis was based on items selected from his articles, drawings, and photos.

We comprehensively analyzed the reference materials and found that there are two types of items for analysis: [Design concepts] and [Design methods]. [Design concepts] are the conceptual words that he used, comprising five items: <Face>, <Spontaneous generation>, <Node>, <Relatum>, and <Ruin>. [Design methods] are the items that he specifically considered, including four items: <Three-dimensional form>, <Floor planning>, <Sectional planning>, and <Materials>.

As a result of the analysis, we clarified what he aimed for through this work, which can be summarized under the following three types: Acquisition of <Face>, Pursuit of <Node>, and Architecture as an intermediary.

**Keywords:** *Jun Itami; Podo Hotel; Design concept; Design method*

## 1. Introduction

### 1-1. Background

Itami, who developed his architectural theories based on his own identity and interaction with the field of art, pursued regionalism and universality that transcended countries and times. We believe that his unique architectural ideas and methods should be reevaluated in this day and age as

transcending critical regionalism. The world’s interest in him is reflected in events such as the following:

- The exhibition ‘Jun Itami: Architecture of the Wind’ was held in South Korea in 2014.
- The documentary film ‘The Sea of Jun Itami’ was screened in 2019.
- ‘Jun Itami Museum’ will open on Jeju Island, South Korea, in 2022.

In contrast, there is no academic research analyzing his works based on all his discourses; accordingly, we have examined the entirety of his currently available discourses (1–4) to analyze his design concepts. In this study, we analyze his design concepts and methods in view of the scale, materials, and environment of his works through his articles, drawings, and photos. The development from discourse analysis to spatial analysis is significant in clarifying the application and practice of design concepts.

### 1-2. Purpose

By clarifying the design concepts and design methods of his masterpiece, we clarify what he aimed at through this work. In the end, we will consider the practical methods for architectural space of the concept of ‘architecture as an intermediary’ (5) that he sought throughout his life.

### 1-3. Previous researches on Jun Itami

As in previous research on Jun Itami in Korea, there are nine papers comprehensively discussing his architectural ideas (6–14). One study (8) focused on the relationship between the composition of PODO Hotel and private houses on Jeju Island. However, it did not take into account all his discourses related to this work. Our research is novel in analyzing his works based on the design concepts that appear in his discourse.

## 2. Outline of research subject

### 2-1. Outline of Jun Itami

Itami’s major activities are listed in Table 1. He was born in Tokyo as a second-generation Korean Japanese. He designed architectural works for approximately 40 years from around 1970. His major awards are listed in Table 2. In particular, in 2010, he won the Togo Murano Award. His major works are listed in Table 3. According to our survey, he designed 123 architectural works in total, including unbuilt works. His major books are listed in Table 4.

Table 1: Jun Itami’s major activities

| Year | Major activities   |
|------|--|
| 1937 | Born as a second-generation Korean in Tokyo                          |
| 1964 | Graduated from University of Musashi Institute of Technology, B.Arch |
| 1968 | Established JUN ITAMI ARCHITECT A RESEARCH INSTITUTE                 |
| 2006 | Established ITAMI JUN ARCHITECTS CO., LTD.                           |
| 2009 | Installed Master Architect of Jeju Global Education City             |
| 2011 | Died in Tokyo  |

Table 2: Jun Itami’s major awards

| Year | Major award  |
|------|--|
| 2005 | Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters from France   |
| 2006 | Kim Swoo Geun Culture Award  |
| 2006 | Asian Award for Culture and Landscape of Settlements (International Designing Competition on Asian City Housing & Environment) |
| 2008 | Korean Architecture Award  |
| 2010 | Murano Togo Award  |

Table 3: Jun Itami’s major works

| Year | Major work          | Location         |
|------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1975 | India Ink House     | Tokyo, Japan     |
| 1982 | Onyang Museum       | Onyang, Korea    |
| 1991 | Church of Stone     | Tomakomai, Japan |
| 1998 | India Ink Hermitage | Tokyo, Japan     |
| 2001 | PODO HOTEL          | Jeju, Korea      |
| 2006 | Three Art Museums   | Jeju, Korea      |
| 2009 | Church of Sky       | Jeju, Korea      |

