

**Moving Gyeongseong:
Korean Reaction to Changes in the Urban
Landscape of Colonial Seoul in the 1920s**

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Senior Honors Thesis

International Relations, Asian Studies

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Preface



Figure 1: Grandma and her older sister in Kawasaki, Japan, circa 1935.
(Photography courtesy of Nam Jeong-yeop)

“Compared to other Korean women of my age, I am very educated. It is because I was in Japan I was able to finish high school. That is very rare. I think the Japanese education system was good. During school, my favorite class was cross stitching. I was the best. We learned basic stitching beginning fourth grade. That same year I learned how to use the sewing machine. Already in elementary school I knew how to make dresses...my dream was to become a fashion designer.

At school we were taught loyalty and that the Emperor was God. We went on field trips once or two times a month to pay respects to the Emperor. Hah, I remember we had to participate in candlelight vigils after Pearl Harbor. We didn't know what was going on. We were just kids. At school, we practiced putting out fires in case our school was hit by a firebomb. Girls were told to wear wide-legged pants and practice carrying buckets of water...

In Japan, we lived in a nice house, wore nice clothes. Our family even had an electric iron. When we first came to Korea, big cities only had trains. Buses? Probably. But the Japanese already had subways! Japan was so much more advanced.

During the war, there was no nylon, and even wool and silk was limited. But when I was a young girl I wanted to wear a kimono during the holidays. I had to cry for it. I used beg for so many things that I wanted. And my parents would eventually give in. There was a department store in Kawasaki. I used to go there with my mother and begged her to buy me a porcelain doll. They were imported Western dolls with glass eyes and blonde hair. They were so expensive! They would be about 30-40,000 won (300-400 dollars) our money now. I loved going to department stores.

I didn't want to move to Korea because I had a Japanese education. I didn't know anything about Korea. I had a totally Japanese childhood, with all Japanese friends. I saw Koreans as dirty and poor. There were relatives who came [from Korea] to visit us [in Japan] and they looked poor. I didn't want to be like them.”

—Nam Jeong-yeop¹

The above quotation comes from my maternal grandmother, a woman who has raised me for most of my childhood, greatly influenced my life and also inspired me to begin this study. During my early years living with my grandmother, I was exposed to a culture not every child, all the more a Korean child, was familiar with: afternoons watching sumo or Japanese variety shows on TV, deciphering ancient Japanese books to fold a lake of delicate swans, turtles, and other animals out of paper, and learning to love the taste of *natto* (Japanese fermented soybean with slippery texture, often an acquired taste) with my rice. This is because my grandmother had spent the first eighteen years of her early life in Kawasaki, Japan, as Minami Asako (Minami is the Japanese pronunciation of her family name Nam; 南) during Japan's occupation of Korea.

My grandmother was not like the typical Korean grandmother that many of my classmates had. While other grandmothers, shrunken from years of farming, war, and poverty, seemed to be too old and pained to keep up with the hustle and bustle of Seoul, Grandma was (and still is) full of life; she was loud enough to cut through our tantrums when my brother and I misbehaved, and even chased us down when we ran too far ahead of her. Grandma has often attributed her energy and good health to the fact that she grew up in Japan, already a modern country at the time of her birth,

¹ Nam Jeong-yeop, in interview with the author, May 14, 2009.

and did not have to “suffer” like the women in Korea.

Grandma said that she had a very comfortable childhood in Japan; while most Korean women of her generation did not have the chance to attend school, Grandma was able to finish high school in Japan and even had a well-paid secretarial job at a bank in Korea after the country’s liberation. In Japan, she wore nice clothes, lived in a pleasant neighborhood, and considered herself a kind of a “city girl.” Even to this day, her life in Japan has significantly shaped her life and her perspective on history. Grandma still greatly admires Japanese culture and speaks quite highly of Japan—on virtually every matter except for Japan’s occupation of Korea (1910-1945). It was only after I began studying Korean history when I realized how her recollection of Japan differed so greatly from others of her generation who had also lived through the colonial period.

Of course, Grandma had a very different perspective because she lived in Japan and had almost completely assimilated into the Japanese society. But after spending the summer of 2009 interviewing Grandma about her life in Japan and hearing her stories, I was inspired to research into what it was that attracted her to Japan and the “fine things” that it offered her. Why was Japan so appealing? Grandma had mentioned multiple times that as a youth, she yearned to be Japanese, not Korean. She knew that Japan had conquered her native land—but how was she influenced by Japan’s prosperity, fashion, tall buildings, and fabulous Western films showing on the big screens? What was it about the way developed Japan looked, smelled, and felt? What was the role of modernism?

As I researched about Korea in the 1920s, I learned that this kind of “Korean identity crisis” was not only felt by my grandmother, but also by many others who observed Seoul’s rapid modernization and “Japanization.” Even though Grandma’s particular experience with Japanese modernity was far removed from 1920s Seoul, her stories can teach us about different perspectives on history. I sought to find out whether her enthusiasm for modernism and Westernization could

also be observed in the lives of ordinary Seoul residents. In this paper, I focus on the visual and tangible changes that blossomed around Seoul as proof of its modernization. How did Seoul's residents feel about the modernization directed onto them solely by their colonizers? Were the enticing and aesthetically-pleasing glitters of modernization used as a tool for colonization? These were questions that I looked for throughout the study.

Introduction

At the time of Korea's annexation in 1910, Japan changed the name of Korea back to Joseon from The Greater Korean Empire (Daehan jeguk; 大韓帝國), which was associated with Emperor Gojong's (r. 1863-1907) autonomous vision of Korea.¹ Simultaneously, Korea's capital Seoul was transformed: once the royal home of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), Seoul was respatialized into the colonial city of Gyeongseong (京城; J: Keijō).² Gyeongseong's transformation accelerated in the 1920s when a building boom created a "modern" geography that had not existed before.

What did it mean to be "modern"? Or in the larger context, how was the Japanese-imported "modernity" defined in Korea? "Modernity" is a kind of development that can be defined in a number of different ways. A phenomenon that emerged from eighteenth-century Western Europe, it is associated with words and phrases such as Enlightenment, rationalism, industrialism, urbanization, nationalism, and capitalist world system.³ For 1920s Korea, a nascent modern society whose "development" was directed by the capitalistic power and its colonial master Japan, its perception of modernity was linked to capitalistic economic development, which included Westernization and "Japanization." According to Korean legal historian Chungwoo Lee, Korea's colonial "modernization" was different from the archetype of

¹ Daehan jeguk was the name of Korea from October 12, 1897 to August 29, 1910, when Japan annexed Korea by Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty.

² Hanyang (漢陽), the ancient name of Seoul during Joseon period, and Hwangsong (皇城), meaning Imperial City, were names also prohibited at the same time.

³ Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, "Introduction: Rethinking Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 9.

European modernity characterized by industrialization, capitalist development, systematization of law, rationalization in thought, popular sovereignty, and democracy.⁴ Lee refers to Korea's experience in the 1920s as a "distorted modernization," in which people did not enjoy democratic protections but instead witnessed the Japanese government's "brutal exercise of power."⁵ Korea therefore experienced something often referred to as *colonial modernism*; its material, urban, intellectual, economic, and political development towards the Western "modern" was heavily influenced by Japan and its colonial policies.



Figure 2: The new Governor-General Building in central Seoul, 1926. The large, imposing structure redefined Gyeongseong's urban geography. (Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 153)

As Korea "modernized," the visual landscape of its capital transformed drastically to reflect the changes. Gyeongseong's ancient buildings embodying two thousand years of Korean autonomy were replaced by new symbols of Japanese power (Fig. 2). As the city's residents traveled along the newly widened roads that connected all the major city monuments, they absorbed their new environment sculpted by imposing Western-style buildings and congregated in

⁴ Chungwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 22.

⁵ Chungwoo Lee, *ibid.*, 35.

public places that were supposed to instill in them a sense of civic morality and turn them into dutiful colonial subjects.

The Japanese—both the individual people and the imperial government—had a powerful role in shaping the look of Gyeongseong. Gyeongseong’s physical changes were directed by the successive Japanese Governor-Generals of Korea, but their efforts were pushed forward by the huge number of Japanese who moved across the strait to live in Korea. By 1931, Korea's total population was at 20 million, and the number of Japanese in Korea was about 500,000, 2.5% of the total population. The large Japanese presence in Korea greatly differed from that of the British in India and Burma in the same time period: the British in India and Burma made up less than .05% of the total, and soldiers, police, and government officials summed up to almost half of that number.⁶ In Korea, however, the number of Japanese merchants was much greater than that of the soldiers and the police force. And most Japanese lived in the city—by 1939 Japanese were only 2.9% of Korea’s total population, but they made up over 15.5% of city population.⁷ Therefore, since the early years of colonization, Japanese residents in Korea had a significant role in transforming Korean cities.⁸ They paved streets, erected buildings, forged their ethnic enclaves, set up commercial districts, and brought in Japanese and Western goods to sell. Their

⁶ Hong Sun-gwon, “Seoseol: Busan dosisa yeongu-ui sichojeok geomto—hanmal iljechogi jaebuiboninui jachijojikgwa jeongchihwaldong” [Introduction: an evaluation of research done on the history of Busan— independence and the political activities of the wealthy during the early years of colonization], in *Busanui dosi hyeongseonggwa ilbonindeul* [Japanese and the development of Busan], edited by Hong Sun-gwon, et al (Seoul, Korea: Sunin Publishing Co, 2008), 15. The combined total population of India and Burma was 335 million, but the number of British in those countries was 156,000. Of that number, 60,000 made up the soldiers and police and government officials made up 4,000.

⁷ Hong, *ibid.*, 15. The port city of Busan, due to its proximity to Japan, has had a long history of Japanese presence in the city. It had a much greater percentage of Japanese than any other city; by 1939 the Japanese made up 23.3% of the city’s population, which was about 222,690 out of the 518,020 total. The number was already high in 1914, when the Japanese in Busan numbered 28,243 out of 55,094.

⁸ Hong, *ibid.*, 15

presence in developing cities like Busan, Daegu, and Seoul was instrumental to Korea's urbanization.

Yet, Japan's central role in shaping urban Korea was one that was rather exclusionary to Korea's indigenous population. Colonial Gyeongseong was generally defined by an ethnic division between the modern (Japanese) and the backward (Korean), a bifurcation enforced by the Japanese economic and political dominance.⁹ The lifestyle of the large expatriated enclave defined modern living. Their living environment was mostly segregated from those of Koreans, even represented in the way the word "district" was referred to—areas where Koreans lived were called *dong* (洞) and where the Japanese lived was called *jeong* (町).¹⁰ The Japanese occupants were colonial bureaucrats, intellectuals, teachers, and businessmen whose residences and the service economy supporting them characterized islands of Japanese modernity surrounded by developing Korea.¹¹ While the exact amount of interaction between Koreans and Japanese residents is disputed by various scholars, it is a known fact that Koreans as a whole expressed strong nationalism-based resentment toward their colonial masters.¹² This stemmed from Koreans' loss of their five hundred-plus years of autonomy to the Japanese, who were thoroughly

⁹ Michael E. Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 79.

¹⁰ "Gyeongseong-dongjeongmyeong-ui yurae geup geumseokui bigyeo, seoului donge ilheumpuri" [The comparison of the origins of names of Gyeongseong's districts, past and present], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 85. At the time the article was written, Gyeongseong was divided into 85 *dong* and 101 *jeong*, a term that the author asserts as "strange" (*isangyareut-han*) and "never been heard of before." He continued, "Before, districts were divided by their location, but now, they seem to be differentiated by people (*sarameul pyojunhaya*) rather than location. In particular, the central area for Joseon people north of Gwanggyocheon (廣橋川) is called *dong*, and the Japanese center south of Gwanggyocheon is called *jeong*."

¹¹ Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*, *op cit.*, 79.

¹² Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 10.

convinced of their superiority over Koreans.¹³ In the past, Korean people had watched with contempt as the Japanese attempted to emulate the West, taking it as proof of Japanese betrayal of the very essence of Eastern culture and tradition.¹⁴ However, the perception of Japan by Koreans in Gyeongseong cannot be reduced to a simple vision of a powerful, detested, political authority—the role of the Japanese in bringing urbanization and modernization and changing the Korean understanding of the outside world must be factored into the equation.

Questions and Hypothesis

In 1920s Gyeongseong, Japan represented the way of the future.¹⁵ Koreans worked under and alongside a steadily growing Japanese community whose dress and lifestyle shaped those of the tiny Korean middle class.¹⁶ As it was the case in other colonized countries, there was the presence of spatial segregation as an ordering principle of social life.¹⁷ To enter Japanese enclaves was to enter a different cultural zone that exposed the duality of colonial modernity. For the socially and economically ambitious Koreans, working within the modern sectors of Korea's new cities meant participating in a blend of Korean and Japanese cultures. Michael E. Robinson argues that the Japanese tried to include the ambitious Korean middle class in the colony's burgeoning modernity in order to gain their compliance, or at least passive

¹³ Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension*, *op cit.*, 4. Lee argues that the Japanese were so thoroughly convinced of their superiority over the Koreans that they found it “only natural to apply their typical behavior pattern toward inferiors.”

¹⁴ Key-hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire, 1960-1882*, 331 in Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension*, *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 35.

¹⁶ Buzo, *ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷ Anthony King, ed., *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment* (London, GB: Routledge, 1980), 30.

acceptance, of Japan's colonization of Korea.¹⁸ But this so-called "passive acceptance" of colonialism in the 1920s was a complex concoction of emotions and ideologies about Korea's experience with modernism, consumerism, and nationalism. Thus, Korean "modernity" of the 1920s was somewhat of a skewed perception projected forward by the Japanese cultural and material influence in Korea.

Then exactly how did Japan's occupation of Korea affect the Korean people's understanding of modernity, and in turn, themselves? According to Lisa Findley, the inhibition of space is a denial of individual liberty.¹⁹ Besides physical occupation of space, possession of space can extend to how a person represents his or herself at various levels, from the level of the body to the level of the landscape.²⁰ During colonial occupation, the colonizer's introduction of policies, lifestyles and habits to the colonized has an impact on the culture of colonized people.²¹ In the case of 1920s Korea, the dominant and the coveted modern culture was that of the Japanese, and this was strictly defined by the new Japanese-erected urban landscape and the Japanese way of living. But how did Koreans perceive the inflow of modernity into their country? Did they see the dominant modern culture as one that was intimately associated with Japan the nation-state? Was Korea's modernism tinted with ideologies that subjected Korea as the inferior nation? These are important questions that will be addressed throughout this paper.

I will argue that Japan's modernization of Gyeongseong's physical space was an integral part of the colonial discourse. As Gyeongseong residents lived, worked, and relaxed in their new,

¹⁸ Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*, *op cit.*, 80.

¹⁹ Lisa Findley, *Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 5

²⁰ Findley, *ibid.*, 6.

²¹ Findley, *ibid.*, 22.

modernized, yet foreign city, they faced a conflict between their enjoyment of colonial modernity and the inherent discrimination that existed within it. The everyday, immediate, physical spaces that affected their daily lives—the colonial landmarks, parks, and downtown commercial streets—all had a conflicting impact on Gyeongseong residents.

These physical spaces entertained, impressed, and attracted urban Koreans, but they also revealed the extent of cultural, political, and economic discrimination that Koreans faced in a city that no longer belonged to them. As Kim Dovey articulates, buildings are a form of discourse that constructs and frames meaning; and “framing” implies both the construction of a world and a way of seeing ourselves in it.²² My research will show that the ambiguous, uneven, and contradicting response from the everyday physical space of Korean colonial modernism was a critical one. The mixture of reactions shows that Korea’s colonial experience was characterized by various competing identities and movements that increased the fragmentation of the Korean self. As painful and humiliating as Korea’s colonialism, the experience ended up presenting to Koreans a new way of seeing themselves and the outside world. Also, the Japanese Government’s Cultural Rule during the 1920s is generally seen as the most successful policy in establishing colonial order and thus the “most effective policy of manipulation.”²³ In hindsight however, it is evident that the Cultural Rule had many contradictions and largely failed to produce “model colonial subjects” even in Gyeongseong’s tiny middle class who welcomed modernity in Korea.

²² Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 1.

²³ Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*, *op cit.*, 49.

Background History

Although Japan's reasons for colonization were obviously for economic and imperialistic, it was important for the Japanese government to demonstrate the historical inevitability of Korean annexation. The Japanese government put forward the theory of the "common ancestral origin of the Korean and Japanese races" (*nissen dōsoron*), which highlighted geographical proximity, shared heritage, and "backwardness" in Korean culture to argue that Korea should therefore be "rejoined" to Japan, the superior civilization.²⁴ As one colonial official described in 1913, Korea's colonization involved "advancing the intellectual and moral character of the new subjects of the Empire, by reforming all their antiquated and evil customs and manners, in order to assimilate them completely to the original people of the Empire."²⁵ Frederick Arthur McKenzie, a Canadian journalist who arrived in Korea in 1904 as special correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, cited a senior Japanese official who outlined the Japanese policy in 1906:

If you ask me as an individual what is to be the outcome of our policy, I only see one end. This will take several generations, but it must come. The Korean people will be absorbed by the Japanese. They will talk our language, live our life, and be an integral part of us. There are only two ways of colonial administration. One is to rule over the people as aliens. This British have done in India, and therefore your Empire cannot endure. India must pass out of your rule. The second way is to absorb people. This is what we will do. We will teach them our language, establish our institutions, and make them one with us.²⁶

It was Japan's long-term goal to eliminate Korean culture and assimilate the people into the Japanese empire. But like so many other facets of colonial rule, the degree to which the Japanese government asserted its assimilationist ideology throughout the thirty-five years of occupation followed the ups and downs of Japan's domestic political environment. Therefore

²⁴ Buzo, *op cit.*, 16.

²⁵ Buzo, *ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁶ Frederick Arthur McKenzie, *Korea's Fight for Freedom*, (Yonsei University Press; Seoul, 1969. Reprint of the original 1920 edition published by Fleming H. Revell Company: New York), 107 in Susan Townsend, *Yanaihara Tadao and Japanese Colonial Policy: Redeeming Empire* (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 128.

Japan's colonial rule can generally be divided into three stages: 1910-1919 Military Rule, 1920-1930 Cultural Rule, and 1931-1945 Assimilation Rule.

The first decade of colonial rule (1910-1919) saw tough and brutal policies that established Japanese power in Korea. The Japanese military restricted cultural and political life in Korea, and this dark period is now referred to by historians as the Military Rule (*bundan seiji*). All privately run newspapers were closed down and the presses of the largest pre-colonial paper, the *Korea Daily News*, were impressed to print a paper for the Governor-General of Korea of the same name. All private organizations were abolished, and another permit system was created to regulate all public assembly. By 1919, the tremendous political tension in the colony exploded into a political upheaval of March 1st 1919 Independence Movement, and the decade following the March 1st Movement saw a change in Japan's colonial policy to the Cultural Rule (*bunka seiji*).²⁷ The 1920s was at the beginning of Japan's Taisho Democracy (1919-1926), a short-lived flowering of liberal politics influenced by the Russian Revolution (1917), Wilsonian Democracy, and Japan's wartime prosperity that inspired a more liberal spirit into Japanese politics. The harsh military-oriented rule under Governor-General Hasegawa Yoshimichi (1850-1924) was replaced by the softer countenance of Admiral Saito Makoto (1858-1936), who announced a number of Cultural Rule policy changes under the slogan of "Harmony between Japan and Korea" (*nissen yūwa*). The time period in turn gave room for the small number of Korean economic and cultural elite to promote a mild form of Korean cultural nationalism.

The Cultural Rule had two main objectives: the first was to tighten security to ensure that

²⁷ After ten years of Japanese rule, the increased physical mobility provided by the railroads, the intensifying economic contacts, and a steady internal migration to the new cities brought Koreans from all walks of life and all regions together on a scale never before possible. This, combined with the relative increase in education and literacy helped to mobilize Koreans and create a political awareness on a nation-wide basis. On March 1, 1919, thirty-three signatories to the Independence Declaration, all well-known intellectual, religious, and social leaders, gathered at a downtown Seoul restaurant for a formal reading of the document.

widespread political demonstrations do not happen again, and the second was to subdue moderate Korean nationalism by allowing Koreans to see Japan's broader "benevolent" intentions.²⁸ In Japanese eyes, such a gradualist approach would allow the Koreans to assess the benefits of assimilations in a more positive manner. The Governor-General adopted a series of measures to eliminate discrimination and provide more opportunities for Koreans in education and employment, and allow more opportunities for expression and assembly. In this context, the drastic changes in Gyeongseong's urban landscape combined with Cultural Rule policies had a significant impact on the lives of the city's residents.

Sources

The bulk of the research in this paper comes from my analysis of Korean newspaper and magazine articles from the 1920s. I have collected articles from two most circulated Korean (not Government-General sponsored) newspaper sources, *Chosun Ilbo* (Korea Daily; 朝鮮日報) and *Donga Ilbo* (East Asia Daily; 東亞日報), and the two most popular and well-circulated magazines, *Byeolgeongon* ("A world out of this world"; 別乾坤) and *Gaebyeok* (Creation; 開闢). In 1920s Gyeongseong, there existed a new opportunity (albeit still controlled) to express one's ideas and political beliefs. Young intellectuals took advantage of increased freedom of expression and assembly to openly pursue writing, debating, and publishing activities. The *sisal* (current event) permit was granted by the colonial government to the two daily newspapers included in this research, the *Donga Ilbo* and *Chosun Ilbo*, while almost half a dozen politically-oriented journals followed discussion not only of current events but also of political and social commentary.²⁹ The

²⁸ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, *op cit.*, 4.

²⁹ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, *op cit.*, 51. The Japanese had issued permits for

magnitude of the 1920s publishing boom was enormous in relative terms: in 1910 the combined circulation of Korean daily papers and important journals probably did not exceed 15,000; but by 1929 the circulation of the two Korean newspapers alone had increased tenfold to 103,027.³⁰ *Donga Ilbo* began its publications in 1920 and was bold enough to proclaim itself as the “voice of the nation” on its masthead.³¹ However, it should be noted that the intellectual ferment and organized communication remained at the surface of the Korean society. For the most part it only expressed the views of the urban, literate minority in the capital city. Although the minority hoped to spread advanced ideas and speak for the masses, their papers and journals were not accessible to the vast majority of Korea's preliterate population.³² Just as Gyeongseong showcased some of the most advanced aspects of colonial Korea, its publications carried the hyper-modernized front of 1920s urban Korean culture.

Still, Korean magazines from the 1920s carried the most fashionable topics about Gyeongseong and had a popular readership among the city urbanites. Today, their articles provide a glimpse into the everyday lives of urban dwellers and depict what they wore, thought, ate, and saw. *Gaebyeok* (Creation), which lasted over seventy-two issues (1920-1926), was one of the major intellectual journals of the 1920s.³³ After *Gaebyeok* was discontinued in 1926, its

over forty magazines and journals during the entire 1910-1920 period but in 1920 alone they granted permits to 409 different magazines and journals.

³⁰ Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*, *ibid.*, 64.

³¹ Koreans who reached school age in the mid 1890s became the first Korean generation to have access to modern education, including education abroad. Students of this new generation graduated and entered the work force during the 1910s, and reached their prime in the early 1920s—precisely the time that the authorities were increasingly willing to grant them means of self-expression.

³² Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, *op cit.*, 56.

³³ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, *ibid.*, 55. *Gaebyeok* was the creation of the young leaders in the native Korean religious movement, the *jeondokyo*, which had emerged from the mid-nineteenth century Tonghak movement as the modern church of the original Tonghak teaching. It had been involved in the independence

publishers embarked on a new publishing project *Byeolgeongon* (“A world out of this world”), which lasted for 101 issues (1926-1934). Its motto declared itself as a “hobby magazine” (*chuiimi japji*), but *Byeolgeongon* did not only carry leisure-related content.³⁴ The magazine included essays, poems, fictional stories, and travel writing by many important writers who were part of Korea’s new literary movement.³⁵ This paper’s research into the landscape and culture of 1920s Gyeongseong has particularly benefited from *Byeolgeongon* reporters’ *iyagi* (storytelling) style of reporting. The writers reported on their observations on the street through personal narratives and social commentaries. Their comments are valuable since it was these middle class intellectuals who, in terms not dissimilar to traditional Confucianism, were to set the moral example for the rest of society.³⁶ Episodic in nature, the reporters’ stories and investigative reports were meant to show how the city functioned a given hour and also present a mosaic of events that appeared as unarbitrated commentaries on Seoul’s urban life.³⁷ These vignettes were particularly useful in that they often told stories of ordinary people in their everyday lives.

As an added note, when looking for specific articles, I searched for various key terms through all the four sources and compiled every single article that described or talked about the search terms. This paper was a product of a conscientious effort to not discriminate research

movement, including the March First Movement, advocating social equality and the formation of the modern elite. With its strong financial backing, intellectual editorials, and commentaries about the current state of affairs, *Gaebyeok* became a first-rate journal of the 1920s.

³⁴ “Changganho yeoon” [The declaration of the first issue], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 1 (November 1, 1926). The opening issue declared that it “will not only consist of worthless chronicles and entertaining stories (*orak gisa*).”

³⁵ There were articles that led a crusade against illiteracy and called out for improvement of Korean living conditions, and the magazine carried poems and essays composed by writers such as Yi Kwangsu and Chae Mansik who spearheaded the burgeoning Korean language movement.

³⁶ Stewart Lone and Gavan McCormick, *Korea since 1850* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 80.

³⁷ Se-Mi Oh, “Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 75.

results and digest every writer's opinion into consideration before making any statements or arguments. But in the end, many of my arguments turned out to rest on the overwhelmingly common attitudes trends expressed in the sources. My hope is that this method has helped me to produce work that has reduced bias or preconceived ideas as much as possible.

Literature Review and Approach

Before 1945, Japanese historians dominated the discussions about Gyeongseong, focusing on the benefits Japan provided by “opening up” the country. They portrayed Japan as the ideal colonizer who laid out the foundations for Korea's development. But as Korean historians entered the field after liberation, they refuted Japanese depictions about colonial Gyeongseong; nationalist historians then constructed a nation from a storehouse of traditional historical memories in order to have the Korean people create their new collective identity.³⁸ Therefore, both the Japanese and Korean narratives imposed on Korean history a system of opposing binaries that produced an exceedingly limited historical narrative.³⁹ Son Jeong-mok is one prominent scholar who has made great contributions to the field since the 1980s with population statistics-focused overview of different elements of colonial Gyeongseong. While his prolific writing covers a range of topics, Son presents a story of Japanese domination in the city.⁴⁰ Gyeongseong is depicted as a thoroughly-divided city with little interaction between the Japanese settlers in the

³⁸ Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 3.

³⁹ Shin and Robinson, “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” *ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ Son Jeong-mok, *Hanguk hyeondae dosi-ui baljachwi* [Footsteps to Korea's modern cities] (Seoul, Korea: Iljisa, 1988), Son Jeong-mok, *Iljegangjeomgi dosigyehoek yeongu* [A study on city planning during colonization of Korea] (Seoul, Korea: Iljisa, 1996), Son Jeong-mok, *Iljegangjeomgi dosihwa gwajeong yeongu* [A study on the process of urbanization during colonization of Korea] (Seoul, Korea: Iljisa, 1996), and Son Jeong-mok, *Iljegangjeomgi dosisahoesang yeongu* [A study on the social conditions of cities during colonization of Korea] (Seoul, Korea: Iljisa, 1996).

south (*namchon*) and the indigenous Koreans in the north (*bukchon*). But in the last few years, historians have been more wary about depicting a master narrative of colonial Gyeongseong, namely one that of forceful imperial Japanese settlers versus the powerless Koreans, and instead have pursued a more multi-faceted look at the city. Todd Henry, the first scholar to tackle the subject in English, put emphasis on the interaction between the Japanese and Koreans in Gyeongseong, as well as the experiences of Gyeongseong residents across various class levels.⁴¹ He argues that Koreans and Japanese did not exist as separate entities, that Gyeongseong was instead a “contact zone.”⁴² Among other things, Henry zooms in on a number of events such as the Joseon 1915 Industrial Exhibition and 1929 Joseon Exposition to showcase the opportunities people had for interaction. Another scholar Se-Mi Oh highlights consumerism that was introduced by the Japanese as an integral component of Korea’s colonial experience.⁴³ Her argument is that “colonial modernity” was appropriated by Japan as a means of control over Gyeongseong. From year 2000 and on, scholars like Sin Myeong-jik have taken new and unique approaches to studying the time period. Sin has analyzed the meaning of “modern” in colonial Gyeongseong by exclusively studying political cartoons.⁴⁴

For my research, I decided to combine the various approaches that previous scholars have taken, but with a heavy emphasis on the opinions presented in 1920s periodicals. I limited the

⁴¹ Todd Henry, “Respatializing Chosŏn’s Royal Capital,” in *Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), and Todd Henry, “Keijō: Japanese and Korean Constructions of Colonial Seoul and the History of its Lived Spaces, 1910-1937” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006).

