

# Study on improving the design of Outdoor Signage for Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street

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**Abstract:** Seoul suffers from over congestion of outdoor signage. Signage is on everywhere including on windows, on entrance way, on every available space on the building wall. The excessiveness is up to the point that decorating surface of a building is almost meaningless and most signage is lost in each other's profuse presence. The competition to attract more attention is resulting in bigger, brighter, and more stimulating signage. As the result, outdoor signage of Seoul have lost its intended function to provide useful information and befallen to be viewed as visual pollution.

As it is an important visual element of city view, the outdoor signage also serves important role of delivering needed information in proper way to enhance convenience of city life. At the same time, it is a very important marketing tool that is essential to economic activity. Outdoor signage also holds enormous potential to act as a visual and structural element to improve city view just as a beautiful architecture does.

However, outdoor signage that does not consider the harmony with its surrounding environment can only be treated as visual pollution. The effort of Seoul to better the city view by improving the outdoor signage started at Jong-ro area. By reforming outdoor signage, the streets of Jong-ro achieved much more harmonious and aesthetically pleasing city view.

The study went through analysis of current status and characteristics of outdoor signage of Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street, Gangdong district to suggest detailed design solution to reform the roadside view and to revitalize the street.

**Key words:** *Outdoor signage, Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street, City view*

## 1. Purpose

Gangdong district has designated Cheonho-dong as specialized area for road reformation, and presently is preparing for the 2nd round of outdoor signage reformation. Basic design scheme has been developed for improvement of outdoor signage.

Purpose of this project is to improve the visual aesthetics of Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street outdoor signage. The solutions are meant to provide benefits for both user and provider, as well as to achieve versatile values for district environment. By improving the street environment, users will be able to enjoy pleasant pedestrian space with visual stability and richness. The providers can attract more customers thus create more revenue. The district can benefit from development of specialized market place.

The geographical scope of this study starts from 421-10 Cheonho-dong and ends with 454-45. The area covers 300 m of Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street with 43 buildings in contact. The expected results of this project are a major improvement in city view, pedestrian centered public space, and the revitalization of the district economy.

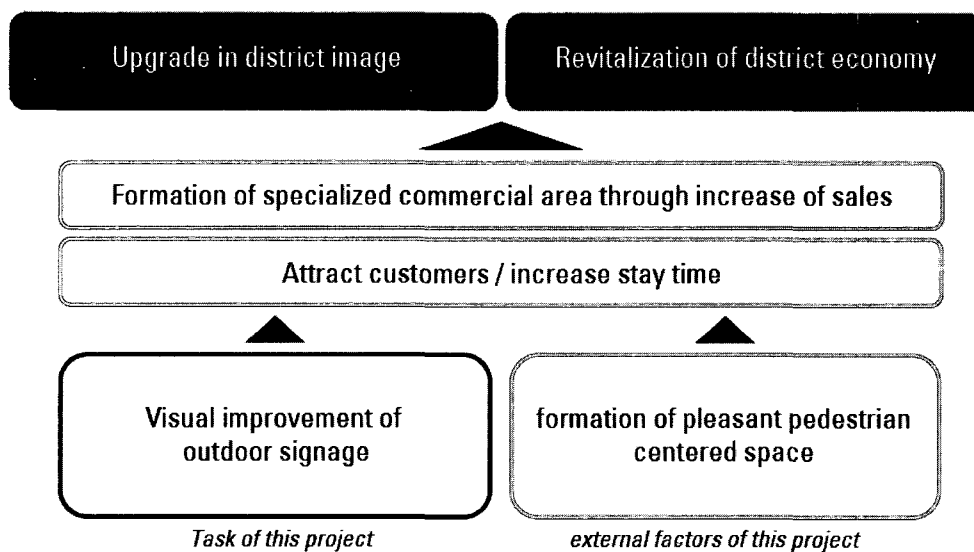


Fig. 1 Purpose of project

## 2. Definition of outdoor signage

Outdoor signage in legal definition means signboard, billboard, banner, poster, leaflet, etc. that can be seen in public space temporarily or permanently. ‘Signboard’ is a term used more generally than outdoor signage.<sup>1</sup>

Types of outdoor signage are horizontal signboard, extruded signboard, pillar type signboard, and window signage.