Table 4: Jun Itami’s major books

| Year | The title   | The publisher                           |
|------|---|---|
| 1969 | All of the small housings                                       | Nitto Shoin                             |
| 1969 | Tomorrow's interior   | Nihonbungei-sha                         |
| 1975 | The Folk Painting of Joseon Period                              | Kodan-sha                               |
| 1981 | Architecture of Joseon Period                                   | Kyuryudo                                |
| 1983 | Architecture and Culture of Korea                               | Kyuryudo                                |
| 1983 | The Hands of 21 Persons   | Kyuryudo                                |
| 1985 | The Space of Korea  | Kyuryudo                                |
| 1988 | Korean architecture and art                                     | Korean architecture and art Publication |
| 1992 | Selections of Traditional Arts of the Joseon and Goryeo Dynasty | Hanegi Museum                           |
| 2004 | Stone, Wind and Sound   | Hakgojae                                |
| 2007 | Joseon white porcelain  | Hanegi Museum                           |
| 2009 | Selections of Traditional Arts of the Joseon Dynasty            | Hanegi Museum                           |
| 2009 | Selections of Traditional Arts of the Joseon white porcelain    | CREO                                    |
| 2012 | Trace of hands  | TOTO Publishing                         |
| 2014 | Trace of hands  | Misewoom                                |

## 2-2. Outline of PODO HOTEL

In this study, we analyzed the PODO HOTEL. PODO means ‘grape’ in Korean. This work was completed in 2001 and won the Asian Award for Culture and Landscape in 2006. A client who was the chairman of PINX asked Itami to design it. Starting with the golf clubhouse in 1998, Itami designed the buildings of this resort one after another. This hotel has a building area of 4050 square meters. The structural method is a reinforced concrete structure and a partly steel frame structure. The hotel contains the entrance, lobby, the office, a restaurant, and 26 guest rooms on the first floor, and in the basement there is a gallery. The Korean-style guest rooms are located on the mountain side, and Western-style guest rooms are located on the sea side. There are also two courtyards: the circular courtyard and the square courtyard (Fig. 1) (15).

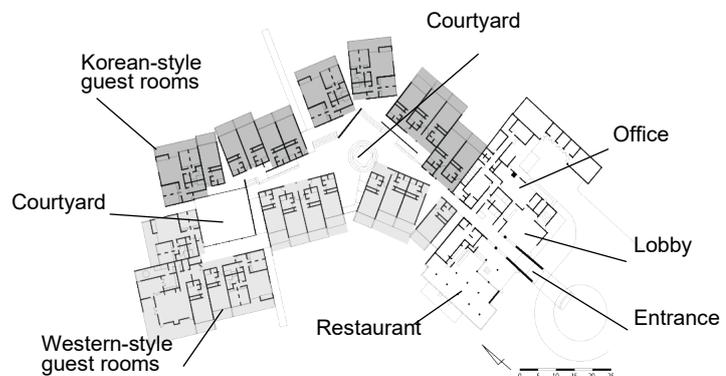


Figure 1: 1st floor planning of PODO HOTEL

### 2-3. Reasons for selecting PODO HOTEL

We chose PODO HOTEL as the subject of our study for two reasons. First, this is a large-scale work on Jeju Island, where he created his major works in his later years; therefore, we believe that it strongly expresses his ideas related to architecture and the region. The second reason is that his letter to the client who commissioned this work clearly shows his ideas related to regionalism and beauty in the design phase.

## 3. Reference materials and methods of analysis

### 3-1. Reference materials

The reference materials are the discourses in which the design concepts about this work appear among all the discourses currently available, and the drawings and photographs that can be visually read. We selected three types of reference materials below. The sources of the drawings and photographs used in this study are from the following collection of works and the website.