⁴² Todd Henry, “Keijō: Japanese and Korean Constructions of Colonial Seoul and the History of its Lived Spaces, 1910-1937.”

⁴³ Se-Mi Oh, “Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008).

⁴⁴ Sin Myeong-jik, *Modun boi Gyeongseong eul geonilda* [Modern Boy strolls through Gyeongseong] (Seoul, Korea: Hyeonsil munhwa yeongu, 2003).

time period of my research to the 1920s because it coincided with the Cultural Rule; it was the time when colonial architecture (embellished buildings beyond what was needed to establish basic infrastructure in the 1910s) began rising up around the city, Korean media was just granted more freedom to express their opinions, and what I call “lures of modernism” began to take root in the city. Additionally, no previous scholar, with the exception of Todd Henry, had looked at Gyeongseong’s parks as an integral component of the city’s changing landscape. Out of personal interest in the history of Seoul’s modern parks, I wanted to explore the subject in depth.

Throughout this paper, I have taken into consideration Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson’s interactive approach to colonial history that looks at colonialism, modernism, and nationalism as linked ideas (Fig. 3):

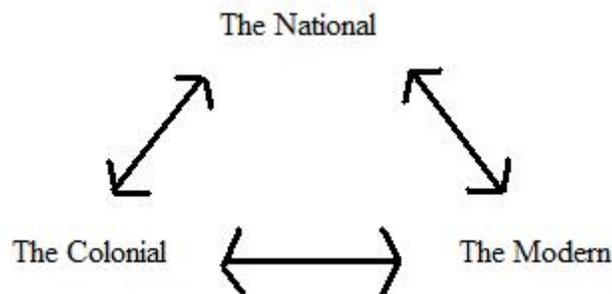


Figure 3: Shin and Robinson’s historical field. (From Shin and Robinson, 5-6)

I concur with Shin and Robinson that due to the complex, multifaceted nature of modernity, the Korean reaction to colonialism should be seen as the “interaction of inclusive forces within the Japanese cultural hegemony.”⁴⁵ Also, overemphasizing only one force (nationalism) is dangerous, for Koreans in the 1920s did not relate everything to nationalist projects as if there were no other reference points in their lives than the fact of Japanese rule.⁴⁶ To Shin and

⁴⁵ Shin and Robinson, “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” *op cit.*, 12.

⁴⁶ Kenneth M. Wells, “The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kūnuhoe Movement,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 197.

Robinson's three mutually influencing ideas, I have added a fourth dimension, Materialism/Visualism (Fig. 4):

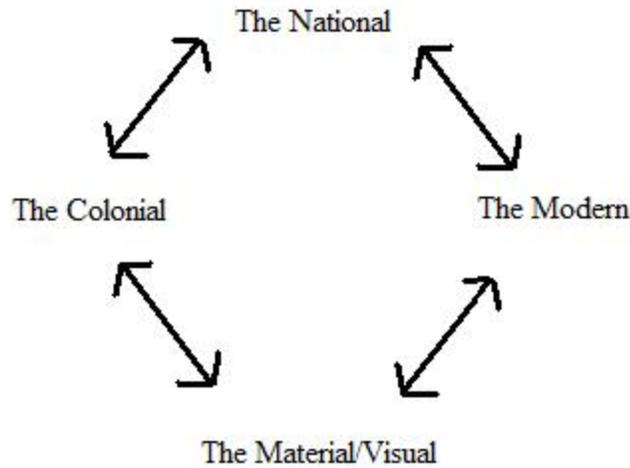


Figure 4: Four dimensions of viewing history.

The fourth dimension is included to fully acknowledge the importance of the material and visual aspect of modernization in context of Korea's colonial experience. It helps to tell the story of colonization in a more nuanced and interesting way; one that goes beyond an artificially short-ended conceptualization of Korean response to Japanese colonialism.

This paper is divided into three sections. Chapter One will analyze Gyeongseong's landmarks as potent symbols of Japanese stronghold in Korea. I will look at the Korean reaction to symbols of modernism and progress (Gyeongseong Train Station) as well as symbols of Japanese power (Governor-General Building and Joseon Singung). Chapter Two focuses on Gyeongseong's parks, particularly the "Japanese" Namsan Park and "Korean" Pagoda Park. There is currently a lack of research into how Korea's first modern parks formed an important venue during colonization. This paper puts the spotlight on the differences in the ways Namsan Park and Pagoda Park were viewed by the Korean public and how this discrepancy led to a nationalistic outcry against Japanese power. Finally, Chapter Three will look at Gyeongseong's streets as exhibitions of colonial modernity and the inherent discriminations within it. The

Korean writers' juxtaposition of glittery façade of modernity in Honmachi with the more "realistic" look at modernity in Jongno is discussed. The chapter also highlights the Korean reaction to being increasingly "cornered" to the northern half of the city.

Lastly, as I discuss the impact and the roles of these different types spaces, I will adopt Todd Henry's usage of the term "officially-sanctioned, social" in substitution for the word "public" (to describe 公共; K: *gonggong* and J: *kōkyō*). This is because our current perception of the word "public" as associated with open access and equality. The two distinct words "Officially-sanctioned" and "social" appropriately capture the colonial government's attitude towards obfuscating "private" interests to make room for an idealized sense of community.⁴⁷ I agree with Henry that such spaces should be described with references to their association with officialdom and assimilation, as well as the hierarchy between the individual and the state.

⁴⁷ Henry, "Respatializing Chosŏn's Royal Capital," *op cit.*, 30.

Chapter 1:

Gyeongseong's Landmarks as Symbols of Japan's Colonial Power

“I had the typical Japanese education. So I didn't think the Japanese were so bad. And just look at them, they are good at what they do. But Japan was so ignorant towards Koreans. It showed in everything they did. They thought Koreans were dirty and stupid...Japan took so many countries. I don't think people of my generation can forgive Japan, even after so many years.”

—Nam Jeong-yeop¹

The Japanese colonial government's effort to change Korea's physical layout began with reorganizing Korea's land system in the early 1910s. Control of the land was crucial for control of the Korean economy, and the imperial government was under pressure from Japanese entrepreneurs to create the right conditions for Japanese investment in Korea. Thus the government opened up Korean land available as a saleable commodity—and in turn, Japanese investment flowed into the country.² The colonial government then unified the Korean currency, improved communication, and increased agricultural growth.³ At the same time, the 1910s inaugurated a building boom as the Japanese invested millions of yen to establish the infrastructure needed for colonial rule. The project included government buildings, shrines, railroads, motor roads, power and telephone lines, hydroelectric dams, barrages, and irrigation works; cumulatively, they laid down the foundations for significant changes to Korea's

¹ Nam Jeong-yeop, in discussion with the author, May 14, 2009.

² Yunsik Chang, “Colonization as the Planned Changed: The Korean Case,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 5.2 (1971):168.

³ Stewart Lone and Gavan McCormick, *Korea Since 1850* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 50. With Korean-Japanese tariff barriers withdrawn in 1920, the Japanese authorities expanded agricultural exports to Japan as a means of developing economic unity, which simultaneously increased Korea's dependency on the Japanese market.

geography.

In 1920s Gyeongseong, the colonial government continued to sustain the great building boom begun in the previous decade, but it now focused more on transforming Gyeongseong's visual geography with potent symbols of Japan's domination in the modern sector of the society. As trappings of authority, symbols signify important forms of legitimation that are crucial to the exercise of authority.⁴ Throughout Gyeongseong, a new crop of modern architecture sprang up to replace the sparse yet traditional Korean look of the city.⁵ A new style of colonial architecture emerged, a medley of traditional Japanese-style buildings (wooden structures, shrines, etc.) and eclectic Western-style buildings modeled after those that emerged in Japan since the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Beginning with the Bank of Joseon (1909) and Gyeongseong Post Office (1910), the colonial government raised imposing edifices such as the new Gyeongseong City Administration Building (1926), Joseon Singung (1926), a new Governor-General Building (1926), and Gyeongseong Train Station (1925). The "Western-style" combined various European design philosophies: it included the French (chateau and French Renaissance), English (English Gothic style of brick masonry), and German (German Renaissance of brick and stone masonry).⁶ As in Japan, the "modern" architecture in Korea showcased how enthusiastically Japan tried to master Western architectural methods and use these buildings as a proof of its Westernization.⁷

These imposing Western-style structures acted as visual signifiers of Japanese power and

⁴ Marvin Olsen, "Forms and Levels of Power Exertion," in *Power in Modern Societies*, edited by Marvin Olsen and Martin Marger (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 33.

⁵ But with urban surveys still incomplete and a city planning law yet to be implemented, the planning of modern Gyeongseong followed the pre-existing road design that was laid out at the end of Joseon Dynasty.

⁶ Hideto Kishida, *Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo, Japan: Maruzen Company Ltd., 1936), 110-111.

⁷ Dallas Finn, *Meiji Revisited: The Sites of Victorian Japan* (New York, NY: Weatherhill, 1995), 4.

authority in Gyeongseong, and imported into Korea an entirely new architectural aesthetics. Buildings are intrinsic part of authority itself; in manifesting authority, architecture can be used as a powerful tool for political or social engineering.⁸ New Japanese-built, concrete-enforced structures across Gyeongseong jutted into the sky, towering over Korean homes and buildings, requiring their colonized viewers to look up to see them. These buildings literally and symbolically hovered over their colonized viewers. Because the design and functions of Gyeongseong's new buildings were so unprecedented, they gave their Korean viewers quite an impression about the changing times. Buildings are constructed with an assumption that the ideas, values and social forms that they embody are either already present or will develop, and that their "proper" functioning will require appropriate behavior and social and cultural rules that are assumed in their design.⁹ As clothes fashion a person and a luxurious home asserts a type of behavior on its dweller, the city's new architecture placed its city residents in context of the magnitude of the physical presence of the new buildings.

This chapter will begin by looking at Gyeongseong's hallmark of modernism and Westernization, the Gyeongseong Train Station (Gyeongseongyeok). The state-of-the-art, luxurious Western building will be studied alongside major constructions that mutilated traditional Korean symbols and the city's *pungsu* (geomancy). The most imposing among them was the Governor-General Building (Joseon Chongdokbu Building), which dominated the Seoul skyline. Its placement directly in front of the Gyeongbokgung (Gyeongbok Palace, the main royal palace) was deliberately calculated to efface any symbolic residue of the ancient regime. To make room for the new building, Gyeongbokgung was forcefully re-oriented and drastically

⁸ William Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 3.

⁹ Anthony King, ed., *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment* (London, GB: Routledge, 1980), 29.

reduced in size, while Gwanghwamun, its Southern Gate, was moved to another location. The Japanese government also built large shrines in Korea's major cities as sites for extending centralized state Shinto into the colony, and principle among them was the enormous Joseon Singung (formerly called Joseon Sinsa) on top of Namsan (South Mountain).

A Brand-New City

The office of the Governor-General played a central role in building Gyeongseong. In the early summer of 1926, it created the seventeen-member Gyeongseong Urban Planning Survey Committee (Keijō toshi keikaku chosa iinkai), which deliberated over a number of key issues including the repair and expansion of roads, underground sewers, and parks. According to Se-Mi Oh, the purpose of the Japanese government's urban reform projects was twofold: it sought to decorate Seoul into a monumental colonial city and direct movement through a north-south axis in the middle of the city.¹⁰ Important administrative buildings and other architectural monuments were moved along Taepyeongno (J: Taihei) axis, and three radical roads linking the Korean neighborhoods of Jongno to the Government-General Building (of which only Sejongno remains in place today) embodied the colonial planners' vision for reconstructing Gyeongseong with a centralized focus (Fig. 5). Taepyeongno itself was widened to a unprecedented 62 meters, consisting of a 20 meter central roadway, a twelve meter passage for vehicular traffic, and a six meter pedestrian walkway. Embodying both the symbolism of colonial rule and the functionality of a modern facility, this "officially-sanctioned, social" space also included plans for a grassy outer border lined with trees and benches where visitors could rest and take a break

¹⁰ Se-Mi Oh, "Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 70.

from everyday life.¹¹ However, financial restrictions and contestations over the use of city space between Korean and Japanese city residents prevented a radical spatial transformation of early colonial Seoul. Only fifteen of the forty-two planned road projects were undertaken, leaving a large part of the precolonial system of roads in place, especially in the back alleys of Jongno and other neighborhoods in the northern half of the city.¹² As a result, an uneven spatial structure came to define the streets of early Gyeongseong (Fig. 6).

Nevertheless, with the city planning well underway, colonial architecture appeared all around Gyeongseong. Authors of a *Keijō nippō* article from early 1925 applauded the near completion of six major modern architectural projects: Gyeongseong Train Station, Joseon Singung, the new City Government building, the new Government General building, Hullyonwon Memorial Athletic Grounds, and Gyeongseong Imperial University.¹³

Architecture has an intimate relationship with those in power and creates landscapes that embody power relationships.¹⁴ Such colonial architecture served to represent the political authority and economic power of the Japanese Empire through the designs of cosmopolitan sensibility.

Following the completion of the new Government-General Building and Joseon Singung in 1926, Taepyeongno's north-south axis began to showcase Japanese imperial power in its various manifestations: from the military (Yongsan), to the religious (Joseon Singung on Namsan), to

¹¹ Todd Henry, "Keijō: Japanese and Korean Constructions of Colonial Seoul and the History of its Lived Spaces, 1910-1937" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), 318.

¹² *Jongnoguji* (A history of the District of Jongno), (Seoul, Korea: Jongnogu, 1994), 54 in Todd Henry, "Respatializing Chosŏn's Royal Capital," in *Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 28.

¹³ *Keijō nippō*, January 1, 1925 in Henry, "Keijō," *op cit.*, 310.

¹⁴ Lisa Findley, *Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 32.

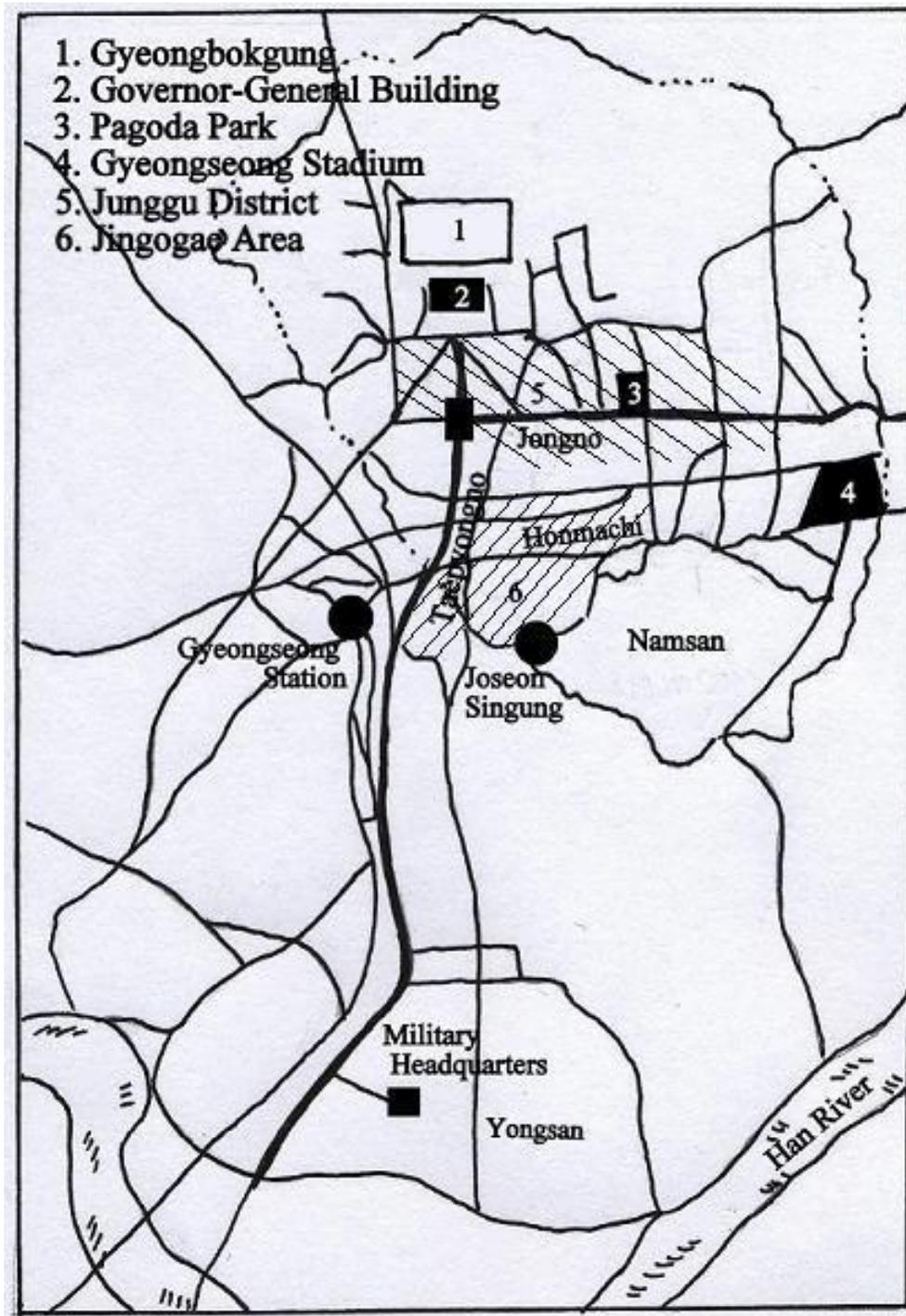


Figure 5: A revised map of roads in Gyeongseong, 1919.
 (Adapted from Henry, "Keijō," 62)

the economic (Honmachi Street), to the political (the Government-General Building erected on grounds previously part of Gyeongbokgung).



Figure 6: A view from Gyeongseong Station to South Gate (Namdaemun).
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 152)

The establishment of modern architecture in Gyeongseong was accompanied by the Japanese officials' effort to assimilate Koreans in the newly created urban space. Matsui Shigeru (1866-1945), a leader in police education serving the Japanese protectorate government in Korea, called for the establishment in Seoul of "social education facilities" (*shakaiteki kyoiku kikan*) including parks, theaters, music halls, sports clubs, libraries, art museums, and zoological gardens. He argued that these institutions provided the most apt way to "harmonize public feelings (*jinshin o yuwa*), to bring about taste (*shumei*) among the people, and, by guiding them with sophistication (*yuga ni michibiki*) to foster the establishment of civic morality (*kotoku*), and thus bring about harmonious co-operative life (*enman naru kyodo seikatsu*)."¹⁵ The March 1st 1919 Independence Movement and the consequent policy of Cultural Rule encouraged Gyeongseong's city planners to design specific facilities that aimed to beckon individuals to enjoy their modern trappings and participate in various activities related to colonial modernity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Matsui Shigeru, "Kankoku ni okeru shakai kyoiku to keisatsu tonon kankei" (Social education in Korea and its relationship with the police), in *Jichi to keisatsu* (Self-administration and the police), (Tokyo, Japan: Keigansha, 1913), 830 in Henry "Respatializing Chosŏn's Royal Capital," *op cit.*, 32-33.

¹⁶ Henry, "Keijō," *op cit.*, 311.

Sano Toshikata, an urban planner, articulated to the rest of the Keijō Urban Planning Survey Committee (Keijō toshi keikaku chosa jinkai) in the fall of 1921, “When I refer to the concept of contemporary urban planning, I am not speaking of Socialism (*shakai shugi*) or Communism (*kyosan shugi*), but of constructing one large, ‘officially-sanctioned, social’ (*kokyo*) structure.”¹⁷ Thus, the shape and look of Gyeongseong’s colonial architecture were deliberately designed to impart a specific message to their viewers.

A prime example of such “officially-sanctioned, social” structure was the Gyeongseong Train Station (Fig. 7), designed by Professor Yasushi Tsukamoto of Tokyo Imperial University and completed in August 1925 after four years of construction. The total cost for the 614,343 square feet building with concrete enforcements amounted to more than 1,945,000 *won* (equivalent to about 194.5 billion *won* or 19.45 million dollars in today’s prices).¹⁸ Gyeongseong Station was modeled after the Tokyo Station, designed by Tatsuno Kingo and completed in 1914, which paid homage to the power of rail through mastery of Western transportation technology and became a monument of progress and empire.¹⁹ The three-storied, red and white brick building flaunted an eclectic look, with a centralized and symmetrical layout topped off with a Byzantine-style ribbed dome. For Japanese architects, brick had played an important part in the creation of new Westernized cities throughout the Meiji Period, and it assumed an iconic significance as a physical embodiment of things Western and modern.²⁰ Also,

¹⁷ “Gendai toshi no riso (7)” (Ideals for the contemporary city, part 7) *Keijō nippō*, Sept 14, 1921 in Henry, “Keijō,” *ibid.*, 311.

¹⁸ Bak Dol-i, “Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?” [How much did Gyeongseong change in one year?] *Gaebyeok*, no. 64 (December 1, 1925), 74.

¹⁹ Coaldrake, *ibid.*, 223.

²⁰ Coaldrake, *op cit.*, 237.

the dome was a paramount in the Japanese architectural vocabulary of authority in early twentieth century to impart a greater visual impact and symbolic significance.²¹ Like the Tokyo Station, Gyeongseong Station's architectural design assumed the authority of the imperial institution, with the design focused on the central grand entrance, imposing portico, and flowing Neo-Baroque pediment.²² Thus, Gyeongseong Station manifested onto its viewers the "modern" social and cultural values assumed in its elaborate design.

In a Japanese newspaper article that described the station as a "popularly-oriented" (*minshu hon'i*) building, Gyeongseong Station was presented as thoroughly "public-oriented" (*koshu hon'i*).²³ Concurrent to the opening of Gyeongseong Train Station, the Nammun Station, which had been Gyeongseong's sole train station for twenty-three years, was torn down and eventually converted into a park, another example of a "social education facility." A Korean newspaper praised, "Together with the imposing (*gwangdaehan*) train station, the new park will make up the grand entrance gate to Gyeongseong (*daegyeongseong-ui hyeon-gwan*)!"²⁴ As people stepped into the sparkling halls of brand-new Gyeongseong Station, they also walked into a "grand entrance gate" to modernity, or at least a grand vision of it.

Gyeongseong Station was built upon the increasing significance of transportation for the centralization of Japanese power, as well as the international context of capital-city stations as

²¹ Coaldrake, *ibid.*, 235.

²² Coaldrake, *ibid.*, 225.

²³ "Iyoiyo shunko chikazuita Keijō no daigenkan" (At least, Keijō's great entryway nears completion), *Keijō nippō*, June 14, 1925 in Henry, "Keijō," *ibid.*, 312.

²⁴ "Gu-gyeongseongyeokteoe gongwon seolchigyehoekseol" [Plans to build a park at the location of former Gyeongseong Station], *Chosun ilbo*, November 11, 1925.

the expression of national confidence and authority.²⁵ As a smaller “replica” or an “extension” of the Tokyo Station, Gyeongseong Station and its homage to authority symbolically projected the Japanese government’s expansion of its economic, political and military interests throughout Korea. The Korean response to the symbolic significance of the building was justifiably varied—one writer smirked, “people passing in and out will fear, or marvel at, or hate the station; others will invariably complain about how it is a waste [of money].”²⁶ With the Gyeongseong Station, the colonial government not only imported into Korea a novel piece of architecture, but also colonial ideologies and way of life.



Figure 7: Finished Gyeongseong Station, 1925.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 165)

Such imposing modern structures with “officially-sanctioned, social” objective were not simply “buildings” in Gyeongseong, where small wooden houses were the norm and tall buildings a scarce rarity. Buildings are created with the assumption that the ideas, values, and

²⁵ Coaldrake, *op cit.*, 225.

²⁶ Bak Dol-i, “Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?” *op cit.*, 74.

social forms that they embody are either already present or will develop.²⁷ Gyeongseong Station, with its Western magnificence, contrasted heavily with its surrounding landscape and struck its viewers with surprise and awe. Upon entering the building, visitors were greeted with a large hall with brightly colored stained glass windows. A magazine article described the new station as “changing the look of our [city’s] features” (*oin-ui imoki serowojinda*), and having an “extremely dignified presence” (*goengjanghan wieomeul tohanda*).²⁸ Newspapers gushed about the sophistication in the station’s details: its state-of-the-art features included a barber shop, indoor heating system (first in Korea’s public buildings), women’s lounge, luxury lounge, a number of posh restaurants, and even a pay-only Western-style bathroom.²⁹ And on its top floor, the station housed one of the fanciest, most expensive Western-style restaurants in all of Gyeongseong.³⁰

However, as “cultural” or “social” as the Gyeongseong Station was initially seen to be, its Korean visitors were also confronted with negative experiences. A number of articles written about the train station in the 1920s were dedicated to complaints about the discrimination and unfair treatment that Korean people faced.³¹ One writer questioned, “Is the facility for Japanese or for Koreans?”³² A popular topic of concern was the fact that the station only served

²⁷ King, *op cit.*, 11

²⁸ Bak Dol-i, “Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?” *op cit.*, 74.

²⁹ “Sinjanghan gyeongseongyeok” [Renovated Gyeongseong Station], *Donga ilbo*, October 8, 1925.

³⁰ “I-il dong-ane seoul gugyeong golgoro haneun beop” [Complete tour of Seoul in two days, the route to take your friend from the countryside], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929).

³¹ My research methodology included scanning through every single *Chosun ilbo* and *Donga ilbo* articles written about Gyeongseong Station in the 1920s, and I found that 30% of the articles (3 of 9) mentioned or criticized the racial discrimination at the station.

³² “Sinjanghan gyeongseongyeok” [Renovated Gyeongseong Station], *Donga ilbo*, October 8, 1925.

Japanese food, without any Korean food in sight.³³ Critics considered “not being able to eat the food right for their taste buds when hungry” as “the most agonizing (*gweroun*) part” of the train-riding experience. Other writers lamented on the ill treatment of Koreans on trains or in the train station. There were numerous citations of verbal or physical abuse of Korean train riders by Japanese ticket attendants, some of which resulted in injuries.³⁴ The discrimination was also experienced by people who worked in or around the station. Tension between Korean and Japanese taxi drivers waiting for customers at Gyeongseong Station’s two parking areas increased during the summer of 1927, when wealthy train riders began purchasing personal cars and hiring personal drivers. With a smaller customer base, the competition between Korean and Japanese drivers for customers intensified. According to a *Donga Ilbo* article, Korean drivers were allocated a significantly smaller portion of customers than Japanese drivers, even though there was far greater number of Korean drivers.³⁵ It was evident that discrimination followed Koreans to even the most beautiful, modern, and “officially-sanctioned, social” facility in Gyeongseong.

With the newly widened roads and the railways laid out across the country during the 1910s, Gyeongseong residents found a greater outlet for mobility in the 1920s.³⁶ Urban

³³ “Seongyeok-e joseoneumsik, joseonin seunggaekui pyeonlileul woehaya” [Joseon food at city station, for the comfort of Joseon customers], *Donga ilbo*, March 7, 1923.

³⁴ “Namsanyeokgwa seunggaekui binan. Seungaekeul murihagae huyok” [The conflict between Namsan Station and its customers. The extreme abuse of the customers], *Chosun ilbo*, September 4, 1925. The abuses cited in the article include kicking, swearing, and hitting by train attendants.

³⁵ “Gyeongseongyeok gunae joseonchabu dongyo. Suipeun baecharyodo bujok, ilbonin chabuwa chabyoli usim” [The unrest of Joseon drivers at Gyeongseong Station. Their income drastically falls behind Japanese drivers, discrimination is acute], *Chosun ilbo*, July 31, 1927.

³⁶ Yunsik Chang, *op cit.*, 168. In 1901 the first railway line in Korea was built by private enterprise between Seoul and Inchon. This was followed by four major lines within the next five years, which laid out 636 miles of track connecting Korea’s seven major cities. In 1910 the colonial government took over the management of the railways.

residents traveled on street cars to move around the swelling city, while a massive number of people from the countryside migrated into the capital via trains (Fig. 8). By the time the new Gyeongseong Station was finished in 1925, the number of people traveling in the country reached a historical high. In the six months between January and June 1924, more than 600,000 passengers from all around the country boarded trains at Gyeongseong Station—an enormous number for a city with a population of around 250,000 in 1920.³⁷ According to a *Donga Ilbo* statistic, over 3,500 passengers left Gyeongseong Station every day between January and May 1923. This amounted to over 400,000 people leaving Gyeongseong and 370,000 returning in the course of four months. Ninety-five percent of the travelers were third-class riders, and many of them traveled to “enjoy the pleasant spring weather.” The article reported that there were also an increasing number of people traveling in groups, especially for high school field trips (*suhak yeohaeng*).³⁸ All in all, *Donga Ilbo*’s figures reveal a cross-class, even proletarian travel movement in the 1920s. While the glitzy, newly completed Gyeongseong Station looked the part to cater to the wealthy Japanese minority, the train station was indeed a portal for the masses. Koreans, young and old, left their homes and entered new ones; the new environment carried an air of transience and impermanence. The new colonial infrastructure allowed Korean people to move for the first time; in a sense, people were liberated from their homes and towns. Gyeongseong Station embodied an odd “freedom” that came with the city’s colonial modernization.

