

THE URBAN TRANSFORMATION OF KOREA: 1955--1970

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This paper gives a brief overview of Korea's rapid urbanization since the Korean War. No attempt is made to deal with boundary changes of cities or the various other components of urban growth which are treated in detail in the accompanying analysis by Dr. Eui-Young Yu.

Urbanization has been extremely rapid in both absolute and relative terms since 1955 and particularly since 1966. During the 1960--70 decade the national population increased by $6\frac{1}{2}$ million, about one-quarter. The rural village population contributed only 200,000 or 4% of this increase. The urban population, including eups (towns of 20,000), grew by two-thirds and contributed the remaining 6.2 million, 96% of the total. Cities with more than 50,000 population in 1970 grew even faster, increasing by more than three-quarters, and absorbing 92% of the total growth. Seoul City, which added more than 3 million people and more than doubled in size during the decade, alone absorbed about half the national population increase.

During the latter 4 years of the decade these trends intensified. Population increase in Seoul, Pusan, and Taegu, the 3 cities over 1 million population in 1970, exceeded that for the nation as a whole. Other cities also grew rapidly, but the rural village population decreased by more than 1 million, a drop of 7% in 4 years (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Rapid urban growth throughout the decade combined with slow rural growth from 1960--66 and the rural decline thereafter led to an increase in their proportion of the national population constituted by cities in all size categories (see last 3 columns of Table 1 and Figure 2). The proportion of the population residing in cities increased by almost 5 percentage points from 30.7% in 1960 to 35.3% in 1966, a net shift of 0.8% of the national population each year. The 1966--70 shift was even more dramatic, 8 percentage points in 4 years, a net shift of 2% of the national population to cities each year.

The rate, as well as the absolute level, of city growth has been proportional to city size since 1960. Individual cities vary somewhat, but the gradient by size categories is regular except for the 10 eups which attained city size in 1970, and five of these are heavily influenced by proximity to Seoul. The capital city grew twice as fast(126%) during the decade as did Pusan, Taegu and the other four cities with 250,000 population in 1970(61%). Cities of 100,000 grew by 47% and cities of 50,000 by 36%.

Explosive population growth has made Seoul one of the world's largest cities with more than 6 million population in 1972. Seoul's extreme dominance in Korea is demonstrated by the fact that, despite very rapid population growth, the proportion of the total Korean city population residing in cities of every size class, with the single exception of Seoul itself, declined during the 1960—1970 decade. Meanwhile, Seoul's proportion of the city population rose from 32% to 41%.

As a result of the population shifts noted above, Korea has become an urban nation. Seoul now exceeds 6 million population; Pusan has about 2 million, and Taegu exceeds 1 million. 29 other cities exceed 50,000, and this number will increase by approximately 10 when the larger towns(eups), which attained 50,000 size by 1970, are reclassified as cities. This reclassification, following from the 1970 Census, will probably be carried out in 1973. With 43% of the population in cities and an additional 7% in eups, the nation passed the 50% urban mark at the 1970 Census.

If allowance is made for considerably greater census undercounting in cities than in rural areas, which would add at least one percentage point to the proportion urban as of the census date, October 1, 1970, and also for continued urbanization in the $2\frac{1}{2}$ years since then, it can be safely estimated that the national proportion urban(including eups) must have reached at least 55% by April 1, 1973, and very likely a percentage point or two higher.

Amidst growing national consciousness of rapid urbanization, of traffic congestion, of environmental pollution, and of rural-urban income disparities, urbanization is now receiving major policy attention in a variety of ways. Major emphasis centers on the Saemaul or New Community Movement and its attempts to promote rural development and increase rural income. Seoul City is building a subway system. Tax measures and pollution controls are being actively discussed as means by which to disperse industry and population. Plans are being developed for relocating a number of industries and offices, particularly those of state run enterprises, from Seoul to smaller cities. Aerial photo-

graphic surveillance of existing and potential new squatter settlements in Seoul City has been stepped up, and numerous squatter units have been removed. Citizen taxes for the major cities have been proposed. The national family planning movement is attempting to intensify efforts in urban areas, particularly those of low income, where the birth rate is high, and in Seoul City, where family planning has not been given high priority and where the national program has been notably weak. Family planners are also discussing stimulation of private sector contraception and induced abortion, which would probably have a disproportionately larger effect in cities. Finally, President Park has urged that Seoul City not grow beyond 6 million population. However, the City census for October 1, 1972 gives 6.07 million (not adjusted for underenumeration), and the present author's unofficial estimate for April 1, 1973 is $6\frac{1}{2}$ million with 6.3 million being an absolute minimum figure.