- Nine articles describing his thoughts on this work (16–24, Table 5)
- His collection of works: *ITAMI JUN Architecture and Urbanism* (Kamakura: CREO, 2011)
- The official website of PODO HOTEL (25)

Table 5: The articles that describe his thoughts on PODO HOTEL

| Article number | Year  | The title of text                   | The title of the document                       | The publisher     | Author                    | Page    |
|----------------|-------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| 1              | 1983  | Landscape with village              | Architecture and Culture of Korea               | Kyuryudo          | Jun Itami                 | 137-140 |
| 2              | 1983  | The private houses of Joseon Period | Architecture and Culture of Korea               | Kyuryudo          | Jun Itami                 | 167-176 |
| 3              | 1983  | Korean white                        | Architecture and Culture of Korea               | Kyuryudo          | Jun Itami                 | 230-237 |
| 4              | 2012* | Dear Mr. Kanehara Hironori          | Trace of hands                                  | TOTO Publishing   | ITM, Jun Itami architects | 118     |
| 5              | 2001  | -                                   | JUTAKUTOKUSHU                                   | Shinken-chiku-sha | -                         | 28-35   |
| 6              | 2005  | The mind's eye of an architect      | JUN ITAMI 1970–2008                             | Shufunotomo-sha   | Jun Itami                 | 74-75   |
| 7              | 2009  | -                                   | INAX REPORT No.180                              | INAX              | -                         | 22-38   |
| 8              | 2009  | From a bowl of Joseon period        | Selections of Traditional Arts of Joseon Period | CREO              | Jun Itami                 | 6-7     |
| 9              | 2010  | The Voice of the Wind               | ITAMI JUN Architecture and Urbanism             | CREO              | Jun Itami                 | 14-15   |

\*This text was written in 1999

### 3-2. Analysis methods

Our analysis methods are shown in Fig. 2. We reconstructed (simplified) the important discourses extracted from nine articles to derive the [Design concepts], and then derived the [Design methods] from [Design concepts] and drawings and photographs. Lastly, we created a structural diagram of the concept and clarified what he aimed for through this work.

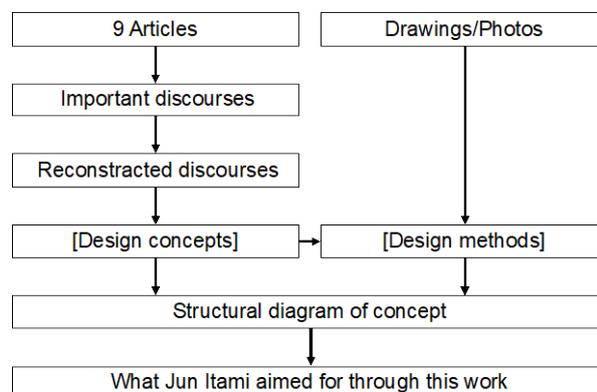


Figure 2 Analysis methods

### 3-3. Structural diagram of concept

Using the method described above, we comprehensively analyzed the reference materials and derived a structural diagram of the concept of PODO HOTEL (Fig. 3). There are two types of items: [Design concepts] and [Design methods]. [Design concepts] are the conceptual words that he used, comprising five items: <Face>, <Spontaneous generation>, <Node>, <Relatum>, and <Ruin>. [Design methods] are the items that he specifically considered, including four items: <Three-dimensional form>, <Floor planning>, <Sectional planning>, and <Materials>. These are interrelated, as shown by the lines in the diagram. The relationship is described in detail in the following section.

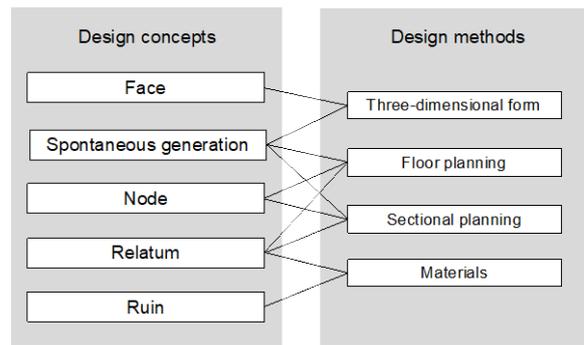


Figure 3 Structural diagram of the concept of PODO HOTEL

## 4. Analysis of [Design concepts] and [Design methods]

### 4-1. Analysis of [Design concepts]

In this chapter, quotations from Itami's discourses are indented, and (Article number-Discourse number) is added at the end of the sentence.