Within a few years after Korea’s annexation, the government also started to construct new roads and improving old ones.

³⁷ “Gyeongseongyeok seungganggaek 60 yeomanmyeongssik” [Number of Gyeongseong Station passengers surpass 600,000], *Chosun ilbo*, October 19, 1924.

³⁸ “Gyeongseongyeokui tantohaneun yeogaek, harue 3,500 myeong-ida” [The number of passengers entering and leaving Gyeongseong Station is 3,500 per day], *Donga ilbo*, May 19, 1923.



Figure 8: The cross-street of Taepyeongno and Gyocharo, 1920s. Streetcar lines connected various city landmarks. (Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 201)

Gyeongseong Train Station was deemed a perfect place to “people-watch” (*saram gugyeong*), for its foot traffic consisted of people from all spectrums of life.³⁹ Trains emerged as Korea’s metaphorical “vehicle” of mobilization toward urbanization, modernization, and socialization. But even though the sheer number of people traveling in the 1920s portrays a picture of great energy and excitement, a closer look at personal narratives show that the new wave was accompanied by various and obscure reactions of great significance.⁴⁰ Korean magazines often described vignettes of people coming from the countryside and arriving in Gyeongseong Station in search of jobs, dreams, and a better life. A typical picture of a young, impoverished, and widowed mother from the countryside running directly from the halting train to a Japanese neighborhood in search of a housework job was the kind of reality that Gyeongseong Station represented.⁴¹ In his memoir, professor and literary critic (as well as South Korea’s first Minister of Culture) O-Young Lee described,

³⁹ Song Jak, et al, “Gijachongchuldong, daegyeongseong-baekju-amhaeng-gi” [Reporter mobilization, Gyeongseong travel writing part two: One hour travel into the society], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 4 (February 1, 1927), 33.

⁴⁰ O-Young Lee, *In This Earth and In That Wind: This Is Korea* (Seoul, Korea: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 182.

⁴¹ Song Jak, et al, *op cit.*, 36.

Because Korean modernization emerged together with her history as a colony, this kind of flourishing was seen as a symbol of guilt and oppression. Many sad and pitiful events take place at the lonely rural railway station where the coxcomb and the cosmos bloom—such as when the young country girls leave to be sold as servants or prostitutes in Seoul, or when one's neighbors leave their old home forever with their gourd dipper as their only baggage....Listening to the sentimental popular song in which “the train departs in the drizzle,” or the folk song in which “the ‘high collar’ arrogant guys order everyone around” and others, we can presume the opposition and the sad feeling towards the railroad.⁴²

The new railroad and roads that people traveled on were ambiguous by nature. They were the means to achieve the colonial modernity that the Japanese represented, yet they were also far from the ideal vision of Japan's modernity. The trains were a form of “officially-sanctioned, social” facility but this did not guarantee that they were so “social.” A writer depicted his experience on a train to Manchuria:

It was right before the train left Gyeongseong Station. An old wife hugging loads of baggage jumped onto my car. It seemed that she ran onto any nearest car because she was anxious about missing the train. Sighing in relief, the woman stumbled around the car, looking for a place to sit. But how did she even expect to do such thing? All the Japanese riders in the car began calling out in their poor Korean, “Go away! Go away!” A small Japanese child with bobbed hair who had been running back and forth between different seats, started pushing on the back of the old woman saying “I don't like you! I don't like you!” in his language. Who knows if the child had a reason or not. Either way, the boy seemed to insist that he too had right to push out a powerless, moneyless Joseon woman at his will.⁴³

Thus, living in the brand-new city and having the infrastructure to travel around the country was a positive feat for Gyeongseong's residents, but the modern structures were also reminders of the discrimination and hardship that people faced in their daily lives. A *Gaebyeok* writer reflected on the opportunities of mobilization in another major city Pyongyang:

Moving street cars, flying airplanes, honking cars, and longer railways represent Pyongyang's advancement, so it is natural that Pyongyang people are happy about that. But Brother, shouldn't they think one step beyond that? Ah! Now that seeing an airplane is

⁴² O-Young Lee, *op cit.*, 183. “High collar” refers to those Koreans who cooperated with the Japanese and therefore were “modernized,” which was characterized by their wearing of Western clothes and white shirts with high collars.

⁴³ So Chun, “Geugeotshi jeil-ideora, choshin haenggakui yeotsedongan” [That was the first time: the six days of acting Japanese], *Gaebyeok*, no. 41 (November 1, 1923), 92.

no longer shocking and there is no need to walk all the way to the train station, should we be content and happy about the world we live in? But aren't those things enjoyed by another group of people, not us? Brother, I think we should instead be sad and reflect on ourselves. Is all this advancement, especially Pyongyang's current advancement, an advancement that provides the fundamentals, or promises stability for 60,000 Joseon people? I don't think so.⁴⁴

There was a discrepancy between Korea's façade of modernity and its "confusing" (*hondonseureoun*) reality.⁴⁵ This added a deeper dimension to what Gyeongseong urbanites saw in their new environment with beautifully embellished buildings and attractively modern facilities. Train stations as scenes displaying economic disparity, hopeful future, people growing up, migration, and broken dreams are rather ubiquitous throughout the world. In Korea, twentieth-century train stations provided snapshots of history during other times of turbulence, namely in the 1950s in the aftermath of the Korean War. During that time, Seoul Station (renamed from Gyeongseong Station) displayed the abject poverty, confusion, and social unrest plaguing the capital destroyed from war. Then how did the scenes of Gyeongseong Station in the 1920s differ from those in the 1950s? The largest difference lies in the fact that the 1920s was the first time people saw the train station as a rich exhibition of history. It was simply unprecedented; also, Gyeongseong Station in the 1920s depicted Korean history as a product of Japan's imposition onto the peninsula, while the turmoil of the 1950s, at least on the surface, was a result of inter-Korean struggles.

At the same time, Korean response to Japanese modernity was also characterized by a great deal of jealousy and frustration. A particularly visual representation of this mixed feeling

⁴⁴ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, "Hondon, saneyonmane goguke dollawaseo" [Confusion; returning home after four years], *Gaebyeok*, no. 39 (September 1, 1923), 52.

⁴⁵ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, *ibid.*, 49.

was in the running children, dirty and sparsely dressed, who chased after a moving train screaming obscenities:

In the humorous action of the children who make these obscene gestures at the train we can read the rebellious hearts of the Koreans toward modernization. Rebellion of this sort is insignificant. The most they can do is give dirty looks to the end of the train or shake their fists. We can also say that this is superficial opposition towards things like trains or Western clothes more than it is rebellion toward anything basic.⁴⁶

While O-Young Lee saw such expressions of jealousy as “insignificant,” another considered this kind of Korean attitude to represent a larger, overshadowing tendency be crude, inconsiderate, and impolite. Korean standards of etiquette (such as automatic “thank you,” “excuse me,” and “I’m sorry”) for non-upper classes were not as standardized as in Western countries:

When I look at the realities of our society, I am terribly embarrassed about our Eastern attitude towards manners. When I ride on the train, I see children standing in a mob gesturing profanities. Our children want to insult at faultless people passing by this desperately....We need to act more politely. And we need be more proactive to lead a clean, civilized way of life.⁴⁷

Although the Korean reaction to the discrimination that plagued Gyeongseong’s increasing modernity was largely emotional, there were such other voices who chose to criticize Koreans for refusing to keep up with modern behaviors and trends. These intellectuals appreciated the Western notions of time, etiquette, and social behavior and were more cautious about lamenting about the Korean situation. Instead, they urged Koreans to adapt to and keep up with the changing times. These goals were in line with the moderate nationalist movements of the 1920s that delineated the debate over national reconstruction.⁴⁸ Cultural nationalists such as Yi Kwangsu, who emphasized educational enlightenment and organization, had a gradualist

⁴⁶ O-Young Lee, *op cit.*, 183.

⁴⁷ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, *op cit.*, 59.

⁴⁸ Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1988), 78.

approach to political liberation.⁴⁹ Yi stressed the necessity of creating a “new person,” or a new national character—for him, nationality was not enduring, but rather could be readily reconstructed with individual cultivation and mass education.⁵⁰ This meant that the masses would have to be tutored in the ways of the modern world to become members of the new Korean nation, for the masses were unprepared for independence.⁵¹ Therefore the nationalist movements in the 1920s addressed issues of teaching, opportunities for training, and reformation of certain Korean traditions. In this context, some of the voices remarking on Gyeongseong’s changing landscape sought to encourage the general public to adopt an appetite for change.

Mutilation of Korean Symbols and *Pungsu*

In addition to erecting a crop of modern, functional buildings to recreate Gyeongseong’s architectural landscape, the colonial government also built symbols of the Japanese power in Korea. Structures such as the Gyeongseong Sinsa (Gyeongseong Shinto Shrine) and the Governor-General Building had been one of the first buildings to be built since the Japanese troops moved into Korea in early 1900s, but they were rebuilt into a larger, more powerful scale in the 1920s. And through the process, the colonial government destroyed Korea’s ancient symbols and replaced them with new ones.

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925*, *ibid.*, 74-75. The cultural nationalist program was “elitist” in that change was to emanate downward from elite leadership. Yi Kwangsu emphasized the primacy of intellectual leadership and on transforming values as a prerequisite.

⁵⁰ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 46-47. Yi Kwangsu believed that Korea could improve its current colonial situation only through the reconstruction of nationality. He divided nationality into two tiers, primary and secondary. The primary features of Korean nationality were civic virtues, such as righteousness, humaneness, and valor. The secondary features included hypocrisy, nonsociability, underdevelopment of science, and exclusiveness. Yi’s main intention was to transform the negative values of the second tier.

⁵¹ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925*, *ibid.*, 75-76.

One of the ways that the Japanese colonial government did so was by tearing down parts of Gyeongbokgung (Gyeongbok Palace), the main palace of the Joseon Dynasty, and then building the new Governor-General Building directly in front of it. According to Korean historians, Gyeongbokgung had been the grandest building constructed in the Joseon Dynasty.⁵² It signified one of Korea's contributions to the world, embodying distinctive characteristics of traditional Korean architecture design such as slight inward slant of columns on the outside, and higher corner columns—these techniques were used to create a delicate and elegant shape of the roof and eave lines.⁵³ Gyeongbokgung is a prime example of Korean architectural aesthetics favoring elegant moderation in color, size, and decoration, as well as humbleness in design.⁵⁴ The construction of its buildings, including four main gates and Gunchongjeon (the largest building where the King dealt with politics and administration, see Fig. 9), were based on the principles from *yin-yang* and Five Elements theory, which emphasized that the buildings and the surrounding terrain create harmony with nature.

With the construction of the new Governor-General Building on the location of Gyeongbokgung, more than 400 palace buildings between the palace and the gates, mostly governmental and administrative buildings called Oejo (outside offices), were destroyed to make room for the new colonial building. This drastically reduced the size and the grandeur of the palace (compare models in Fig. 9, Fig. 10). At the same time, Gwanhwamun (South Gate), the main entryway directly in front of the palace, was moved to another location in 1926 (Fig. 11).

⁵² Go Go-seng, "Gyeongseong-i gajin meyongsowa gojeok" [Famous and historical places of Gyeongseong], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 19.

⁵³ Yun Jang-seop, *Hanguk-ui geonchuk* [Korean Architecture], (Seoul, Korea: Seoul National University Publishing, 2008), 28-30.

⁵⁴ Yun, *ibid.*, 34-35.

A number of people considered the removal of Gwanghwamun as a stinging jab. This kind of reaction was related to the strong sense of pride that Gyeongseong residents had for their city:

Seoul people have great sense of pride about the fact that he is “a Seoul person.” This kind of mentality solidified over the course of its five hundred year history, and people think that they have special benefit from living in Seoul. Despite the good and bad aspects of the city, they have a strong belief that Joseon is the best.⁵⁵

Writers argued that Gwanghwamun was “the source of big pride (*jarang*) for Asian architectural design” and that it “provided a significant backdrop to Joseon culture.”⁵⁶ Gyeongbokgung had been the ultimate symbol of Korean culture and history, as the palace where the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) had autonomously ruled Korea for more than five hundred years. By trying to demolish the traditional Korean symbol and erecting a Japanese colonial symbol in its place, the Japanese government sought to incorporate the Korean past into the Japanese present. The Governor-General Building thus exaggerated the possibility of Japan’s future in Korea while belittling the Korean subject (Fig. 12).

The new Governor-General Building came to be situated on the main South-North axis of Taepyeongno, and took over the location of Taepyeongwan, the official residence of Ming Dynasty royal consuls.⁵⁷ Although the Governor-General Building was completed in October 1926, the tearing down of the palace had begun more than a decade before, when the formerly

⁵⁵ Go Yeong-han, “Seoul-iraneun geumase, seoul-ui johengot, nabbeungot, seoul saram-eun mueose aechakeul dugo saneunga” [The taste of Seoul, its good and bad places; what are Seoul residents attached to?], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929).

⁵⁶ “Palweolchosunbuteo cheolhwedoeneun Gwanghwamun” [Gwanghwamun will be torn down early August], *Donga ilbo*, July 2, 1926.

⁵⁷ “Byeokhaesangjeon (碧海桑田) gachi gyeokbyeonhan seoului yeotnaljipgwa jigeumjip” [Drastically changed look of Seoul’s old houses and today’s new houses], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 97. “Taepyeong” from Taepyeong Avenue and Taepyeong Bridge originally came from the name of the official building.

경복궁 복원 계획도

고종 10년(1875년)에서 1910년 사이에 제작된 것으로 추정되는 「복원도」에 기반하여 그린 경복궁 복원 계획도(2003년)이다. 복원은 경복궁의 열정이다. 이 그림을 보면 고종 연간에 증진된 경복궁의 규모와 위엄을 짐작할 수 있는데, 당시에는 경복궁에 전기가 330여 동(약 15,000여 평)에 이르렀다.

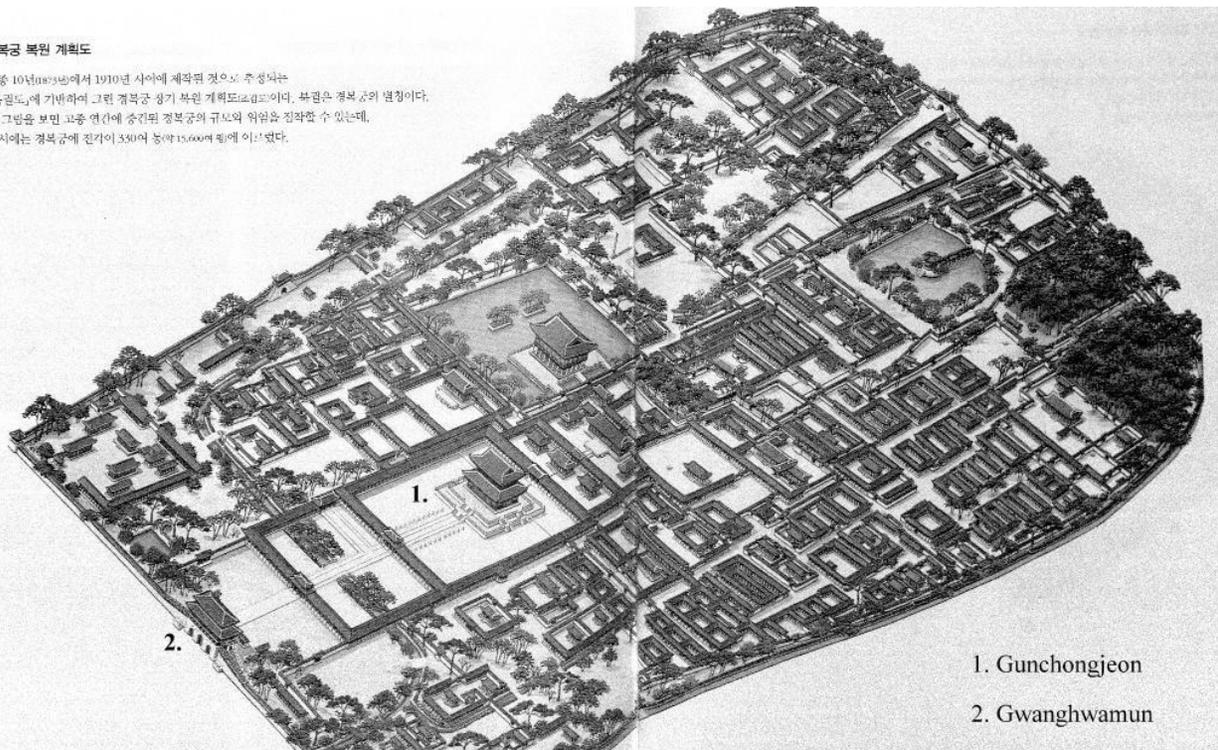


Figure 9: Gyeongbokgung in late Joseon Period, approx. 1896. (Image from Sin Eung-su, 394-395)

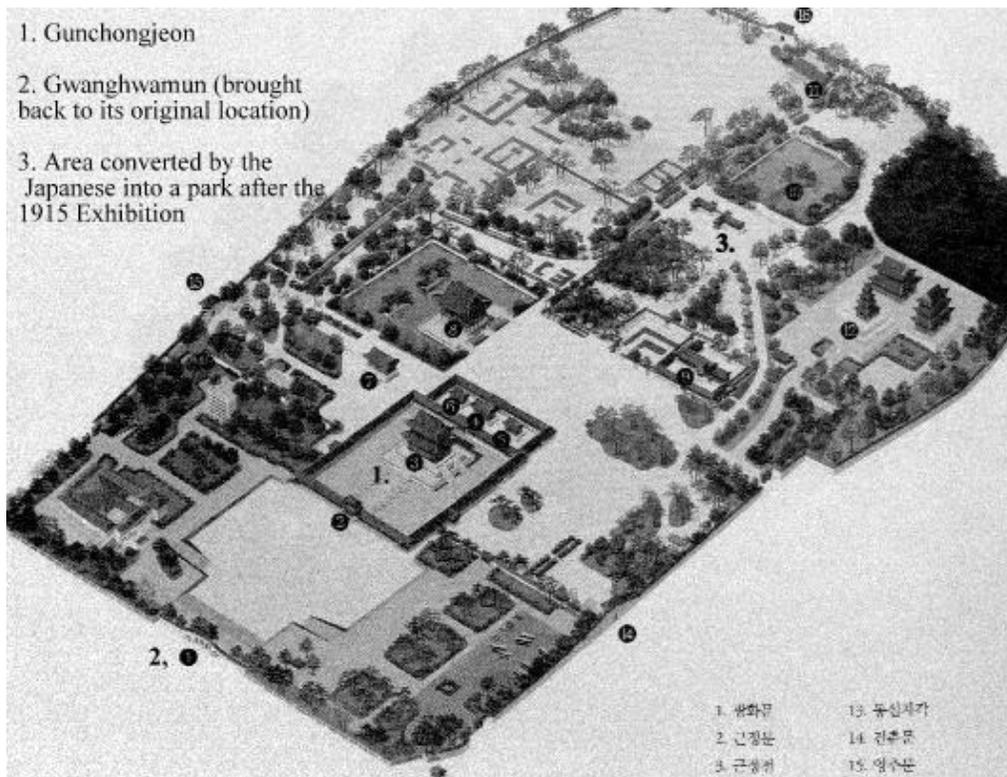


Figure 10: Gyeongbokgung in 1990, pre-restoration. Most of the palace's demolition was done by the Japanese government during the colonial period. (Image from Sin Eung-su, 396)

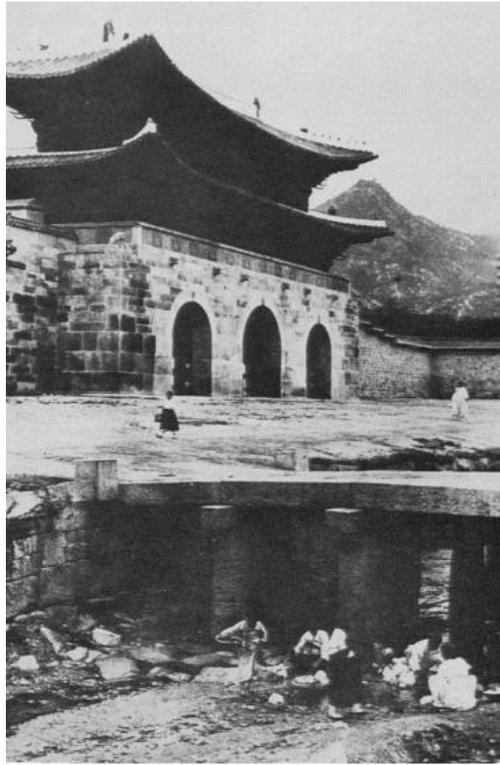


Figure 11: Gwanghwamun, 1927.
(Photo from Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe, 25)

loyalty-only ceremonial grounds were converted into an open space and became selectively open to the public. Japanese officials created a modern Japanese garden, planted hundreds of trees, and constructed a series of gravel pathways around the palace. In 1915, the grounds hosted the Korea Industrial Exhibition (Joseon mulsan gongjinhoe) that celebrated the five year anniversary of colonial rule. The newly-built art museum at the northeastern part of the grounds remained a permanent fixture since the 1915 Exhibition, and the quadrant was opened as a civic park for the first time in the spring of 1925. The space welcomed the city's residents to come and enjoy the season's cherry blossoms, an important symbol of Japanese culture—this was consistent with the Japanese city planners' aim to build Gyeongseong into a showcase city that conveyed colonial

ideology through special and architectural representation.⁵⁸ In sum, the palace had turned into essentially a “colonial park” in order to cultivate new loyalties to the Japanese Empire.



Figure 12: A view of the Governor-General Building under construction, 1920. (Photo from Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe, 42)

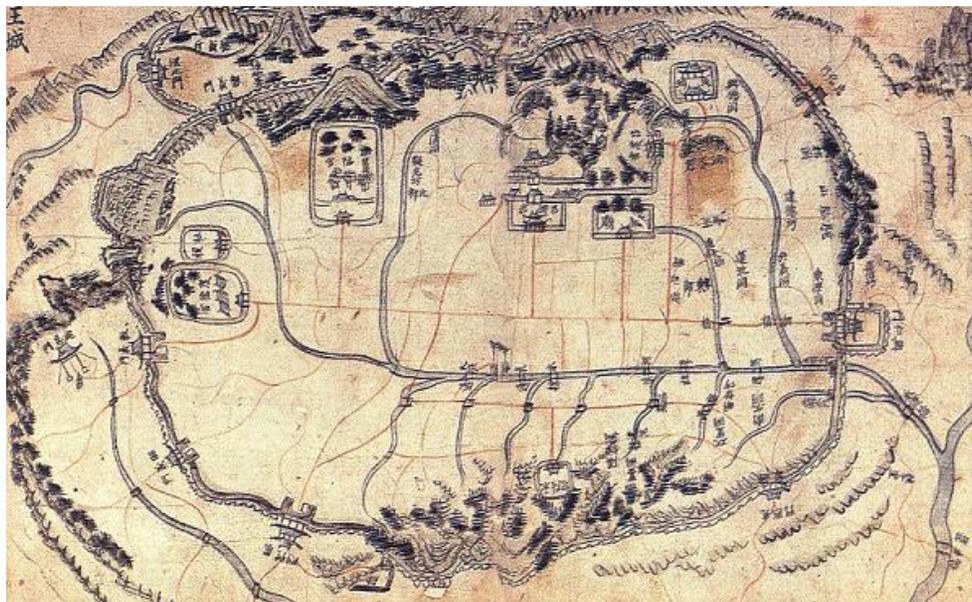


Figure 13: An old pictorial map of Seoul, late Joseon Period. Mountains in the north, northeast, and the south protect the royal landscapes in the center of the city. (Image from Ryu, 235)

⁵⁸ Oh, *op cit.*, 70

With the completion of the Governor-General Building, the ancient orientation of *pungsu* (風水; feng-shui), or geomancy of the entire city center was destroyed. Traditional *pungsu* theory is one of the most fundamental concepts that form the root of Korean culture, and it had greatly influenced the construction of the royal palace in the capital.⁵⁹ According to Joseon scholars, the capital city of Hanyang (Seoul) had been established on the finest location of the entire peninsula of Korea; and Gyeongbokgung was built in the middle of that finest, most propitious location.⁶⁰ Concerning the arrangement of the palace in particular, Jongmyo (Royal Ancestral Shrine) was placed to the left, Sajikdan (an altar for the god of earth and the god of crops), to the right, and the government office to the front. It was also built following a specific pattern of “three gates, three courts” in order to concentrate the central power.⁶¹ Korean scholars believed that a propitious location is defended by a strong mountain behind it and a small mountain and a source of water in front of it, the combination of which helps to retain the wind and the *gi* (氣; life force energy) of the city.⁶² The method for auspicious structural arrangement concentrated on achieving balance and harmony between buildings and their natural

⁵⁹ Sim Woo-kyung, “Background of Korean Traditional Landscape Architecture,” in *Korean Traditional Landscape Architecture*, edited by The Korean Institute of Traditional Landscape Architecture (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp, 2007), 38.

⁶⁰ The capital was built after Yi Seong-gye, who overthrew Goryeo (918-1392) and acceded to the throne in 1392, moved the capital from Gaegyeong to Hanyang.

⁶¹ Kim Yong-ki and Choi Jong-hee, “Landscape Architecture of the Royal Palace,” in *Korean Traditional Landscape Architecture*, edited by The Korean Institute of Traditional Landscape Architecture (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corp, 2007), 71.

⁶² Choi Jun-sik, *Sinseoulgihaeng 1: Seoulindeului yeongwonhan hyusikcheo, namsan dapsagi* [New Seoul travelogue volume one: essays on visits to Namsan, the eternal refuge for Seoulites] (Seoul, Korea: Yeolmae Publishing Co, 2003), 98.

surroundings, with minimal changes to the landscape, to create a pleasant environment rich in *gi* (Fig. 13).⁶³



Figure 14: The finished Governor-General Building. The roof tiles create the shape of 日, signifying Japan. One can only catch a glimpse of the royal palace behind the building. (Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 42)

The architecture and its spatial behavior signified a threat of “domination” or “intimidation” to its casual viewers.⁶⁴ The Korean response to the fate of the Gyeongbokgung was strongly negative and emotional; many newspaper articles lamented about the palace “completely disappearing behind the Governor-General building.”⁶⁵ The building, due to its differentiated representations of Japan and Korea (Fig. 14), reminded its Korean viewers of an

⁶³ Sim Woo-kyung, *op cit.*, 41-42. Yi Jung-hwan (1690-1752) emphasized in *Taengniji* (Ecological Guide to Korean Geography): “In general, for the selection for human settlement, the geographical advantage of the site should be considered first, then its physiological and economic condition, followed by the traits of the villagers’ mind and human nature, and finally the natural scenery of mountains and rivers. If the site falls short on one of these important factors, it will not be a favorable place to live.” This became the foundation for Korean landscape architecture.

⁶⁴ Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 10.

⁶⁵ “Gyeongbokgung yetdaegwolo” [The old road to Gyeongbok Palace], *Chosun ilbo*, January 7, 1926.

unstable embodiment of power relations.⁶⁶ In one article, spoken from the point of view of an American visitor to Seoul, the author remarked on the threatening presence of the Governor-General building in front of the historic palace.⁶⁷ He juxtaposed pleasant (*goeun*) images of Korean children running in front of the building with the gloomy large building behind them as symbolic of Japan's stronghold in Korea.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the Governor-General Building was the geographic arrangement of the building. The Governor-General Building was placed only slightly southwest of Gyeongbokgung's entrance, but clearly south-west of the spatial arrangement of the landmarks surrounding Gyeongbokgung—Bukhansan (North Mountain), Changgyeonggung (Changgyeong Palace), and Changdeokgung (Changdeok Palace) (Fig. 15). The spatial arrangement of the Governor-General Building brings to mind the strategy that the powerful Tokugawa had used when building the Nijō Castle near the imperial palace in Kyoto in 1603. In 1626, within the Palace of the Second Compound of the Nijō Castle, a temporary structure was added for receiving and accommodating the emperor. This emperor's inn was built at the same time as Tokugawa's palace, both of which were placed around an ornamental lake. By strategically locating these two complexes in relation to each other, Tokugawa took the opportunity to assert his power over the imperial court. The emperor's inn faced north, which was undesirable in solar terms and undignified geomantically. Not only that, the Tokugawa palace was set to the northeast of an ornamental lake, in a hostile direction, while the imperial

⁶⁶ Jong-Heon Jin, "Demolishing Colony: The Demolition of the Old Government-General Building of Chosŏn," in *Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 41.