<sup>1</sup> Design Manual for making good signboard, 2005, Seoul, 6pp

## **2.1 Horizontal signboard**

Horizontal signboard can be installed or painted on building wall. Materials like wood, acryl, metal are generally used to express letter, shape, symbol, etc. Generally, one horizontal signboard is allowed for one business. If the business is located at the corner of the building, two signboards are allowed. Currently in designated district for city aesthetic, horizontal signboard is prohibited for 2<sup>nd</sup> fl. Instead 3D letter type signage is recommended.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.2 Extruded signboard**

Signage with letter, shape, or symbol displayed on materials such as wood, acryl, metal that extrudes out from wall of the building are called extruded signage. The maximum extrusion is 1.2m from the wall and 20m wide (30m for business area). If the width of the building is under 10m the signage can be in two lines.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.3 Pillar type signboard**

Pillar type signboard displays letter, shape, symbol, etc. on the board made of wood, acryl, metal, etc. and directly stands on the ground. In some cases the signboard is attached on extruded round, triangular, or rectangular pole. Only one pillar type signboard can be used per each building site and the dimension cannot exceed 40 m<sup>2</sup> in total.<sup>4</sup>

## **2.4 Window signage**

Window signage means letter, shape, symbol, etc. imprinted on fabric, paper, vinyl, etc. which is attached on building windows. This type of signage should be applied for windows of building lower than 3 floors above the ground. The signage must be 1/2 the square measure of the entrance door, or dimension under 3 m<sup>2</sup>. Signage that is smaller than 20 cm in height or width is not to be included in calculating the total.<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Status analysis of Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street**

### **3.1 Status analysis of type of business**

Currently Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street has about 222 businesses, which include pub, restaurant, shop, etc. To call is a specialized fashion district the distribution of business is quite random. Presently the top categories of business are food, fashion, and service in order.

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<sup>2</sup> the administrative raw for the outdoor signboard & Advertising, article 15

<sup>3</sup> the administrative raw for the outdoor signboard & Advertising, article 17

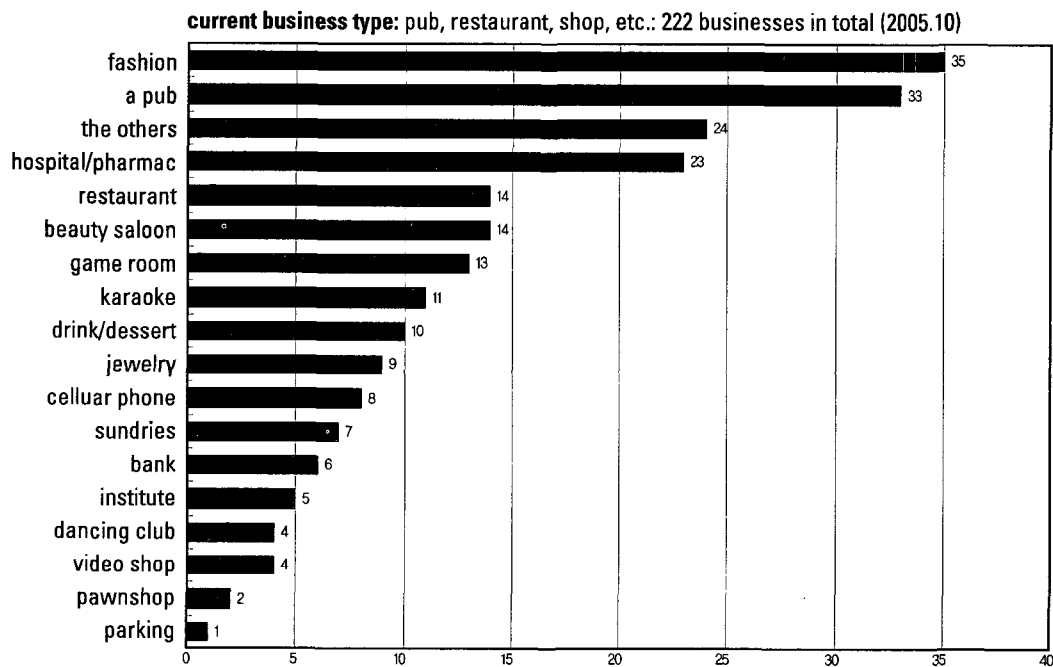
<sup>4</sup> the administrative raw for the outdoor signboard & Advertising, article 20

<sup>5</sup> the administrative raw for the outdoor signboard & Advertising, article 30

### 3.2 Status analysis of current shops and signage

There are 222 stores in 43 buildings, which average out to be 5.2 shops for each building (with exception of Nabi Shopping Mall). With exception of buildings around Cheonho main street and Nabi Shopping Mall, most buildings are lower than 5 floors above ground and deteriorating.

Currently 789 signages are installed for 222 shops, which average out to 3.6 per each shop. Among 789 signages 387(49%) are installed without proper permit, and 345(42.7%) are violating the law in one way or the other. (display method, installation, lighting, etc.) Only 57(7.2%) signages met the legal requirement and had proper permit.



**Fig. 2** Status analysis of current business type

	Horizontal signboard	Extruded signboard	Vertical signboard	Window sign	Pillar type signboard	film	Billboard	Neonsign	Total
amount	354	162	108	87	61	11	4	2	789
percentag	44,9	20,5	13,7	11,0	7,7	1,4	0,5	0,3	100

**Table 1** Status analysis of current signage type

### 3.3 Customer analysis

Customers are mainly in their 10-30's. The customer age profile changes by the time of the day. Daytime through early evening, the street is mostly occupied by teenagers. However, from late evening to early next day, customers at their 20-30's occupy the street. Currently, teenagers with low purchasing power are occupying the street for longer period of time. The challenge is to reform the street to attract customers at their 20-30's who has more purchasing power for longer period of time..

