Seoul International City: Korea's Modernization and its Entanglement with Global Empire

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Architectural History

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May 2025

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Abstract

Maximilian Kim, Master of Architectural History, May 2025.
Seoul International City: Korea's Modernization and its Entanglement with Global Empire.
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The opening of Asia to the world is a conversation that often heavily revolves around China and Japan, as both countries were military coerced by Western powers into facilitating trade. Increased exchanges with the West saw the dissemination and propagation of new architectural and infrastructural forms, as well as technologies and ideas. Nowhere in Asia were these influences more relevant than Korea, known as Joseon, that had experienced a sudden and violent "opening" at the hands of Japan. Joseon is often overlooked in discussions of Asia's colonization, particularly in regard to Western influence. Its annexation by the Japanese Empire obfuscates the crucial role that Western powers played in influencing the political climate in Asia, rendering Joseon an inevitable colony. This thesis explores the ways in which Korea's entanglement with colonial powers manifests in the infrastructure and architecture of Seoul, with both Korean and foreign agents working to internationalize the city for their own designs. These relationships, emerging well in advance of Korea's annexation, continued to shape Seoul through the twentieth century, with their remains serving as important pedagogical tools for the South Korean state.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis committee, Professor Sheila Crane, Professor Joseph Seeley, and Professor Andrew Johnston, for their time, patience, and valuable feedback. This project presented a huge challenge for me, helping me grow as both a scholar and a person. I sincerely appreciate your guidance in helping navigate the many twists and turns that took place. I would also like to thank my family for their continuous support, and my friends, both inside and outside UVA, who have been stuck with me over the last two years.

Introduction

In December of 2023, I was walking down Jong-ro, one of the oldest streets in Seoul. It was my family's first time back in Seoul in over a decade, and already I had noticed several changes that had taken place in the interim. Many of the businesses that I remember patronizing years before had vanished entirely, with some blocks being entirely replaced with flashy new growth. In that same amount of time, the global presence of South Korea had changed dramatically, with South Korean media and technology enjoying increasingly widespread consumption in both U.S. and global markets. For Seoul, this resulted in increased investments, and in turn rising property values and living costs. The city was being reimagined to suit the needs of its present and future stakeholders.

In spite of the sleek and hypermodern image of Seoul portrayed in South Korean media, much of the city consists of fairly typical pragmatic urban growth. The facades on either side of most major thoroughfares in Seoul are largely dominated by concrete and steel boxes that were erected in the second half of the twentieth century. These earlier constructions facilitate most of the economic and domestic activity in the city, housing offices, restaurants, hotels, and residences. The continued use of these spaces, often deemed unsightly on account of their visible age and wear, runs counter to the image of the city promoted as a center of innovation.

Crucial to the idea of a prominent South Korean state is the prevalence of a national architecture. This is most clearly evident in the reconstructed palaces, gates, and fortifications restored after the Japanese occupation by the South Korean state. In addition to these more obvious symbols of Korean statehood, plenty of vernacular examples of Korean architecture survive. Many of them can be dated to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, at least in terms of

material. Together, they demonstrate a distinct Korean architectural tradition that is equally important to the imagination of Seoul as its towering new skyscrapers.

Perhaps no single building is more important to the image of both Seoul and Korea at large than the Jongmyo shrine. Jongmyo shrine is one of the handful of historic buildings in Seoul that survive almost entirely since its initial reconstruction in 1601. It can be dated to 1394, when king Taejo, the founder of the Joseon Dynasty, moved the Korean capital to Seoul, then known as Hanseong. This move came about from a desire to embody Korean Confucianism in the layout of the capital city itself. Although many of the existing historic capital cities on the Korean peninsula could satisfy this need to some extent, it was determined that a new, planned city could not only embody Korean Confucianism, but do so for centuries to come.

Jongmyo was established as a Confucian shrine dedicated to ancestor worship. Although the Joseon Dynasty ended after the Japanese invasion in 1910, Jongmyo continues to operate as it originally intended, coming to embody the spirit of an independent Korea on top of its original purpose as an explicitly Confucian shrine. This shift can be observed in the placement of a large statue to Yi Sang-Jae in the park constructed outside Odaemun Gate, the historic entrance to the shrine complex proper. Yi Sang-Jae was a prominent figure in efforts to usurp Japanese colonial rule, being heavily involved in clandestine publication and organization of independence groups. Yi Sang-Jae is also commemorated outside Korea's Independence Hall, located in Chungcheongnam-do, which is a museum dedicated to Korean independence efforts during the 20th century Japanese occupation. Monumentally entangling Yi Sang-Jae with Jongmyo merges the traditional use of the shrine with the needs and desires of the modern Korean state. Having been constructed at the inception of the Joseon Dynasty, Jongmyo's function as a site of royal

authority is fairly self-evident. The shrine sits just to the south of the current palatial complex of Changdeokgung and Changgyeongung, and immediately to the north of Jong-ro.