⁶⁷ "'Gyeongbokgung eompyeneun nune mopsi geoseulyeo,' jakjogyeongseong-e dochakhan" [Those newly arrived to Gyeongseong says, "The tearing down of Gyeongbok Palace is unsightly to the eye"], *Donga ilbo*, November 29, 1926.

inn sat to the southwest of the lake, in the most benevolent direction.⁶⁸ The Tokugawa therefore protected the emperor from the flow of evil forces in the universe; but at the same time the emperor had to acquiesce in the invitation of his subject, and be received within the host's own built environment especially prepared for the occasion.⁶⁹ The case of the Governor-General Building in Korea had the reverse effect: it was protected by the arrangement of mountains and palaces to its northeast, which served the protecting role as the ultimate “ghost gate” (鬼門) that blocks evil spirits and gave the Governor-General Building a great geomantic advantage over royal Joseon palaces.



Figure 15: The protected geographical arrangement of the Governor-General Building. The palaces and the North Mountain form a wall around the Governor-General Building.

⁶⁸ Coaldrake, *op cit.*, 144.

⁶⁹ Coaldrake, *ibid.*, 144.

Another significant way that the Japanese colonial government replaced a Korean symbol with one of their own was by expanding the Gyeongseong Sinsa into a larger Joseon Singung on top of Namsan (Fig. 16). At its completion in 1926, the enormous Joseon Singung became the heart of Shinto worship in Korea. Namsan, the southern protectorate of Gyeongbokgung, was the historic home to Joseon Dynasty's Ancestral Shrine (Guksadang) and Seoul's beacon tower (Bongsudae) for fire and smoke signaling, and had an intimate relationship with the city's residents.⁷⁰ Guksadang was one of several tutelary shrines that were a part of Seoul's sacred landscape, but it was the city's most venerable *sadang* (祠堂)—a shamanistic hall that housed Joseon Dynasty's ancestral tablet. It was said that the shrine housed an icon of a Buddhist monk named Muhakdaesa (無學) (circa 1340–1405), who had served as a royal advisor to the founder of the Joseon Dynasty, King Taejo.⁷¹ But as the Japanese encroached onto Korea, a Shinto shrine hall, Taesingung (太神宮,) was built on Namsan in 1898 and was re-named Gyeongseong Sinsa in 1913.⁷² The Sinsa enshrined Japanese Emperor Meiji (明治天皇, r. 1867-1912) and Amaterasu Omikami (天照大神), a goddess believed to be directly linked to the

⁷⁰ Kim Gi-ho, "Namsan: yeoksawa bijeon" [Namsan: history and vision], in *Ileobeorin Seoul, dasi chatneun Seoul* [Lost Seoul, found Seoul], edited by An Du-sun (Seoul, Korea: Seoul siripdaehakgyo buseol seoulhak yeonguso, 1994), 244.

⁷¹ Laurel Kendall, "Auspicious Places in Mobile Landscape: Of Shamans, Shrines and Dreams," in *Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 110.

⁷² Masahiko Sawa, "Iljaeha 'sinsamunjae' wa gidokgyojui hakgyo" [Protestant Schools and the 'Shinto Problem'], in *Hangukgidokgyowa sinsachambaemunjae* [The Korean Protestant Church and the Shinto worship issue], edited by Kim Seung-tae (Seoul, Korea: The Institute for Korean Church History, 1991), 395. The Shinto Shrine at the top of Nam Mountain was not the first and only shrine built on Korean soil. The first was built after the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1609, when Japanese merchants entered the port city of Busan. At one time there were more than 3,000 merchants in Busan, enough to build a decent "Japan town" and a shrine named Geumdo bira shinsa (金刀比羅神社) for protection against unpredictable weather in their travels. After the Treaty of Ganghwa (K: Ganghwado joyak J:Nitchō-shūkōjōki) in 1876 that opened up Japan's trade with Korea, Japanese in Inchon and Wulsan built a number of shrines. There were about forty-two Shinto shrines in Gyeongseong, Inchon, Wulsan, and Busan before the annexation of Korea, but many more were constructed after 1910.

Imperial Household of Japan. The colonial government began expanding Gyeongseong Sinsa in 1920, and the project finished as the national shrine Joseon Singung (J: Chosŏn Jingu) in 1925.⁷³ The same year, Guksadang was removed from Namsan and relocated to another mountain called Inwang Mountain.⁷⁴ Joseon Singung's main temple and fifteen subsidiary buildings dominated the mountain scene. This signified a huge cultural replacement of the landscape that defined Namsan's historical past.

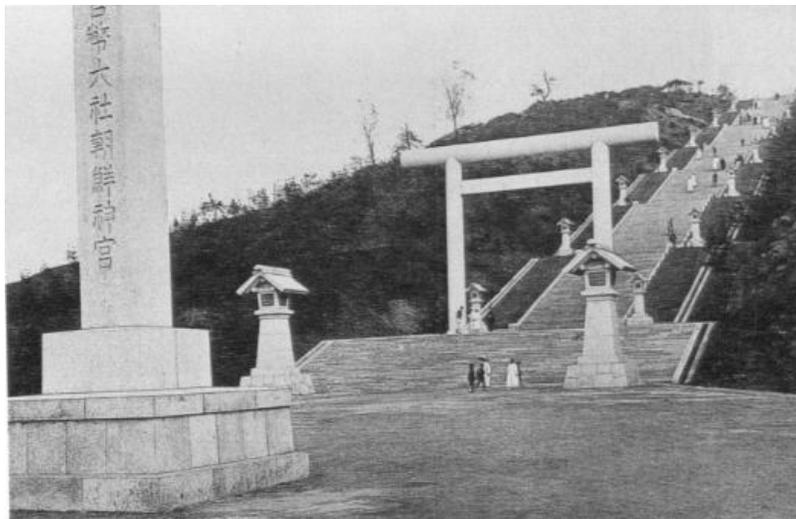


Figure 16: The front entrance to Joseon Singung. (Photo from Gang Gyeong-seon et al, 23)

Japanese urban planners considered the Joseon Singung as the “geographical central point” (*chiriteki chushinten*) of Gyeongseong. As Gyeongseong's urban development moved southward towards Yongsan, Namsan took on an even greater significance as both the symbolic and geographical center of the forward-looking city. The center point of the city was brought down south from Gyeongbokgung to Namsan, the mountain occupied by Joseon Singung. From Joseon Singung, the Governor-General Building (whose frontal entrance connected to the Korean neighborhoods of Jongno) sat at the opposite end of Taepyongno, almost directly up

⁷³ “Gyeongseongsinsa jijinjae” [Gyeongseong sinsa begins constructions], *Chosun ilbo*, May 26, 1920.

⁷⁴ Je-Hun Ryu, *Reading the Korean Cultural Landscape* (Elizabeth, NY: Hollym, 2000), 246.

north.⁷⁵ Planners also designated the area around the new City Government building as the urban center (*toshin*), likening it to a veritable “heart” (*shinzo*) of the city’s “organic body” (*yukitai*).⁷⁶ The shrine occupied a massive 423,140.5 square meters (128,000 *pyeong*) of land—it was four times the size of the huge Governor-General Building, which took up 99,170.5 square meters (30,000 *pyeong*). In Japan, Shinto had established an impressive building tradition over time (particularly in the Meiji Era) as the physical connection between the nation’s spiritual and imperial authority.⁷⁷ Thus, Shinto Shrines in Korea also became an architectural and iconic expression of Japan’s centralized imperial, religious, and bureaucratic authority. To reach the top of the shrine one had to climb 384 steps; it was a great ordeal for people to visit the shrine for worship.⁷⁸ But the elevated shrine was not completely detached from the everyday lives of ordinary Korean residents. According to people who lived in Seoul as a child in the 1920s, people were instructed to stand up, bow, and pray to the Joseon Singung when the rail passed by it towards the Namsan stop.⁷⁹ Forced reverence to State Shinto had begun to shape people’s daily lives despite the distance that lay between them and the physical shrine.

Beyond symbolism, the problem with Joseon Singung and Shinto in Korea stemmed from Japan’s effort to extend Government Shinto onto Korean soil. By 1937 there were 368 Shinto

⁷⁵ Choi Jun-sik, *op cit.*, 130.

⁷⁶ “Tokeijo kara mita shinchosa” (The new government building as seen from city planning), *Keijo iho* no. 62 (Dec 1926) in Henry, “Keijō,” *op cit.*, 225.

⁷⁷ Coaldrake, *op cit.*, 282.

⁷⁸ Choi Jun-sik, *op cit.*, 123.

⁷⁹ Choi Jun-sik, *ibid.*, 130.

Shrines in Korea, mostly dedicated to Amaterasu.⁸⁰ Most Koreans despised Shinto; to them, it was everything that was “Japanese, foreign, and condescending.”⁸¹ No matter how many shrines were built, Koreans only saw them as Japanese invasion into the Korean spiritual space. One writer referred to Joseon Singung as the “worst place in Seoul” and commented, “Every time I walk past it, chills shock through my body because I feel like a swarm of goblins (*doggaebi*) are flooding out of it.”⁸² Also, government-enforced mandatory Shinto worship became a passionate religious and nationalistic problem for Korean Christians, a minority who had a significant leadership role in the Independence Movement, and were seen rather favorably by the rest of the population.⁸³

Overall, Shinto was translated as another colonial method to irk and humiliate the colonized people. Although the common understanding is that Korean resistance against forced worship became a major problem after the inception of the Assimilation Rule in the 1930s, there is evidence that it was already an issue in the 1920s.⁸⁴ Schools had begun organizing visits to

⁸⁰ Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868-1988*, 95 in Julia Adney Thomas, “Naturalizing Nationhood: Ideology and Practice in Early 20th Century Japan,” in *Japan’s Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900-1930*, edited by Sharon Minichiello (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 121.

⁸¹ Hildi Kang, *Under the Black Umbrella: Voices From Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 114.

⁸² Go Yeong-han, “Seoul-iraneun geumase, seoul-ui johengot, nabbeungot, seoul saram-eun mueose aechakeul dugo saneunga,” *op cit.*, 53.

⁸³ Donald Clark, “Protestant Christianity and the State: Religions Organizations as Civil Society,” in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, edited by Charles Armstrong (London, GB: Routledge, 2002), 190. The prestige of Christianity was much enhanced by the reputation of Christian schools as they directly addressed the political and social crises that confronted Korea as it was succumbing to Japanese colonial domination.

⁸⁴ Assimilation Rule was the Japanese colonial policy from approximately 1931-1945. It was characterized by Japan’s increasing pressure to turn Koreans into obedient colonial subjects who will support Japan’s war mobilization for the Manchurian Incident (1931) and the Sino-Japanese War (1937). Examples of Assimilation Rule policy were: mandatory adoption of Japanese names, Shinto worship, participation in war effort, and outlaw of Korean language and various aspects of Korean culture. In the 1930s, those who accepted the Japanese ritual were seen as Japanese collaborators or Koreans betraying their nation. If they did not however, then they would be cast as disloyal subjects and subject to punishment as members of the Korean resistance.

the Joseon Singung in the early 1920s, and a number of students were bold enough to refuse participation. In 1925, the words “Shinto worship problem (*sinsa chambae munjae*)” were already being thrown around for being a “religious issue (*jonggyo munjae*)” encroaching on one’s “religious freedom (*sinyang jayu*).”⁸⁵ Same year, Korean lawyer Song Bon-Jung representing the Gyeonggi Province Council responded to the expulsion of students for refusing participation in Shinto worship by raising questions in *Chosun Ilbo* about religious freedom as a basic human right (*jonggyodeok sinyangeun jeoldae jayuga ahninga?*).⁸⁶ Thus, in the 1920s, Shinto was already boycotted by certain Korean intellectuals as a colonial institution infringing on one’s religious freedom, thanks to Cultural Rule policies that allowed greater freedom of expression through writing.⁸⁷ And the Shinto shrine, the physical manifestation of Shinto beliefs, was more than just a Japanese wooden structure occupying space in the neighborhood center; it was a vessel for pushing “faithless worship” to Koreans.⁸⁸

The tenacity with which the Japanese government has pressed the Shinto issue in Korea and elsewhere points to its significance as the guaranty of the establishment of inner authority over subjected peoples.⁸⁹ The Official National Shinto Ceremony took place on the Joseon Singung on Namsan Park beginning 1920.⁹⁰ At the death of the Japanese Emperor Meiji in

⁸⁵ “Joseonin hakseng-ui sinsachambaemunjae” [Shinto worship issue among Joseon students], *Chosun ilbo*, September 26, 1925.

⁸⁶ “Joseonin hakseng-ui sinsachambaemunjae,” *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Although writers had greater freedom to express their political ideas, they had to walk on thin rope, and were often prosecuted if they went too far. *Chosun ilbo* and *Donga ilbo* were forced to close down and reopen numerous times.

⁸⁸ “Joseonin hakseng-ui sinsachambaemunjae,” *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Holtom, *op cit.*, 154

⁹⁰ “Gwanpyedaesa joseonsinsajinjae namsaneseo” [Government shrine worship ceremony at Joseon Sinsa on Namsan], *Donga ilbo*, May 28 1920.

1926, Joseon Singung held funeral and worship ceremonies mirroring those happening in Japan.⁹¹ The Japanese colonial government used various outlets to make Shinto-going a “natural” part of colonial activity. Gyeongseong’s prisoners were treated to occasional “outings” to the Joseon Singung, where they enjoyed a day of rest from physical labor. On those special days, they were given a much better lunch meal than their usual fare and even received a red and white-colored *dduk*, or rice cakes (in the colors of the Japanese flag) to commemorate the occasion.⁹² The Joseon Singung thus represented the official, royal, and imperialistic Japan.

At the same time, certain Korean intellectuals steered away from reading into Joseon Singung for its symbolic significance; these progressive thinkers instead advocated that Koreans should first reject their own superstitions (*misin*). One Western-educated writer commented that the Shinto shrine on Namsan and the growing Christian movement in Pyongyang create an “interesting contrast”:

Some say that the Japanese live in superstition. But our people have an affinity to act even more superstitious. There is still so much talk about whether we should treat sickness with prayer or with a healing touch. Religious groups are springing up. Churches much too fancy for our living standards are being built....There are people who tell others to go fight the troll under the bridge (*oedari doggaebi*)....I heard that in Pyongyang there is an old lady who can predict your love life and your future just by feeling your pulse. My mother and I argue vehemently about such things. Ah! Anywhere I go I see and hear about superstition. I think the spirit of our entire nation is dominated by our dependency on fate (*unmyeongwan*).

Another article urged its readers to stop being fixated on seeing black Western suits as symbol of the Japanese, because such symbols were limiting the Korean capacity to look into the future and

⁹¹ “Joseon Singung-ui cheonjobonggojae (踐祚奉告祭)” [National worship in Joseon Singung], *Donga ilbo*, December 26, 1926.

⁹² “Jeonjoseonjoesu iilganhyusik, oneun sipoil joseonsinsau jinjwa” [Holiday for all of Joseon’s prisoners, day off at Joseon Sinsa this coming fifteenth], *Donga ilbo*, October 10, 1925.

think about themselves in context of modernism.

When I walk down a street, my black suit always causes a problem. Children wave to me, “Mr. Japanese man, *konnichiwa!*” Wives doing housework stop and stare....Anyone wearing black clothes is a Japanese man. Or he is a Chinese, a martyr, or a tax collector. People wearing black clothes or a black hat receives undeserving respect, or even fear. All of a country village’s problems always revolve around men wearing black. Ah, black clothes, when will you stop threatening villages with fear?⁹³

The author further mused that Koreans are always “waiting for someone, waiting for a new world” although “they don’t know what that looks like”—and this, they “trust completely.”⁹⁴

The article sought to diminish the effect that black clothing and preconceived ideas about it had on its viewers. He described the Korean reaction as a “fear,” an easily irrational emotion, to show that the black suit represented an empty symbol of authority.

The Korean Response

In all, the Korean response to Gyeongseong’s changing landscape was mixed. On one hand, people were in awe of the physical changes happening around them: the widened roads, railroads, and developing city infrastructure were obvious benefits to colonization. People marveled at the elaborate beauty of buildings such as the brand-new Gyeongseong Station, which especially shocked those from the countryside who had never witnessed such imposing structures. However, Korean newspapers in the 1920s carried a relatively heavily negative undertone about the physical changes happening in Gyeongseong. While such functional building as the train station did not have to sacrifice traditional Korean buildings to take its place, other structures of symbolic significance, such as the Gyeongbokgung and the Guksadang on top of Namsan, were

⁹³ So Chun, “Geugeotshi jeil-ideora, choshin haenggakui yeotsedongan” [That was the first time: the six days of acting Japanese], *Gaebyeok*, no. 41 (November 1, 1923), 95.

⁹⁴ So Chun, “Geugeotshi jeil-ideora, choshin haenggakui yeotsedongan,” *ibid.*, 97.

replaced by imposing Japanese symbols of political and spiritual significance that possessed a “coercive” form of power. As defined by Kim Dovey, coercion consists in transforming private, communal, group or cultural space into organizational spaces in which people perform actions directed towards the fulfillment of another’s plan.⁹⁵ These structures were not the visions of modernity that other buildings represented; rather, they were symbolic of the imperial nation that was driving forward all the “modern” physical changes. For these various reasons of intrusion, Shinto shrines were one of the first buildings to be eagerly torn down by Koreans as soon as Japan lost WWII. In Namsan Park today, only the stairways to the summit are relics from the former shrine compound established by the Japanese.

Buildings that mutilated old Korean symbols that previously stood in its place incited a great deal of anger and shame from the people of Gyeongseong, who were fiercely proud of their city’s more than five hundred years of history. Newspaper and magazine articles about the changing look of the city described the Korean humiliation. But at the same time, writers were also aware of the reality of changes happening around them. A *Gaebyeok* writer confessed that Gyeongseong is “not ours anymore,” and recognized that the “past will not return, so there is no reason for crying.”⁹⁶ To another, it was a fact that “the Japanese power and influence cannot be pushed back by the will (*him*) of the Joseon people alone.”⁹⁷ A particularly somber and passionate writer compared the city’s mourning to a crying *haetae*, a traditional mystical creature believed to guard royal palaces from natural disasters. The essay mourned:

⁹⁵ Michael Weinstein, “Coercion, Space and the Modes of Human Domination,” in *Coercion*, edited by J. Roland Pennock and John Chapman (New York, New York: Aldine, 1972), 69 in Dovey, *op cit.*, 11.

⁹⁶ Syang Tu-saeng, “Gyeongseongui isipnyeongan byeoncheon” [Gyeongseong’s changes in twenty years], *Gaebyeok*, no. 48 (June 1, 1924), 70.

⁹⁷ “Gyeongbokgung-eul jungsimeuro ilbonin-ui bukjeom,” *op cit.*

Haetae's cries fill Joseon to its brim! Why does it cry? It cries in sadness, in resentment, in fury. The set of haet'ae that guarded Gwanghwamun from fires for almost fifty years are now hidden away from our sight, their cries get louder day after day....Still, our *haetae* must survive. Will the *haetae* be able to breathe again? Black hands suffocate its throat so it cannot breathe.⁹⁸

Mutilation of Korea's symbolic structures aside, the new urban buildings occupying urban Gyeongseong also constantly reminded Koreans about the discrimination that they witnessed in daily life. Japan used the most advanced technology of the times in fashioning Korea: the brand-new, Western-designed banks, post offices, train stations, and government buildings signaled Korea's entry into a modern era, but the average Korean person was removed from the process. But the Korean reaction to modernization cannot be reduced to sadness and bitterness. The minority intellectual class of Korean writers had different reactions to the increasing modernity of their city—some appreciated the city's developments for its adoption of certain Western standards, even though they were tied to discrimination and other significant colonial baggage. These men also put forth their ideas in Korean publications and hope to affect their fellow countrymen's beliefs.

⁹⁸ Gim Gi-jin, "Maeumui pyeheo, gyeoul-ui seoseo" [In winter: destruction of my soul], *Gaebyeok*, no. 42 (December 1, 1923), 122.

Chapter 2: Gyeongseong's Modern Parks

“When I was a little girl we often went to the park near my school. Fujimi Park. Parks were still not as nice as they are today, but I went after school to go on swings and play games in the playground.

What do I remember from my childhood? I jump roped, swam, did crafts, embroidered, had picnics with friends, went to movie theater. I loved going to the beach for clam digging. I don't think many Koreans had as much fun as I did growing up in Japan.”

—Nam Jeong-yeop¹

“On Sundays we saw the sights of Seoul: the North Palace, the Park on the slopes of the South Mountain, the zoological gardens, or we made excursions on the Han River.”

—O-Young Lee²

Korea's early public parks were a phenomenon completely engineered by Korea's foreign-induced urbanization and lurch into modernity. Traditional Korean culture did not include any form of government-sanctioned “park” as we know it today. Royal palaces and homes of wealthy *yangban* maintained gardens decorated in the style of traditional Korean aesthetics, but they were limited for private use and admiration.³ Homer Hulbert, an American missionary to Korea in the late nineteenth century, remarked on the country's surprising lack of public parks:

The Koreans have no notion of public parks or other places of public ornament or recreation, and yet they are passionately fond of wandering about the hills finding picturesque nooks and enjoying the beauties of nature. School picnics or other similar entertainments are held in these pretty retreats during the proper season...their only attractions are a rocky gorge, a little pond and a summer pavilion ten feet square...In country districts the monasteries form the public parks...here the people will congregate and have a grand picnic, generally in connection with some national festival. But besides this, there is in almost every village

¹ Nam Jeong-yeop, in interview with the author, May 15, 2009.

² O-Young Lee, *In This Earth and In That Wind: This Is Korea*, (Seoul, Korea: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 185. The book is made up of the author's vignettes about her childhood in colonial Seoul.

³ *Yangban* were the hereditary elite who constituted some ten percent of the population.

some large tree beneath which the people meet to talk and gossip. It is the village agora. The old men bring out their chess boards and play, and the leaders of the village talk over the communal affairs.⁴

But between the late Joseon period and the end of Cultural Rule in 1930, various Joseon Dynasty landmarks around Seoul were turned into public parks. Some examples are Janchungdan Park, which was originally the site for Chohondan, a memorial commissioned by King Gojong in 1900 to recognize the Royal Guards who sacrificed their lives protecting Queen Min during the Eulmi Incident of 1895.⁵ But the site's ritual ceremonies were prohibited by the Japanese government beginning in 1908 and Chohondan was converted into a modern park in 1919. Another example is Hyochang Park, which was a royal tomb site converted a campground for Japanese soldiers, and then turned into a public park in June 1924.⁶

Before the inception of Cultural Rule, parks in Korea had only been open to those who paid the entrance fee, thereby limiting access only to the upper class. But beginning January 20, 1920, Japanese officials waived the entrance fee and opened the doors to Gyeongseong's parks for the general public. The establishment of the city's parks in the 1920s went hand-in-hand with Japan's attempt to modernize the landscape and the residents of its colonial capital. A Japanese newspaper announced that "the city's parks have been opened along 'officially-sanctioned, social' (*kokyo*) lines," referring to the government project of preserving a number of

⁴ Homer Hulbert, *The Passing of Korea* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1909. Reprint, Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1969), 249-250.

⁵ The Eulmi Incident (Eulmisabyeon) is the term used for the assassination of Empress Myeongseong (Queen Min) (1851-1895), executed by Japanese agents under Goro Miuro. The assassins battled the Korean Royal Guards led by Hong Gye-hun (洪啓薰) and An Gyeong-su (安駟壽). Hong Gye-hun and Minister Yi Gyeong-jik (李耕植) were subsequently killed. Emperor Gojong ordered Chohondan (招魂壇) to be built on the site of current Jangchungdan Park to commemorate the lives of these fallen men.

⁶ Hyochang Park was originally called Hyochangwon (孝昌園) because it hosted the tomb of First Prince Munhyo (文孝世子) (1782-1786), the adopted son of Jeongjo (1752-1800), the twenty-second king of Joseon.

green spaces for the health (*kenko*) and education (*kyoiku*) of Keijō's residents.⁷ Thought of as the "lungs of the city" (*toshi no haizo*) by Japanese city planners, Gyeongseong's parks provided residents with a place to rest, enjoy a healthy atmosphere, and for children, to exercise and develop their physical strength.⁸ In addition to parks, various green areas saved along the city's main road and at other "officially-sanctioned, social" sites contributed to the larger urban planning project to construct Gyeongseong's position as a modern city.

Gyeongseong's parks emulated the modern parks already in place in Japan. Japanese cities had similarly gone through a green transformation since the beginning of Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), which had as one of its goals to fuse Western advancements with Eastern values.⁹ The Japanese government had determined that the park system was a characteristic feature of advanced nations, and vigorously pursued it in park planning.¹⁰ Japanese park planners struggled to assimilate Western culture and at the same time come up with an original landscape architecture for their parks.¹¹ The end result was Japanese and Western-style parks with

⁷ "Keijō funai no kōen o kōkyōteki ni kaiho" (Opening Keijō's parks to the public), *Keijō nippō*, February 4, 1920, in Todd Henry, "Keijō: Japanese and Korean Constructions of Colonial Seoul and the History of its Lived Spaces, 1910-1937" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), 319.

⁸ "Toshi keikaku ippan" (Overview of urban planning), *Keijō iho* no. 10 (November 1922), 4 in Henry, "Keijō," *ibid.*, 319.

⁹⁹ On January 15, 1873 the government decreed its first law on the public park, the Cabinet Proclamation No. 16 (*Dajokan futatsu juroku-go*), which obligated each prefecture of Japan to preserve the places of scenic beauty and historical landmarks as public properties, and designate such properties as public parks. By 1887, there were sixty-seven parks in Japan, with a total area of about 2,000 hectares.

¹⁰ Oyadomari Motoko, "Politics of National Parks in Japan" (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985), 103. During the Meiji period numerous reports and publications appeared describing park systems and urban conditions in Europe and American cities. These articles included descriptions of the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, Hyde Park, the Crystal Palace, Kew Gardens in London, and the Central Park in New York.

¹¹ Sato Akita, *Landscape Planning and Recreation in Japan: With a Short History of Governmental Policies and Administration* (Tokyo, Japan: Parks and Open Space Association of Japan, 1985), 35.

elements borrowed from various European sources. The “Western-style” was defined by both design and utility; it displayed the Japanese vision of European aesthetic and cultural values.

For example, the Ueno Park in Tokyo (opened in 1873), housed Western-style architecture and structures such as zoos, museums, aquariums, fountains, and promenades that showcased Japan’s accessibility to modern culture; but those buildings shared space with traditional shrines and pagodas, many of which had been sitting on the location for hundreds of years. Drooping cherry tree malls were at the focal point of the park, exhibiting traditional Japanese aesthetic taste. Hibiya Park (opened in 1903), also in Tokyo, the first municipal park in Japan built as a city planning project in the modern sense, was built primarily in the Western-style, modeled after a Prussian park and complete with a large central lawn (sports ground), wide walkways for carriages and bicycles, electric lighting, tennis courts, and elaborate flowerbed arrangement.¹² The Japanese portion of the park had a traditional garden modeled after a daimyo’s pleasure garden.¹³ For the government, it was important that the park become a place of assembly; Dr. Honda Seiroku (1866-1952), a professor at Tokyo Imperial University and a man who later became an important contributor to the establishment of national parks, led the park planning committee to accommodate gathering of citizens in the park. The outdoor bandstand was built in 1923, and the Hibiya Public Hall was completed in 1929, to host various entertainment and cultural activities.

¹² Sylvie Brosseau, “The Promenades and Public Parks of Tokyo: A Tradition Permanently Reinvented” in *Gardens, City Life and Culture: A World Tour*, edited by Michel Conan and Zhen Wangheng (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2008), 224.

¹³ Brosseau, *ibid.*, 224.