## 4. Case Study: domestic & international

### 4.1 Passionate street of youth\_ Harajuku

Outdoor signage in Harajuku, the most prominent fashion district in Tokyo, is intended to meet the eyes of pedestrian rather than of the traffic. On the main street, each luxury shop and café prides on its elegance with shop exterior decoration that seamlessly integrate with the core attributes of the building itself. Outdoor signage of smaller shop in alleyway is also designed and installed with its environment in mind. Each signage is uniquely designed yet, integrates nicely with its surrounding.

### 4.2 Renown for signboard\_ Osaka Dotonbori

Street of Osaka Dotonbori is internationally famous for its splendid neon signs and unique billboards and statues installation. The neon signs form contrasting yet harmonious accordance with the traditional style of Japan. As a famous food district, it is very eventful and attracts people with its magnificence.

### 4.3 Glittering street of neon sign\_ Ginza

In Ginza area where there are many high-rise buildings, extruded signage is more common. To preserve the exterior design of the buildings, horizontal store front signage was mostly avoided. Instead, information is displayed on extruded signage for better visibility from the road. For shops by the walkway horizontal store front signage was included in the design of building exterior from the beginning. More information like location and operation hours of each shop is effectively displayed on general information board. Extruded signage of each building had unified size and shape from the beginning. This helped to effectively deliver needed information without damaging the street view.

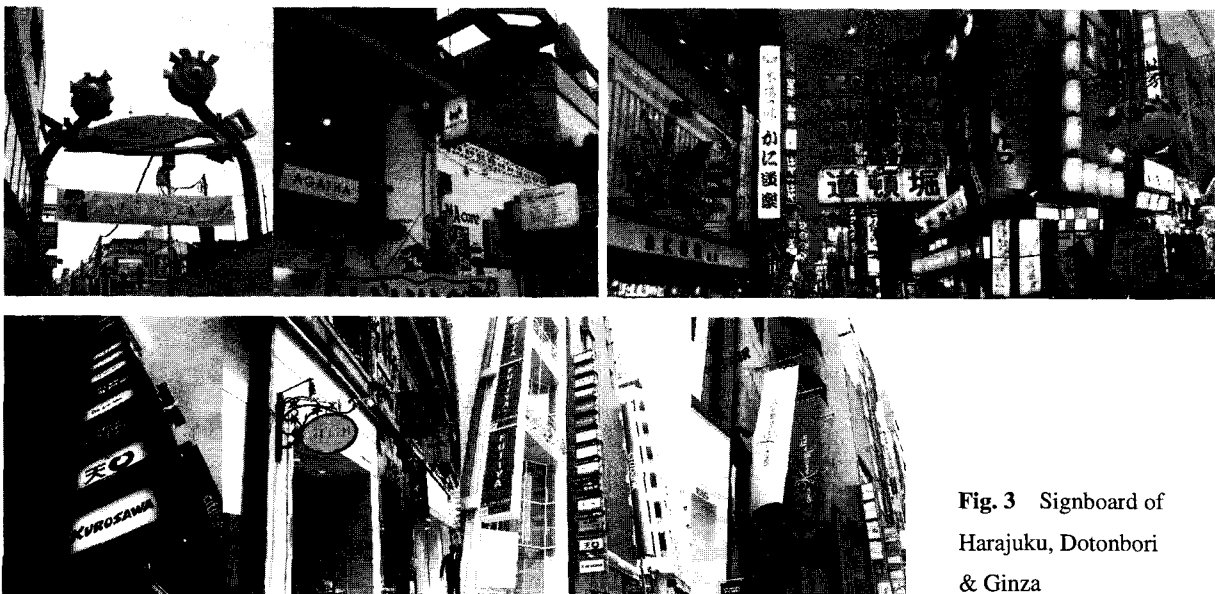


Fig. 3 Signboard of Harajuku, Dotonbori & Ginza

#### **4.4 Kunkook University\_ Noyu Rodeo Street**

The roadway in front of Kunkook University (Gwangjin-gu, Soeul) was transformed into pedestrian centered walkway. Outdoor signage of each shop was limited to 1 horizontal signboard and 1 extruded signboard. The size of the letter was limited to 3/8 of the size of the board, and full-lit signboard was prohibited. As the result of this effort, this fashion specialized district was included into a tourist course. With more visitors the sales automatically increased. This renovation effort caught attention of professional domestic city planners as a exemplary case that proved effectiveness of block unit renovation.

#### **4.5 Hongik University \_ Street of youth & Flea Market**

Unique design of outdoor signage at 'Street of Youth' (in front of Hongik University) attracts attention of young customers. Store signage directly reflects and contrasts the exterior of the store to create unique atmosphere. In a playground near Hongik University, a flea market opens every Saturday evening. Many people visit this flee market in the weekends for the unique and dynamic blending experience of with participating artists. This space and cultural events that happens in it is positively adding cultural value to its district.