Jong-ro runs east-west across the city, effectively cutting it into two pieces. For most of Seoul's history, Jong-ro served as the city center, being the broadest avenue that ran across the city's horizontal axis. While walking the street with my family, it was difficult to get a true sense of the importance that the road once represented, with the commercial heart of the city having both migrated southward and greatly expanded. Most of the buildings that now occupy either side of the street are typical 20th century growth, some displaying their wear through cracked paint, stained concrete, and tired signs. From this streetscape alone it was impossible to derive a sense of what used to occupy that same space. As we were walking, I found myself wondering what the spaces we passed looked like at the turn of the twentieth century, just prior to the Japanese occupation.

As I was turning this question over in my head, we came to a stop to let some traffic pass. We were about a couple blocks away from the shrine, and we had begun to talk about what our plans would be for lunch. As US-based mapping sites like Google Maps are incredibly fickle in South Korea, on account of the South Korean government's privacy laws regarding GPS data, we began to look around as a group for any attractive restaurants. As we were doing this, I noticed that we had just passed a couple of jewelry shops, sat right next to each other in the same building. I did not think too much of it, until we resumed walking and passed by several more on the next block, all essentially dealing in the same materials. Over a dozen such shops inhabited the same couple of city blocks, all facing northward towards the palatial district and the Jongmyo shrine.

It was this particular moment that caused me to stop and think further. Perhaps it was the juxtaposition between the historic Jongmyo shrine and the concrete boxes across the street that made the clustering of jewelry stores more jarring. The big question that emerged was as follows: were there always jewelry stores operating at this spot? One look at the present buildings on the site could tell any observer that other types of structures had once stood there for several centuries prior. However, the current buildings followed a modern, international design, evidencing a clear Western or Western-influenced presence. Clearly a shift in urban design had taken place, with Korean architectural forms being discarded in favor of modern ones, but the mechanisms by which this had taken place eluded me.

The shift of Korean architectural practice in Seoul away from traditional forms became a central theme for this thesis, initially motivated by this experience near the Jongmyo shrine. This history is entwined with broader histories of Korea and colonialism, with Seoul's palatial district occupying a central role as well. This is on account of the various Korean kings and emperors that lived there, heading the state apparatus that dictated many of the changes that affected the city of Seoul over its history.

The history of Seoul's palatial district, especially the five major palaces that are reconstructed in situ today, is a subject that has seen a fair degree of exploration in English historiography, mostly in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. However, most of these works are limited in scope to the palaces themselves, and do not expand much in the areas surrounding them. Many publications are limited to architectural synopses of the various buildings, especially those from the Korean War onwards. The reason for this was simple, in that the typical buildings of Seoul, outside of their traditional Hanguk form, were not compelling enough to warrant significant address in the many works that focus on the palatial complexes.

This leads to another critical node of this thesis, that being the imagination of Seoul and Korea in turn. Through engagement with historiography of the late Joseon Period, key patterns regarding international approaches to Korea as a problem begin to emerge, especially as Asia becomes increasingly menaced by colonial powers. Not only is Korea relegated to the bottom of the East Asian hierarchy, but it is also effectively doomed to be colonized, with the Japanese being first in line to take control. Part of the Korean response is to internationalize, with ground zero for these efforts being Seoul. This internationalization was also brought about by foreigners, whose presence was encouraged by the Joseon administration, particularly dignitaries and missionaries, who integrated Korean architecture with Western tastes and sensibilities. In this way, both the path to the colonization of Korea, and Korean efforts to prevent its happening, are directly tied to the Western imagination of Asia, and to the mechanics of colonialism in general.

The scholarship on the history of Seoul is expansive, with recent contributions working to address many interpretive gaps. A large portion of work is dedicated to Seoul's colonial history, as the city was transformed into a colonial administration center for the Japanese government. As many key cultural sites now incorporate both colonial and traditional Korean narratives at the same place, their interpretation remains a debated topic among Korean historians. Even the reconstructed palace complexes, such as Gyeongbokgung, Changdeokgung, and Deoksugung, are now equally artifacts of the modern Korean state as historic landmarks, adding a further dimension to historic intrigue that has motivated recent scholarship.