Hibiya Park pioneered the Western-style park in Japan, which in turn greatly influenced the subsequent public park construction movement in Japan and its colonies.¹⁴ Japanese-built parks in Gyeongseong would also have a strong culture and ethics-centered dimension, to encourage city residents to partake in certain government-sanctioned activities. This is because parks in Japan and Korea modeled after European parks, which were much more than urban ornaments or places for public recreation. They also provided spaces where the higher classes tried to teach or advocate their bourgeois lifestyles, leisure activities, and aesthetic values. Park regulations were established to frame the expression of correct attitudes and conducts for common people to learn about more “civilized” behaviors and manners.¹⁵

In this context, the perception of Korea and Koreans held by ordinary Japanese was an important driver of colonial policies, and the Japanese saw Koreans with contempt, as selfish, backward and culturally inferior peoples.¹⁶ Their accusations pointed to the colonialist supposition that Koreans, individualistic in nature, lacked any “sense of civic morality” (K: *gongdoksim*; J: *kotokushin*), or if some of them did, it was one that was excessively centered on the family.¹⁷ According to Japanese colonial commentators, this family-based morality had prevented the establishment of community facilities such as civic parks, city orphanages, and public libraries. Thus, the government sought to use Gyeongseong’s changing landscape to pick out Korea’s certain acceptable traditions such as filial piety and patriarchal hierarchy, while

¹⁴ Sato Akita, *ibid.*, 38

¹⁵ Brosseau, *op cit.*, 223.

¹⁶ Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 16.

¹⁷ Todd Henry, “Respatializing Chosŏn’s Royal Capital,” in *Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 31.

discouraging others such as superstitions, xenophobia, and overreliance on traditional view of the world.¹⁸ Through public facilities, the Japanese government hoped to encourage patriotism, industrialization, and Western practices. With the gradual construction of various community facilities, after the annexation, Koreans were urged to use these institutions to cultivate a sense of civic morality that befitted them as modern Japanese imperial subjects.

Namsan Park in southern Gyeongseong was constructed like a “comprehensive park” like the Ueno Park in Tokyo, complete with modern structures and public facilities in addition to the Joseon Singung, the physical and spiritual centerpiece of the park. Korea’s foreign-built parks, especially the best known Namsan Park, defined the structure of Korea’s modern parks, and their original layouts have largely been maintained throughout the twentieth century. More remarkably, in the 1920s, at the inception of Korea’s park-going movement, Gyeongseong’s parks began to have a growing presence in the city residents’ lives. Parks were one of the visual representations of the city’s burgeoning modernity, which stressed greater complexity through the creation of new social groups and hierarchical divisions for both production and consumption.¹⁹ Japan became the producers of modern parks, and Koreans their most affected consumers.

This chapter will focus on the two main parks in Gyeongseong in the 1920s that provide insight into the role of parks as an element of city life. The first is the spacious Namsan Park, constructed as an ideal vision of what Japanese public space would look like in Korea, complete with Joseon Singung, the main Shinto shrine in Korea. The second is Pagoda Park, which

¹⁸ Henry, “Respatializing Chosŏn’s Royal Capital,” *ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹ Terrance Young, “Modern Urban Parks,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, Thematic Issue: American Urban Geography (Oct., 1995), 535.

occupied small plot of land at the center of Gyeongseong adjacent to Jongno, the main commercial street in the northern, Korean-occupied part of the city. Pagoda Park sat at the heart of Korean activity in Gyeongseong, while Namsan Park occupied the center of Japanese stronghold in Korea, largely detached from the world that Koreans knew in their northern corner. To a number of Korean intellectuals, Gyeongseong's parks were another type of urban landmarks that illuminated their low socio-economic position in the colonial city.

Namsan Park: the Modern Park

Namsan Park sits on top of Namsan (南山), occupying a total area of 102,093 acres. It is still the largest park in the city of Seoul. In the Joseon Period, Namsan was known for the view of Seoul at its peak, and its scenic beauty composed of pine and other types of trees. Namsan had a close relationship with Seoul's history and the daily lives of its people, for it provided a beautiful cherished location to rest and relax.²⁰ In 1897, the Japanese built the first park on Namsan called Waeseong Park (J: Wajodai, 倭城大公園), to commemorate the lost lives of Japanese during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (1536-1598) invasion of Korea (1592-1598). In the original park, the Japanese created the main roads and planted a grove of about six hundred cherry blossom trees. In 1908 the Hanyang Park (J: Kanyo, 漢陽公園) was added onto Namsan, and in 1910 Waeseong and Hanyang Parks combined to form Namsan Park. The park was expanded to the east in 1928 when the Gyeongseong City Planning Research Center approved the Governor-General's proposal to add 16,529 acres (500,000 *pyeong*) of government forest.²¹

²⁰ Kim Gi-ho, "Namsan: yeoksawa bijeon" [Namsan: history and vision], In *Ileobeorin Seoul, dasi chatneun Seoul* [Lost Seoul, found Seoul], edited by An Du-sun (Seoul, Korea: Seoul siripdaehakgyo buseol seoulhak yeonguso, 1994), 244.

²¹"Namsan namnoeh hansu sinseong. Namsangongwon jungsim-ui gyehoek, gwonyurim bulhaundong" [Building of

The plan spent 600,000 won (equivalent to about 60 billion *won* or 60 million dollars in today's prices) to develop the real estate and roads around the park, which in turn pushed up the value of the land nearby.

Given the increasing importance of Namsan's urban site within the spatiality of Gyeongseong, it comes as little surprise that the colonial government planned to develop Namsan into a large forest park. As early as 1916 Japanese officials invited two well-known park experts, Honda Seiroku (1855-1952), the main designer of Japan's Hibiya Park in Tokyo, and Tamura Tsuyoshi (1890-1979), a Japanese landscape garden specialist, to survey Namsan.²² After conducting investigations from February 1916 until January 1917, Honda and Tamura recommended that the mountainous region (including the Jangchungdan area to the east), be converted into a "Great Eastern Park" for Gyeongseong and for all of Joseon. To do so, they urged city officials to take advantage of the peninsula's mountainous landscape and the beauty of its vegetation. The two men also proposed constructing a museum, zoo, orchard, botanical garden, athletic grounds, and a library, an institution which would add an edificatory function to the modern colonial park.²³ Namsan Park was meticulously kept up by the colonial government; pavilions celebrating natural orientations of water and rocks, a gathering spot for senior citizens, sat at the foothills of the mountain, welcoming the visitors.²⁴ On the way to the top of Namsan, the freshly paved roads allowed the park to be very accessible to vehicles.

a road south of Namsan. The plan for the center of Namsan Park and the movement to shave down government forest], *Chosun ilbo*, December 16, 1928.

²² Henry, "Keijō," *op cit.*, 320.

²³ "Nanzan o shite dai-koen tarashimeyo" [Making Namsan into a large park], *Keijō nippō*, January 7, 1917 in Henry, "Keijō," *ibid.*, 322.

²⁴ No Gu-seong, "Gyoengseong-I gajin meyongsowa gojeok" [Famous and historical places of Gyeongseong], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 27.

Once at the peak, cherry blossoms neatly lining the roads and the spacious area of the park gave its visitors the ample, picturesque room to enjoy the scenery from the highest point in Gyeongseong (Fig. 17). Today, there is not much information available about the specific look and layout of Namsan Park in the 1920s, but it is known that the park was undergoing a lot of changes with different facilities constantly being added.



Figure 17: Namsan Park, 1914.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 363)

Gyeongseong’s city planning movement made sure that Namsan Park would remain the center of the city’s spatial configuration. It sat on Taepyeongno, south of the new Governor-General building, the political heart of the city, and Japanese commercial and residential areas surrounded the park. In his 1921 address subtitled “Residents of Gyeongseong, Conquer Namsan” (*Keijō fumin Nanzan o seifuku seyo*), architect Sano Toshikata (1880-1956) described the ongoing importance of Namsan: “In the future, the center of Gyeongseong will be Namsan as it develops eastward and southward. We should, at once, conquer Namsan, making it into a

natural park and the urban areas around it into a residential district for the general public.”²⁵ By 1923, major roads had been built around the park, and streetcar rails radiated from the Park to meet other major landmarks such as Hullyeonwon, the military training center.²⁶ Namsan, at the heart of Gyeongseong rail activity, became the focus of the city’s civic space.

Simultaneously, Namsan Park became a “model park” that hosted various cultural activities to nurture a city of “model Japanese subjects.” Namsan Park’s role in maintaining the ideal form of Japanese parks in Korea echoed the nationalistic ethos of Japan’s natural preservation law of 1892 (called the Law to Preserve Old Shrines and Temples) which stated: “the preservation of historic, scenic, and natural monuments means the preservation of our country, and *preservation of country means loving our homeland*” [my italics].²⁷ In another words, the preservation of Japanese landscape form became equivalent to nationalism and patriotism. In Korea, public parks formed “officially-sanctioned, social sites” that were to encourage the city’s residents to cultivate a “proper” sense of Japanese civic morality, with class- and gender-specific visions of what kind of social and cultural activities the “proper” Japanese should pursue.²⁸

Namsan Park, like other public parks in the modern era, became increasingly important as the venue for virtue-generating activities. It began hosting a number of modern, middle-class activities such as flower viewing, outdoor music festivals, and sports competitions. In 1923,

²⁵ “Gendai toshi no riso (8)” [Ideals for the contemporary city, part 8], *Keijō nippō*, September 15, 1921 in Henry, “Keijō,” *op cit.*, 322.

²⁶ “Namsangongwoneul jungsim, jeonchagili boilteoida” [Rails will appear in the center of Namsan], *Donga ilbo*, July 15, 1923.

²⁷ Eiji Uchida, *Shiseki Meisho Tennen Kinenbutsu*, 9 10 (1934), 834-839 in Oyadomari, *op cit.*, 171

²⁸ Henry, “Respatializing Chosŏn’s Royal Capital,” *op cit.*, 33.

Gyeongseong introduced a weekly concert of live Western music for the public, free of charge, at Namsan and other parks around the city.²⁹ Namsan Park often hosted events showcasing Asian music performed by the Gyeongseong Music Ensemble (京城樂隊奏樂), also free of charge and open to the public.³⁰ These kinds of public activities were revolutionary; Koreans had never before witnessed such government-organized public events. Radio was introduced in Korea when Gyeongseong Radio Station started broadcasting Japanese political messages in November 1924; a brand-new station building at the foot of Namsan was completed in December 1926.³¹ Gyeongseong Radio Station began broadcasting afternoon music and shows from Namsan beginning April 1925, vowing to “provide enjoyable programs” from the onset.³² Its daily broadcasted programs captured the attention of the wealthy minority who were able to own radios, while many more listened in from public radios. Although only about 30% of the broadcast was in Korean and the rest in Japanese, the radio station was nevertheless an innovative new form of media for Koreans. A *Donga Ilbo* article that described the inception of radio shows declared Namsan the “entertainment center of Gyeongseong.”³³

Physical activity through sports was another activity promoted by the Japanese government and necessitated Namsan Park and its vast open space. Modern Western parks assumed that women, adolescents, and children formed a group who were considered to be

²⁹ “Samgongwone dolagameyonseo mokyoile yangakyeongju, cheotbeoneun palweol” [Thursday Western music performances in the three parks, first one is in August], *Donga ilbo*, July 28, 1923.

³⁰ “Gyeongseongak daejuak, oneulbameun namsangongwoneseo seonghwangiden deilhae” [Gyeongseong orchestra, to perform at Namsan Park tonight for the first time], *Donga ilbo*, August 18, 1924.

³¹ “Namsangongwon mujeonbangsong, jakilbutro sijak” [Namsan Park’s radio program begins yesterday], *Donga ilbo*, April 23, 1925.

³² “Namsangongwon mujeonbangsong, jakilbutro sijak,” *ibid.*

³³ “Namsangongwon mujeonbangsong, jakilbutro sijak,” *ibid.*

appropriate users of parks. The acceptability of playgrounds shifted as childhood became viewed as a stage in the development of a properly socialized individual.³⁴ In Korea, magazine articles such as one titled “Boys, Play Football” (*Ssanaineun hutboleul chira*) encouraged its readers to teach soccer to their sons. The writer looked favorably upon the “competitive sport” that is “educational” (*gyoyukjeok*) and teaches “team spirit” (*hyeopdongsim*): “It is obvious to anyone that team spirit is essential to function well within the society; people must learn this during their youth. Many sports focus on the success of one individual, and individualism is the opposite of what is necessary to participate in national, societal activities” (*gugga saenghwal, sahoe saenghwal*).³⁵ Although the article’s emphasis on building a team-oriented conscience cannot be solely attributed to Japanese cultural influence, the Japanese government sought to encourage group activities in Korea for the same reasons. Their emphasis on public parks as venues for physical activity paved way for government-organized sports games such as the Joseon Singung Competition that was meant to help Koreans see themselves as community-oriented citizens of the Empire.

Namsan Park and its Joseon Singung was the spiritual base (and partial venue) for the Joseon Singung Sports Competition, the largest sports competition in the country. It began in 1925 at the completion of Gyeongseong Stadium (today’s Dongdaemun Stadium), the nation’s first sports stadium (Fig. 18). The Stadium built “in the name of the 300,000 Gyeongseong residents” included more than 330 acres of marathon tracks, 165 acres of baseball field, 33 acres of tennis courts, and thousands of seating, as well as Western bathrooms, fountains, and other

³⁴ Young, *op cit.*, 539.

³⁵ Gim Won-tae, “Sanaigeodeun futboleul chara” [Boys, play football], *Gaebyeok*, no. 5 (November 1, 1920), 107.

state-of-the-art facilities.³⁶ Ever since the first YMCA was established in Korea in 1908, organized sports had taken a greater role in shaping Gyeongseong residents' pastime. The national competition was created and organized entirely by the Japanese, and as the name reveals, was completely attributed to Joseon Singung. Participating teams from all over the country, even from cities far out in the countryside, came to Gyeongseong to play in the competition.³⁷ By the third competition in 1927, there were over 8,000 participants, both Korean and Japanese, showing off their talent in baseball, track and field, volleyball, judo, swimming, and other sports.³⁸ The same year, the Gyeongseong Radio Station began broadcasting the event throughout the capital.³⁹



Figure 18: Track events at Gyeongseong Stadium.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 291)

³⁶ Bak Dol-i, "Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?" [How much did Gyeongseong change in one year?] *Gaebyeok*, no. 64 (December 1, 1925), 74.

³⁷ "Jeonbukjeongu daepyosanggyeong joseonsingunggyeonggi jeonggudaehoe-e chamgacha" [Tennis players from northern provinces arrive to Gyeongseong for the Joseon Singung Tennis Competition], *Donga ilbo*, October 9, 1926.

³⁸ "Gyeonggi chamgaja 800 myeong. Joseonsingung gyeonggidaehoe" [Participants for Joseon Singung Sports Competition amount to 800], *Chosun ilbo*, October 10, 1927.

³⁹ "Gyeonggi chamgaja 800 myeong. Joseonsingung gyeonggidaehoe," *ibid.*

The Joseon Singung Sports Competition was the first nationally organized multi-sport event in Korea, and it promoted team sports, healthy physical activity, and government-organized events of spectatorship. Organized sports in Korea were an extension of Japan's domestic sports programs established beginning Meiji Era. After the first *undokai* (sports festivals) at the Naval Academy in 1874, "sports days" spread to schools throughout the country and became a mandatory extracurricular activity.⁴⁰ Mori Arinori, who became Minister of Education in 1885, was among the enthusiastic promoters of *undokai*, which he saw as an ideal means of improving the health and simultaneously intensifying the patriotism of the nation's schoolchildren.⁴¹ With the *undokai* as the basis, modern sports diffused rapidly throughout the Taisho Period (1912-1926): Home Ministries inaugurated the first Meiji Shrine Games (Meiji jingu kyogi taikai) in Tokyo at the newly completed shrine in 1924. In the same year, the Ministry of Education declared "National Physical Education Day" and directed all schools to observe the day as an annual event in order to promote "collective behavior, moral training, and...national spirit in the students."⁴² Similarly, in Korea, sports became one of the modern cultural activities encouraged by the colonial government to instill a sense of collective mentality.

In all, looked upon as the park that is "distant and spacious," Namsan Park was seen under a rather favorable light.⁴³ Newspapers commented positively on the natural beauty of the park, and decorated their pages with images of people enjoying flower-viewing and the musical

⁴⁰ Guttman and Thompson, *op cit.*, 92.

⁴¹ Shun'ya Yoshimi, "Body, Festivity and Modernity" (Paper presented at a conference on "Sports and Body Culture in Modern Japan," Yale University, (March 31- April 2, 2000) in Guttman and Thompson, *ibid.*, 92.

⁴² Imamura Yoshio, *Nihon taiiku shi* (Tokyo: Fumaido, 1970), 509 in Guttman and Thompson, *ibid.*, 154.

⁴³ So Je-bu, "Chugijisang daecheong-gyeol" [Autumn cleaning], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 66 (September 1, 1933). The author of the article praises Namsan Park for being clean, large, and desirable.

performances that took place there.⁴⁴ The positive images of Namsan Park had an impact on the perception of the potential of parks and other public areas to provide a beneficial venue for city residents. At the same time, the benefits of parks and the citizenship-building activities associated with them were not always readily available to Korean residents. For example, the Gyeongseong Stadium may have been “considered the best in Asia” according to Bak Dol-i, a *Gaebyeok* reporter, but the high game and event ticket prices, as well as the strict monitoring of spectators by the colonial government officials, deterred many of Koreans from attending games.⁴⁵ Another *Gaebyeok* writer expressed his frustrations about the public’s general displeasure and annoyance about the financial and political restraints that people felt in a public sports stadium.⁴⁶ To these writers, Koreans’ lack access to these cultural activities again symbolized the inequality plaguing the colony.

As the next section will discuss, Namsan Park was seen in opposition to Pagoda Park, Gyeongseong’s only “Korean” park that was often juxtaposed against Namsan Park and other “Japanese” parks in town. Despite the large size of Namsan Park and the number of cultural activities that were hosted there on a weekly basis, Namsan Park was mostly exclusive to Japanese residents in Gyeongseong. Namsan’s location in the Japanese-occupied southern part of the city greatly contributed to this effect—in fact, all the parks in the city except Pagoda Park were not easily accessible to Koreans since they mostly lived in the northern part of the city, while all the parks were located in the south. Korean writers had the tendency to concentrate on

⁴⁴ “Bomnun, jakil namsangongwon-eseo” [Yesterday’s spring snow at Namsan Park]. *Donga ilbo*, February 16, 1924.

⁴⁵ Bak Dol-i, “Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?” *op cit.*, 74.

⁴⁶ Bak Dol-I, “Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?” *ibid.*, 75.

the discrepancy between the appearances of the two parks. Their differences were often seen as elements of the city's changing landscape that reflected on Gyeongseong's uneven modernization.

Pagoda Park: the Park for the Koreans

A park that was close to the hearts of Gyeongseong's Korean residents was Pagoda Park (塔公園), known today by its pre-colonial name Tapgol Park that was brought back in 1992. Korea's very first public park, Pagoda Park sits on the historical neighborhood of Jongno and occupies 15,720 square meters of space centered around an octagonal pavilion. Not much is known about the exact look of the park in the 1920s, but its layout did include numerous benches and a small bridge with a stream running underneath it, and various Korean pines decorated the park.⁴⁷ The location of Pagoda Park had originally housed Buddhist temples Heungboksa (興福寺) during the Goryeo period and Wongaksa (圓覺寺) during the Joseon period, but the area was deserted for a few hundred years after Yeonsangun (1476-1506, r. 1494-1506), the Tenth King of Joseon, tore down Wongaksa temple and its surrounding buildings. Then in 1897, Irish architect John McLeavy Brown (a financial advisor for King Gojong) designed the current Pagoda Park, which was opened to the public in 1913 after briefly being used as a Royal garden. When Pagoda Park served as the gathering ground for the March First 1919 Independence Movement, the "officially-sanctioned, public" space endorsed by the Japanese government ironically became the location where the Independence Declaration was read. Since then, Pagoda Park has turned into a deeply meaningful location for Korean history.

At the center of the park is a ten-storied Wongaksa Pagoda (National Treasure No. 2) which dates from 1467 (thirteenth year of King Sejo, early Joseon Dynasty) and stands at twelve

⁴⁷ Chun Pa, "Bomeul matneun tapgolgongwon" *Gabyeok*, no. 33 (March 1, 1923), 77.

meters tall. While most Korean pagodas are made with granite (stone pagodas distinguish Korean pagodas from other East Asian pagodas), Wongaksa Pagoda is one of the few pagodas on the peninsula made of marble. The bottom three tiers forming the pedestal look the character 亞 (meaning Asia), the first three stories follow the shape of the base, and the next seven stories are shaped like squares. Although the Wongaksa Temple itself had disappeared in the 1500s, the remaining Wongaksa Pagoda has carried on its religious, architectural, cultural, and historical significance as a relic of Korea's intimately historical relationship with Buddhism. Because the Wongaksa Pagoda (with the adjacent pavilion) sits as the focal point of Pagoda Park, it adds great national and historical value that makes the park an important "Korean" park (Fig. 18).



Figure 19: A view of Pagoda Park, colonial period.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 167)

Throughout the occupation, Pagoda Park was a popular destination for Seoul residents to “rest their tired bodies and minds after a day of hard work,” due to its prime location on Jongno.⁴⁸ Pagoda Park bustled with a large number of Korean foot traffic and was even

⁴⁸ “Sangsang batgat sesang: Gyeongseongui daseot magul” [A world beyond our imagination: five devil’s caves in

endearingly referred to as “a place absolutely necessary in Seoul.”⁴⁹ Because it was the only park in Jongno District, a *Donga Ilbo* article from 1920 described Pagoda Park as an “evening playground (*noriteo*) for Gyeongseong’s citizens” during the sweltering summers, for it “allowed people to cool off in the night breeze.”⁵⁰ Another essay written about Pagoda Park called out to it affectionately:

Anyone can come, anyone can visit. You can leave if you want to leave, play if you want to play, sleep if you want to sleep, sit if you want to sit, and lie down if you want to lie down. The park doesn’t have to only kiss, rub, or hug you to show its affection. Oh, our affectionate and loving park—Tapgol Park! We will enjoy your presence forever.⁵¹

In the September 1929 issue of *Byeolgeongon* that described various aspects of Gyeongseong life, Pagoda Park was presented as a democratic place, where people of all ages, rich or poor, gathered together. The author chirped, “Sad people can cry all they want with support from others; people gather and sit to chat, laugh, sing, and walk together. What can be better than that? Here, you don’t need to have money or wear nice clothes; everyone is equal. It is a place absolutely necessary in Seoul.”⁵² Pagoda Park was also thought of as “the perfect place to take your friend from the countryside.”⁵³ Pagoda Park was truly a “Place for Koreans.” Various newspaper and magazine writers in the 1920s drew vignettes of the park as a valuable

Gyeongseong], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 155.

⁴⁹ Go Yeong-han, “Seoul-iraneun geumase, seoul-ui johengot, nabbeungot, seoul saram-eun mueose aechakeul dugo saneunga,” [The taste of Seoul, its good and bad places; what are Seoul residents attached to?], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 53.

⁵⁰ “Tapgol-gongwon munyeoneun sigak bam yeoldusiggaji” [Tapgol Park opens doors until midnight], *Donga ilbo*, April 28, 1920.

⁵¹ Chun Pa, *op cit.*, 77.

⁵² Go Yeong-han, “Seoul-iraneun geumase, seoul-ui johengot, nabbeungot, seoul saram-eun mueose aechakeul dugo saneunga,” 53.

⁵³ “I-il dong-ane seoul gugyeong golgoro haneun beop,” [Complete tour of Seoul in two days, the route to take your friend from the countryside], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 63.

community center that was frequented by night and day. It served as a popular meeting place for young people, while visitors of all ages brought food from the nearby night market to picnic on the park's grass. The park allowed its visitors to feel "happiness and a sense of attachment to its natural beauty."⁵⁴ The 1922 June edition of *Gabyeok* magazine described a writer's poetic experience at Pagoda Park:

The fearsome sun finally went down. Yes! People come out to walk slowly and leisurely, wearing summer dress made out of cool ramie cloth. Then, as if saying "Welcome," the streetlights of Tapgol Park, the home of trees and shade, light up brightly. The park is much too small but it is truly a precious and endearing place for Gyeongseong residents who daily suffer from heat in dusty, stuffy homes. When my friend K and I bought food and fruits from the night market and walked into the park it was pretty dark outside, nearing 9:00pm. As I walk into the gate, my body was already covered under the green shade of trees above me, and the sweet smell of roses filled my nose. Walking on the small road leading up to the pagoda, stepping on the shadows of cherry blossoms, I felt as though I was swimming across a cool pond.⁵⁵

Like an oasis, Pagoda Park consoled its visitors with its comforting and friendly atmosphere. Its visitors were able to experience the diversity of the people who stopped by at Pagoda Park and called Gyeongseong their home. Pagoda Park's convenient and accessible location near Gyeongseong's Korean neighborhoods added to its value in the city.

Like Namsan Park, Pagoda Park also hosted various activities that were meant to display modern culture to its visitors. At night, to escape the trapped heat in their houses, Gyeongseong residents hurried to Pagoda Park to listen to live performance of Asian and Western music sponsored by the government. The first Summer Breeze Music Festival (Napryang yeonjuhoe)

⁵⁴ Chun Pa, "Bomeul matneun tapgolgongwon," *op cit.*, 78. The essay describes, "Tapgol Park, to give us happiness (manjok) and a sense of attachment (*aechakseong*), it entertains us with pretty flowers in the spring, cool shade in the summer, red leaves in the fall, and white snowflakes in the winter."

⁵⁵ "Janmul janmul gongwonjeongjo, hayai gak gongwon" [Our feelings towards different parks], *Gabyeok*, no. 26 (August 1, 1922), 96.

began in 1920 to host evening shows at Pagoda Park once a week, free of charge (Fig. 20).⁵⁶ Even though the rear door of the park normally closed at 5:00 pm, the Governor-General's office permitted the door to open until 11:30 pm on the days of the concerts. Gyeongseong's Chief of Public Utilities quoted in a *Donga Ilbo* article explained that the original rule was set in place because "delinquents" (*bulyangbae*) would come in through the back door to step on the grass and destroy the flower beds. Although "parks are built for the usage of an average citizen," the article asked to maintain "a sense of public duty" (*gongdeoksim*) by protecting the trees and foliage from harm and encouraging others to also do the same. The article ended by remarking, "even though a delinquent ignores his public duty...he might change his ways if another sincerely asks him to do so."⁵⁷ As the article reveals, government-sanctioned cultural events promoted rules of etiquette and a sense of "public duty." As Pagoda Park evolved to define the look and manner of organized public gathering in Korea, specific rules for interaction were also bestowed upon its visitors.

⁵⁶ "Tapgolgongwonui jeilhoe napryangyeonjuhoe, sibilbame bonsau huwoneuro gyeongseong" [Tapgol Park introduces Summer Breeze Music Festival on the tenth, with the support from the Governor-General], *Donga ilbo*, June 12, 1920. The article describes that although the Gyeongseong Band (Gyeongseong akdae) faces problems with funding, they would "like to play with their heart for the city's residents, despite all the troubles" (*bulpyeongwa gonraneul mureupsseugo*).

⁵⁷ "Tapgolgongwonui jeilhoe napryangyeonjuhoe, sibilbame bonsau huwoneuro Gyeongseong."

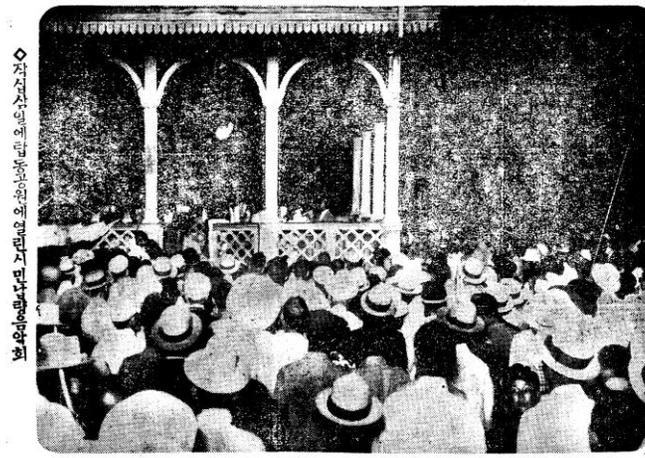


Figure 20: Pagoda Park Music Festival. (Image from *Chosun Ilbo*, August 15, 1926)

As much as the Korean residents took pride in their Pagoda Park, it was also apparent that Pagoda Park differed greatly in size and quality from the other parks around Gyeongseong that were mainly used by Japanese residents. In addition to the largest Namsan Park, Jangchungdan Park (獎忠壇公園) occupied 5,460 acres, Hyochangwon Park (孝昌園公園) 1,233 acres, and Sajik Park (社稷洞公園) 1887 acres, while tiny Pagoda Park only took up 157 acres (15,720 square meters). Korean intellectuals were irked that the small Pagoda Park was the only park in the Korean residential area in the entire Gyeongseong. The 1926 April *Gaebyeok* issue illustrated,

There are five parks around Gyeongseong, all but one in the areas where the Japanese live. There is Namsan Park, Jangchungdan Park, Hyochangwon Park in Yongsan. In the west, there is Sajik Park, and in the center of the city is a palm-size Pagoda Park—the only one frequented by Koreans. . . . Where most Koreans live in the northern part of the city, there is nothing that even resembles a park. The Japanese need to listen to the voices of us “northerners.”⁵⁸

One of the parks, Jangchungdan Park, sat in the heart of the Japanese-half of Gyeongseong, so it was surrounded by brightly lit Japanese and Western restaurants, shops, and official buildings. Unlike Tapgol Park, Jangchungdan Park was often described as having an idyllic, peaceful, and spacious location. A *Gaebyeok* author described the park as having air that was “fresh and

⁵⁸ “Sageon! Yeoron! Gwanchal!” [Event! Opinion! Observation!] *Gaebyeok*, no. 68 (April 1, 1926), 80.

breezy,” which Tapgol Park desperately lacked.⁵⁹ He elaborated to describe a scene of a small group of young women walking idly and leisurely in an open park, without a threat of harm at nine in the evening, which “cannot be seen at any other park.” Other articles presented a picture of Japanese wives came to wash their clothes, young men bathed in the ponds, and young lovers came for romantic walks.⁶⁰ These scenes of such “Japanese parks” as depicted by Korean writers looked much less crowded, better kept, and more homogeneous than those of Pagoda Park.

