

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES IN SEOUL, 1975-1985*

DOO-SEUNG HONG
Seoul National University

This paper examines the degree of inter-class residential segregation in urban Korea by looking at the middle class concentration in Seoul during the period of 1975-1985. Discussion is focused on how the pattern of distribution of the middle class households changed during this period. Using the 2 percent sample of the Population and Housing Censuses, spatial distribution of the middle class is explored. Recognizing that sharp residential segregation by social class is a more recent phenomenon, this paper implies that segregation deepens the gap between housing classes and the gap in turn may facilitate the segregation of residence.

INTRODUCTION

In social stratification research less attention has been devoted to the spatial distribution of strata or classes than temporal changes in their composition. Topics on the former have been rarely tapped in stratification studies except for a few (e.g., Urry 1981; Kang 1991). Rather the topics have been dealt with in other fields such as urban sociology and urban geography (e.g., Kim and Park 1984; Thrift 1987; Han 1989; Kim 1992). In urban sociology, for example, much has been discussed on residential segregation of different groups since the 1920s (e.g., Burgess 1925; Duncan and Duncan 1955). Yet research carried out in Western societies has been more concerned with segregation by ethnic or racial groups than with segregation by social strata or classes. It is in part because ethnic or racial segregation has been more conspicuous than inter-stratal or inter-class segregation, and in part because ethnic or racial segregation is often overlapped with class segregation. Recently, the geographical concentration of the urban poor draws much attention from the social science community (Massey 1990; Massey and Eggers 1990). These studies portray that a small number of the middle class move out to suburban areas leaving the core of the city to poor ethnic groups. This line of research reveals that ethnic and racial segregation is important for

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explaining the emergence of the urban lower class.

Research on housing and residential environments in Korea reports that the gaps between housing classes have been widening in large cities since the 1970s. Particularly, it is suggested that the construction of apartment building complexes has facilitated inter-class residential segregation. For example, Lee (1980, 1982) argued that the construction of large-scale new residential areas in the 1970s aggregated the households with similar socioeconomic attributes, and thereby accelerated class division based on housing and consequently, restructured urban society itself. In the similar vein, Hong and Kim (1988) viewed the spatial relocation process during the period after the 1960s as the process of class segregation. In the period after the mid-1970s, they argue, middle-class apartment complexes formed homogeneous clusters, and physical segregation emerged more clearly between the middle class and the other working and/or lower classes than it had been. Hypotheses or descriptions addressed by them, however, remain to be more carefully assessed and empirically verified.

This paper attempts to observe the degree of inter-class residential segregation in light of the middle class concentration in urban Korea, during the period of 1975-1985 in Seoul. Discussion will be focused on how the distribution of the middle class households changed during this period. Segregation is often regarded as a counter-concept of concentration, but concentration on an area does not necessarily imply a homogenization of the area since the concentration may accelerate heterogenization within the area as well. The concentration of the middle class households in a specific administrative unit may be regarded as internal similarity within the unit, but at the same time it is probable to accompany within-unit heterogeneity. To illustrate, the 90 percent concentration of the middle class households may bring about social as well as spatial cleavages from the remaining 10 percent. Therefore, concentration is presumed a more appropriate term than segregation.

This paper concerns how densely populated middle class households are in a specific administrative unit within the city. It is assumed that if the proportion of the middle class in every unit is equal to the city average, class concentration is minimal whereas if the proportion of the middle class is either 100 percent or 0 percent in a unit, the maximum concentration would result.

DATA AND METHOD

Data

Data on which this paper is based are the 2 percent¹ sample of the 1975

and 1985 Population and Housing Censuses taped for public use purposes. Data on the economic activity of individuals and on the housing of households are combined into a single file. Class status of each household is defined by the occupational status of the household head.