Seoul is a difficult place to interpret because so much changed so quickly. Over the course of just over a century, from late nineteenth century to the twenty-first, Seoul underwent a series of material and political transformations that combined are somewhat unprecedented in the modern world. The city transformed from one dominated by largely traditional Korean

architecture to one of the most modern cities on the planet, imagined by many as synonymous with the very concept of the future. Many of the sites of what once were monumental landmarks are long-since built over, and the ones that do survive are choked out by massive skyscrapers, twentieth century urban growth, and vehicular traffic. Only in a handful of places like the Buk-Chon Hanok village is Seoul's visual past really possible to grasp, but even this place is beginning to see the encroachment of modern development.

The field of historic preservation in Korea is a nuanced subject. While traditional forms like the Hanok have become a point of pride for some, and object of fascinations for others, it is not synonymous with the economic role that South Korea now occupies on the world stage. This was certainly the prevailing view during the latter half of the twentieth century, as the two Korean states raced each other to achieve world recognition and economic superiority over the other. Having inherited the urban framework left behind by the Japanese colonial regime, the South Korean state has had a fairly limited time to recognize and address the magnitude of the transformation that has taken place in Seoul. Sites of Korean identity and historicity clashed with the needs of a fledgling state desperate to modernize.

This thesis examines the spatial consequences of Western encounters for the city of Seoul, marking its development as both an international city and the heart of a colonial enterprise. Each chapter will tackle historic episodes that involve Koreans and Western actors that profoundly altered the urban fabric of Seoul. This will proceed the from the shipwrecking of Dutch sailor Hendrick Hamel to the modernization efforts of the late Joseon, and in turn Korea's precarious international position at the turn of the twentieth century. The final chapter will cover broadly developments that occur during Korea's "colonial period", which extends from the Japanese occupation to the U.S. backed South Korean government, to show continuity with

earlier developments and frameworks. This thesis attempts to integrate Seoul's evolution with global colonial worldmaking, arguing that its roots extend much further, both temporally and geographically, than the turn of the twentieth century.

The first chapter covers the entrance of Korea into the Western consciousness, looking both inward and outward in regard to the Joseon state as it navigates the encroachment of European colonial powers into East Asia. The second chapter centers on Seoul as a key battleground for both Korean sovereignty and East Asian hegemony, showing how Seoul was forced to internationalize rather than relying on Sinocentric power. The third chapter focuses on how Seoul modernized, covering infrastructural and architectural developments that emerged as a result of both Korea's internationalization and the efforts of colonial powers. The fourth chapter examines Seoul's transformation into a colonial administrative center, both under Japanese and American occupation, showing continuities emerging from global attitudes towards Korea birthed through earlier colonial encounters. Lastly, the conclusion traces Seoul through the lens of post-colonial statecraft and the Cold War, with the 1988 Seoul Olympics serving as a capstone to the internationalization of both Seoul and Korea from which the present cityscape developed out of.

It is important to note that this thesis largely consults English language sources. It was determined that attempting to tackle the breadth of Korean language historic scholarship on Seoul as a non-native speaker would be too large a task, especially to comprehensively engage with the material. The vast amount of English language and translated materials compounded this decision. Further inquiry into Korean sources, as well as collections containing materials related to diplomatic and religious missions from both European and Asian countries involved with Korea, would be a welcome addition to this project.

Chapter I

Imagined Korea

In the grand scheme of global history, Korea has scarcely entered the European imagination. As Western institutions would come to consign the fate of an independent Korea, tracing Korea's position within the political imagination of Europe relative to their wider experiences in Asia is critical in understanding the construction of a colonial geography. European colonial projects in Asia depended on knowledge of the region that was acquired over centuries, informing how encounters and relationships would take shape.

Although the Korean peninsula has hosted several significant polities that influenced East Asia, any Western contact would have had to have been mediated through China, and by extension the myriads of Arabic and Turkic civilizations that occupied the Eurasian steppes. For the average European merchant, there would be little reason to personally visit East Asia instead of utilizing the existing network of merchants that stretched across both the Eurasian landmass and Indian Ocean. Even knowledge of China was quite limited until the publishing of Marco Polo's travels in the 13th century. Europeans would spend the next several hundred years trying to access China's resources, fueling initial transatlantic colonization efforts, with explorers often equipped with a copy of Marco Polo's travels to use as a sort of encyclopedia.