The extent to which these various policy measures and discussions will be sufficient to halt or slow urbanization in the face of the very powerful demographic, economic, and social forces which produce it is an interesting question, and one that might well receive the closest scrutiny by economic development and policy planners. It seems unlikely to the present author that the measures discussed to date will be sufficient to slow urbanization very markedly, given the increase in the rate of population growth that will inevitably accompany a probable baby boom and an unfavorable shift in the age structure in the latter 1970's even if family planning is pushed vigorously and fertility rates continue to decline (official population growth rate estimates to the contrary notwithstanding).

It does seem conceivable, however, that some of these measures may have a genuine effect in decentralizing Seoul City's population. In this respect, an important question is whether industry, business, and population are genuinely dispersed to smaller cities and rural areas at substantial distances from Seoul or whether the relocation takes the form merely of decentralization from Seoul City proper to Inchon, Suwon, Euijeongbu, and other satellite communities, which are becoming ever more tightly integrated into a Greater Seoul Megalopolis as Seoul City and the satellite communities expand in population and area and as communication, highways, and other transportation facilities improve. The 1970 Census population of Seoul, Inchon, Suwon, Sungnam (formerly Kwangju), Euijeongbu, Anyang Eup, Sosa Eup, and Shindo Myun was 6.8 million. If allowance is made for considerably greater census underenumeration in Seoul City than

elsewhere in the nation and for continued population growth in the $2\frac{1}{2}$ years since the 1970 Census, it is reasonable to estimate the combined population of these areas at approximately 8 million as of April 1, 1973, almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the nation's present 34 million population (lower official estimates not adjusted for census underenumeration to the contrary notwithstanding). This number would increase if adjacent rural areas were included. Thus, what appears to be developing with greater rapidity than is generally realized is a great conurbation in and around the capital city—the Seoul-Inchon-Suwon-Sungnam-Euijeongbu Megalopolis. Unless strenuous contrary efforts are undertaken, it seems likely that this developing Megalopolis will contain about one third of the nation's 39 million population by the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan in 1981 (lower official estimates to the contrary again notwithstanding). Such a forecast presents a grave challenge to Korea's social and economic planners. Are they prepared for the challenge?

Table 1. Korean Population by Residence and Rate of Change: 1955-1970

Rank of City 1970	Area	Population(1000' s)				% Change				% City Population*				% National Population			
		1955	1960	1966	1970	1955-60	1960-66	1966-70	1960-70	1955	1960	1966	1970	1955	1960	1966	1970
	Nation	21,526	24,989	29,192	31,469	16%	17%	8%	26%	—	—	—	—	100%	100%	100%	100%
	32 Cities+10Eups of 50,000**	5,694	7,664	10,312	13,609	35	35	32	78	100%	100%	100%	100%	26.5	30.7	35.3	43.2
	3 Cities of 1,000,000	3,081	4,286	6,081	8,500	39	42	40	98	54.1	55.9	59.0	62.5	14.3	17.2	20.8	27.0
1	Seoul	1,575	2,445	3,803	5,536	55	56	46	126	27.7	31.9	36.9	40.7	7.3	9.8	13.0	17.6
2	Pusan	1,049	1,164	1,430	1,881	11	23	32	62	18.4	15.2	13.9	13.8	4.9	4.7	4.9	6.0
3	Taegu	457	677	848	1,083	48	25	28	60	8.0	8.8	8.2	8.0	2.1	2.7	2.9	3.4
	4 Cities of 250,000	848	1,132	1,470	1,826	33	30	24	61	14.9	14.8	14.3	13.4	3.9	4.5	5.0	5.8
4	Inchon	318	401	529	646	26	32	22	61	5.6	5.2	5.1	4.7	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.1
5	Kwangju	233	314	404	503	35	29	24	60	4.1	4.1	3.9	3.7	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.6
6	Taejon	173	229	316	415	32	38	31	81	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.0	.8	.9	1.1	1.3
7	Chunju	124	188	221	263	52	18	19	40	2.2	2.5	2.1	1.9	.6	.8	.8	.8
	11 Cities of 100,000	874	1,045	1,286	1,531	20	23	19	47	15.3	13.6	12.5	11.3	4.1	4.2	4.4	4.9
8	Masan	130	158	155	191	22	-2	23	21	2.3	2.1	1.5	1.4	.6	.6	.5	.6
9	Mokpo	114	130	162	178	14	25	10	37	2.0	1.7	1.6	1.3	.5	.5	.6	.6
10	Suwon	81	91	128	171	12	41	33	88	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.3	.4	.4	.4	.5
	Other 8	549	666	841	992	21	26	18	49	9.6	8.7	8.2	7.3	2.6	2.7	2.9	3.2
	14 Cities of 50,000	644	809	970	1,098	26	20	13	36	11.3	10.6	9.4	8.1	3.0	3.2	3.3	3.5
	10 Eups of 50,000**	247	392	505	654	59	29	30	67	4.3	5.1	4.9	4.8	1.1	1.6	1.7	2.1
	83 Other Eups***	1,664	1,976	2,168	2,275	19	10	5	15	—	—	—	—	7.7	7.9	7.4	7.2
	Total 125 "Urban Places"	7,358	9,640	12,480	15,884	31	29	27	65	—	—	—	—	34.2	38.6	42.8	50.5
	Rural(Myun) Population	14,168	15,349	16,712	15,585	8	9	-7	2	—	—	—	—	65.8	61.4	57.2	49.5

*Cities+10 Eups over 50,000 in 1970.