#### 1) <Face>

The scenery of Jeju Island has many small hills made of volcanoes. I got the 'face' from that. (7-1)

It (face) goes beyond the location of the area, so it is the 'power' of the place. I cut it out and shaped it. (7-2)

He described the 'power' emitted from the region as the <Face>. It is the unique context of the place and its power, with a sense of temperature and strength. He captured this unwavering power in the land, and tried to make us realize that 'we are in the land' through the form, material, and atmosphere of his works. On Jeju Island, he regarded 'a series of small hills made of volcanoes' as the <Face>.

#### 2) <Spontaneous generation>

I started the zoning following the vines of spontaneous plants. (4-4)

I think that Korean villages are truly integrated with nature and they are like nature itself. (2-2)

I used the level difference to clarify the essence of the villages and the motif of private houses, and focused on the spontaneous ones. (4-3)

The grapes and villages he used as motifs were both spontaneous and non-artificial. Through his research on Korean private houses, he felt 'human life' in the beauty of roof contours and mountain ridges. He used the concept of <Spontaneous generation> for the zoning of this work.

Corresponding to the terrain, not against the terrain, I was careful about the placement. (4-2)

I want to think that the series of PINX works is the architecture born from the soil, human life, and human thought. (6-1)

I cut out a part of nature and gave it a function. (7-4)

The shape formed along the terrain, the piling of stones to prevent the natural wind, and the concept

of giving function to a part of the nature are also considered <Spontaneous generation> concepts. Moreover, he considered this work to be born from nature and humans.

### 3) <Node>

People have something like a <Node> attached to their emotions. A gentle and continuous flow is suddenly cut off. Then, a new flow starts again from the place where it was cut off, and it is cut off again. Even at this point, there is no fixed rule, and there is a time when infinite deviations intersect. I want to express this with the word <Node>. I think that Korean music, Korean architecture, and Korean art have the <Node>. (8-1)

He defined <Node> as ‘the interval between infinite gaps in blocking,’ and he perceived it through Korean music, Korean architecture, and Korean art. He felt human breathing and warmth in the temperament and rhythm.

There is a land with many hills and a collection of private houses built on the slope. Although the roofs of private houses are discontinuous, they flow sideways under the ridgeline of the mountain as if they form a line. (2-1)

I tried zoning while being aware of the traditional Korean Pansori rhythm and its essence, continuity, discontinuity, and interruption. (4-5)

He discovered the beauty of continuous and discontinuous lines and blocking through his survey of Korean villages. It is said that the concept is <Node>. This concept was influenced by Kim Ji-ha's theory of ‘The beauty of Korean lines’ in 1969 (4). He used this aesthetic sense for the zoning in this work.

### 4) <Relatum>

The theme of the Jeju Island series was the past and present, the tradition and modernism, and nature and architecture, which is also a cross section of my architectural theory. I considered how to harmonize them in opposition. Moreover, I considered how to make use of the indigenous materials, harmonize them in opposition, and bring reality to my abstract world. (5-1)

In 2010, Itami said that this hotel was a work that he started thinking about from <Relatum>. The word <Relatum> is used by Mono-ha artists as well. In this work, he expressed <Relatum> like past and present, local traditions and modernism, and nature and architecture. He considered how to express and relate the essence of each element.

The emphasis was on your (client's) first image and the expression of words. I imagined words as a concept of shutting, hiding, releasing, opening, closing, and mixing. (4-1)

I was aware of the wind and formed a small settlement with stones to prevent wind, walls mixed with bricks, roof shape, and irregular flow. (4-6)

In his letter to the client, these words appeared: shutting, hiding, releasing, opening, closing, and mixing. This shows that this work has a variety of <Relatum>. It is interesting that words like ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ are also used in his article about the space of the Jongmyo Shrine, a Korean traditional architectural work (26).

### 5) <Ruin>

I asked, ‘I want to create a building that will remain as a ruin, so let me use titanium for the roof.’ (7-3)

The roof is durable, so I think it will be a masterpiece for me. (7-5)

He chose titanium as the roofing material to create a building that will survive as a ruin in the future. <Ruin> is usually not used in a positive sense, but he was impressed by the beauty of ancient architecture in Japan, Korea, and Europe before he designed this work. Therefore, he aimed to design architecture that would remain a beautiful landscape over time.

