

Historical Consequences of Migration and urbanization in the Republic of Korea

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<Contents>

I. Introduction	IV. Post-War Period(1953-early 1960's)
II. Liberation Period(1945-1950)	V. Industrialization Period (since the mid-1960's)
III. Korean War Period(1950-1953)	

I. Introduction

Factors relating to migration and urbanization in this article cover a rather broad range including various factors such as political, economic, and socio-cultural variables which have affected the course of urbanization of Korea since the end of World War II.

In social phenomena, demographic factors and social factors in a broad sense are mutually interacting as head and tail of a coin in the

course of social development in a given period of time. In some periods, demographic factors may dominate and affect the course of social development more than social factors, while social factors may direct the course of population changes in other periods of time.

Population changes in relation to migration and the urbanization process since the liberation of Korea can be broadly divided into several stages : 1) the early period of liberation (1945-1950), 2) the Korean War period(1950-1953), 3) post Korean War period(1953-early 1960's),

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and 4) the industrialization period(since the mid-1960's). In each stage, either demographic factors or social factors in a broad sense have played more decisive roles in the course of population change and social development.

When the urbanization of Korea is reviewed, the population growth was very high during the early period of Liberation, as shown in Table 1, exceeding 4.9% average yearly growth due to high natural growth plus enormous social growth by immigrants from outside of south Korea, mainly from Japan, China(particularly from Manchuria), and north Korea. In this period, the population growth in the urban area was extremely high, at 11.0% yearly, due to the enormous population concentration in urban areas, particularly in Seoul. The population in rural areas also showed a high growth rate of 3.9% yearly due to a high level of fertility and

resettlement of repatriates and refugees from abroad and north Korea. During the Korean War period, population growth slowed to the level of 1.0% yearly due to low fertility caused by family separation and high mortality resulting in a great loss of manpower. However, urban population growth continued at a high level of 6.8% yearly due to refugee movement during the war, while the rural population decreased. During the period from the end of the Korean War in 1953 to the mid-1960's, the trend of population growth was very high, at a level of 2.7%–2.9% yearly in a closed population due to the high level of fertility, though family planning programs were initiated from the early 60's. In this period(1955–1960), the urban population grew by 5.6%-5.9% yearly with the increase in the number of cities from 27 to 32 and with in-migration from rural to

Table 1. Urbanization in the Republic of Korea (1944-1990)

Year	Total Population (thousand)	Yearly growth rate(%)	Urban area			Rural area	
			Population (thousand)	Growth rate(%)	Percent Urban	Population (thousand)	Growth rate(%)
1944	15,879		2,064		13.0	13,815	
1949	20,189	4.9	3,474	11.0	17.2	16,715	3.9
1955	21,526	1.0	5,263	6.8	24.5	16,263	-0.4
1960	24,989	2.9	6,998	5.6	28.0	17,991	1.9
1966	29,193	2.7	9,780	5.9	39.1	19,413	1.3
1970	31,466	1.9	12,953	7.3	41.2	18,513	-1.2
1975	34,707	2.0	16,793	5.3	48.4	17,914	-0.7
1980	37,436	1.5	21,434	5.0	57.3	16,002	-2.2
1985	40,448	1.5	26,443	4.2	65.4	14,005	-2.6
1990	43,520	1.5	32,397	4.1	74.4	11,123	-4.5

Source : National Statistical Office, Census Report.

urban areas, which brought the increase of rural population growth down to the level of 1.9%-1.3% yearly, or far lower than the national growth level during the period.

During the period of industrialization since the mid-1960's up to present, population growth rates have slowed down due to the drastic decline in fertility to a below-replacement level by effective implementation of government family planning programs. Urban population growth has accelerated paralleled with the rapid economic development which was initiated in the early 1960's. The percentage of urban population rapidly increased from 28.0% in 1960 to 74.4% in 1990 in accordance with the change of industrial structure, the rapid increase in the number of cities from 32 in 1966 to 73 in 1990, and in-migration from rural areas, a large portion of whom were young and un-married. Accordingly, rural areas have experienced depopulation and manpower shortage problems during farming seasons.

Since migration behavior is selective and affected strongly by the stage of social development in a particular period of time, the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants and the magnitude, direction, and motives of migration flow reflect precisely the social settings of a given period.

II. Liberation Period(1945-1950)

The division of emancipated Korea into two parts along the 38th parallel by the Allies at the end of World War II was a basic socio-political setting never anticipated by the Korean people, and became the pre-condition for the social de-

velopment ahead.