The unit of analysis adopted in this study is an administrative unit called *dong*. In 1975 there had been 343 *dongs* in the City of Seoul and in 1985 they were expanded to 453. But the administrative units that did not appear in the sample or those with under 30 cases were excluded from the final analysis. In this way, information from 292 *dongs* (51 *dongs* omitted) for 1975 and 449 *dongs* (4 *dongs* omitted) for 1985 is used. In 1975 the omission of 51 *dongs* was mostly from either central business districts in Chongno-ku and Chung-ku or newly developed areas in Kangnam-ku. Especially, Chamsil-2-dong and Chamsil-3-dong were demarcated as administrative units but nobody lived there at that time. I presume that the omission of these units will not distort the whole picture.

Definition of the Middle Class

The *middle class* consists of the old middle and the new middle class. In the category of the old middle class included are self-employed wholesale and retail traders and caterers, and self-employed workers. Such occupations are also added as wholesale or retail managers, sales supervisors, technical sales workers and catering business managers with the exclusion of self-employed production workers.

On the other hand, the *new middle class* consists of white-collar workers such as professional, technical and related workers, administrative and managerial workers, and clerical workers. For a more precise definition of the term, information about employment status is necessary, but unfortunately we cannot find it from the 1985 population census. Since most of these workers are presumed in the status of employee, the omission hardly makes any serious bias. Here the new middle class is so widely defined as to absorb the upper middle class (Hong 1983). By this criterion, included in the new middle class category are: business top executives and high-ranking government officials who may be classified as the upper class, and self-employed technical or lower professional workers who often fall in the category of the old middle class.

FINDINGS

The questions are asked of how the new middle class is spatially distributed

¹It is roughly 2.6 percent sample of the whole population.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS BY YEAR

% of NMC ¹⁾	Unit: N (%)	
	1975	1985
- 9.99	39 (13.4)	26 (5.8)
10.00-19.99	91 (31.2)	138 (30.7)
20.00-29.99	77 (26.4)	162 (36.1)
30.00-39.99	46 (15.7)	67 (14.9)
40.00-49.99	20 (6.8)	24 (5.4)
50.00-59.99	14 (4.8)	23 (5.1)
60.00-69.99	3 (1.0)	8 (1.8)
70.00-	2 (0.7)	1 (0.2)
Total	292(100.0)	449(100.0)

Note: ¹⁾NMC refers to the new middle class.

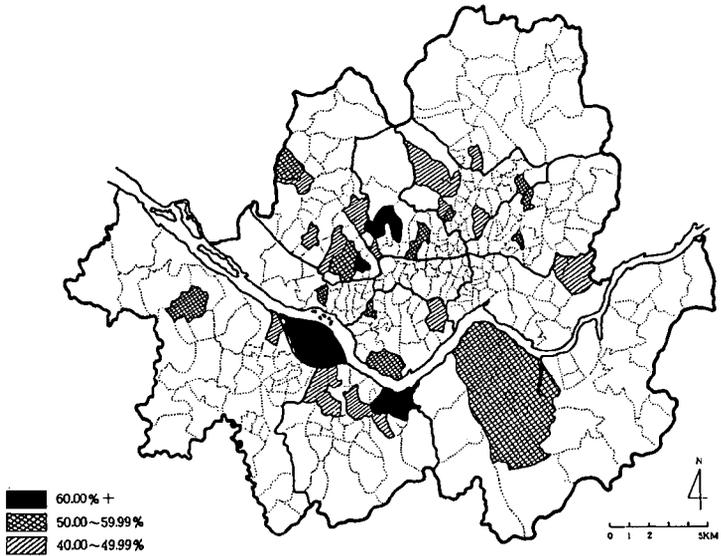
and how the pattern of distribution changed during the period of 1975-1985. As Table 1 shows, in 1975 the *dongs* where the proportion of the new middle class households exceeds 60 percent were 5 (1.7%). Ten years later in 1985 the figure increased to 9 (2.0%). On the other hand, 39 *dongs* (13.4%) which had less than 10 percent in 1975 decreased to 26 (5.8%) in 1985.