## 4-2. Analysis of [Design methods]

### 1) <Three-dimensional form>

With <Three-dimensional form>, the concepts of <Face> and <Spontaneous generation> were expressed. First, based on what he perceived as <Face>, he made the form in harmony with the surrounding forest. Second, he designed the curve of the roof, which is continuous with the lines of mountains and the roofs of private houses (Fig. 4). He was aware that he was only ‘cut out’ to create a place for people in nature. It can be said that <Spontaneous generation> was thereby expressed.

### 2) <Floor planning>

In <Floor planning>, the concepts of <Spontaneous generation>, <Node>, and <Relatum> were expressed.

First, he made a natural arrangement of several corridors around the courtyard, organized like private houses on Jeju Island (Fig. 5). The corridor looks like a branch of grapes, and the guest rooms look like bunches of grapes. In addition, the layout of the guest rooms is a cluster type. This is similar to the composition of private houses on Jeju Island. In this hotel, our experience is as if we were in a village by the repetition of the inside and outside by the gap spaces between the guest rooms and the courtyard (Fig. 6). It can be said that <Spontaneous generation> was expressed.

Second, like grape branches, the width gradually changes and breaks in the middle. The flow line was designed to raise expectations for the next space (Fig. 7). It can be said that <Node> is expressed here.



Figure 4: <Spontaneous generation> in <Three-dimensional form>

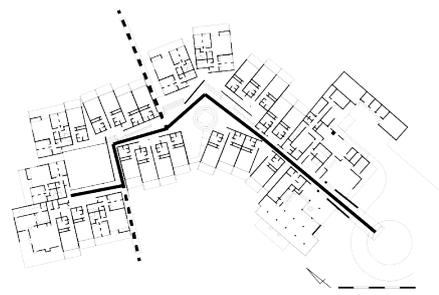


Figure 5: <Spontaneous generation> in <Floor planning>

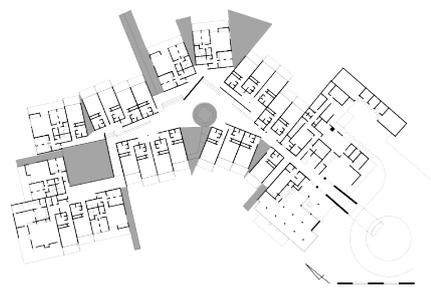


Figure 6: <Spontaneous generation> in <Floor planning>



Figure 8: 'Opening' of <Relatum>

Figure 9: 'Closing' of <Relatum>

Third, it may be said that <Relatum> was expressed (5). <Relatum> is the word in his letter to the client. For example, the courtyards express 'Opening' (Fig. 8). The gradually expanding gaps between guest rooms also express 'Opening,' and the gradually narrowing gap spaces express 'Closing' (Figs. 9, 10). In addition, the plane form that draws the external environment deeply into the internal space indicates the <Relatum> between the external (nature) and the internal (architecture). Moreover, it can be said that the arrangement of Western-style rooms and Korean-style rooms shows the <Relatum> of two concepts: east and west, past and present.

### 3) <Sectional planning>

In <Sectional planning>, the concepts of <Spontaneous generation>, <Node>, and <Relatum> were expressed.

First, in this work, there are small stairs, wide stairs, and ramps, similar to the roads in the villages of Jeju Island (Fig. 11). This level difference allows us to experience the path of traditional private houses. It can be said that <Spontaneous generation> is hereby expressed.

Second, in the part that expresses <Node> in <Floor Planning>, light enters from above and we can feel <Node> as the changes in brightness in walking down the corridor (Fig. 7).

Third, by changing the ceiling height, <Relatum> expresses such concepts as 'Releasing' and 'Confining' (Fig. 12). For example, the ceiling of the corridor gradually increases from the entrance to the circular courtyard, expressing 'Opening' and 'Releasing.'