Major demographic factors affecting social development in the chaos of the socio-political situation right after liberation were a rapid population growth due more to enormous social increase of population by immigrants than to natural increase, and population concentration into urban areas without accompanying industrialization, as could be observed widely in many under-developed and newly emerging countries in the Asian region after World War II.¹⁾

The over-urbanization process in this period proceeded in three ways: 1) urban-oriented settlement of repatriates from Japan and other areas such as China and the Pacific islands, 2) urban concentration of huge numbers of refugees from north Korea across the 38th parallel to avoid communist regime and search for freedom, and 3) a large amount of rural in-migrants into urban areas who were residuals of the over-populated agricultural sector, those escaping from insecure social order due to destructive left-wing turmoil, and ambitious youngsters in hope of rising in the world.

The repatriates and refugees from outside of south Korea amounted to over 2.2 million in a very short period of time, from August 1945 to the end of 1946, and most of them, particularly those from north Korea, settled in the urban areas, especially in the capital city of Seoul(See Table 2).

The enormous number of immigrants, amounting to over 2 million in this period, worsened the extremely poor economic situations prevalent nationwide and threatened the insecure social order generated by the left-wing turmoil.

Table 2. No. of People Returned after Liberation (1945-1949)

Area	Source of data			
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Ministry of Public Health & Social Affairs	US Military Government (1945-1946.5)	1949 Census Data
Japan	1,117,819	1,407,255	1,030,549	936,000
Manchuria	317,327	382,348		212,000
Mainland China	72,848	78,442		42,000
Other areas	32,864	157,916		181,000
North Korea	648,784	456,404		—
Total	2,189,642	2,482,365	1,030,549	1,641,000

The worsening economic conditions accompanied by the left-wing agitation and movements made innocent people incline to left-wing ideology, and political and military turmoil such as Taegu city riot (Oct. 1946), Jeju island riot (April 1948), Military revolt by left-wing soldiers in the south-western part of Korea (Oct. 1948) were severely threatened the social security, which became one of the causes the North Korea dared to raise the Korean War in 1950.

According to 1955 census data, more than 74 % of refugees from north Korea were settled in urban areas. Most of them (68%) were in Seoul, in order to sustain their living due to lack of prior social relationships, and were engaged mostly in small-scale manufacturing, sales, and service activities in the urban sector. The north Korean refugees consisted mostly of land-owners, men of wealth, intellectuals, religionists, and young students, and they had been oppressed during their staying in North Korea by the communist regime; therefore, they had not only strong anti-communist feelings, but also

strong human ties among themselves. For instance, the North-West Youth Club members composed of North Korean students and adults played a decisive role to resist the left-wing movements and restore the nationality and social order in the early stage of national development. The north Korean youngsters and ex-military officers who enlisted in the army played a great role during the Korean War and later modernization process in Korea. The religious north Korean Christians evangelized a quarter of the Korean people as Christians as of 1980, which can hardly be observable in Confucianism and Buddhism oriented Asian countries. The north Koreans' hardship in living, accumulated knowledge and skills, and strong aspiration for upward mobility were manifested in later stages of economic development and modernization of Korea since the 1960's²⁾

III. Korean War Period (1950-1953)

The Korean War can be characterized, in demographic aspects, as a period of 1) great loss

of human resources amounting to nearly one million by war, as shown in Table 3, which brought inevitably a low population growth of 1.0% a year, 2) various migration flows different in direction and magnitude according to the moves of the front lines in the Korean peninsula, and 3) emerging over-populated cities in the south-eastern part of Korea serving as refuges from the communist invasion, particularly such cities as Taegu and Pusan, filled with war-time refugees mainly from Seoul and its vicinity.

Table 3. Human Loss During the Korean War

Cause	Civilian	Army	Total
Death	244,663	29,494	274,157
Massacred	128,936	—	128,936
Injured	229,625	101,097	330,722
Abduct & POW	84,532	65,601	150,133
Missing	303,212	105,672	408,884
Total	990,968	301,864	1,292,832

Source : Bank of Korea, Korea Economy Annuals, 1955.

The moves of the front line during the war in accordance with the north Korean army invasion along the 38th parallel, recovery of lost land by UN counter-attack, breakthrough to north across 38th parallel by UN forces, retreat of UN forces from the north, and stalemate of battlefields along the line before ending the war brought several significant migration flows in terms of characteristics of migrants, magnitude, migration type and direction of move. They are 1) south Korean refugee moves to the south, 2) the moves of many south Korean notables to the north compelled by the north Korean armies, when the UN Forces were recovering

the south by counterattacks and the Inchon-landing, 3) mass refugee moves of north Koreans to the south, and south Korean refugee moves, so-called '1.4 Retreat', when UN Forces were forced to retreat from North by the intervention of Chinese Red Army to Korean War, and 4) the south Koreans' return to former resident places due to the cease of war in 1953.