Marco Polo's Travels was no ordinary travelogue or written account. It was the only way by which many readers understood the Asian world, indexing its observations with the litany of exotic goods that made their way across the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean to Europe. When Europeans first began making long-distance exploratory voyages, it was often explicitly to facilitate direct passage to China. Marco Polo's Travels directly impacted on the way in which

Europeans were imagining the world. No longer was the far East an unknown, it was now more concrete, and as would manifest centuries later, something to be conquered. This mechanism is crucial in order to understand the way in which Europeans, and later Americans, would encounter Korea. Many first encounters between Europeans and indigenous populations in foreign lands were colored by impressions garnered from texts like Marco Polo's travels, including religious and classical texts as well.[1]

An analogous case would be that of Han Chinese diplomat Zhang Qian, who in the 2nd century BCE provided a series of reports of foreign lands to Han Emperor Wudi, who became so enamored with their details that it spurred a series of Chinese military incursions that successfully expanded the Han Empire. These reports told of great riches, exotic goods, and crucially military vulnerabilities that could be exploited by the Han. Much like Europeans entranced by Marco Polo's accounts, Han Emperor Wudi was directly influenced by accounts of foreign lands, rendering them not only tangible and comprehensible, but as possible military and economic targets. By this mechanism, the world can be mapped in the interests of stakeholders, whether explorers, merchants, or emperors.[2]

China, or Cathay as it was known by many Europeans, was the clear jewel of Asia. As such, it is somewhat logical that Korea, particularly the Joseon state, would have been obscured by the shadow of its massive neighbor. Both the Ming and subsequent Qing dynasties maintained close political ties to the Joseon state, with the two sharing a common Confucian culture and similar social structures. Although wars flared up between China and Korea prior to the

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[1] Peter Jackson, "Marco Polo and His 'Travels'," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 61, no. 1 (1998), 82–101.
[2] Craig Benjamin. Empires of Ancient Eurasia: The First Silk Roads Era, 100 BCE–250 CE. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 72-78.

fourteenth century, the emergence of both the Joseon and Ming states saw a prolonged period of relative peace between them.

The emergence of Joseon also saw the development of Seoul as a planned capital city, geographically and spatially embodying Confucian values as interpreted by the Joseon state. Following general plans and approaches derived from China, the city, then known as Hanseong, was organized cardinally around two main axes, four principal gates, four auxiliary gates, a palatial district, and a market district. Jongmyo shrine, discussed earlier, was initially constructed during this formative period, in 1394. King Taejo, the founder of the Joseon Dynasty, built this city in conversation with other Asian imperial capitals that followed similar idyllic principles.[3]

Like any other prominent city in the orbit of China, the presence of foreigners, especially merchants and artisans, would have been typical for Seoul. Many of these would be from China and Japan, as well as polities in Northern and Southern Asia, perhaps as far south as Java in Indonesia. During the height of Ming power, international commerce, especially by sea, was accompanied by diplomatic missions as well as bodies responsible for arranging sales and moving goods. The Joseon state was continuously occupied with the problem of piracy, which evidences the importance and scale at hand.

This would change dramatically over the next few centuries. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Joseon state would be well regarded for its strict isolationist approach to politics and trade from the outside world. Multiple invasions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries incentivized tight border control, as well as the incredibly limited movement of people in and out of the kingdom. The fall of the Ming Dynasty made the situation

[3] D.W Pankenier. (2015). Astronomy and City Planning in China. In: Ruggles, C. (eds) Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy. Springer, New York, NY.

even more precarious for Joseon, as it saw itself as the inheritors of its cultural legacy. These conditions created strong incentives for Korean state to keep interactions with foreigners to a minimum.[4]

It was under these circumstances that Europeans accidentally found their way into Korea. Dutch sailor Hendrick Hamel, upon wrecking on Jeju Island in 1653, found himself and his crew under a form of detainment by the Joseon royal court. While they were afforded a good deal of freedom and agency within Korea, especially for individuals with no real legal protection, they were ultimately forbidden from leaving on account of official imperial policy. This was in part due to the fact that at the time of Hamel's incarceration, Joseon was still recovering from both Japanese invasions and submission to the Qing, along with the Ming Dynasty's formal capitulation in 1644. Additionally, the Joseon court would have been well aware of the trade and communications between the Dutch and the Japanese, further incentivizing retention of the Dutch sailors. After all, security concerns, especially maritime, ranked consistently high on the priorities of the Joseon state. Having settled disputes with China, only the Japanese remained as a real military threat. The Russian Empire did not control any significant portion of Manchuria at this time, leaving the full force of Joseon military concerns directed at Japan, and the Dutchmen caught between them.[5]

When Hamel was able to escape Korea in 1666, he fled to Japan, before publishing an account of his experiences in 1668, titled *Hamel's Journal And A Description Of The Kingdom Of Korea 1653-1666.* For the entire European reading public, it was the first encounter with the existence of Korea as a polity, laying the foundation for the image of its culture and its people.