**Fig. 4** Noyu rodeo street & Flea market

### **5. Analysis of problem**

#### **5.1 Outdoor Signage**

Most of outdoor signage is without proper permit or illegally installed. They are over crowded, oversized, and over expressed. Signage is installed without concession or a compromise with its environment, resulting in loss of information delivering power. As if that was not enough, standing signage and illegal advertisement are all over the roadside, blocking the walkway and damaging the aesthetics of city view.

#### **5.2 Street view**

Buildings of Rodeo Street are mostly between 2-5 floors above the ground and very old with exception of few renovated buildings. Although roadside has been reformed to widen the pedestrian way,

the factors like high level difference between the walkway and roadway, and the electric power cable on the roadway still need more reformation for better city aesthetics. Lack of roadside trees and street furniture for the convenience of pedestrians are yet another improving point. Inappropriate public information signages and illegal street vendors are also hindering elements for improving the aesthetics of city view.

### 5.3 Resident Survey

- time period: 2005.09.12 ~ 09.30
- number of persons: 268 persons
- contents: the knowledge & revitalization of the Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street

## 6. Improvement Direction

### 6.1 Image Keywords

Keywords that represent the current Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street and the new keywords for improvement concept has been selected simultaneously for comparison. This process was performed to analyze positive and negative of its current image and eliminate negative and strengthen common denominator and positive.

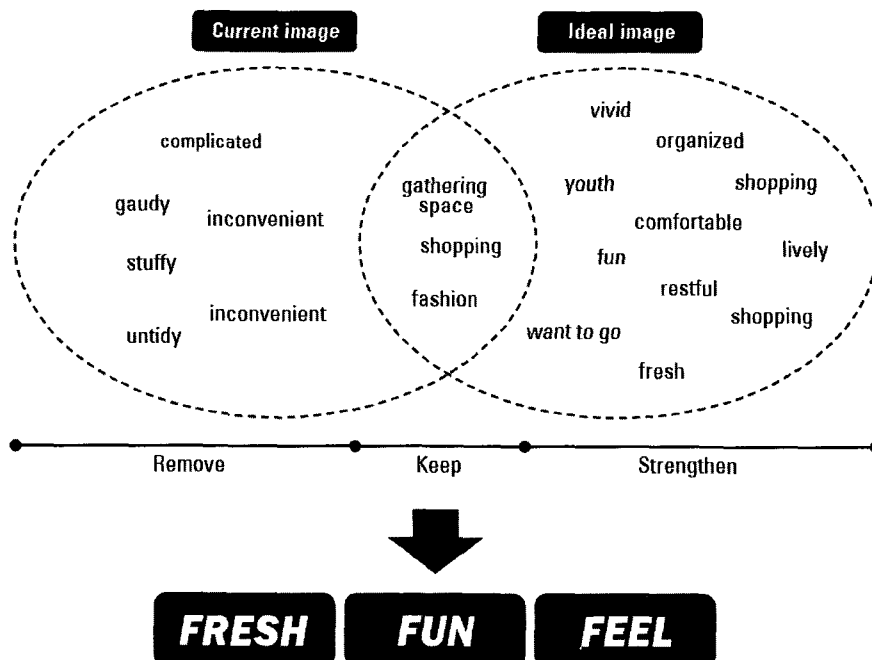


Fig. 5 Image keywords

### 6.2 Concept

The concept is providing cultural space with pleasant and clean visual elements to target customers

in their 20-30's. The concept proposes 3F strategy to create pleasant, clean, exciting, and youthful street with abundant cultural elements.