**One of the 10 is Shindo Myun, Koyang Gun.

***Only 10 of the 83 had populations under 20,000 in 1970.

Figure 1.

Korean Population by Residence: 1955-1970.
 (Population Sizes Shown in Millions)

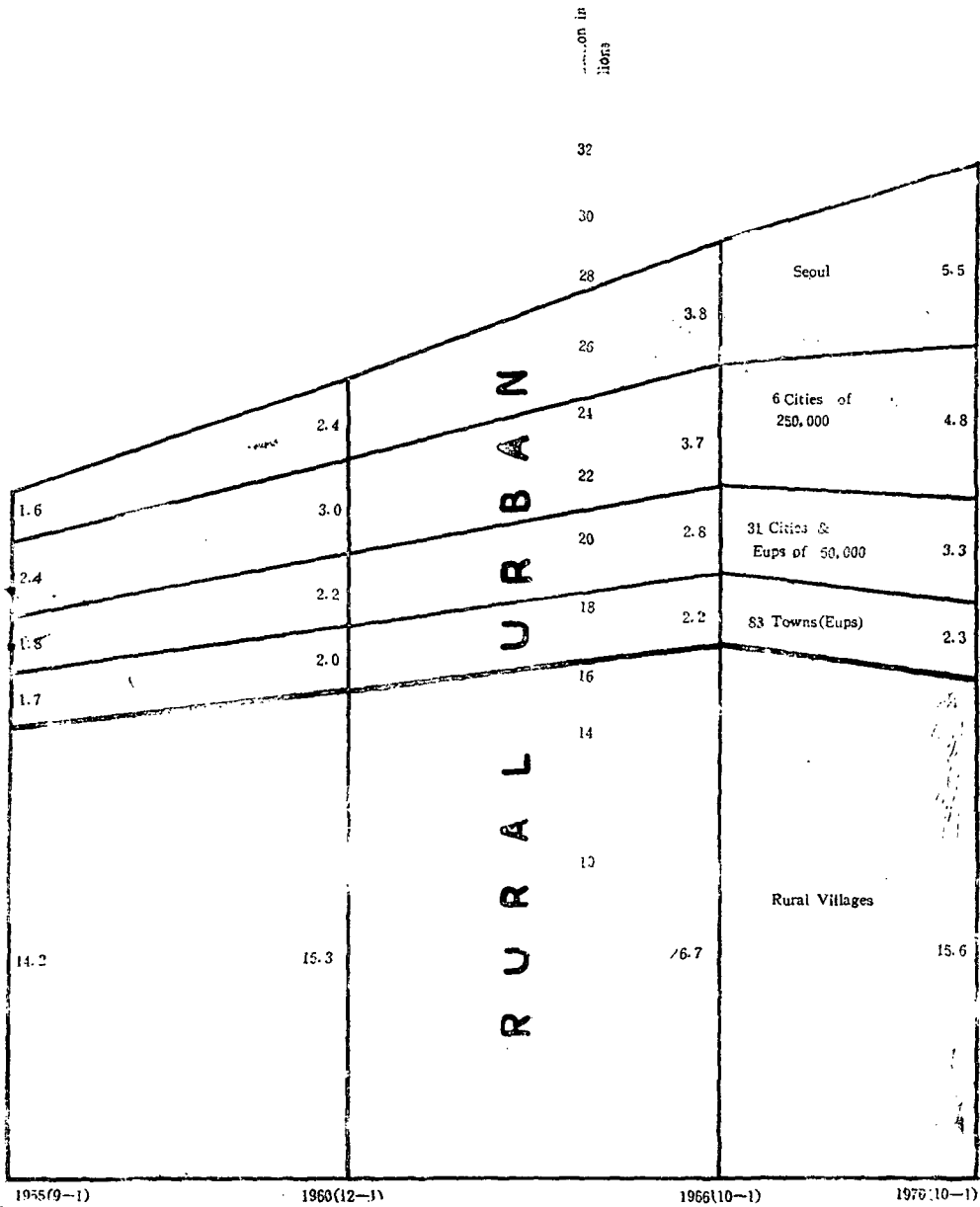


Figure 2.

Proportionate Distribution of Korean Population by Residence : 1955—1970.