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[4] Kenneth M Swope. (2014), The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–44, Abingdon: Routledge.
[5] Gari Ledyard. The Dutch Come to Korea. Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, Monograph Series No. 3. Seoul: Taewon Publishing Company, 1971,14, 27-34.

Hamel had no real insight into the historic and political factors that motivated his detention, with much of the intrigue in his account stemming from his endurance and eventual escape. As such, the impression gained of Korea was that of a closed state, both rigid and conservative, spawning the public image of Joseon Korea as the "Hermit Kingdom".[6] Like Marco Polo three hundred years prior, Hamel's account brought another Asian state to the European political imagination. Unlike China and Indonesia, which maintained fantastical qualities on account of their desirable goods, Joseon at the time did not have exports compelling to Western markets, trading mostly with neighboring China and Japan. The almost mythical qualities ascribed to "Cathay" and "India" were never applied to Korea, becoming seen as a curiosity and a backwater, a traditionalist regime that was voluntarily closed off to the West.

Although Hamel was responsible for bringing Korea to Europe, he was not the only foreigner, let alone Dutchman, to be present in Korea during the mid-seventeenth century. In 1627, Jan Janse de Weltevree ended up in Joseon custody in the wake of a rebellion by Chinese prisoners taken by the crew of the *Ouwerkerck,* the vessel that de Weltevree had signed on. Along with a contingent of other Dutch sailors from the *Ouwerkerck*, de Weltevree intended to sail the captured Chinese junk to the port of Tainan, in Formosa (present-day Taiwan). Battered by poor weather, the junk wound up on the shores of an island off the western Korean coast, where the Dutchmen were overpowered and the survivors impressed into Korean military service, working to develop and produce arms for the Joseon military.[7]

De Weltevree appears in Hamel's narrative as a helpful figure, summoned by the Jeju administration to aid in dealing with the dozen Dutchmen who found themselves having

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[6] Ledyard, 52-71.
[7] Ledyard, 125-132.

immense difficulty establishing communication with local officials. In fact, it was essentially impossible. It was De Weltevree who appealed to king Hyojong, though in vain, to allow Hamel and the others to return to the Netherlands. It is likely due to the De Weltevree's own service to the Joseon state that the newer arrivals were given comparatively gentler treatment, being afforded many freedoms and accommodation, even in the wake of their banishment to Jeolla, a province on the Southwestern Korean coast, following the discovery of an escape plot.[8]

The figures of Hamel and De Weltevree are important in considering the attitude of the Joseon state towards Europeans and European presences in Korea. In both cases, Europeans were seen as military assets, managed directly by the Joseon administration, providing a great deal of services, or "chores", to the Joseon aristocracy, evidenced by Hamel's accounts. It is likely that De Weltevree's situation served as a precedent for the treatment of Hamel, with the Dutch perceived as enemies adjacent to China, and Korea by extension. By the time of Hamel's detention, Dutch relationships with Japan would have compounded this perception of the Dutch as potentially dangerous. De Weltevree may have also served as a model in that he fully assimilated to the Joseon state. After assisting the Joseon military with arms manufacture, he would later command military units and pass the civil service examination in 1648.[9]

Hamel and the other survivors stayed in Seoul for a period of about two years, between 1656 and 1657, before a foiled escape plot resulted in their banishment to Jeolla province in Southwest Korea. It was during this period that they were brought before King Hyojong, and De Weltevree attempted to bid for their release. Serving in the royal guard, Hamel and the others lived in a complex directly overseen by Joseon officials but were otherwise free to move around

[8] Ledyard, 59-65.
[9] Ledyard, 26.

the city. For the time, the presence of foreigners in Seoul, especially non-naturalized Europeans, was a novel phenomenon. This appears to have caused some problems for the royal court, as Hamel and several of his countrymen repeatedly endeavored for escape. There was also additional pressure on King Hyojong for entertaining their presence so close to the palace, drawing unwanted attention and curiosity from city residents. Although it was an escape attempt that broke the camel's back, the stubborn resistance of the Dutch sailors to accept a position in Joseon society frustrated the Joseon court, who saw the fully naturalized De Weltevree as a model example that they should follow.[10] It is noteworthy that a number of Dutchmen did indeed opt to stay in Korea, with one individual supposedly founding the Byeongyeong Nam clan.