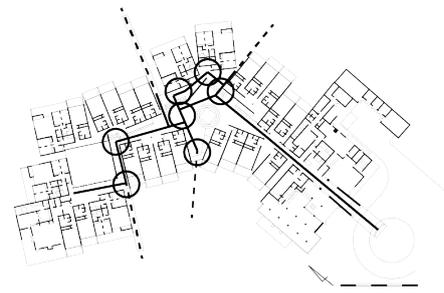


Figure 7 :<Node> in <Floor planning> and <Sectional planning>

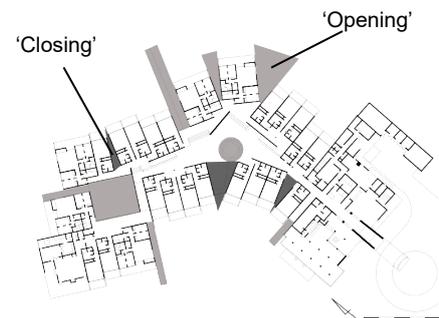


Figure 10: <Relatum> in <Floor planning>

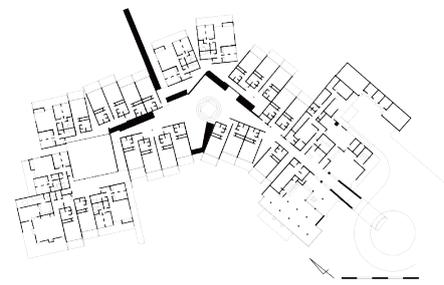


Figure 11: < Spontaneous generation > in < Sectional planning >

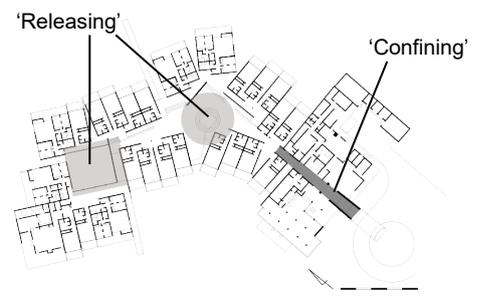


Figure 12: < Relatum > in < Sectional planning >

#### 4) <Materials>

In <Materials>, the concepts of <Relatum> and <Ruin> were expressed.

First, <Relatum> was manipulated using various <Materials>. Stones, bricks, and titanium were used as exterior <Materials>, and cherry wood, black leather iron plate, split bricks, traditional ash walls, and marble were used as interior <Materials>. It can be said that he expected an effect on perception. Light entering through the gaps in the guest rooms is reflected by the basalt rock on the floor, emphasizing the unique texture. Moreover, in the courtyards and guest rooms, the upper part of the shoji is Korean style, and the lower part is Japanese style (Fig. 13), showing the <Relatum> between Korea and Japan.

Second, titanium-plated roofs are extremely durable, while their appearance changes in various ways with changes in the sky on Jeju Island (Fig. 14). He aimed to design an unchanging architecture that would remain as a <Ruin> over time.



Figure 13: Shoji at courtyard



Figure 14: Titanium-plated roofs

#### 4-3. Results of analysis

To summarize the above, 10 effects were extracted from the various combinations of the two items: Through the landscape of Jeju Island, Continuity with existing forms, Village layout plan in corridors and rooms, Ambiguous axis in the corridor, Spatial concept in sequence change, Experience of site height difference, Conflict between open and closed, Creation of spatial rhythm, Perceptual effect of material combination, and Temporal transformation and timelessness.

These effects can be classified into three types: Acquisition of <Face>, Pursuit of <Node>, and Architecture as an intermediary. These can be said to be what he aimed for through this work. The overall relationship is illustrated in Fig. 15.