A 1925 *Chosun Ilbo* article contrasted Pagoda Park with Jangchungdan Park located in the Japanese neighborhood, lamenting the fact that Pagoda Park “doesn’t even look like a park with poor laborers sleeping on the ground.”⁶¹ When describing Jangchungdan Park, the writer illustrated, “Young couples laugh and enjoy themselves. Under dark branches, youth hide from people’s gazes and whisper their sweet love to each other, without a care about the time. Voom! Cars climb up hills and come toward our way.”⁶² The writer regretted that Pagoda Park is a “morbid place that only filthy people (*gujigujihan saram*) frequent” and that “two worlds exist in two different parks.”⁶³ Another *Gaebyeok* article described Pagoda Park as looking like “a garden in someone’s back yard” because “there is nowhere to sit or go.” People “walk to and

⁵⁹ “Janmul janmul gongwonjeongjo, hayaiu gak gongwon,” *op cit.*, 102.

⁶⁰ “Janmul janmul gongwonjeongjo, hayaiu gak gongwon,” *ibid.*, 102.

⁶¹ “Jeolmeun cheongchuni moyeodeuneun ansikgwa jeongsukui gongwon. Bora Namsanmit hanpyeon gongwoneseoneun utseumsori gereona tapgolgongwoneseoneun ojik eumwulhan gibun” [Calm and quiet park where young people gather. One can hear laughter coming from Namsan Park, but there is only melancholy air at Tapgol Park], *Chosun ilbo*, August 25, 1925.

⁶² “Jeolmeun cheongchuni moyeodeuneun ansikgwa jeongsukui gongwon. Bora Namsanmit hanpyeon gongwoneseoneun utseumsori gereona tapgolgongwoneseoneun ojik eumwulhan gibun,” *ibid.*

⁶³ “Jeolmeun cheongchuni moyeodeuneun ansikgwa jeongsukui gongwon. Bora Namsanmit hanpyeon gongwoneseoneun utseumsori gereona tapgolgongwoneseoneun ojik eumwulhan gibun,” *ibid.*

fro from one tree shade to another.”⁶⁴

At the same time, the diversity of the people who frequented Pagoda Park celebrated the park as the “People’s Park” and allowed the site to be where one could observe Gyeongseong’s interactions with the changing times. Bored prostitutes, students in uniforms, shriveled grandmothers, Modern Boys, hawkers, middle-age intellectuals, and energetic children all frequented the park. However, the same diversity also showcased the abject poverty and difficult struggles that many of the city’s Korean residents struggled with. Suddenly thrown into a new capitalist economy run by minority Japanese colonists, Koreans in the period had suddenly found themselves to be landless (after Japanese land reforms), shell-shocked, unable to speak the new official language, and even poorer than before (especially in comparison with the Japanese minority). These impoverished, unemployed Korean residents were highly visible at Pagoda Park, a refuge for people who had nowhere to go and nothing to do. Also, as the “Place for Koreans,” the tiny, crowded park attracted the city’s misfits looked down upon by the conservative Confucian society: prostitutes, homeless, gamblers, fortune tellers, and delinquents who aimlessly wandered around the park day and night. Reporters describing Pagoda Park often disapproved of the idleness they observed at the park (my italics):

At Pagoda Park, a crowd of about two hundred is moving about. *The atmosphere inside the park is dark and chaotic, like moles swimming through the sewage water in May and June.* White-donned old men in traditional hats, children in colorful clothes, middle school students, laborers, beggars, coolies, mochi sellers, Western-dressed men, and others sit or stand idly, as if they can happily go on doing so for months. Two, three people are even napping on the pagoda.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ “Jeolmeun cheongchuni moyeodeuneun ansikgwa jeongsukui gongwon. Bora Namsanmit hanpyeon gongwoneoneun utseumsori gereona tapgolgongwoneoneun ojik eumwulhan gibun,” *ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi ohu dusi samsipbun-buteo sesi samsipbun-kkaji” [One hour reporter mobilization, Gyeongseong travel writing: March 29th 2:30pm to 3:30pm], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 20 (April 1, 1929), 133.

Throng of jobless, homeless people slumped around the park in broad daylight. Some even argued that the negative aspects of Pagoda Park outweighed the positive aspects, and that the city is better off not having the park at all.⁶⁶ Other writers were alarmed by the large number of fortune tellers who made their wages sitting around Pagoda Park, feeding people's superstitious beliefs that modernists found backward.⁶⁷ One apologetically called Pagoda Park a "devil's cave" (*magul*) due to the large number of dirty, lazy people lying around the park, as well as con artists that preyed on naive people fresh from the countryside and pick-pocketed those who were too careless.⁶⁸ An article passionately cried out:

Why are all these people with nothing to do coming to Pagoda Park? There are no facilities for rest, games, or sports. Its fate (*palja*) is tied to its location near Jongno. It should either be completely torn down, otherwise be renovated so that it actually looks like a park with a breeze. I lost my mind during the one hour I spent walking around the chaotic park. But you can't expect something amazing to happen in our dull world. The iron cage doors of the park are open, but why won't we come out of it? Why don't we have any energy? Why are we acting so pitifully as if we are dying animals?⁶⁹

The tone of the article is full of pity and regret. It was too easy for Pagoda Park to be juxtaposed against the other parks around the city that did not openly showcase Gyeongseong's social problems. The image of the "ideal public park" had already been established with Namsan Park, and all the other parks around Gyeongseong in the 1920s except for Pagoda Park conformed to the image. All the other "Japanese parks" were visited by upper-class Japanese

⁶⁶ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi ohu dusi samsipbun-buteo sesi samsipbun-kkaji," *ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁷ Articles such as "Gija byeonjangchuldong" [Dispatch of reporter in disguise]. *Byeolgeongon*, no. 9 (October 1, 1927) was full of such complaint. Here, the writer in disguise goes out to Tapgol Park to find fortune tellers and figure out their legitimacy.

⁶⁸ "Sangsang batgat sesang: Gyeongseongui daseot magul" [A world beyond our imagination: five devil's caves in Gyeongseong], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 155.

⁶⁹ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi ohu dusi samsipbun-buteo sesi samsipbun-kkaji," *op cit.*, 135.

residents and just a small number of elite Koreans who were able to blend into the colonial society. They had the economic and political means to leisurely enjoy the parks' amenities, and the parks in turn reflected the comfortable status of their visitors. Korean newspaper and magazine articles describing Jangchungdan Park did not include any mention of the kind of social disparity visible at Pagoda Park. Rather, they focused on people in Western suits, foamy beer, and joyful sound of people singing. People in those parks were portrayed as happy and carefree, but often with a strong tone of jealousy:

In these heavenly [parks], who gets drunk from the scenery but goes hungry, and who gets drunk from the scenery but keeps his stomach full? Ah, you immature, drifting monsters with money on your sleeves—do not muddle Seoul's landscape with your *gisaeng* and cars!⁷⁰

These writers' frequent usage of Pagoda Park as a symbol of Korean repression in their own city, especially in comparison to other more "Japanese" parks, revealed the extent that parks helped to define the Korean relationship with Japanese colonial modernity.

However, certain writers chose not to present the social disparity seen at Pagoda Park as a product of colonialism; they instead focus on the fault of Koreans for remaining stagnant. Their frustration about the poverty, gambling, and idleness seen at Pagoda Park was channeled in a way to censure their countrymen to take responsibility for their actions. For example, a writer commented on the Koreans' lack of discipline about time:

We need to learn to be respectful about time. When I go to a musical performance and have to wait thirty minutes to an hour (one time I waited one hour and five minutes) to hear the introduction, I wanted to give the host a piece of my mind. We need to begin reflecting on and studying different elements of our lifestyle. We need to figure out our weaknesses and begin solving them by ourselves, one by one.⁷¹

⁷⁰ So Chun, "Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryuk-ui ryudong," *op cit.*, 59. *Gisaeng* are Korean female entertainers for *yangban*, nobles, and kings. Although they had low social status, they were highly trained in singing, dancing, playing instruments, prose, and other fine arts.

⁷¹ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, "Hondon, saneyonmane goguke dollawaseo" [Confusion; returning home after four years], *Gaebyeok*, no. 39 (September 1, 1923), 59-60.

Another writer mentioned that “there are too many things in our society that needs to be dusted, mopped, or completely swept and thrown into the garbage can.”⁷² He urged his readers to be more proactive about changing Gyeongseong:

As much as we try to make Tapgol Park look nice, fortune teller crooks who sleep around the park will still get in our way...Even though the core [of the park] is rotten, shouldn't we try to make it look pleasant on the outside? ...It is in such an embarrassing state (*changpihanggol*). We must sweep away these fortune tellers and clean up the park.⁷³

These writers highlighted the necessity for Gyeongseong's Korean residents to take a more participatory role in adopting more Western standards for their lifestyle. Such writers were attracted to Japan's certain “modern traits,” traits such as cleanliness, timeliness, and politeness that the Japanese government were trying to bestow upon Koreans. The elite, already “modernized” writers, urged Koreans to embrace these qualities for their own benefit; to become more progressive and improve their way of living.

In conclusion, for the first time in Korean history, parks began to formulate the Korean people's pattern for meeting, gathering, and relaxing in a public environment. Parks were considered as “officially-sanctioned, social” sites demanded that residents use them in ways designated by the Japanese colonial government. Government officials encouraged urban residents, particularly members of lower ethnic, class, and gender backgrounds, to cultivate a sense of refinement (*shumi*) befitting them as presumably “equal” members of the greater Japanese imperial community.⁷⁴ The Japanese government's motivation behind building Gyeongseong's parks were along the same line as the reasons for pushing forward standardized government schools for children, encouraging sports and athleticism, and exposing Koreans to

⁷² So Je-bu, “Chugijisang daecheong-gyeol” [Autumn cleaning] *Byeolgeongon*, no. 66 (September 1, 1933), 34.

⁷³ So Je-bu, “Chugijisang daecheong-gyeol,” *ibid.*, 34-35.

⁷⁴ Todd, “Keijō,” *op cit.*, 320.

Western culture. They hoped to turn Koreans into refined, submissive, and modern colonial subjects faithful to the Japanese Empire.

A phenomenon developed entirely by foreigners, Koreans had very little influence on the location, design, building, and maintenance of the first parks. Among the five parks that occupied the city in the 1920s, only one, the Pagoda Park, was easily accessible to Gyeongseong's Koreans. This unbalance in Gyeongseong's parks led to a dichotomy between "Japanese" parks and the one and only "Korean" park, and the beautiful appearance of "Japanese" parks, namely Namsan, Jangchungdan, Sajik, and Hyochang Parks, were compared against Pagoda Park. Those parks defined what the Japanese had but Koreans did not. The differences in the parks were also apparent in the dress, behavior, and mood of the people who frequented the parks. Writings on parks from the time period tended to focus on the scenic beauty of the Japanese parks, while Pagoda Park was criticized for its dullness, frustratingly small size, and visible signs of Korean poverty. Pagoda Park's shortcomings were accentuated by Korea's intellectual elites as they who poured out the humiliation they felt about the status of the park so intimately connected to the Gyeongseong's Korean identity. While still an appreciated "modern" phenomenon only introduced to the country a few decades earlier, Gyeongseong's parks and their regional, ethnic differences exhibited the uneven contradictions of colonial modernity. The visual disparity in Gyeongseong's parks gave another reason for Korean writers to form nationalistic voice and cry out against the Japanese power in their city.

Chapter 3: Gyeongseong's Streets

“My father worked for a large Japanese company called Nihongokkan that had thousands of employees and helped make wartime material. I know it was a big company because it had its own workers’ store and a hospital. He wasn’t a forced laborer or anything like that. Dad had a good job that even a lot of Japanese couldn’t get.

Because our father had such a good job, we didn’t have to live in dirty Korea town, wore nice clothes, and lived a middle class life. Lots of Koreans those days lived in a dirty part of town. Our family was very clean, and we were the only Koreans in the neighborhood. I didn’t know any other Koreans around me...

I didn’t face discrimination. My siblings and I could all speak Japanese, our family wasn’t poor. I was so neat that Japanese girls called me a Japanese name like *ggaengeumi* (clean freak)...this was when Japanese were ignorant toward Koreans and called us dirty....My mother made sure that we were always wearing the nicest clothes so we wouldn’t get made fun of. I was probably one of the best-dressed girls in class.

We often spoke Japanese at home, too. We couldn’t speak Korean at school, so I wasn’t used to speaking Korean at all. Oppa (older brother) had come to Japan at age seven and he was the closest one to me, and he spoke Japanese too.”

—Nam Jeong-yeop¹

Although the above excerpts provide us with specific vignettes of my grandmother’s life as a young Korean girl in Japan, it is still meaningful to look at her experience in the larger context of Korea’s colonialism under Japan. There were relevant similarities between her attitude toward assimilation into Japanese culture and the views of Koreans interacting with modernity in the 1920s Gyeongseong: they both revolved around absorbing and emulating the Japanese modernity, while still deeply conscious of the fact that Japan was the colonial master. Gyeongseong’s streets—the streets of various neighborhoods, commercial districts, slums, and city centers where people were able to see, smell, and taste the transformation of their city—provided the space for Koreans to see and understand the modernity brought to them from Japan.

¹ Nam Jeong-yeop, in interview with the author, May 14, 2009.

In 1920s Gyeongseong, it became fashionable for people to stroll leisurely around the city and take pleasure in the city's urban landscape. The newly paved streets provided a venue to go sightseeing and shopping, look for new entertainment venues, and socialize with others (Fig. 21). *Byeolgeongon* published a series of articles called "The Person on the Road," which depicted all the different types of people in Gyeongseong and presented the city as one full of people on their feet, enjoying their time around town.² Streetcar tracks connecting various landmarks around the city facilitated people's movement. Men and women, old and young, rich and poor were all on the streets, and the diversity of the city was particularly visible in public spaces and commercial areas. One enthusiastic writer described:

I climbed up onto the streetcar headed towards Pongnae-dong! Sitting in the trolley were wealthy young ladies and gentlemen, fresh from the countryside to enroll into city schools. There were also middle-aged men and women, out to enjoy the spring weather. The rail conductor busily answered people's questions about which stop to get off.³

Writers frequently commented on the new mass movement around the city; the streets were seen as a new channel of energy that breathed life into "moving Gyeongseong" (*umjigineun gyeongseong*).⁴ Consumerism was also an essential aspect of Gyeongseong's colonial experience that was readily visible on its streets. Already a decade into colonization and the Japanese military and governmental presence firmly established, Gyeongseong was taking on a new form. The small but growing middle class avidly chased after department stores, Western

² "Rosang-ui in" [Person on the road], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 2 (December 1, 1926), 25.

³ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi" [One hour reporter mobilization, Gyeongseong travel writing: March 29th 2:30pm to 3:30pm], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 20 (April 1, 1929), 140. Pongnae-dong was the name of a neighborhood in Gyeongseong.

⁴ Song Jak, et al, "Gijachongchuldong, daegyeongseong baekju amhaenggi" [Reporter mobilization, Gyeongseong travel writing part two: One hour travel into the society], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 4 (February 1, 1927), 27. The article dives into specific areas of Gyeongseong such as the train station and the Bureau of Human Resources Affairs that organizes people and makes it a "moving city."

shops, pool halls, cafés, and movie theaters, which were built to mimic Japanese and Western models and were cropping up around the city. Modern Boys and Modern Girls, young people embracing Western trends, flooded the streets, flaunting their Western suits and short hairstyles. Thus, Gyeongseong’s growing urbanization became visible through the social, cultural, and economic changes occurring on its streets.

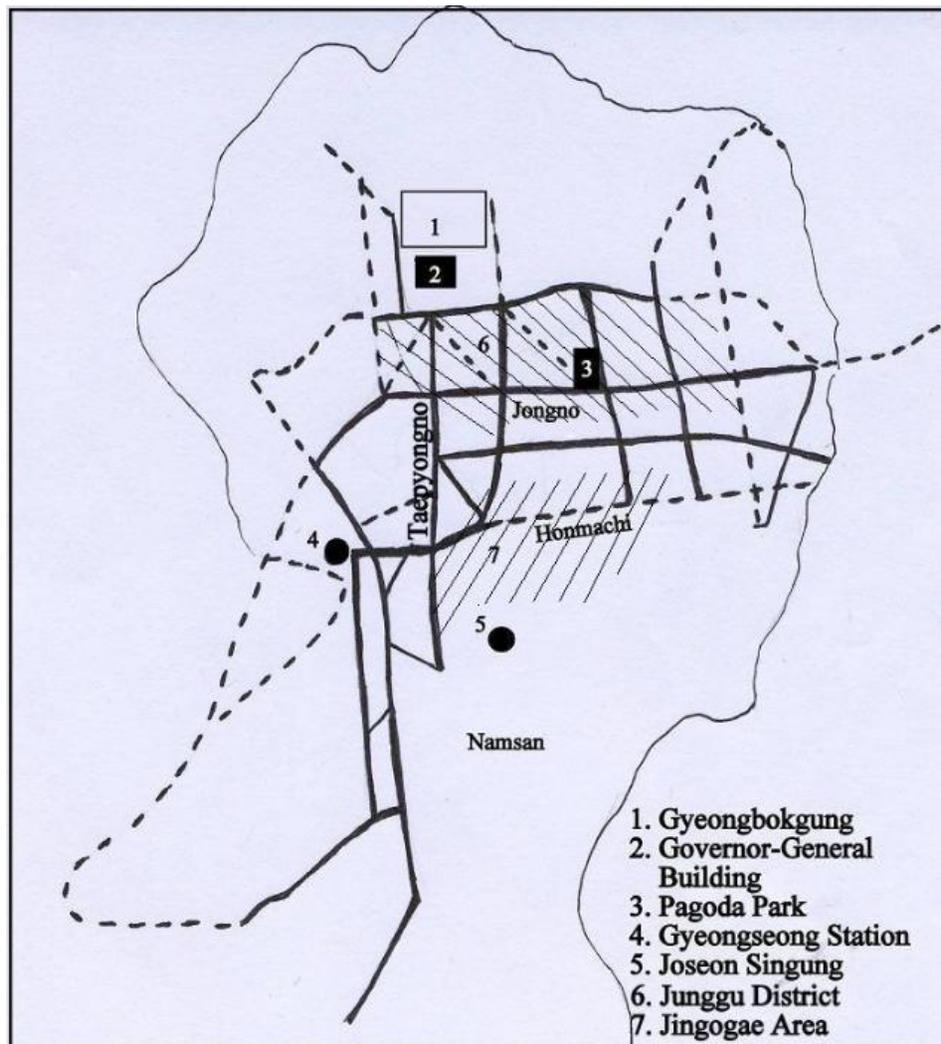


Figure 21: Revised Gyeongseong street network plan. (Adapted from Henry, “Keijō,” 309)

Articles from the time period show that people did not passively observe their new environment; instead, the city’s residents were fascinated by the city’s changes and were engaged in their surrounding culture. This chapter will look at how Gyeongseong residents’ active

relationship with their environment was one of the main ways Koreans established their own sense of modernity. Because the changes were so physically apparent, people of all classes interacted with the meaning of colonial modernity on a daily basis, particularly in the busy and eventful streets of Honmachi and Jongno, which will be compared with each other in the following section. The chapter will also analyze Gyeongseong's streets for its seductions of modernity and as a display of Japan's cultural imperialism in Korea. Finally, it will conclude by looking at the Korean feeling of commercial and geographical competition with Japanese residents, as well as their experience being pushed out to the northern outskirts of the city.

Honmachi, the “Little Tokyo”

The street in Gyeongseong where one could see the most elaborate form of “modernity” was Honmachi, located across the northern border of Namsan Park (Fig. 22). The Honmachi Street (本町), located in Jingogae (泥岷) area, was the commercial area that was established and developed by Japanese merchants, and became synonymous with Gyeongseong's latest styles and trends.⁵ In the Joseon Period (1392-1910), Jingogae (also called Namsangol) had been occupied by poor *yangban* scholars, for the area south of the palaces (Jongno) were taken up by the *yangban* in power. Japanese merchants began to gather to live in Jingogae in the late 1800s after the Japan entered Korea through the unequal Treaty of Gwanghwa of 1876 and established the first Japanese legation. The Japanese settlers filled in and stabilized the notoriously wet and murky land that pooled all the water flow from Namsan, making traveling practically impossible

⁵ The current name for Honmachi is Chungmuro (忠武路). Jingogae is the name for a small hill north of Namsan, around the area of today's Myeongdong. Its approximate area extends from behind the current Chinese Embassy to the back road of Sejong Hotel.

after a heavy rain.⁶ From 1895 throughout the first decade of 1900, Japanese settlers paved roads such as the one from Jingogae to Namdaemun (South Gate), and established the first sewage system in central Seoul.⁷ During the Occupation, Jingogae was primarily occupied by Japanese residents; by the mid-1920s, the number of Japanese amounted to about 70% of the total population.⁸ The large number of Japanese residents in Jingogae then built their central street Honmachi, which blossomed into the most fashionable street in Gyeongseong. Jongno, located north of Namsan in front of Gyeongbokgung, had historically been the center of commerce, but by the 1920s the focus had shifted to Honmachi and Euljiro, which situated a number of Japanese-built banks and department stores. Built to replicate the upscale Ginza district in Tokyo, Jingogae looked as posh as some of the trendiest areas in Japan.



Figure 22: Entrance to Honmachi, 1930s.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 131)

Honmachi was home to the limited number of Gyeongseong's foreign restaurants, theaters,

⁶ Kim Young-Nam, *Myeongdong byunchunsa: Junggu hyangtosa gwangye jaryo jechiljip* [History of changes in Myeongdong: materials related to the local history of Junggu, volume seven] (Seoul, Korea: Junggu munhagwon, 2003), 27.

⁷ Kim Young-Nam, *ibid.*, 27

⁸ Kim Young-Nam, *ibid.*, 32

pool halls, and *dabangs* (coffee houses).⁹ The first coffee house in Korea opened in 1923, and *dabang* culture bloomed from then on, flourishing in the 1930s. After the March 1st, 1919 Movement, young people were looking for a place to drink tea and chat about world affairs, and *dabangs* were an apt venue for communication that turned into a key source of information throughout the occupation. Self-nominated “culture people” (*munhwain*) who sought after Western culture, frequented coffee houses and saw them as cultural hubs. Thus, coffee houses had a rather significant impact on establishing and dispersing Gyeongseong’s modern culture.¹⁰

Because of its concentration of department stores, Jingogae was referred to by writers as the site that “controls Joseon’s commercial power.”¹¹ These department stores laid out the foundation for Korean shopping culture and established Honmachi as what writers called Gyeongseong’s “premier commercial center.”¹² One writer explained:

When exploring Jingogae, from the area in front of the Bank of Joseon and bordering the Gyeongseong Post Office, one can enjoy stores and businesses sprawled out from all sides. Of course, they are plentiful and full of vitality. The display windows draw in eyes with their expensive things and splendid goods that continuously bring in customers.¹³

Four main department stores competed fiercely in Junggu area (Fig. 23). Mitsui chaebol (also known as Samjeong chaebol; 三井財閥) built the Mitsukoshi (三越貨店) in 1906 and expanded into a large, modern superstore in the current location of Shinsaegae Department Store. In 1921 Sorim Munjeong (小林門中), which operated the Sorim Suit Store (小林洋服店), opened doors to

⁹ Although *dabangs* offered teas such as black and ginseng tea, the most popular drink was coffee, which had entered Korea in 1882.

¹⁰ Kim Young-Nam, *op cit.*, 96

¹¹ Jeong Su-il, “Jingogae, Seoulmat, Seouljeongjo” [Jingogae, Seoul’s flavor, Seoul’s atmosphere], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 46.

¹² So Chun, “Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong” [Past and present look at the movement of Seoul’s central power], *Gaebyeok*, no. 48 (June 1, 1924), 58.

¹³ Jeong Su-il, “Jingogae, Seoulmat, Seouljeongjo,” *op cit.*, 46.

Jeongjaok Department Store (丁子屋貨店), which was later expanded in 1929. The six-floor Samjungjeong Department Store (三井百貨店) was built in 1922, and it was expanded into a full-size store in 1932. In Honmachi, the Pyeongjeon Department Store (平田百貨店) opened doors in 1926, and it was popular among young married women who bought household items and kitchenware.¹⁴



Figure 23: Mitsukoshi Department Store (left), Joseon Construction Bank (right), mid-1930s. (Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 127)

Honmachi's dabangs and department stores laid out the backdrop for the playground of Modern Girls (*modeon geol*) and Modern Boys (*modeon boi*), who captured the attention of Gyeongseong's urbanites. They were young adults in the twenties who chased after the Western trends (*yuhaeng*) in clothes (suits, skirts, and shoes) and entertainment (music, films, dances, billiard). Modern Girls and Boys were sometimes associated with following Western intellectual movements (Feminism, Socialism, Democracy, etc.), although this was much less common. Like their "Moga" (Modern Girl) and "Mobo" (Modern Boy) Japanese counterparts collectively called "Ginbura" (because they lingered around Ginza), these young Koreans were called "Honbura" (after Honmachi). Modern Girls and Modern Boys were the iconic products

¹⁴ Kim Young-Nam, *op cit.*, 93

of Gyeongseong's flirtation with Honmachi modernism. Modern Boys styled their hair short and donned Western suits and hats that contrasted against the traditional Korean dress. But it was the Modern Girls who colored the streets of Gyeongseong with their trendy outfits: they either cut their hair short to their chins or put it in a low bun at the back of their heads, and wore wide, pleated, calf-length skirts with *jeogori* (the top part of the traditional *hanbok*).¹⁵ This basic style was accessorized with pointed pumps, parasols, and purses (Fig. 24). The length of the skirt got shorter and shorter throughout the 1920s and the color of girls' skirts changed seasonally, while leather pumps and gold-colored wrist-watches were the most coveted fashion items in town.¹⁶ These trends were set forth with the help of the growing number of department stores around Gyeongseong.

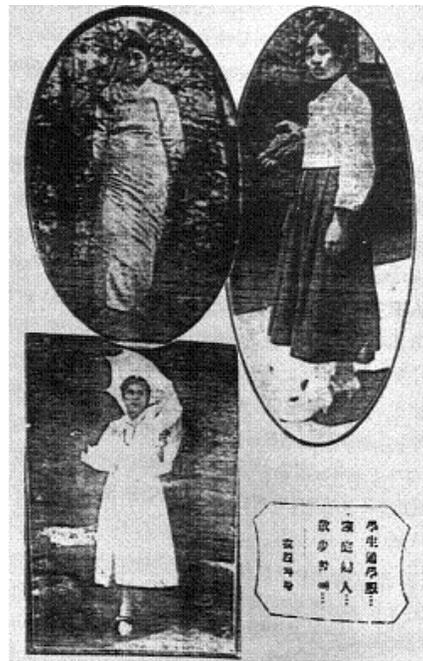


Figure 24: The typical fashion of Gyeongseong women in the 1920s.
(Photos from Mijuno, 124)

¹⁵ Choi Byeong-taek and Ye Ji-suk, *Gyeongseong ripoteu* [Gyeongseong Report] (Seoul, Korea: Sigongsa, 2009), 125.

¹⁶ Choi and Ye, *ibid.*, 126-130.