The cases of Hamel and De Weltevree are exceptional, in that they are honored in memoriam in both the Netherlands and South Korea in the present day. Without Hamel's escape and publication, it is unlikely that either he or De Weltevree would have attracted significant historic attention, especially following the publication of Hamel's journal. In all likelihood, there were other cases of Europeans, or otherwise foreigners, shipwrecking on Korean soil before disappearing from the historical record. There do appear to be some indications of such events from the late 16th century, although without interpreters like De Weltevree many of these figures would have simply vanished.[11] Further investigation of Korean and Chinese records would likely shine more light on this matter.

Korea's isolationism was fairly severe by most circumstances, though by no means unprecedented when compared to its geographic and cultural neighbors. East Asian countries have long practiced extended detentions for individuals that found themselves on foreign soil,

[10] Ledyard, 72.
[11] Ledyard, 26.

intentionally or otherwise. Both China and Japan have exhibited periods of heightened xenophobia, with multiple documented episodes of deportations and executions of foreigners across each society. It is worth remembering that the Dutchmen in their custody were considered military assets, and at worst acting in concert with the Japanese. With this in mind, their treatment reflects the vulnerability of Joseon's position in East Asia, as submissive to the Qing and quite vulnerable to Japanese aggression.

Much of the Korean approach to diplomacy was closely tied to their own perceptions of their role in relation to the Ming Dynasty and the Qing that supplanted them. During the 1610 and 1620s, Ming China suffered incursions by the unified Jurchen tribes of Manchuria and requested Joseon for military assistance. The Joseon state, then under king Gwanghaegun, attempted to maintain a form of neutrality, which was immensely unpopular amongst the nobility for two main reasons. In the first case, Korea and China shared a foregrounding of Confucian principles, with China perceived as the center of the Confucian world. This shared Sinocentric cultural foundation resulted in the perception that the Confucian world itself was under threat from a foreign other. In the second case, it was the Ming that had come to the aid of Joseon to ward off Japanese invasions in 1585 in 1592, creating a clear obligation to return the favor. Although 10,000 troops were eventually dispatched in 1619, it proved to be a futile measure, with the battle of Sarhu serving as the final blow to the combined Joseon-Ming forces. Although Gwanghaegun was able to maintain Joseon sovereignty through an independent peace deal with the Qing, his hesitancy to aid the Ming, combined with the already tumultuous political climate, contributed greatly to his deposition in 1623.[12]

[12] Swope, 15-22

The defeat of the Ming by the Qing reverberated throughout the East Asian world and nowhere was this more felt than in Korea. For Koreans, China was the center of the world, where most of their ideology and epistemology was rooted. Both Confucianism and Buddhism, the two most dominant ideological systems in Korea, were effectively Chinese imports, with the latter modified by Chinese practitioners. For contemporary Koreans, especially nobles and scholars of great political influence, the Ming were the rightful owners of Chinese traditions rather than the Qing invaders from the north. As a great number of Ming refugees entered Joseon following the Ming capitulation, in the eyes of many Koreans Joseon became the true heir to the Ming Dynasty, and Confucianism in turn.[13]

The impact of the fall of the Ming on Korean foreign policy cannot be understated. For Injo, the successor to the deposed Gwanghaegun, the cultural center of the world had just been usurped by a barbarian other. This created a drive to maintain proper Confucian ways, at least nominally, in order to preserve "China". Although Injo was a fairly ineffectual ruler, whose actions resulted in direct invasions by the Qing in 1627 and 1636, anti-Qing sentiment was a significant force amongst the Korean aristocracy and scholarship. This distrust of the Qing, as well as the Japanese, certainly pressured Joseon into taking an isolationist stance, with no sure allies beyond its borders.[14]

Having inherited the legacies of Ming China, Joseon was tasked with both maintaining Confucianism while recognizing a need to build the country's economy and military in order to withstand future invasions. As Beijing was occupied by the Qing, Seoul became a center of "the little central kingdom", as the spatial heir to the Confucian tradition. Although the city had

[13] Swope, 67.
[14] Thomas Quartermain. (December 2019). "State Symbols, Group Identity, and Communal Memory in Jeong Gyeong-un's Godae illok, 1592-1598". The Review of Korean Studies, 77.

already been oriented around a Confucian plan since its founding, this new cultural status motivated a more conservative approach to managing the urban fabric of Seoul, an attitude that would manifest when Christian elements began making inroads on the Korean peninsula.

