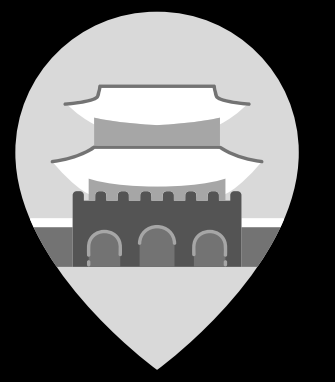


# City and Society: Seoul in the 1960s - 1970s



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## Introduction

Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, is one of the most technologically advanced and vibrant cities in the world nowadays. Having been the capital of Korea for more than six hundred years, the city symbolizes the tremendous prosperity of Korea. Korean society has undergone major transformations since the 1960s. Urbanism impacted social relationships and personalities; it also produces the feeling of anonymity, superficiality, transiency, and individualism (Louis Wirth 1938, 1 & 7). The rapidly industrializing society and economic development of Seoul in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a population shift from rural areas to the nation's capital in search of opportunities and upward social mobility; such an urbanization process with the rising individualism further revealed the actual predicaments in the working class behind the triumph of the Miracle on the Han River.

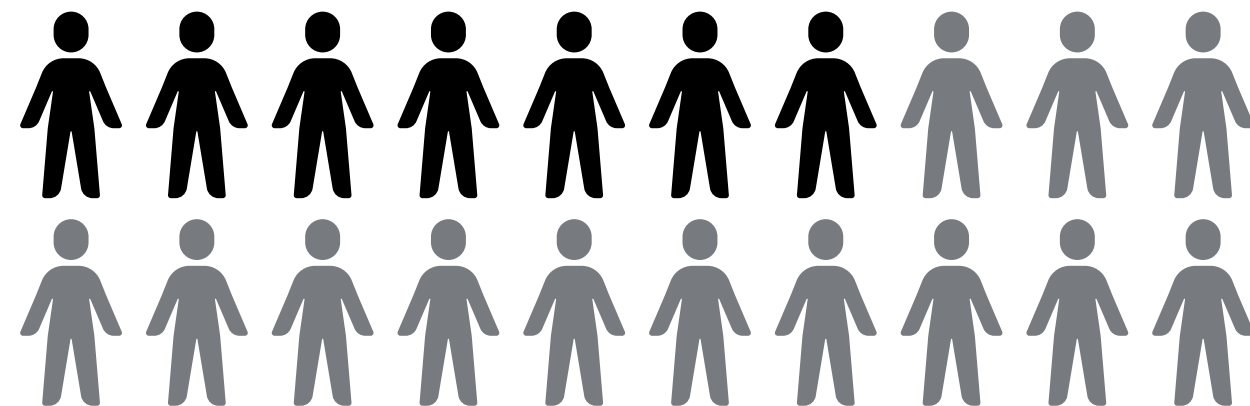
## Methodology

The paper answers the following research questions, (1) What are the impacts of rapid urbanization on Korean society in the 1960s and 1970s; (2) What would a sudden increase in city population and change in class structure bring to society; (3) How did people feel and concerned; (4) How did those excruciating predicaments arise and what does the role of individualism play in modern contemporary society.

By utilizing the two modern pieces of literature, Kim Sŭngok's "Seoul: 1964, Winter," (1966) and Cho Sehŭi's *The Dwarf* (1978) with the urbanization history of South Korea, this study examines the corresponding issues and brings out more clearly about the underlying impacts of urbanization in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Analyses and Results

### Urbanization, Urban History and Economic Policy under Park Chung Hee Era



The population of the six largest cities, including Seoul comprised around 32% of the total national population in 1970 (Joo 2018, 24).

The decision of limiting aid and substituting the direct grants with economic development plan from the United States in the later early 1960s, the Rhee Sang Man's government was not able to curb inflation, the high unemployment rate and promote further economic growth. In the Third Republic of Korea, Park Chung Hee's regime then established the first Five Years Economic Development Plan in 1962. The plan shifted the economy focus from import substitution industrialization to export-oriented industrialization, and from light industries to heavy chemical industries (Joo 2018, 18). The rapid economic growth has substantially generated more national revenue and attracted people to move from rural regions to Seoul for earning more income and searching for upward mobility.

### Urban Growth Management Policies of Seoul

#### Managing Surging Urbanization: 1960-1971

- Relocating parts of government offices in Seoul to other major cities and key strategic facilities
- Implementing the enactment of the regional industrial development plan and develop new industrial cities in the Southern Eastern part of the country
- Restricting local students transfer into Seoul

#### Controlling Urban Sprawl: 1972-1979

- Making an amendment to Urban Plan Law
- Designing a "green belt" surrounding Seoul city boundary to ban unlawful housing construction and limit its urban physical growth

However, it is not able to relocate the population. The increasing population still flooded Seoul and generated more slums and social issues in Seoul (Kim and Donaldson 1979, 664; Ahn and On 1997, 287-288).

### Reconfiguration of Social Dynamics in Korean Society

The economic development plan in the 1960s focused on export-oriented industrialization, which led to the sudden growth and expansion in labor intensive manufacturing sectors. A low wage policy was maintained to build up the international competitiveness of Korean exports and support the rapid industrialization by recruiting a cheap industrial labor force (Kim and Donaldson 1979, 662). By regulating the price of domestic agricultural products at the time, the growth of the agricultural sector significantly decreased compared to the rapidly growing industrial sector. The composition of the working population changed. The proportion of the agricultural class therefore declined while that of the working-class and middle class in cities grew.

### Untold Stories Behind the Korean Miracle: The 1960s and The 1970s



#### "Seoul: 1964, Winter" (1966) by Kim Sŭngok

It describes the story of three strangers with different backgrounds meeting and drinking alcohol together by circumstance on a single night in 1964.

"Seoul is a place that includes every kind of desires" "I feel something called life (saeng). I feel freed and untied from everything when I leave the house at night and start wandering in Seoul". (Kim 2016, 10, 14)

Seoul contains lots of desires and acts as a transitory space, the way to explain and approach varies from each individual. The younger men embrace the imaginary freedom, individualism and meaningless place at the night in Seoul while the older listless man cannot.

#### The Dwarf (1978) by Cho Sehŭi

It describes the lives of different socio-economic classes in capitalistic Korean society, especially the "dwarf" family during the time of industrialisation and urbanization in the Park Chung Hee regime.

"They earn more than ten times the money we made They can go back to their clean and warm house at night." "I want to kill all the people who called dad a dwarf". (Cho 2018, 219-220)

The linked stories tell the panic, insecurity and exhaustion from the predicament faced by the working class. The dehumanization in factories deprived the human rights of the working class. The social stratification in Korean society is serious. People are categorized into different groups and classes. A large gap further between the poor and rich is found and exacerbates the resources allocation, human rights and discrimination.

## Conclusion

From the 1960s to the 1970s, South Korea experienced the rapid industrialization and economic development than ever. Seoul have undergone a noticeable demographic change, which was the great population shift from rural areas to the nation's capital in search of opportunities. Throughout the urbanization process, urbanism in Korean society changed the social relationships, and personalities and introduced the rise of individualism. "Seoul: 1964, Winter" (1966) and *The Dwarf* (1978) illustrate the social condition and problems encountered by the different socio-economic classes, especially the working class. The Miracle of Han River did improve the living environment of South Korea and international image, yet people might overlook various social problems, including individual subjectivity, autonomy, class consciousness, discrimination and more.

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