In order to visually present the geographical distribution of the new middle class, its proportion is grouped into three levels as depicted in Figure 1. On average, in 1975 white-collar workers constitute 24.3 percent of the total household heads in Seoul. The mean proportion plus one standard deviation is 38.3 percent, plus two is 52.2 percent, and plus three is 66.2 percent. Equivalent in 1985 are 25.5 percent, 38.4 percent, 51.2 percents, and 64.1 percent, respectively. If we take the 40, 50, and 60 percentages as a criterion for grouping, the range of 40-50% is one standard deviation more than the mean, 50-60% is two standard deviations more than the mean, and 60% and over is three standard deviations more than the mean.

On the map we could find easily that during the decade from 1975 to 1985 there was a great change in geographical distribution of social classes. On the northern part of the Han River the number of *dongs* where the new middle class had occupied over 40 percent of the total household heads was 27 in 1975. It decreased to 12 in 1985. On the southern part, on the other hand, twelve in 1975 increased to 44 in 1985. The most remarkable increase was found in Kangnam-ku and Kangdong-ku (as of 1985) where the figure changed from 3 to 38.

If we look at the middle class all together, the pattern becomes more distinct. In Table 2, during the period the number of *dongs* where the pro-

(A) 1975



% of the New Middle Class Households

(B) 1985

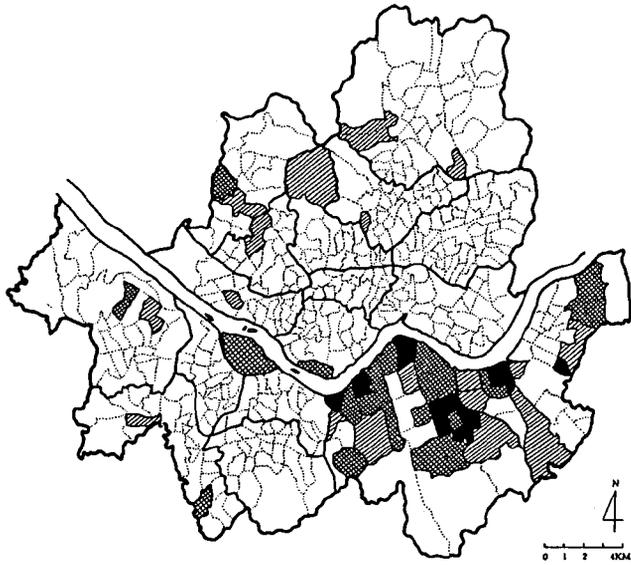


FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF NEW MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS BY *DONG*

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS

% of NMC	Unit: N (%)	
	1975	1985
- 9.99	4 (1.4)	— (0.0)
10.00-19.99	25 (8.6)	3 (0.7)
20.00-29.99	26 (15.7)	44 (9.8)
30.00-39.99	65 (22.3)	138 (30.7)
40.00-49.99	50 (17.1)	144 (32.1)
50.00-59.99	59 (20.2)	74 (16.5)
60.00-69.99	28 (9.6)	30 (6.7)
70.00-79.99	13 (4.4)	13 (2.9)
80.00-	2 (0.7)	3 (0.7)
Total	292(100.0)	449(100.0)

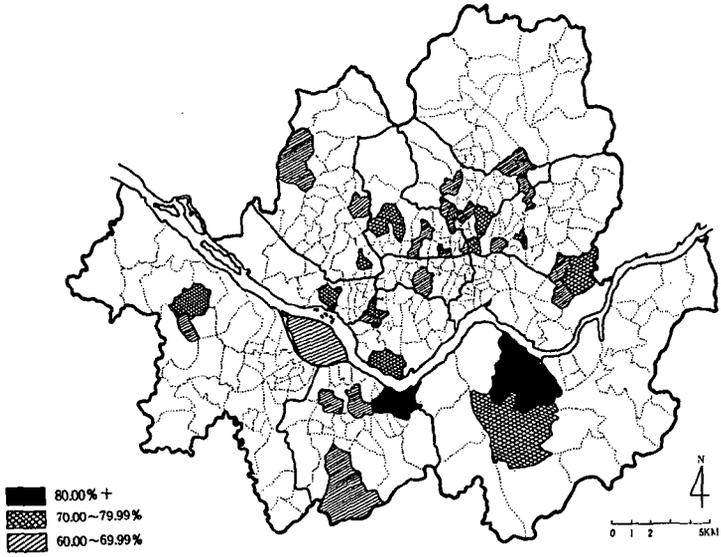
portion of the middle class household is less than 20 percent was 29 (10.0%) in 1975 decreased to 3 (0.7%) in 1985. On the other hand, the areas with over 70 percent change from 15 (5.1%) to 16 (3.6%). In 1975 two *dongs* show over 80 percent (Ch'ongdam-dong 86.6%, Dongjak-dong 82.9%) whereas four *dongs* show under 10 percent change (Myongil-dong 8.8%, Sindorim-2-dong 8.5%, Naegok-dong 8.4% and Sungin-1-dong 7.7%).