Figure 25: An “Ugly Contest.” (Cartoon from *Byeolgeongon*, no. 7 (July 1, 1927))

Modern Boys and Girls frequented shaved-ice and udon restaurants, teahouses, and cafes, and ordered these “modern” foods while speaking Japanese-heavy mix of Korean and Japanese.¹⁷ This was rather unavoidable since Western and Japanese restaurants and cafes mainly served Japanese customers and could only be found in Japanese neighborhoods. But because Modern Boys and Girls were seen as “modern” due to their association with Japanese-constructed and Japanese-produced stores, clothes, and foods, the young people were seen as more “Japanese” and less “Korean” than the rest of the population. Thus, their trendiness and visual presence in the city had a much greater cultural significance in context of Korea’s colonialism. In effect, as much as Modern Boys and Girls lit up the streets of Gyeongseong, they were often the targets of Korean writers’ criticism for their “pour, drink, and dance” (*bueora*,

¹⁷ Sin Myeong-jik, *Modeon boi Gyeongseong eul geonilda* [Modern Boy strolls through Gyeongseong] (Seoul, Korea: Hyeonsil munhwa yeongu, 2003), 29.

masija, chumchuja) kind of lifestyle.¹⁸ They were also made fun of for their pretentiousness and cultural faux pas in their effort to look modern; a 1927 *Byeolgeongon* cartoon drew attention to their strange style of dress, which often mix and matched Korean, Japanese and Western styles (Fig. 25). The cartoon characters are strutting outfits that range from somewhat traditional (*hanbok* with four pocket watches dangling down) to modern but ill-fitted (huge trench coat dragging on the ground). The outfits showcased Korea's awkward stumble into modernity.

Therefore, as much as Modern Girls and Boys were glamorized, they were also condemned for their unorthodox lifestyles that defied Korea's strict Confucian traditions. Another article, with a tone of regret, described Modern Boys engaging in billiard, one of their favorite pastimes:

One man was wearing a ready-made spring Western suit with rimless glasses; his hair was short but he had put on so much oil that it was shooting into the sky like porcupine needles. His age? About twenty-three or twenty-four. His accent revealed that he was Japanese. Another man was wearing *hanbok* and a gold pocket watch. He had a thin, sallow face and was eating caramel—I could tell he was an opium addict. How ludicrous is it to be so young but only reserving his sickly face indoors to play pool! Wouldn't it be so much better if he went outside and enjoyed the fresh air to regain his health? I know it's none of my business, but I still worried about him.¹⁹

In the 1920s, Pool halls and movie theaters took a hold of Gyeongseong. By the end of 1920s, twelve theaters existed in the entire city; seven of them were located in Junggu, four in Honmachi itself.²⁰ There were eighteen pool halls; Junggu hosted the location for twelve of them, including four in Honmachi.²¹ Pool halls were the home for the rather well-to-do young

¹⁸ Lee Seo-gu, "Jongnoyahwa" [Description of Jongno at night], *Gaebyeok* renewed publication, no. 1 (November 1, 1934), 91. The author writes about how Modern Girls and Boys that he knows have "pour, drink, and dance" as their life motto with no other wish (*han huimangdo amugeotdo eopsi*).

¹⁹ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daebyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi ohu dusi samsipbun-buteo sesi samsipbun-kkaji," *op cit.*, 139-140. *Hanbok* is the traditional Korean outfit.

²⁰ Kim Young-Nam, *op cit.*, 95. Junggu is a district in central Seoul.

²¹ Kim Young-Nam, *ibid.*, 95.

people to mingle with modernity:

There were two pool tables in the room, two-three people playing on each. There were only a few customers—eight, myself not included—two of them were in their thirties, dressed in their winter Western suits like me. The rest were Modern Boys with folded hat rims and wide-legged pants. They seem not to have permanent jobs—at night they are in the theater and mingling in the streets during the day....They wear stylish Western suits, spending luxurious, leisurely time in high-class, fashionable places...Their families probably don't have to worry about rice.²²

But as mentioned earlier, not all Modern Boys and Modern Girls were defined by their dress and pastimes. *Chosun Ilbo* illuminated on the two types of Modern Girls: the first kind was the girls who wear Western dresses, perm their hair, love music, know some English, and love literature and art; the other, much rarer type was “made up by women who want equal rights (*pyeongdeung*) as men to study, work, and gain economic power...and want to have choices with marriage, reproduction, and divorce.”²³ But it was the first type of Modern Girls—the ones “in groups and taking up half of the road when traveling to and from school, holding hands and talking confidently in loud voices,” who contributed to Gyeongseong’s changing visual landscape. Whether Korean writers approved or did not approve these young people roaming the streets of Honmachi, Modern Boys and Girls were the agents of Western, “modern,” and more recognizably “Japanese” changes coming into Gyeongseong. For this reason, Honmachi was often referred to as Gyeongseong’s “cultural center” (*munhwaui jungsimji*).²⁴

Jongno for the Koreans

Like Honmachi, Jongno was where Gyeongseong residents were able to encounter the

²² “Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daebyeongseong baekju amhaeng-gi ohu dusi samsipbun-buteo sesi samsipbun-kkaji,” *op cit.*, 138.

²³ “Geunrae-e chacha saenggineun modeon geoliran? Dugaji isseuna igeotseun inseupui bandong-ida” [Who are the Modern Girls? The two types recoil from convention, part 2], *Chosun ilbo*, March 31, 1927.

²⁴ So Chun, “Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong,” *op cit.*, 58.

modern way of life that came to characterize the city. New buildings for commercial and entertainment purposes appeared all around Jongno, transforming the mood of the neighborhood (Fig. 26). Here, people were able to see, feel, and taste the Korean urban culture burgeoning in 1920s Gyeongseong, but its densely Korean population in the crevices of Jongno also showcased the poverty that the majority of Koreans faced. Full of Korean people from all spectrums of life, Jongno was as lively, if not more, than Honmachi—in particular, the bridge on Jongno’s main cross street (Jongno saga) was a prime location where one could truly experience the sweat, laughter, and tears of Gyeongseong’s Korean residents. One writer described a vibrant scene:

People waiting for the [Jongno] streetcar have on all different colors of clothes. *Gisaeng* pass by on rickshaws. Students walk with books under their arms. Rich outcasts in cars, police, reporters, teachers, delinquents, girls with short hair, opium addicts—all of them travel across here.²⁵

The writer describes Jongno as an exciting urban center like Honmachi, but one that was more accessible to Koreans. Daily adventures and mischief ensued throughout day and night. In the evening, Jongno opened up a popular night market (*yasijang*) that became a regular meeting spot for young people. The night market, transplanting the hustle-bustle of day market under flood lights, gave another “city life” element to 1920s Jongno.

The night market, which was called “the owner of Jongno,” and other entertainment venues supplied Jongno with its fair share of urban debauchery.²⁶ Jongno had a substantial role in shaping Gyeongseong’s nightlife; the same crowd of Modern Girls and Modern Boys wandering the streets of Honmachi visited Jongno’s entertainment district: “When theaters spit people out

²⁵ “I-il dong-ane seoul gugyeong golgoro haneun beop” [Complete tour of Seoul in two days, the route to take your friend from the countryside], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 62.

²⁶ Lee Seo-gu, *op cit.*, 86.

past 11:00pm, everyone congregates to Jongno. Boys chase after uninterested girls and Mobo, Mogas run into tea houses.²⁷ A particularly enchanted writer captured the bright night scene:

On Jongno, bright neon signs flash at your eyes and records songs play in your ears. Street lights light up the roads and you have to cover your ears from *jangtaryeong*. Music clubs and the sound of laughter flowing out of them! The sound of music! Night is the time of bright music. It is the golden time for girl waitresses....Here you can meet *gisaengs*, actresses, and girls with broken hearts. It is nighttime heaven!²⁸

Jongno, like Honmachi, was at the center of Gyeongseong's fun and adventure. Young people were able to enjoy their new, Western sources of entertainment: they hummed along with jazz songs playing on gramophones, danced the Charleston, and went to theaters. The plethora of magazine essays and newspaper articles from the 1920s about Jongno period greatly appreciated and celebrated the emergence of these modern entertainment venues on Jongno.



Figure 26: Korean Stores on Jongno i-ga, 1930s.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 137)

An April 1929 *Byeolgeongon* article that described a reporter's one-hour adventure around Jongno area portrayed a street with great deal of movement and energy. The writer ran into

²⁷ Lee Seo-gu, *ibid.*, 88.

²⁸ Lee Seo-gu, *ibid.*, 86. *Jangtaryeong* was one of the songs that beggars sang while walking around the market or the street.

dirty, poor peddlers selling all sorts of things from their carts; looped into smoke-filled game rooms (*oraksil*) and pool halls (*danggujang*); went shopping for a tie in one of Jongno's many shops; and reflected on the busy people running in and out of the city.²⁹ The article illustrated:

I head toward Jongno. It's spring; look at the hordes of people bustling about! Modern Girls and Modern Boys, rubbing shoulders, walk toward my direction. Streetcars and cars drive about. I ponder about what my article should be on. I part ways with my partner in front of Jongmyo Shrine, walk a bit further down, then dive into a pool hall.³⁰

Once in the pool hall, the writer observed that it is full of people from the countryside, who had recently come to Gyeongseong looking for opportunities. However, instead of working, they were gambling their money away. The tone changed:

The sign reads "Game Room" (*orakjang*), but it is more like a gambling room. On one side a feeble, gaunt-faced person is calling, "Welcome, welcome, it's a game for everyone," while another person turns on the gramophone. The time is 2:47 in the afternoon! The place isn't large, but it is full of people. Newbies fresh from the countryside, day laborers, and tramps stand about throwing balls....18, 19 year old country boys and gambling addicts hit balls, yelling "Wonsan, Daegu, Pyongyang!" They continuously bet 10 *jeon*, 20 *jeon*, 50 *jeon*, and continuously lose; only the owner takes it all....The gramophone merrily sings, "Play, play when you are young. You only live once..."³¹

This excerpt depicted the sad reality of Jongno's encounter with gambling and addiction; Gyeongseong's dive into modernity and urban entertainment unfortunately dragged in its downsides. Instead of focusing on the glitzy nightlife that Modern Girls and Modern Boys enjoyed, the particular writer chose to zoom in on the negative images of modernity on Jongno.

Similarly, as much as Gyeongseong residents enjoyed their time in Jongno, many people writing on the topic also concentrated on the grievances displayed out on the street. While

²⁹ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseng baekju amhaenggi ohu dusi samsipbunbuteo sesi samsipbunkkaji," *op cit.*, 132-133.

³⁰ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaenggi ohu dusi samsipbunbuteo sesi samsipbunkkaji," *ibid.*, 132. Jongmyo Shrine (宗廟) is the Korean Royal Ancestral Shrine located on Jongno.

³¹ "Gija daechuldong hansigan tambang daegyeongseong baekju amhaenggi ohu dusi samsipbunbuteo sesi samsipbunkkaji," *ibid.*, 132-133.

Honmachi was controlled by the Japanese, Jongno was and traditionally had been the center of Korean activity. Therefore the writers' depiction of the negative realities of colonial Gyeongseong narrowed in on a distinctively "Korean experience." Another travel diary in February 1927 issue of *Byeolgeongon* also conveyed a downbeat undertone while delivering vignettes of Jongno. The writer first visited the banks, one of the most posh institutions in the city. After seeing the wealth of the rich minority, he headed to Jongno, where he bought from a street vendor steamy hot *hoddeok*, a red bean paste-filled pancake, and looked inside a job-search agency (Fig. 27). There he found throngs of eager yet unfortunate job applicants, waiting in lines, hoping to land a job as a general laborer or a domestic worker at a Japanese home.³² Other magazine writers mourned at the sight of poor and dirty young girls recruited by merchants to sell packs of gum on the street, even though no one but "those with the softest hearts" would buy from them.³³ Descriptions of 1920s Jongno were full of pick pockets roaming in the streets, taking advantage of drunken salary men at night or bright-eyed newcomers from the countryside. Very few stories about Jongno went without images of idle laborers and impoverished peasants from the countryside.

This is not to say that the socio-economically "dark" Jongno and more "glamorous" Honmachi were depicted as two separate entities sterilized from each other. Instead, they were often juxtaposed side-by-side due to their roles as the commercial focal points of Gyeongseong. They were locations electrified with energy, entertainment, and interesting people, and therefore were often combined as subjects for city vignettes. Still, while Korean writers more readily portrayed Honmachi as an alluring, fashionable neighborhood, Jongno was described under a

³² Song Jak, et al, *op cit.*, 35.

³³ Lee Seo-gu, *op cit.*, 88.

dimmer light, as the place where success met failure and the side effects of modernity that haunted its residents (Fig. 28). Their differences were highlighted and a binary was established. The two streets did not combine under the umbrella of Gyeongseong commerce, but they existed as two ends of an axis counterbalancing each other. Their differences heightened by the Korean media only accentuated their competing roles in the city.



Figure 27: Children selling *hoddeok*.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 327)



Figure 28: An aerial view of Jongno.
(Photo from *Seoulteukbyeolsisa pyeonchanwiwonhoe*, 153)

Seductions of Modernity

Despite their differences, Honmachi and Jongno had one thing in common: they were Gyeongseong's doors to all the rather "sinful" seductions of modernism, including dancing, loud Western music, materialism, consumerism, and promiscuity (*nochul*). Many writers, guarded with traditional Confucian upbringing, branded self-proclaimed "modern" Koreans as a pretentious bunch only preoccupied with "wearing cosmetics, acquiring the newest fashions, and eating rice with *jogi*."³⁴ An essay depicting Seoul by its scent exclaimed: "Sexy! That's Seoul. Money! That's Seoul. Alcohol! That's Seoul. Seoul is great, Seoul is great. The smell is great." The author drew vignettes of the consuming city, remarking that money "gets carried by a fan and flies in all directions."³⁵ His poetic metaphor continued:

Seoul! It smells stale but at the same time not so stale. Perfume! Western food! *Naengmyun*! Hair oil! Gasoline! And barbeque meat! It is full of things that are scary and dirt.

Seoul's smell! Shake your head left and right! Don't be envious of the impressive-looking people who jut their shoulders in the streets! Yes. They are only masked clowns!

Seoul's smell! It is so stale and rancid it makes your hair fall out and shoots pain through your teeth. Ah—Seoul's old smell makes your body shrink into itself.³⁶

Commentaries that accompanied criticisms of 1920s consumerism included those about Gyeongseong's wastefulness and vulgarity. A *Byeolgeongon* cartoon poked fun at how the flamboyant dress (and leather heels) of young people supposedly expressed their "modernity (Fig. 29). The cartoon sighed that "[dressing such way] is the only way to express one's level of

³⁴ "Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin gyeongseong" [Joseon people's Gyeongseong affected by foreign middlemen's power], *Gaebyeok*, no. 48 (June 1, 1924), 40. *Jogi* (yellow corbina) is a traditionally expensive fish, eaten only by the wealthy *yangban* class.

³⁵ Choi Yeong-ju, "Seoulnaemse, seoulmat, seoul jeongjo" [Seoul's smell, Seoul's taste, Seoul's mood], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 28, 1929), 37.

³⁶ Choi Yeong-ju, "Seoulnaemse, seoulmat, seoul jeongjo" [Seoul's smell, Seoul's taste, Seoul's mood], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 28, 1929), 37-39. *Naengmyun* is cold buckwheat noodles.

education,” and that “acting educated is difficult.” Another writer expressed sarcastic disbelief about the wealthy disparity in Gyeongseong: “Past midnight, cars in all directions [of Jongno] are all transporting *gisaeng*. Who can cry that there is no money around here?”³⁷ The author continued,

What is Jongno trying to be? While chasing after crazy and lost short-haired girls to Jingogae, stores open up and one immediately gets caught in the mouth and stomach of vendors. In the back alleys, devils in small restaurants eat up students’ school tuition money.³⁸

As Gyeongseong residents evolved into nighttime “city people,” an increasing number of writers focused on the city’s young, urban delinquents. In an article called “Round Up of Delinquent Men and Women: Night Journal By Reporters in Disguise,” reporters dressed up as a high school student, tangerine peddler and a medicine man, sought out to look for nighttime delinquents out in Gyeongseong. “Delinquent youth” (*bullyang cheongnyeon*; 不良青年) was a term that was tossed around in the new modern city. In Japan, as the country underwent a rapid, turbulent transition to modernity, Japanese government officials and social reformers had taken aggressive steps to combat what they saw as growing delinquency among young people.³⁹ A similar development also took place in Korea. Writers portrayed “delinquent” teenagers running in and out of theaters, girls walking alone at night with boys following behind them, and young unmarried couples linking arms in public. The writers constructed a picture of a city full of night owls adorned in Western clothes, who chased after exciting and pleasurable adventures that their city provided them. They also complained about hearing on street corners “children

³⁷ Lee Seo-gu, *op cit.*, 88.

³⁸ Lee Seo-gu, *ibid.*, 88.

³⁹ David Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 1.

say what children shouldn't be saying" as well as "strange popular music that has negative impact on children's education."⁴⁰



Figure 29: "Modern Boy and Modern Girl."
(Cartoon from *Byeolgeongon*, no. 3 (February 1, 1927))

While the modern reader can look at such citations as a portrait of adolescent mischief, the writers associate the delinquents with moral failures:

Ah, Gyeongseong at night. It is a pit hole of sin and evil. Night after night, darkness only creates such a great amount of sin and evil (*joe-ak*). But that kind of sin and evil is nothing new; the more remarkable part is that students make up more than half of those sinful delinquents.⁴¹

This kind of negative description of Gyeongseong aligned with its view as a sin city that sought to create a façade of modernism and at the same time began encountering "modern" social problems. While these kind of "seductions" are not surprising to contemporary viewers, they were unprecedented in 1920s Gyeongseong. For hundreds of years, Joseon Dynasty had kept

⁴⁰ So Je-bu. "Chugijisang daecheong-gyeol" [Autumn cleaning], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 66 (September 1, 1933), 36.

⁴¹ Sam Dae, Buk Ung, and Pa Yeong, "Bullyang namnyeo ilmangtadin, byeonjanggija yagantambanggi" [Round up of delinquent men and women, night journal of reporters in disguise], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 15 (February 1, 1928), 122.

Korea closed-off to foreign influences, but under Japanese occupation, Western attitudes and customs flooded into the capital. The city's residents had to find a way to deal with and adapt to the changes around them.

Cultural Imperialism

With their commercial streets providing access to modern consumption culture, Gyeongseong residents found a new way of seeing themselves. Even though what they considered as “modernity” was not generated within Korea and were being entirely flown in from the outside, consumption encouraged Gyeongseong residents to define themselves as modern. Colonial Seoul was an exhibitionary space that upheld selective signs of universal modernity and created spectatorship-based consumer subjects.⁴² Koreans were thus the exclusive “viewers,” whose role did not overlap with those of the “producers.”

The impact of Honmachi and Jongno on Gyeongseong residents shows the ways in which Japan rendered modernity as a “utopian concept,” at the same time reaffirming the colonial hierarchy with Japan as the leader and agent of Korea's modernization.⁴³ The Japanese modern influence on the city and the corresponding modern changes in Gyeongseong became synonymous with Gyeongseong's identity. And this new modern identity was a conflicting one; it was attributed to the influence from the Japanese, who were at the same time causing the demise of unadulterated “Koreanness” of the city. The first line of the following excerpt identifies the oxymoron behind “Korean modernity” (my italics):

You have to stand at Jingogae to feel like you have fully seen Seoul—people from the

⁴² Se-Mi Oh, “Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915-1937” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 66.

⁴³ Oh, *ibid.*, 3.

*countryside feel pride in Korea after they see it. That's why you lose your mind when you come here, and feel forced to buy at least one thing. Ah! But because of them [Jingogae merchants] Joseon's livelihood is dying. Can we imagine our blood drying up? Ah, the fearful temptation of Jingogae (museoun Jingogaewi yuhok)! Does Joseon have to be sacrificed (huisaeng) for Jingogae's temptations?*⁴⁴

The Korean nation was no longer in existence, and the Japanese colonial government sought to wipe out the remaining Korean culture. Gyeongseong presented the look of Japanese modernity, and it was to be adopted in order for Koreans to be part of the new modernity. Therefore, culture, a source of identity, became associated with Japan the nation state.⁴⁵

Se-Mi Oh describes Gyeongseong's changing city center in the 1920s as a tactic of cultural imperialism. The city center represented Japanese colonialism with its architecture, political and commercial zones, and symbiotic Korean and Japanese commercial districts.⁴⁶ Because all the signs of modernity were being channeled and censored by the colonial power, modernity became fixed, physical, and tangible in a specific way. In 1920s Gyeongseong, there was an established image of what modern culture looked like and consisted of. An article describing different neighborhoods in Gyeongseong shed light on the image:

“Cultural neighborhood” (*munhwachon*) consists of people who engage in cultural activities (*munhwa saenghwal*). Cultural activities include living in a new, Western house; listening to records playing piano, solo vocal, or a jazz band music; having a radio antennae on your roof; and eating Western food at least once a day. But the times are so difficult for Joseon people that it is hard to even have one bowl of bean sprout porridge; for Gyeongseong residents poked and stretched at all sides, who can possibly afford cultural activities? Even among financially comfortable people it is hard to pick out people who can engage in cultural activities. That's why it is hard to find a “cultural neighborhood.” But we still might be able to find cultural activities in the modest homes of poor Westerners and Japanese wage-earners.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Jeong Su-il, “Jingogae, Seoulmat, Seouljeongjo,” *op cit.*, 47.

⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xiii.

⁴⁶ Oh, *op cit.*, 66

⁴⁷ “Daegyeongseong-ui teuksuchon” [Special neighborhoods of Gyeongseong], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 106.

The author recognized that “cultural activities” were not so limited to Western activities; one could engage in cultural activities by living Korean but “fun and comfortable life,” which were equivalent to the middle class’ “clean and neat life.” But he also mourned that these places were limited and that other important “cultural neighborhoods” were being taken over by Japanese residents.⁴⁸ While the new cultural activities were visible to Korean eyes, they were mostly barred to everyone except for the fortunate few.

Another article mentioned the fact that Joseon residents in Gyeongseong feel pressured to adopt the Western and Japanese ways of life: “[people] covet a high-class lifestyle...[you] have to eat white rice with *jogi*, powder your face, and hold a parasol.”⁴⁹ Similarly, the Westerners’ tall consulates and lofty homes incited feelings of jealousy in a writer:

The sound of piano flowing out of their homes tells us about their lifestyle. They have enough money to spend and the freedom to move around. To compete with them, we have to compete with their countries. They smile after they speak and their faces are full of energy. We can be jealous about the lives they lead, but I hope that we can be like them one day.⁵⁰

These articles again show that cultural imperialism in Korea was established in the gaze of the colonized, who looked, but could not obtain. As defined by Edward Said, imperialism exists in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices.⁵¹ Also, the colonized people’s “notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, and rejected” with modernization.⁵² The case of Korea conforms to Said’s

⁴⁸ “Daegyeongseong-ui teuksuchon,” *ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁹ “Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin Gyeongseong,” *op cit.*, 40.

⁵⁰ Daegyeongseong-ui teuksuchon,” *op cit.*, 109.

⁵¹ Said, *op cit.*, 9

⁵² Said, *ibid.*, 9.

description of imperialism: Japan defined what culture meant in Korea. Therefore, Japanese-induced material modernization in Korea was a vehicle for the colonial government to flex its cultural imperialism.

At the same time, the Korean feeling of admiration and jealousy toward Western and Japanese success fueled the intellectual minority's discussion about Korea's need to modernize and adopt Western ways. One writer, after returning from a four-year study abroad, urged his countrymen to "walk faster" (*jom bbalangbbalang geolleo*):

If there is something to do, we need to do it fast (*bbalangbbalang*), if there is a place to go, let us go first before taking a rest....if Westerners saw our manner of walking, what kind of curse, what kind of insult, what kind of slander would they say to us! Beginning with our walk (*geolleumgeori*), we must fix our temperament (*seongjil*).⁵³

The author disparaged the impoliteness of Koreans: "Even when someone asks you for directions, he often doesn't say thank you. People don't say thank you even when you go buy things at a store."⁵⁴ He also commented on the need for Koreans to wash their clothes, modernize their looks, and have cleaner and more manicured habits:

Since we wear white (*baeksek uibok*; 白色衣服), shouldn't we wash our clothes more than others? I can't stand seeing people walking around with white clothes darkened with dirt and mud. If people can't wash their clothes regularly, I would rather have them wear colored clothes....Tiny thatched house falling over, and people sitting inside shirtless smoking a cigarette, is a vision of a village in a lost country....There is also the habit of wives still wearing *jang-ot*. Old or young, all wives wear *jang-ot* if they are to walk outside. What kind of strange custom is this? Gyeongseong still cannot break away from its old-fashioned (*bogujeok*; 保舊的) ways.⁵⁵

These examples show that the inflow of Japanese and Western lifestyles into Gyeongseong in the 1920s provided an opportunity for Koreans to re-evaluate their own customs, challenge their

⁵³ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, "Hondon, saneyonmane goguke dollawaseo" [Confusion; returning home after four years], *Gaebyeok*, no. 39 (September 1, 1923), 51.

⁵⁴ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, *ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁵ Gim Seong and Gim Hyeong, *ibid.*, 52-53. *Jang-ot* is a kind of long hood formerly worn by married Korean women when going outside. It covered the entire body from head to toe, except for a small opening for the face.

conventions, and their relationship to the modern life.

At the same time, Japanese colonialism should not be validated for producing a certain outcome of modernity in Korea. Colonialism was by no means necessary for Korea to modernize and open its doors to Western influences. It is certainly not a prerequisite for an underdeveloped country to become a more “modern” or “advanced” nation; it actually set back capitalist development in various countries.⁵⁶ There is evidence that lasting effects of Japan’s colonization of Korea delayed Korean economic development until the 1960s.⁵⁷ When the Japanese imperial government declared Korea its colony in 1910, it made Korean economy a dependent of Japanese economy, and began exploiting Korean labor, natural resources, and industry. Colonial economic policies were designed to meet imperial needs at the expense of Korean welfare, while any economic competition between Korea and Japan was carefully controlled.⁵⁸ So even though the modernization of Korea in the early twentieth century was in some ways a result of Japanese colonialism, the economic development was only a partial and incomplete development.⁵⁹ However, Korean economic, material, and intellectual modern developments inevitably took place during the colonial era. Those changes were significant because the 1920s happened to be the first time Koreans experienced modernity in the magnitude they did. Thus, the Japanese influence which impacted Korean modernity in the 1920s should

⁵⁶ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), 205. Rodney refutes the argument that European colonial governments in Africa did much for the benefit of Africans and they developed Africa. He declares, “Colonialism had only one hand—it was a one-armed bandit.”

⁵⁷ Paul Kuznets, *Economic Growth and Structure in the Republic of Korea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 87. Kuznets argues that accelerated growth after 1960-62 was characterized by radical structural change that loosened institutional and historic constraints, most of which were a part of Korea’s colonial legacy.

⁵⁸ Yunsik Chang, “Colonization as the Planned Changed: The Korean Case,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 5.2 (1971), 186.

⁵⁹ Chang, *ibid.*, 186.

be noted for its role in shaping the history and people of early modern Korea.⁶⁰

Competition for the City

With frequent comparisons being made between Honmachi and Jongno, the sheer prosperity of Honmachi shocked its Korean viewers. The wealth of the area was envious to urban Gyeongseong residents, but it was even more shocking for Korean peasants from the countryside. Jingogae merchants made about 6-7 million *won* per month (equivalent to 6-700 billion *won* or 60-70 million dollars in today's prices); one author warned that "soon all the silk in Korea will be bought from Japan." He added, "so many ladies, wives, and *gisaeng* buy cloth in Jingogae that the store signs there say that it is the 'ultimate location' to buy Joseon's products." The author further reminded its readers, "But everything comes from Japan, nothing is made in Joseon."⁶¹ In contrast to the wealth in Honmachi, here was a tone of darkness in the representations of Jongno, which sat under the shadow of bright and luxurious Honmachi. An interesting description of the two streets was from the perspective of a blind man, who wrote about the contrast of Jongno and Honmachi from what he heard and felt in the air:

I have opportunities to walk through Jongno and Honmachi. Even a blind man like me can feel the difference between a sound economy and economic depression. Firstly, you can feel the change in Honmachi. I can hear the steps of Japanese shoes, footsteps of many different people, and the joyful sounds of selling and buying. The times seem good. The sound of gramophone and radio grandly float about and the laughter and chatter of men and women are lively and energetic. Therefore I can tell that Honmachi is full of customers.

Jongno is in *bukchon* and in the center of Joseon neighborhood, but it does not provide me

⁶⁰ History could have turned out in a million different ways: Korea could have just as easily been "modernized" by Czarist Russia if Russia had won the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). If by chance Korea was never colonized by a foreign power, perhaps it would have gone down a similar path of modernization as Thailand. We can only guess what could have happened, but Japan was certainly not indispensable for Korea's development.