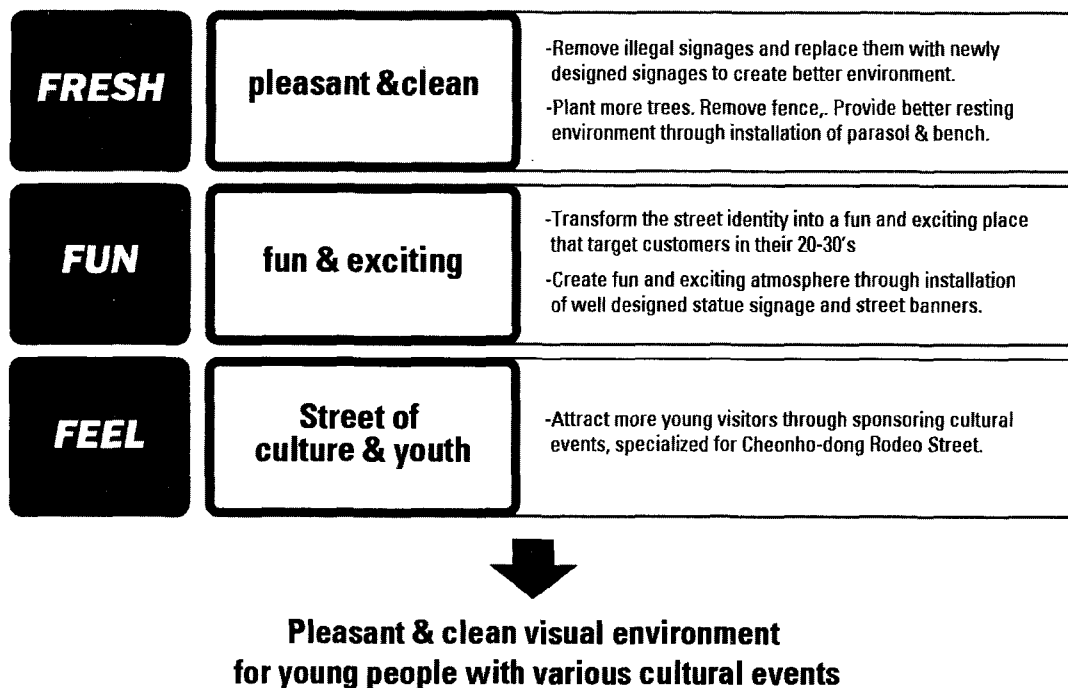


Fig. 6 Design concept

### 6.3 Specifics of improvement

As a guideline to improve design of outdoor signage, specifics such as quantity, shape, size, color, letter, lighting has been set up. Proposal to improve roadside atmosphere was included since it is essential to the success of this project.

#### 6.3.1 Quantity

There are way too many outdoor signages in this area. The number of signage should be regulated according to the administrative law for the outdoor signboard & advertising.<sup>6</sup> By designating Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street as a specialized city aesthetic district, the number of permitted signage as well as the size should be decreased and strictly regulated under special care system.

#### 6.3.2 Type

Considering the narrowness of the street and small scale building, standing signage should be avoided. Horizontal signage for 1st fl should be the square type and avoid direct lighting. For 2nd fl, channel type should be used. Extruded signage should be scaled down and uniquely designed. The all the signboard of a building should have unified size and shape that is intended from the designing phase of the

<sup>6</sup> the administrative raw for the outdoor signboard & Advertising, article 13, clause 7



architecture itself.

### **6.3.3 Size**

'The bigger the better' does not apply to outdoor signage. It only works when the signage visually and structurally create harmonious look with its environment. Each building should pre-plan the size and location of the signage for consistency. Especially in case of extruded signage, the building owner should pre-install it before the sales.

### **6.3.4 Color**

Use of high saturation color can obstruct the aesthetics of city view, therefore should be avoided when possible. In order for varieties of outdoor signage to harmoniously exist together, use of mid-tone color planning would work effectively. In order for varieties of outdoor signage to harmoniously exist together on the street, use of mid-tone color planning is necessary.

### **6.3.5 Lighting**

One of the most major elements that interfere with good city view is full lit the square type signage. Although this kind of signage has high visibility at night, because of lack of consideration for street view aesthetics, it is difficult to create harmonious look with surrounding environment. Instead, channel lettering and moody lighting through use of LED is suggested for better street view at night time. Also proper and controlled ways of using neon signage can be carefully considered.

### **6.3.6 Typography**

Big and thick lettering for outdoor signage does not mean better visibility. It may catch more attention, yet that does not necessarily mean it is more readable. For better readability it is important to respect negative space of letters. Rather than confusing readers with excessive expression of obsolete information, it is important to deliver prominent information in compact format for better understanding.

## **6.4 Roadside reformation**

The 1<sup>st</sup> street reformation project of Cheonho-dong has been completed, yet, it still needs more improvement to coincide with the concepts of this project. It needs to provide more comfortable resting place and attractive street culture to encourage visitors come to stay around longer.

For more comfortable pedestrian environment, sidewalk needs to be lowered or leveled off to the height of roadway. Decrease the size of bollard and adjust the placement to the most effective position. Increase the varieties of road side trees as well as the quantity to create restful area and more environmentally friendly atmosphere. Instead of cold industrial look of metal fence for roadside trees, install parasol and bench to create and support eventful street culture. The gray electric power pole on the roadside should be replaced with environmentally friendly material such as wood.

Check the effectiveness of public traffic signage and make sure that the roadside view is not hindered by obsolete signage. To raise the awareness of Rodeo Street, specially designed signage should be installed at both sides of the entrance. Use streetlamp and building wall banners, to create active and exciting atmosphere.

### 6.5 Concept Drawing

In the concept drawing Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street is divided in zones to check the specifics of improvement points for each area. Zone 1 is area centering Cheonho main street entrance. Zone 2 is area centering Rodeo Street. Zone 3 is centering the Old cross street. The purpose of zoning is to comparably predict roadside environment after outdoor signage improvement.