Mapping of the middle class distribution is shown in Figure 2. As did with the new middle class, three different groups are identified. The number of *dongs* where the proportion of the middle class households is over 80 percent was 2 in 1975 and 3 in 1985. Comparing (A) and (B) of Figure 2, the number of *dongs* in 1975 where the middle class households was over 60 percent was 34 on the northern part of the Han River in 1975. It decreased to 5 in 1985. On the other hand, in Kangnam-ku and Kangdong-ku the figure increased from 2 to 37. In short, the northern part of the Han River where old settlements of the city were, has lost middle class residents. This is offset by the gain of the southern part that has been newly developed for business and residential areas.

The areas of the middle class are overlapped with those of apartment complexes as Table 3 shows. In 1985, the correlation between the proportions of apartment residence and of college graduation is .723 and the correlation between apartment residence and the new middle class is .678. Apartment residence also shows a high correlation with the ownership of housing ($r = .681$) and thus, more tenants live in separate dwelling units than in apartments.

In 1985, no other dwelling units are found in 8 *dongs* than apartment complexes. This trend suggests that physical concentration of the middle class

(A) 1975



% of the Middle Class Households

(B) 1985

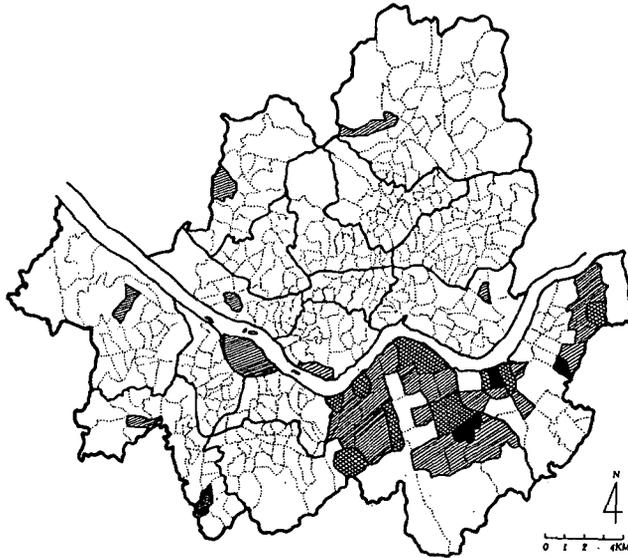


FIGURE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF MIDDLE CLASS HOUSEHOLDS BY *DONG*

TABLE 3. CORRELATION MATRIX OF VARIABLES BY YEAR

	1975 ¹⁾					\bar{X} (s.d.)
	Housing	College	New Middle	Middle Class	Apart.	
1985						
Housing Own. (%)		.477	.486	.377	— ²⁾	44.7 (14.0)
College Grad. (%)	.751		.878	.769	—	16.8 (15.4)
New Middle C. (%)	.723	.921		.849	—	24.3 (13.9)
Middle Class (%)	.673	.869	.905		—	41.9 (16.6)
Apartment (%)	.681	.723	.678	.636		—
\bar{X} (s.d.)	40.6 (10.9)	19.4 (15.0)	25.5(12.8)	43.5(12.1)	12.1 (23.2)	

*All coefficients significant at .01 level.

Notes: ¹⁾Figures in upper right are for 1975 (N = 292) and lower left for 1985 (N = 449).