In the aftermath of the fall of the Ming, the Joseon administration had its fair share of internal problems. While Joseon culture enjoyed a relative renaissance during this period, the imperial court struggled financially, and the once-stalwart opposition to the Qing began to melt by the end of the 18th century. Corruption and factionalism remained ever-present issues in the Joseon aristocracy, with efforts to grow military and industry being bogged down in political disputes. It was this Joseon that Hamel shared with a European audience, one having just experienced both military and cultural catastrophe, and struggling to recover its economy. By no means was it an attractive destination for trade, with China and Japan being more effective intermediaries for the local East Asian trade. Seoul by the end of the 17th century was seen as the capital of a fairly minor kingdom in the orbit of Qing China and little more. Unlike *Marco Polo's Travels*, Hamel's account of Korea did not write of its great wealth, culture, and tales of mysticism. Rather it was the account of a prisoner, comparable to colonial tales of explorers captured by indigenous cultures, only to make a daring escape. The publication of Hamel's journals marked the beginning of Korea in the eyes of the West, birthing an image that would change dramatically as Joseon navigated the great colonial race embarked by imperial powers during the next several centuries.

The fall of the Ming represented a total shift for the Joseon state, including the city of Seoul. One particular change was architecture, with new materials and forms finding their place in the urban landscape. The coincidence of both the Ming and Joseon Dynasties meant that most cultural exchanges to and from Joseon occurred between them, with the Qing introducing the

first real change in over two hundred years. The greatest transformation in Seoul during this period occurred in the form of Qing brickmaking, imported to Korea by a number of Joseon envoys, resulting in the construction of the Hwaseong Fortress in neighboring Suwon in 1796. The impressive construction, as well as the successful implementation of new materials and techniques, saw several brick structures erected in Seoul in the following years. This is evidenced through extensive debate between Silhak scholars arguing for the superiority of Chinese bricks over timber, accounting for a profound timber shortage in Korea at the end of the 18th century. The construction and continued use of large-scale brick kilns in Seoul is additionally well-documented, highlighting a shift towards mass production away from the traditional Joseon sense of architectural craftsmanship.[15]

Prior to this moment, Korean architecture largely consisted for forms that meshed with Confucian principles that impressed a consistent style across most Korean buildings. The introduction of techniques that so sharply departed from the Confucian norm would be a sign of things to come in the following century. Many scholars, however devout they might have been, recognized the need to reorganize and revitalize the Joseon state through reforms, both in terms of bureaucracy as well as practical application. This resulted in the Silhak reform to Confucianism, which sought to ground the lofty principles of Korean Neo-Confucianism in the needs of both the state and the peasantry.[16] It is unlikely that Qing construction techniques would have been permitted in the absence of such a reform.

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[15] Myengsoo Seo. 2021. "Changing Perceptions of the Qing Dynasty in the Late Joseon Dynasty and Chinese Style Architecture That Emerged in Joseon in the 18th Century." Journal of Asian Architecture and Building, 4.4

[16] Seo 2021, 4.4 Engineering 21 (3): 849–64. See Also Mark Setton. (1997). Chŏng Yagyong: Korea's Challenge to Orthodox Neo-Confucianism. SUNY series in Korean studies. SUNY Press

The 18th century also saw the introduction of Christian missionaries, initially Jesuits, who moved across the northern border in order to build proselytize. While the earliest known Korean contact with Christian works was much earlier, only when missionaries begin building congregations on Korean soil did the Joseon state take action against them. Several Koreans found themselves enamored with Catholicism, especially amongst the intellectual class, which sparked a great series of tensions that would culminate in two significant martyrdoms in 1791 and 1792.[17] Many of the debates regarding Catholicism centered around moral incompatibilities with Confucianism, at least in the conventional orthodox view. One of these central issues regarded the nature of the soul, and its relation to physical objects, or idols. Simply put, Catholicism does not permit idol worship, while Confucian rites involve worship at an altar, and involve ritual implements that could easily be read as idol worship. Catholic imagery was also seen as reprehensible, clashing harshly with contemporary Joseon tastes. Rather than the specific content, it was the moral implications of Christian literature that were the most threatening in the eyes of the Joseon Confucian order. From the perspective of King Jeongjo, it was inadequate education on Confucian principles, rather than any Catholic appeal, that resulted in the gradual growth of Catholic congregations on Korean soil. In his view, Catholicism should disappear altogether once this key issue was remedied.[18]