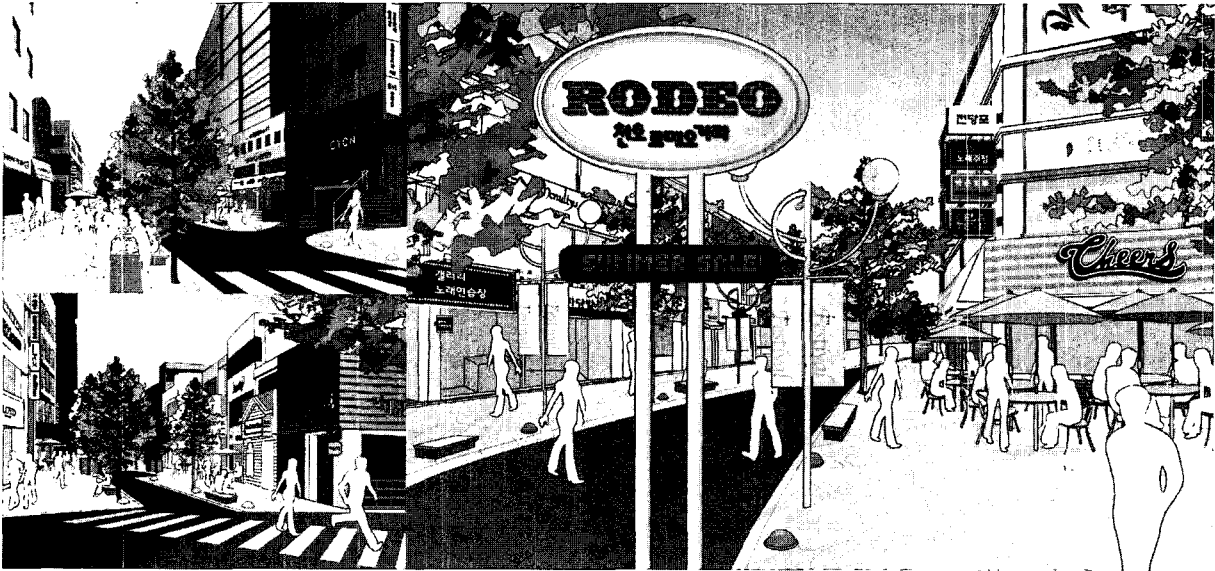
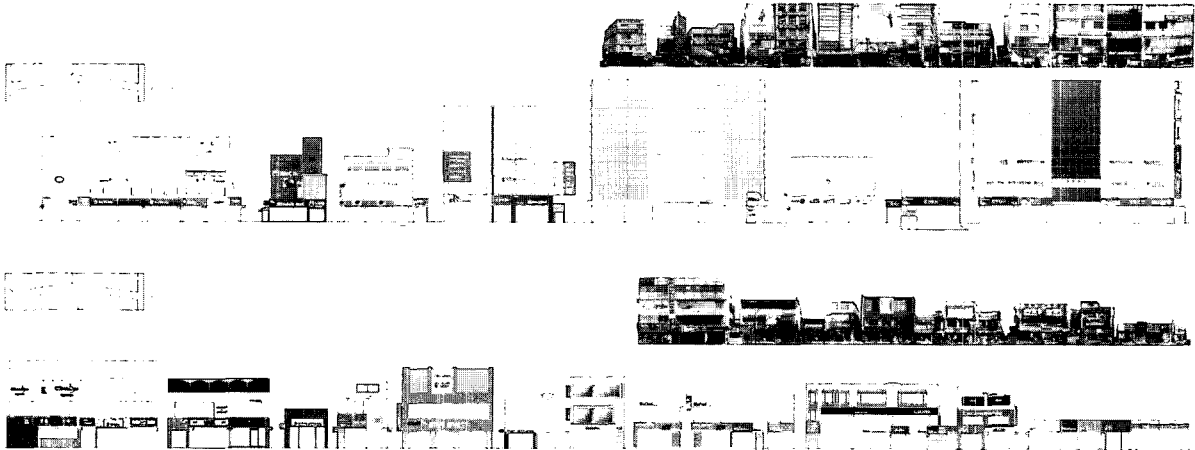