²⁾Data not available.

has proceeded with an increase in scale of the collective housing area. The middle class households with higher education form a class group around apartment complexes. Of course, the same unit may consist of diverse strata. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that homogeneity is solely contingent upon the high proportion of the middle class households. Eighty percent middle class households may alienate the other 20 percent of non-middle class households.

DISCUSSION

Up until the early 1960s, when the city boundary was still narrow, residential segregation was not so conspicuous. People of diverse strata lived together in physically adjacent, mixed environments. But the process of space relocation after the 1960s has brought inter-class segregation. Such segregation has become more apparent, particularly between the middle and the non-middle class, with the construction boom of apartment buildings in the 1970s and 1980s. This study supports Lee's (1980, 1982) earlier hypothesis that the construction of large residential complexes in Seoul facilitated stratal differentiation based on housing by aggregating homogeneous socioeconomic groups.

The process of housing construction and parcelling-out has provided objective conditions for residential homogenization, and the middle class exerted efforts to maintain their homogeneity. In a normative sense, it has been controversial among housing policy planners whether residential areas are to be made homogeneous or heterogeneous. Those who are sympathetic with

the heterogeneous setting tend to emphasize the advantages of diverse composition. Mixed living makes residents be exposed to other people's life and accept sociocultural differences, and therefore, could reduce political conflicts that might arise between different strata. but the unplanned neighborhood tends to be homogeneous through natural selection process. That is, those who want to purchase a housing unit are gradually absorbed into appropriate areas by considering such factors as land and housing prices, level of neighbors' living, and others' perception of the area.

Since social association is determined by physical proximity and homogeneity, homogeneity has been positively assessed despite its dysfunctions. In Korean society, efforts to maintain homogeneity has to do with status-seeking behaviors. The middle class residents tend to protect themselves from the intrusion of lower classes pursuing homogeneity in the process of housing purchase as well as in daily life. They are often consolidated for the protection of their property. Unlike a resistance of urban poor or squatters for survival, the self-protection strategy of the urban middle class is a struggle for protection of the status quo or their vested interests.

The middle class tries to reproduce their socioeconomic status already secured by intergenerational upward mobility or status transmission. One reason for rapid urbanization in Korean society is due to an expectation for better education in cities for their children, particularly in Seoul. Overheated aspiration for education is triggered by middle class parents. After equalization of secondary schooling, parents try to move to "good" school district areas. As a result, housing prices got to be determined by school districts. In the case of Seoul, schools located in the Eighth School District in the Kangnam area had marked good performance in college entrance examinations, and so this area is favored by parents. Therefore, housing prices are higher there compared to other areas.

This paper implies that the concentration of the middle class may enhance their paucity in the core of the city, something which has been already witnessed in advanced industrial societies. The exodus and concentration of the middle class does not suggest its isolation from other strata, especially from the urban poor, nor deepening poverty as suggested in earlier studies. Nevertheless, physical agglomeration of the middle class may imply the probability of class or status crystallization by not sharing life space with other classes.

Residential segregation deepens the gap between housing classes, and inversely, the gap itself may facilitate segregation of residence. Discussion in this paper has implicitly assumed that it is preferable for diverse social classes to share daily life boundary. Residential concentration of the middle class is likely to consolidate internal solidarity based upon group or individual self-interests. Class or stratum formation is further consolidated by securing inter-

nal homogeneity, and segregation obviously leads to inter-class discord. But it is not yet conclusive to argue that residential mixture is more preferable to segregation from social policy perspective.

In urban Korea, sharp residential segregation by social class is a more recent phenomenon. In the 1960s and 1970s, urban redevelopment plans expelled illegal squatters from their living quarters and forced them to resettle in areas distant from the central business district. In the 1980s, they had to vacate these dwelling areas again to move farther out for the sake of urban renewal with the vacated areas consequently occupied by middle-class households. This process characterizes the space relocation pattern of the period after the 1960s as a shift from class mixture to class segregation. We have noticed that middle-class families show a group solidarity as long as they find it necessary to unite for their rights and interests with regard to property and living environments.

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DOO-SEUNG HONG is Professor in the Department of Sociology and Director of the Population and Development Studies Center at Seoul National University.