The refugee moves of south Koreans at the time of war took place mainly in the northern parts of south Korea along the 38th parallel, including Seoul and its vicinity, and southward refugee moves took place as return moves after the war was over. According to the population year-end Account, the population of Seoul decreased from 1,693 thousand in 1950 to 648 thousand at the end of 1951, reflecting the fact that more than 1 million or 62% of the residents evacuated Seoul. Seoul regained its population to 1,243 thousand at the end of 1954 and 1,575 thousand in 1955 due to return migration. More than 70% of the refugees from Seoul were dispersed in southern parts of Korea and settled mostly in urban areas, particularly in Taegu and Pusan cities. These refugee flows made a lot of social contributions to the areas they moved to, such as civilizing the people, expansion of marriage area and so forth. In this period, the urban areas, particularly Taegu city and Pusan city, were over-populated by the refugee concentration, and housing problems for them expanded squatter areas and their economic activities for sustaining living were extremely hard, which inevitably brought a severe moral breakdown accompanying with wartime American culture that introduced into the existing traditional values and norms.

At the end of September 1950 when the north Korean army began to retreat from the south, many notable figures in political, social and cultural fields remained in Seoul and the south Korean residents along the northern parts were forcedly taken to north, while the residents in the southern parts were compelled to enter into Mt. Chiri in order to organize the second front as partisans. They became the most tragic elements of the so-called 'Search for 10 million separated families' program aired from the end of June 1989 through KBS TV.

In mid-October 1950 when the UN Forces began to retreat from north Korea after the intervention of the Chinese Army, nearly one million north Korean residents joined in the marches of refugees toward south under the auspices of UN Forces. The exodus over Daedong River by the residents of Pyongan provinces and the withdrawal from Heungnam Harbor by the residents from Hamkyong provinces are the typical cases in their refuge moves, which were used to be called '1.4 Retreat.' Most of them settled in the rural areas of East and West coast near DMZ line, being quite different from the North Korean refugees in the liberation period, in hope of returning home right after war. In fact, their evacuated locations in this period were closely related to 1) transportation means they hired, 2) availability of army transport, 3) timeliness of refuge, and 4) their places of origin.

The Korean War brought implicitly and explicitly a lot of social implications in the course of national development. Although the devastation of land and economic hardship by war have been recovered since the 1970's due to the rapid

economic development and industrialization, the normless culture inculcated in the mind of people due to the breakdown of traditional morality based on familism and prevalence of an immature western way of living based on individualism, particularly among younger generations, has made people lose any consensus bringing the nation's intergration, and authoritarian personalities nurtured by military culture still strongly deter the realization of true democracy in life. The egoistic way of living prevailing among the people also deteriorates the national integration and further social development.

IV. Post War Period(1953-early 1960's)

During this period the population growth was extremely high, at a level of 2.8% yearly, in a closed population due to the TFR level around 6.0, until the effect of family planning programs initiated in the early 1960's became visible. The baby-boom cohorts reproduced in this period formed huge demographic waves, and they have affected decisively, in the course of life cycles, the educational programs in each stage due to the rapid growth of school enrollment and lack of teaching manpower and facilities, employment problems due to the rapid increase of labor supplies in the labor market, and so forth.

The urbanization process in this period was also rapid not only because of the structural change of industries but the enormous in-migration flows from rural to urban areas due to over-population and economic hardships in rural areas. The population concentration in urban areas in this period proceeded in the form of concentration into Seoul and Pusan, the 2nd largest

city of Korea. According to several studies, 47% of 1.5 million migrants during the period of 1961-1966 moved into Seoul and 13% to Pusan, and 38.7% of urban migrants and 53.6% of rural migrants were heading to Seoul.⁴⁾ 77% of in-migrants into Seoul had economic reasons for moving, such as looking for a job, job transfer, and looking for new business, while 23% of them moved into Seoul for socio-cultural reasons such as schooling, marriage, and family reunion; and farmers moving to Seoul were changing their jobs mainly into production workers (46%), sales workers (32%), service workers (10%), and others.⁵⁾

During this period the population of Seoul had increased from 1,575 thousand in 1955 to 3,793 thousand in 1966. Seoul's proportion of the urban population increased from 29.8% to 38.8%, and the proportion of total population rose from 7.3% to 13.0%.