Fig. 7 Concept drawing

### 7. Results & Proposal



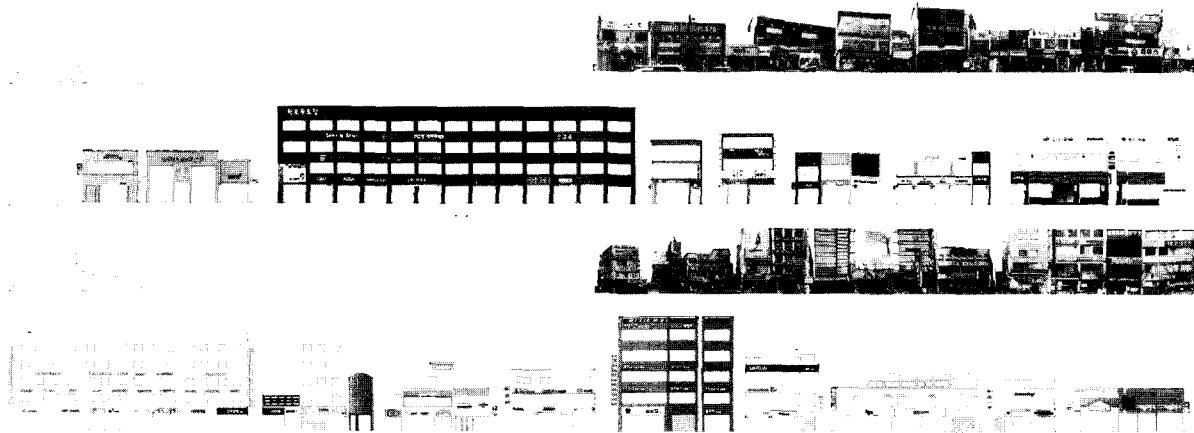


Fig. 8 Design results of street

### 7.1 Proposal by Building\_453-15~17

**Building characteristics** / the front side of this high-rise building faces Cheonho main street. Except for couple of financial and communication network related companies, most other occupants are hospital.

**Design Direction** / The current brand signage was replaced with channel or 3D lettering signage. The size of the letters was decreased. Unified fonts were applied for box type signage of various hospitals. For integrated signage 'Gangdong Medical' extruded type signage was used.

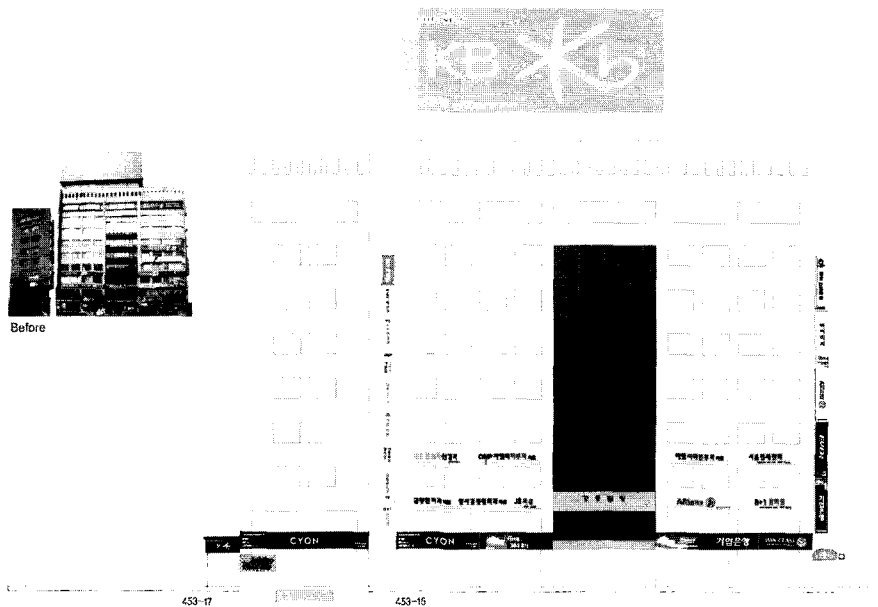


Fig. 9 Proposal by building\_453-15~17

### 7.2 Proposal by Building\_453-8~3

**Building characteristics** / The building is located near Nabi Shopping Mall. Illegal signages pasted over the whole building surface.

**Design Direction** / Integrated informational signage was installed on front side. All other detailed information were rearranged and displayed on the extruded signage, which extends out of the side of the building.

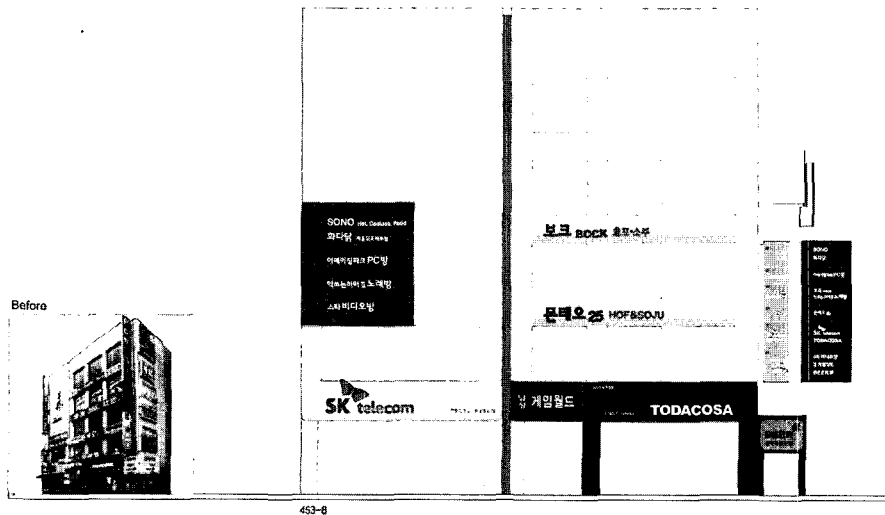


Fig. 10 Proposal by building\_453-8~3

### 7.3 Proposal by Building\_441-41, 411-4

**Building characteristics** / Although the exterior of the front of the building is coated and painted, they are deteriorating. / Board type signage and banners are excessively covering the whole building including the windows.