⁶¹ "Geumhu-ui Gyeongseong-eun yeongrakho, baljeonho" [Gyeongseong's future: drop or develop], *Chosun ilbo*, November 11, 1927.

the same impression as Honmachi. Of course I can hear radio from all corners. But it sounds sad (*sseul sseul*). Why does it sound so sad? Even though there is sound of people yelling for goods, and no matter how nice the goods are, I can tell that both the sellers and buyers are in a different economic situation than the people in Namchon. I can feel the reality of the difference in the livelihood of Joseon people and those in Jingogae.⁶²

The bilateral orientation of Jongno and Honmachi in the northern and southern part of the city led to their competition with each other, but it was intensified by Japanese merchants increasingly moving up to Jongno, the “Korean territory.” Jongno merchants now not only had to compete against not only Honmachi merchants, but other Japanese shop owners moving up to the Korean parts of the city.⁶³ Bank of Joseon and other lending institutions pushed Japanese merchants to set up shop in Gyeongseong, and the Japanese residents’ rapid purchase of Gyeongseong real estate continued to push out Korean shop owners to the outskirts of the city.

The Korean media exhibited strong feelings of insecurity towards the success of Japanese merchants in Gyeongseong. One writer lamented, “Before, Japanese merchants stayed down in the south but now they are moving up to Jongno. Now they are following the Governor-General’s lead and taking over the northern part of the city.”⁶⁴ The large number of prosperous Japanese immigrants constantly reminded Korean people that Korea was an enforced dependent and wounded their pride. The strong competition offered by the Japanese in the fields of industry, commerce, and agriculture under government protection may not have damaged the economy as a whole, but it disturbed settled practices and was seen by Koreans as a hindrance to their getting a livelihood.⁶⁵ Another writer warned Korean business owners to

⁶² Gim Seong-sil, “Byeolyucheonji, bulgujau in seogwan, maeng-ini bon sesang” [Disabled person’s world: the world as a blind sees it], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 47 (January 1, 1932), 22.

⁶³ “Geumhu-ui Gyeongseong-eun yeongrakho, baljeonho,” *ibid.*

⁶⁴ So Chun, “Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong,” *op cit.*, 58.

⁶⁵ Chong-Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965), 279.

“protect their commercial territory because the future of Gyeongseong’s commerce is moving south.” The writer recognized the reality that “Japanese merchants have developed Jingogae overnight to become the commercial hub (*sangup jungsimji*) of Gyeongseong,” and that “even when buying such a thing as a towel, men and women, young and old will rather spend money and take the rail to the Japanese part of town.”⁶⁶ Korean consumers, entering a new, modern, and more international age, were craving what was fashionable and Western. They felt the overwhelming temptation to spend their money, which nationalistic writers wrote as “sucking the Korean blood” and “sacrificing Korean lives.”⁶⁷ Koreans’ conflicting desire and revulsion for Japanese goods can be seen as a type of colonial coercion, which is explained as “a latent kind of force” that “operates under the cover of voluntarism” and “often prevents the subject from forming resistance.”⁶⁸ As much as Korean writers tried to fend off the attractiveness of Japanese material modernity, their writings reveal that the public was enthralled by it.

The writers’ nationalistic sentiment against Japanese commercial power was part of the “buy Korean” campaign initiated by the Society for the Promotion of Native Production (Joseon mulsan changnyeonhoe), which was formed in 1923. The Korean production movement sought to stimulate the consumption of Korean goods, as a demonstration of national unity and as a method of stimulating the development of native industry.⁶⁹ Although the movement was implicitly a boycott of Japanese and imported goods, nationalist intellectuals hoped to avoid

⁶⁶ “Geumhu-ui Gyeongseong-eun yeongrakho, baljeonho,” *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Jeong Su-il, *op cit.*, 47.

⁶⁸ Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form*. (New York: Routledge 1999), 10

⁶⁹ Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1988), 78.

repression by emphasizing the positive aspects of “production.”⁷⁰ In a similar effort to combat the “encroachment” of Japanese merchants onto Jongno, newspaper and magazine articles enthusiastically pushed store owners to become more competitive about their businesses. One such article in *Byeolgeongon* walked through Jongno, store by store, and pointed out the successes and failures in the aesthetics of their signage. The writers encouraged competition and business as a form of national duty, for “commerce has a large role in building a strong nation.”⁷¹ They commented on the look and size of font, pictures, embellishments, cleanliness, and uniqueness of the different signage.

The article in essence was a lesson on marketing techniques; it urged shop owners to update their signs in order to bring in more customers and criticized that the current state was not satisfactory. But the article did not mention at all about the reason why Koreans were drawn to the glitz of Honmachi, not only for the eye-catching signs, but for the Western and Japanese products that lay inside the stores. Nevertheless, these articles expressed the intense feeling of commercial competition that Koreans felt in their home territory. But as Hiroshi Hashiya described, in the case of Seoul, when settlers lived within the boundaries of the existing city, the existing center developed in parallel with the Japanese district.⁷² This meant that Honmachi and Jongno had a symbiotic relationship with each other. Honmachi needed Korean shoppers in order to thrive, and Jongno needed the competitive push from Honmachi in order to modernize and meet the public’s expectations.

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Korea, 1920-1925*, *ibid.*, 78.

⁷¹ Gim Bok-jin and An Seok-ju, “Gyeongseong gaksangjeom ganpanpumpyeonghoe” [An evaluation of the quality of signs on Gyeongseong’s stores], *Byeolgeongon*, no. 3 (January 1, 1927), 116.

⁷² *Teikoku nihon to shokuminchi toshi* (Imperial Japan and colonial cities) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2004), in Oh, *op cit.*, 67.

In another article titled “Our Commerce Movement,” the writer pointed out Koreans’ lack of business mind. He asked, “Why is a neck tie that can be bought for 60 *jeon* when directly imported being sold for 1.20 *won* in Jingogae, but 1.90 *won* in Jongno?” His interview with a shop owner revealed that not only did Korean merchants lack a suitable transportation system to directly import goods for sale, but they lacked a good “business sense” (*sangsa gyeongyeongsang*). He criticized that “if Koreans begin a business relationship, they will continue it for tens or hundreds of years without looking for ways to improve their margins.”⁷³ The writer lamented that “Joseon people have not yet this day understood the problems of economics” and convinced the readers that a “winning battle in economics may determine the life or death of our ethnic independence.” Mentioning the success of the Japanese, the writer urged that Koreans should not hate the amount of power that the Japanese hold, but aim to be in their position of power:

We hate foreigners because of their foreignness and their way of life...but that hate thwarted us from development. We hate foreigners for no reason and have developed a habit of continuously bowing down (*sungbae*) to them....These days we become excited and hopeful when we hear the words of freedom and equality. Of course, freedom and equality are previous ideals. But we need to think more largely about our problem in attaining economic freedom and opportunities.⁷⁴

Although not many Koreans benefitted from the rise of new industries and enterprises, people were able to observe the ways in which the Japanese approached certain “modern” tasks, as well as their material way of life. It may have been possible that the better standard of living

⁷³ Gim Gi-jeon, “Uriui sanup undong-eun gaesidoe-eotdoda” [Our commercial movement has begun], *Gaebyeok*, no. 15 (September 1, 1921), 24-25.

⁷⁴ Gim Gi-jeon, *ibid.*, 24-25.

enjoyed by the Japanese made the Koreans envious and inspired them to desire independence so as to seek the same advantages.⁷⁵

Therefore, the duality between Japanese commercial district Honmachi and Korean commercial district Jongno was an ambiguous one. While the boundary between Japanese and Korean districts was clearly marked, Honmachi did not maintain its status by keeping Koreans out, but rather by drawing them into it. Japanese shops entered Jongno neighborhood, and they pressed Jongno to modernize through competition with Honmachi. The production of opposition, therefore, depended on accentuating the Japanese newness, and on integrating Honmachi through allure and envy that sustained the status of the Japanese district as the object of desire.⁷⁶ Honmachi was the physical manifestation of capitalist modernity transplanted in colonial Korea, pushed to the consumers by the Japanese colonial government. It was viewed with distrust for its power over Koreans recently submerged head-first into the glamour of modernism, but at the same time also seen by certain intellectuals as a source to emulate and learn from. While the intellectuals did not need or desire Japan to be their model, they utilized the Japanese presence in Korea to learn from the enemy.

Cries Against Japanese Encroachment onto the Northern Half of the City

By the early 1920s, Koreans were already pushed to the northern half of the city (*bukchon*), while the Japanese had created their own bubble community in their southern half of the city (*namchon*), with all the modern comforts of Tokyo. The predominantly Korean-inhabited *bukchon* was connected to the Japanese-populated *namchon* along the main axis of Taepyeongno.

⁷⁵ Chong-Sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*, *op cit.*, 279.

⁷⁶ Oh, *op cit.*, 77.

But since the building of the Governor-General building in front of Gyeongbokgung in 1926 and the continual movement of Japanese merchants to Jongno, the Japanese settlement in Gyeongseong steadily moved up north. Throughout Gyeongseong's changing orientation, the difference between colonizer and colonized was articulated by maintaining a boundary between the new center occupied by Japanese residents and the existing center of the city without completely isolating one from other. One writer saw this move as "establishing a political center point (*jungsimji*)" since "the Governor-General's power, as well as the Japanese power, would flow evenly throughout Gyeongseong."⁷⁷ Other Korean writers reacted extremely strongly to this phenomenon:

After the new Governor-General building opened, the voice of the Japanese in *bukchon* started growing louder and louder. This is the scariest change among changes. *Namchon* is already Japanese territory (*ilchon*), but now the *bukchon* is becoming one as well. Ah, this terrifying change! Agonizing change! What is there for us to do?⁷⁸

The Korean media saw the unavoidable shift as a "threatening" move of "Japanese taking over the city."⁷⁹ This "problem regarding the power of foreigners" (*oeinui seryeok*) was seen as "one of the largest problems that Joseon people face today."⁸⁰ Japanese purchase of northern real estate drove up the price of land, which in turn forced out the impoverished Korean residents of the city. One writer lamented, "[Japanese] people coming are concerned for his own livelihood, but [Korean] people being excluded don't have many days left to live—this is only sadness. Koreans get kicked out of city center the city is no longer theirs. We have no future, we can

⁷⁷ So Chun, "Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong," *op cit.*, 58.

⁷⁸ Bak Dol-i, "Gyeongseongeun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaetna?" [How much did Gyeongseong change in one year?], *Gaebyeok*, no. 64 (December 1, 1925), 75.

⁷⁹ "Gyeongbokgung-eul jungsimeuro ilbonin-ui bukjeom" [Gyeongbokgung as the center: the northern point of the Japanese], *Donga ilbo*, October 26, 1923.

⁸⁰ "Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin Gyeongseong," *op cit.*, 38.

only cry in misery.”⁸¹ By 1929, the price of land near a major Jongno intersection rose to near 8-9 *won* per *pyeong* (equivalent to about 8-900,000 *won* or 80-90 dollars today’s prices), the priciest being near the Bank of Joseon, which was in close proximity to Jingogae.⁸² New restaurants and shops turned up in the area every day, and the rising gentrification of the area was felt acutely by the Korean residents. The majority of Koreans were not able to experience the modernizing changes happening around their city. The new developments mostly “flexed the power of Japan that permeated through Gyeongseong.”⁸³

The crowding out of *bukchon* had additional impact on Gyeongseong’s demographic: due to the expensive living condition, many residents opted to move out of the city or immigrate to China, Russia, or Japan.⁸⁴ This phenomenon was not only limited to Gyeongseong; it happened in all the large cities: for example, in Sinuiju, Koreans only owned 1/23 of the city’s land in 1923.⁸⁵ Families escaped the capital to opt for a more sustainable life. Gyeongseong residents dispersed overseas, to the south of Namsan, to the north of Buksan, outside Gwanhwamun, East Gate, West Gate, and beyond.⁸⁶ The emotional outcry about the Japanese takeover of Gyeongseong poured through the papers. Nationalists grieved about how Koreans

⁸¹ “Gyeongbokgung-eul jungsimeuro ilboninui bukjeom,” *op cit.*

⁸² “Jongno-negeoriwa bonjeong maepyeong 800-900 woneu goga” [Jongno and Honmachi: increase to 800-900 *won* per *pyeong*], *Chosun ilbo*, August 7, 1929.

⁸³ So Chun, “Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong,” *op cit.*, 58.

⁸⁴ “Gyeongseongeu imin: jeon-nyeonboda jeung-ga” [The increase in the number of immigration from Gyeongseong], *Chosun ilbo*, May 25, 1925.

⁸⁵ “Sinuijusigawa joseininui soyu, jeonmyeonjeok palsipmanpyeong-e gyeo-u isipsambunui il” [Sinuiju and Joseon people’s property: only 1/23 out of 800,000 *pyeong*] *Donga ilbo*, March 7, 1923.

⁸⁶ So Chun, “Nero bogo jigeumeuro bon Seoul jungsimseryeokui ryudong,” *op cit.*, 57.

were no longer the “owners of Gyeongseong”⁸⁷ and how “everyone was forced to change in order to survive”⁸⁸:

Not only Joseon people’s topknot (*sangtu*), but everything—completely everything—was lost. We became scarecrows, putting on another person’s hat and following that person’s reason and logic. In the middle of it all, a wrench like myself miss and cry for my topknot, for dark and rotten Joseon and Gyeongseong twenty years ago. But that is a past that will never return. Crying is the only freedom that I have left.⁸⁹

In other similar articles, there was the feeling of “having to constantly think about oneself.”

This kind of emotion can be seen as ubiquitous in a city life, but there was also the additional feeling of distrust against the colonial master hovering over every corner of colonial landscape.

In similar light, a strong tone of xenophobia revealed itself—one writer noted that the “invasion” of foreigners, not only Japanese but also Chinese and Westerners, in Gyeongseong was one of the city’s worst problems.⁹⁰ He argued that there were too many “middlemen” (*junganin*) in the city who perpetuated the discrimination that Koreans faced in the bottom rungs of the society.⁹¹

Korean newspapers and magazines in the 1920s focused many of their pages pointing out the economic and political inequality that existed in Gyeongseong and beyond. Writers were enraged about the land redistribution system that took away land from wealthy Korean landlords but placed them in the hands of a few Japanese:

After losing their rich rice patties and having no food to eat and no place to sleep, Joseon people cross mountains and trek thousands of miles to find kernels of beans to eat. And because they cannot sustain an expensive life in the city, they are being pushed outside of the

⁸⁷ Syang Tu-saeng, “Gyeongseongui isipnyeongan byeoncheon” [Gyeongseong’s changes in twenty years], *Gaebyeok*, no. 48 (June 1, 1924), 66.

⁸⁸ Syang Tu-saeng, “Gyeongseongui isipnyeongan byeoncheon,” *ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁹ Syang Tu-saeng, “Gyeongseongui isipnyeongan byeoncheon,” *ibid.*, 70. *Sangtu* is topknot.

⁹⁰ “Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin Gyeongseong,” *op cit.*, 38.

⁹¹ “Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin Gyeongseong,” *ibid.*, 38.

East Gate and West Gate, beyond all the gates in hope to escape poverty....These people have come to Gyeongseong after hearing that it is a nice place to live. They come alone or with their families, but with nothing and no one to trust. But Gyeongseong does not give these people jobs or food to eat. They have nowhere to go and therefore lead difficult lives.⁹²

People also mourned about the lack of facilities in the north compared to the south. One writer described the northern part of the city, where the Koreans lived, as unbearable—there was not even a fire station, while quite a few existed in the Japanese southern half of the city.⁹³ He complained that all the parks, including cemeteries, were in the south, and that all the facilities for Koreans were greatly limited. A byproduct of such obvious discrimination was the fact that there were far more Japanese in schools than Koreans, despite the huge discrepancy in the numbers of the populations. Also, *bukchon* neighborhoods physically looked drastically different than other parts of the city. Left untouched by the colonial city planners, the neighborhoods in colonial Seoul were composed of zigzag alleyways.

In conclusion, the “modernism” seen in the urban streets of colonial Seoul was a physical idealization that affected the Korean residents’ lives in different ways. Full of unevenness and contradiction, colonial modernity magnified the brokenness of the Korean self, but it was only through this experience that individuals reached a possibility for reshaping their world.⁹⁴ The fierce competition between Korean and Japanese merchants shaped the relationship between Japanese-occupied Honmachi and Korean-occupied Jongno, the streets that showcased Gyeongseong’s modernity. These streets were full of “seductions of modernism,” which drew in their Korean viewers but at the same time pushed them away. Koreans also cried out against the Japanese “encroachment” to the northern half of the city, one of the unavoidable results from

⁹² “Daegyeongseong-ui teuksuchon,” *op cit.*, 107.

⁹³ “Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin Gyeongseong,” *op cit.*, 45.

⁹⁴ Oh, *op cit.*, 103.

Korean attraction to the modernity that Japan offered them. And as the writings from the time period show, a large number of impoverished Koreans felt no connection to Japanese modernity. The situation of the marginalized was presented by Korean reporters, the intellectual minority, as symbolic representation of their frustrations. An exemplifying excerpt focused on poverty in Gyeongseong and the difficult lives of the commoners:

Our livelihood is continuously threatened. More than 188,000 in Seoul suffer a similar fate as the *haetae*'s situation but threats still shower down at us. Right now, around thirty percent of merchants on Jongno are on the verge of bankruptcy...we don't know if money is life or life is money. Money completely dried off from our lives. *Haetae* cornered by hungry ghosts is standing in the street crying!⁹⁵

Therefore, the Korean intellectuals' reaction to the changes going on in Gyeongseong's streets was varied and ambiguous at best. The streets were portrayed as the center of the fun and entertainment, but they were also the location where the inequality in colonial modernity revealed itself. Some depictions of the city from the time period portray a city enjoying the wonders of modern inventions, flow of Western goods, and a budding urban lifestyle. Yet at the same time, people powerfully and emotionally opposed the increasing stronghold of Japanese residents, who ironically were the agents bringing in the modernity that many Koreans embraced. Thus, the everyday in colonial Seoul was where one battled between nationalistic contention against Japan's colonial control and the benefits of colonial modernity.⁹⁶ The mixture of reactions from what people saw on the streets ranged from positive to extremely dark, but they all to a certain level exposed the visible and invisible traps of colonial modernity.

⁹⁵ Gim Gi-jin, "Maeumui pyeheo, gyeoul-ui seoseo" [In winter: destruction of my soul], *Gaebyeok*, no. 42 (December 1, 1923), 124.

⁹⁶ Oh, *op cit.*, 3.

Conclusion

Today, almost a century after Japan's monumental constructions around Seoul, many of the buildings studied in this paper are seen under a different light. Throughout the twentieth century, they had long been viewed as "demons of a grim past," as structures erected by foreign powers who forcibly opened up Korea to the rest of the world. But now, Korea has more or less come to terms with its colonial architectural history. The great majority of the Shinto Shrines in Korea have been demolished, and for a number of cases, their sites have been replaced with Korean Protestant Churches. After a long debate that spanned across a number of years about the symbolic significance of the Governor-General Building hovering over Gyeongbokgung (Fig. 30), the colonial building was finally torn down in 1995. Various projects for the rehabilitation and renovation of Gyeongbokgung are now well underway to fill the space that the Governor-General Building had previously occupied and fix the damages from years of colonialism, war, and neglect. Also, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is currently working on major preservation projects for one of its "important modern structures," the original Seoul Station.¹ After Korea's 2007 appointment as the World Design Capital 2010, other landmarks discussed in this study, such as Pagoda Park, Namsan Park, Myeongdong (Honmachi) and Jongno have been celebrated for their historic roles in the city. But from my numerous conversations with different people, I have learned that most Seoul residents are not aware that these historic locations (particularly Myeongdong and the Seoul Station) have ties to the Japanese Occupation

¹ Kim Hyung-eun, "Breathing new life into landmarks," *JoongAng Daily*, December 1, 2009. <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2913264>.

and were constructed by the Japanese colonial government.



Figure 30: A view from Gyeongbokgung of the former Governor-General Building prior to its demolition, 1995.

However, in the context of 1920s Seoul, Japan's colonial structures had a strong, yet mixed impact on the people using, visiting, or seeing them. As this paper argued, intellectuals from the time period responded to their physical surrounding through new opportunities for written expression, which granted them a considerable amount of freedom to talk about their feelings toward their changing capital. Most of their opinions were directed at the state of their country under the humiliating Japanese rule. But they were also critical of their fellow countrymen; this was tied with the fact that Korean cultural nationalists of the 1920s did not generally respect or appreciate their traditions and culture. Instead, they condemned their own historical background, especially the Confucian heritage, as backward and sought to reconstruct Korean nationality largely based on modern liberal Western thought.² Nevertheless, these writers, who were often Western or Japanese-educated leaders of Korea's nationalist movements, were able to witness both sides of the ethnic boundaries in the city, and often spoke in a manner

² Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 46.

that sought to identify with their Korean brethren but was also directed from the top-down. Thus, from their writings that show strong responses to Seoul's urban changes, we are able to witness the kind of tone and vernacular that characterized Korea's "official" response to 1920s colonial modernity. Of course, the study falls short by not including the opinions of the "average" Korean person from the time period in order to see what the majority of the city's residents truly saw and felt. But since most of the population was illiterate in the 1920s, we can only have our best guess through the elite writers' various vignettes of the city, which often depicted the lives of typical urban dwellers.

In all, this research saw that Gyeongseong's changing urban landscape had a significant role in affecting the way the city's Korean residents viewed modernity. Because the structures and representations of power can be embedded in the framework of everyday life, Gyeongseong's physical and visual signs of colonial change indicated the ways that Japan controlled the city. Gyeongseong's landscape surprised, shocked, impressed, and frightened Korean residents, and the varied reactions were integrated into the ongoing nationalist movements. Although Japan's initiative for the more lax Cultural Rule was to impress upon Koreans the look of Japan's more "benevolent" intentions and assimilate them into the Empire, it is evident that the superimposing rule of the colonial government faced unavoidable limitations. The Japanese government had granted Koreans "subjectship," not "citizenship."³ Even though naked power could ensure military, political, administrative, and economic domination, in social and cultural spheres, the Japanese government was limited and had an indirect impact at best.⁴

³ Shigeki Sato, "The Politics of Nationhood in Germany and Japan" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998) in Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, *ibid.*, 45.

⁴ Han-kyo Kim, "The Japanese Colonial Administration in Korea: An Overview," in *Korea Under Japanese Colonial Rule: Studies of the Policy and Techniques of Japanese Colonialism*, edited by Andrew C. Nam (Kalmazoo,

Therefore, the generalized description of the Cultural Rule as the period that had the most “success” in converting Koreans to accept colonial rule is not complete.

Also, this paper intended to illuminate the idea that Korea’s colonialism cannot be seen as a strict binary between the colonizers and the repressed, powerless colonized. Although the power disparity between the two parties are obvious, other factors, such as the combination of modernity, consumerism, and nationalism as this paper highlighted, added complexity to the relationship. Of the colonial period as a whole, there are two broad views: that the introduction by Japan of modern production, transport, finance and education, intentionally or not, provided Korea with a modern capitalist system; and alternatively, that the exploitation of Korean resources for Japanese profit, and the control of capital and land by Japanese entrepreneurs, left Korea a semi-feudal dependency.⁵ This general view forces the topic of colonization to be an extremely sensitive and difficult one for both the Koreans and the Japanese. However, such broad views are becoming less and less helpful as East Asian scholars of the 21st century take a deeper and more nuanced look at the colonization era. My study is by no means definitive, but I want to emphasize that a more layered look at Korea’s colonial experience is needed to better understand what Korean people saw, felt, and learned throughout the time period.

Korea’s colonialism was not completely unusual within a worldwide perspective of the time period, but its experience was certainly unique of its kind. Korea was colonized by a nation only a short swim away, but beyond the geographical proximity, its colonizer was a group of people with whom Korea had closely interacted with in the past. Although Korea had shared with Japan a number of cultural treasures such as agricultural techniques, Zen Buddhism, and the

MI: Center For Korean Studies Western Michigan University, 1973), 51.

⁵ Stewart Lone and Gavan McCormick, *Korea since 1850* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 51.

movable type, Korea-Japan relations had historically been shaky. Since Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea (1592-1598), the island nation was viewed at times as strange, foreign, and worrisome. Thus, when Japan colonized Korea, another Asian nation with a common source of historical influence and many other similarities, Koreans felt deeply humiliated on a number of levels. Classic nineteenth-century imperial culture was plentiful with words and concepts like "inferior" or "subject races," "subordinate peoples," "dependency," "expansion," and "authority," but unlike cases with Western and non-Western nations, "race" was not at issue.⁶ Instead, Japan's colonization of Korea heightened ethnic tension and cultural differences. This is why the Japan-Korea ethnic binary is an appealing way of explaining the colonization; but as this paper has shown, this is a much too simplistic approach.

Lastly, Korea's flirtation with modernity in the 1920s was only the beginning. Seoul and Korea at large, had not previously witnessed modernity to the level it was submerged into during the 1920s. An outcome of years of devastating colonialism was that Japan, with all its accessibility to modernity, opened Korea's doors to the Western world outside of it, and Koreans would only become even more exposed to it in the future. The 1930s saw the peak of Korea's colonial modernization, before Japan became fully engaged in the Pacific War. Western modernity and consumerism became much more widespread, at least in the large cities, and a new generation of Modern Girls and Modern Boys colored the streets in even brighter hues. For South Korea, modernization accelerated to a full throttle in the second half of the twentieth century, and Seoul is still undergoing rapid changes today. However, it is the 1920s that will remain as the period that birthed various aspects of Korea's modern culture—the elements of history that continue to shape the look of contemporary Korea today.

⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 9.

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- “Gyeongseongyeok seungganggaek 60 yeomanmyeongssik” [Number of Gyeongseong Station passengers surpass 600,000]. *Chosun Ilbo*, October 19, 1924.
- “Gyeongseongyeokui tantohaneun yeogaek, harue 3,500 myeong-ida” [The number of passengers entering and leaving Gyeongseong Station is 3,500 per day]. *Donga Ilbo*, May 19, 1923.
- “I-il dong-ane seoul gugyeong golgoro haneun beop” [Complete tour of Seoul in two days, the route to take your friend from the countryside]. *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 58-64.
- “Jakil tapgol gongwone yeollin simin napryang yeonjuhoe” [Summer Breeze Festival Music Festival began at Pagoda Park yesterday], *Chosun Ilbo*, August 15, 1926
- “Janmul janmul gongwonjeongjo, hayau gak gongwon” [Our feelings towards different parks]. *Gaebyeok*, no. 26 (August 1, 1922), 96-106.
- “Jeolmeun cheongchuni moyeodeuneun ansikgwa jeongsukui gongwon. Bora Namsanmit hanpyeon gongwoneseoneun utseumsori gereona tapgolgongwoneseoneun ojik eumwulhan gibun” [Calm and quiet park where young people gather. One can hear laughter coming from Namsan Park, but there is only melancholy air at Tapgol Park]. *Chosun Ilbo*, August 25, 1925.
- “Jeonbukjeongu daepyosanggyeong joseonsingunggyeonggi jeonggudaehoe-e chamgacha” [Tennis players from northern provinces arrive to Gyeongseong for the Joseon Singung Tennis Competition]. *Donga Ilbo*, October 9, 1926.
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- “Jongno-negeoriwa bonjeong maepyeong 800-900 woneu goga” [Jongno and Honmachi: increase to 800-900 won per pyeong]. *Chosun Ilbo*, August 7, 1929.
- “Joseon Singung-ui cheonjobonggojae (踐祚奉告祭)” [National worship in Joseon Singung]. *Donga Ilbo*, December 26, 1926.
- “Joseonin hakseng-ui sinsachambaemunjae” [Shinto worship issue among Joseon students]. *Chosun Ilbo*, September 26, 1925.
- “Jungganin oeinui seryeokeuro gwanhan joseonin gyeongseong” [Joseon people’s Gyeongseong affected by foreign middlemen’s power]. *Gaebyeok*, no. 48 (June 1, 1924), 38-55.
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- “Namsangongwon mujeonbangsong, jakilbutro sijak” [Namsan Park’s radio program begins yesterday]. *Donga Ilbo*, April 23, 1925.
- “Namsangongwoneul jungsim, jeonchagili boilteoida” [Rails will appear in the center of Namsan]. *Donga Ilbo*, July 15, 1923.
- “Namsanyeokgwa seungaekui binan. Seungaekul murihagae huyok” [The conflict between Namsan Station and its customers. The extreme abuse of the customers]. *Chosun Ilbo*, September 4, 1925.
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- “Sangsang batgat sesang: Gyeongseongui daseot magul” [A world beyond our imagination: five devil’s caves in Gyeongseong]. *Byeolgeongon*, no. 23 (September 27, 1929), 154-155.
- “Seongyeok-e joseoneumsik, joseonin seunggaekui pyeonlileul woehaya” [Joseon food at city station, for the comfort of Joseon customers]. *Donga Ilbo*, March 7, 1923.
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Figure 31: Grandma and my first aunt, December 2008.