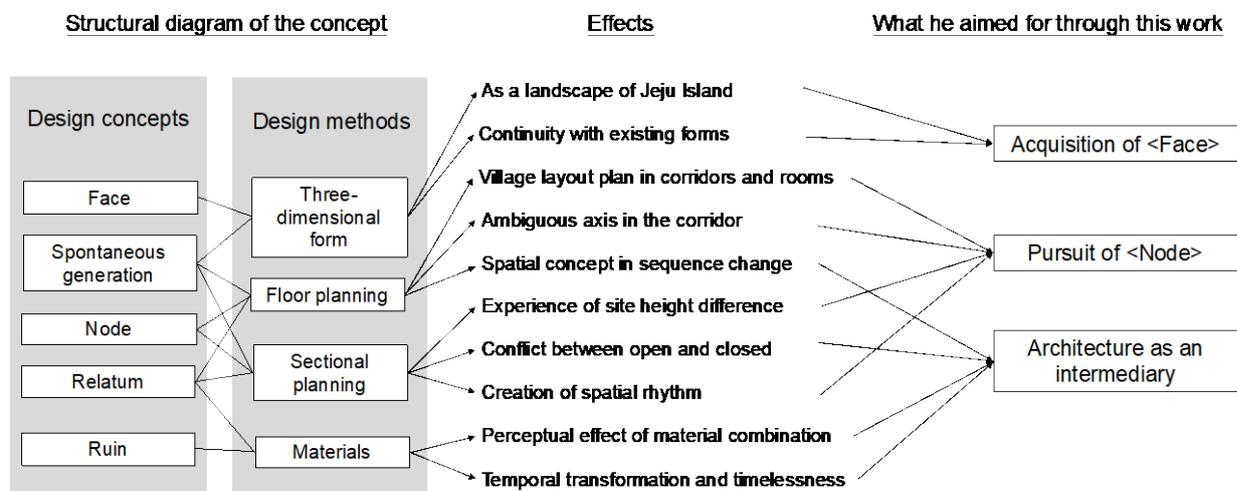


Figure 15: The overall relationship diagram in PODO HOTEL

## 5. Conclusions

As previously stated, we have revealed three points that he aimed for through this work. In this chapter, we summarize each item and then conclude the paper.

### 5-1. Three points that he aimed for through this work

#### 1) Acquisition of <Face>

<Face> means the ‘power’ emitted from the region. This work has ‘selfless beauty,’ which is a beauty that is not artificially created. <Face> is necessary to create an architecture that remains as a landscape and a <Ruin>. In this work, <Face> was expressed as the flowing curves and rhythm of <Node>.

#### 2) Pursuit of <Node>

<Node> denotes the interval between the infinite gaps in blocking. This is what he perceived as the beauty of Korea. He felt human breathing and warmth in the rhythm. In this work, <Node> was expressed as a distortion of the axis, arrangement of rooms, level change in the corridor, and spatial rhythm.

#### 3) Architecture as an intermediary

In previous studies, we found that he aimed to meet ‘new beauty’ through architecture (5). In his words, ‘new beauty’ means the wild beauty and warmth that is lacking in modern architecture. It is said that he created an architecture that acts as an intermediary when humans encounter the ‘new beauty’ through the <Relatum> at PODO HOTEL (Fig. 16). The <Relatum> regarding spatial experience (opening, closing, etc.), <Materials> (various materials), time (past, present, future), and countries (Korea and other countries) has been realized.

Itami explored the ideal way of ‘architecture as an intermediary’ through PODO HOTEL. He described the elements necessary for ‘architecture as an intermediary’ as <Face>. In this land, it was through the <Node> that he expressed the beauty that Korea held for him in all items of the [Design methods]. We can touch it as experience and perception in this work.

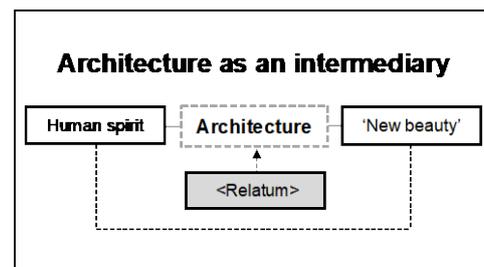


Figure 16: Architecture as an intermediary at PODO HOTEL

### 5-2. Future outlook on research

Our research on Itami’s other works will deepen our consideration of his concept of ‘architecture as an intermediary’ and the method by which he developed it into his architectural spaces.

## Notes

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15. Figure 1. The author traced the drawing published in *ITAMI -Jun Itami Architecture and paintings* (Tokyo: Kyuryudo, 2002), 25.

16. Jun Itami, "Landscape with village", *Architecture and Culture of Korea* (Tokyo: Kyuryudo, 1983), 137-140.
17. Jun Itami, "The private houses of Joseon Period", *Architecture and Culture of Korea*, 167-176.
18. Jun Itami, "Korean white", *Architecture and Culture of Korea*, 230-237.
19. ITM and Jun Itami architects, "Dear Mr. Kanehara Hironori", *Trace of hands* (Tokyo: TOTO Publishing, 2012), 118.
20. *JUTAKUTOKUSHU* (Tokyo: Shinkenchiku-sha, 2001), 28-35.
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