V. Industrialization Period (since the mid-1960's)

The social implication of the military coup in 1961 headed by Gen. Park signifies the end of politics having ruled by civilians since 1945 and opening the age of rule by military. During 19 years of his reign and succeeding 9 years of President Chun's regime, though the political developments to democracy had been hardly improved, there were remarkable triumphs in the field of economy. The government boldly transformed industrial policy from the traditional farm-oriented policies to industrialization, and the succeeding five 5-Year Social and Economic Development Plans, together with the fertility decline by the effective implementation of fami-

ly planning programs have brought about tremendous changes in our society due to rapid economic development and industrialization.

The tremendous social changes due to rapid economic development and industrialization in this period can be epitomized from the demographic point of view as 1) demographic transition due to the improvement of vital levels and 2) the population redistribution phenomena, urbanization due to industrialization and population concentration from rural sector on the one hand and rural de-population due to excessive rural exodus in the other hand. The rural-to-urban migration streams have been the main internal migration flow as ever; however, the flows had turned in the direction of local large cities and the so-called Capital Zone which is made up of the special cities of Seoul and Incheon, and Kyonggi province since 1970's, due to the progress of industrialization and rapid development of other urban areas. Particularly in case of the Capital Zone, many rural areas, especially areas surrounding the city of Seoul in the middle of the zone have been transformed into cities and form a megalopolis urban consolidated area, occupying 38% of total population as of 1990 in 2% of the realm (See Table 4). The Seoul megalopolis-urbanized area has been confronted inevitably by many city problems such as housing, traffic, pollution and so forth.

In the 1980's, a new migration pattern, namely the J-turn phenomenon or suburbanization process, can be observed in the area of Seoul and its vicinity. The city of Seoul was undergoing changes metabolizing its population by sending out population aged 25-34 and married with their children to the cities surrounding Seoul in

Table 4. Population Growth of the Capital Zone <1960-1990>

Year	Total population (thousand)		Population of Capital Zone (thousand)				Population of 6 large city	
	Total	%	Total	%	Urban	Rural	Total	%
1960	24,989	100.0	5,194	20.8	2,938	2,256	5,231	20.9
1966	29,193	100.0	6,896	23.6	4,521	2,375	7,309	25.0
1970	31,466	100.0	8,894	28.3	6,327	2,567	9,874	31.4
1975	34,707	100.0	10,929	31.5	8,539	2,390	12,567	36.2
1980	37,436	100.0	13,298	35.5	10,744	2,554	15,572	41.6
1985	40,448	100.0	15,820	39.1	13,247	2,573	18,354	45.4
1990	43,520	100.0	18,600	42.7	16,523	2,077	20,679	47.5

Source : NSO, Population and Housing Census.

connection with housing problems, and supplementing 15-24 unmarried age groups from outside. This type of migration flow can also be observed in other large cities recently.⁶⁾

On the other hand, the growth of rural population had been changing from the increasing stage in the liberation period to relatively decreasing stage during the post war period, and since the 1970's rural-depopulation has taken place except in the fringe areas surrounding large cities, due to the excessive out-migration, particularly among young age groups responding to the urban magnetism. The intensive rural de-population has brought labor shortage problems during the farming seasons due to the withered age structure, and farming has been performed by the elderly and female labor forces remaining in the villages under the condition of increased agricultural land per household.

Another outcome derived from fertility decline, small family size, and aging due to the recent demographic transition, family nucleation

or separation between generations of the family due to small family norms, and particularly, the rural-to-urban migration and urbanization, is the breakdown of Korean traditional family systems, which has brought not only the problem of aging, particularly in terms of support for the elderly, but also the problems of breakdown of the existing socio-cultural norms and bringing the people to a normless stage.

Though economic development has favorably proceeded accompanying industrialization and rapid urbanization, the political development in Korea has been far behind what the people expected due to the authoritarian or bureaucratic government administration and parochial or subject political cultures prevailing among the people; however, after so-called 6.29 declaration of democratization proclaimed by president Roh in 1987, the dawn of a new era has opened implicitly and explicitly in the way of realizing true democracy in this country. The improvement of level of living due to economic growth,

heterogeneity due to industrialization and urbanization, and high attainment of manpower have become the generating factors irrevocable to political development in Korea. The waning of the agricultural sector due to the excessive rural exodus has emerged as one of the critical issues at present, and various measures such as ameliorating the agricultural structures, sustaining and retracing the agricultural manpower, inducing minor enterprises to locate near farming areas, and so forth are being carried out in order to minimize the inter-sectoral gaps.

Foot Notes

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- 3) J. J. Yoon, "A study on dispersion of Korean people in modern ages," *Journal of Seoul Woman's College*, Vol. 15, 1985.
- 4) E. H. Choe and J. S. Park, *1966 Special Demographic Survey Results*, The Population and Development Studies Center, SNU, 1969.
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