**Design Direction** / Unified the 1<sup>st</sup> fl and the 2<sup>nd</sup> fl visually by using blind. Separate board type signage was not used. / All the signboards and banners on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> fl were removed. 3D letter type signage was installed on the wall space between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fl. The windows were visually unified by installation of banner.

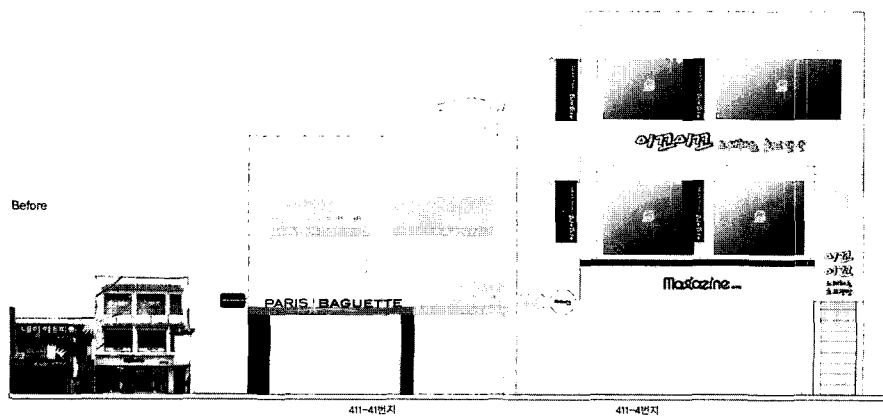


Fig. 11 Proposal by building\_441-41, 411-4

#### 7.4 Proposal by Building\_454-65

**Building characteristics** / The building has a very complicated structure. There are high numbers of occupants. The general tone of the surface is on darker side.

**Design Direction** / Considering the dark tone of the surface and complicated structure, the signage was designed to emphasize simplicity and attention.

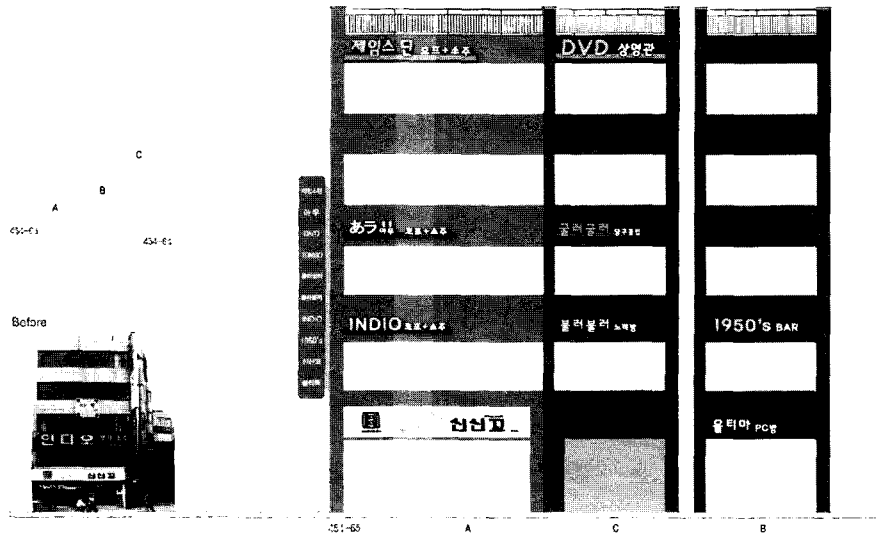


Fig. 12 Proposal by building\_454-65

### 7. Conclusions

The attempt to improve outdoor signage system should not stop at this project. This Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street project is only a start. Detailed design guideline for signage, Budget to support replacement of outdoor signage, and continuous cooperation and support from shop owners are keys to the success of this process.

Also, roadside image upgrade through 2nd reformation that corresponds to the concepts of this project is needed to create synergy. In order to attract more people and encourage them to stay longer in Cheonho-dong Rodeo Street, various cultural events should be planned and performed with consistency. Rather than single-time event, through continuous effort, Rodeo Street should adapt flea-market to create new and specialized cultural theme.

Improvement in outdoor signage system, reformation of roadside atmosphere, and sponsoring of cultural event, together can maximize the effectiveness of this project and transform Cheonho-dong area into an exemplary case of cultural street of Korea.

To improve city roadside atmosphere, study for more fundamental solution is essential. As the first step, the building owner needs to take charge of signage installation to prevent competitive installation of signage by each business. The design of signage installation should be included from architectural planning

stage. Also, instead of quantitative dependence on related legislation, qualitative deliberation needs to be carried out for fundamental improvement of the quality of signage.

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