There existed a spatial component to the Catholic encounter as well. Imagining the visual landscape of Seoul in the late 18th century invokes a vision of uniformity, in building size, shape, material, etc., all which is laid out according to Confucian principles. The impact that the inclusion of a church would have on the visual experience of the city cannot be understated. It

[17] Hyunmo Park. "King Jeongjo's Political Role in the Conflicts between Confucianism and Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century Korea." The Review of Korean Studies 7 (2004), 205-227.
[18] Park, 205-227.

seems that king Jeongjo was concerned with the changes that a Catholic presence would bring not just to Seoul, but to Joseon as a whole. As a result, churches that operated during this time did so in a clandestine fashion, occupying residential buildings, with the first churches following European footprints arriving with British and American missions in the 19th century.

The presence of Christianity posed a problem for Seoul as the heart of Korean Confucianism. From its planning in the 14th century, it was intended to spatially reflect a Confucian worldview in the same fashion as its Chinese counterparts. Chinese capitals historically reflected the ideal society in their planning, incorporating spiritual and cosmological elements. The emergence of Confucianism and its widespread produced cities organized and aligned to Confucian principles, facilitating rites and rituals integral to Confucian society. Of critical importance to a Confucian city are shrines, designed as the centers for public worship in a city. As such, the open practice of Christianity affected not only the moral order, but also the spatial order of a Confucian city. In this way, some of the anti-Catholic sentiment shared by the contemporary Korean scholarship can be interpreted as a response to a threat that expands greatly beyond the specifics of private ritual. A visible Catholic presence would make orthodox Confucians less comfortable. After all, it took nearly a century for Korean builders to adopt Qing construction techniques, and that was following the immense Silhak reforms.[19]

The encounter with Catholicism was approached by king Jeongjo as a political problem, addressed to immediate concerns regarding potential conspiracies against him. Considering that Christian texts contained a vast amount of foreign knowledge and were based in doctrines incompatible with the orthodox Confucian worldview, that King Jeongjo would see Catholicism

[19] Park, 21.

as a threat rather than an opportunity for learning is reasonable. Some Koreans who secretly consumed Catholic texts did so to access novel Western knowledge and ideas.[20] Aside from conflicts within the Joseon literati, the emergence of Catholicism in Korea was a fairly slow and gradual phenomenon. It would not be until European countries established formal Christian missions in the 19th century that truly dramatic changes would occur, with the construction of both Western-style chapels and hybrid structures to facilitate worship. In the meantime, the 18th century brought about minimal change to Seoul, although the spread of Christianity would set the stage for political relationships between Korea and Christian Europe.

The Christianization of Asia was a compelling concept for Europeans stretching back centuries, as the very existence of ancient civilizations like China throws a wrench in the works of Christian chronology. For some Christian historians, Confucian practice was seen as a distortion of Christian teachings, with artifacts traced to Nestorians used to support this claim. The notion that a country full of ostensibly heathens could create such a powerful and enduring culture, as well as producing compelling products unrivaled in Europe was difficult for many to swallow. Naturally, efforts to spread Christianity were quickly followed with both mercantile and military elements.

As the 18th century drew to a close, European powers were looking to scramble for Asia, which contained the historic economic centers that produced much of the world's wealth for much of world history. Portugal and the Netherlands had initiated the race in the 16th and 17th centuries, centering on port cities and islands rather than penetrating into the Asian mainland, intending to control the spice trade. Unlike earlier relationships that were mercantile and often

[20] Park, 17.

facilitated with gunboat diplomacy, European powers were now interested in the direct conquest and administration of foreign territories. In the wake of their respective successes, and the explosion of the transatlantic slave trade, the European gaze encroached increasingly eastward, emboldened by newfound wealth and influence. The globe had truly begun to shrink as European empires sought to establish control over world trade.

Unlike China, India, the Spice Islands, or the "Lost Kingdoms" of central Asia, Korea was never an object of interest for European powers. Part of this has to do with Chinese domination of East Asian exports, and part of it has to do with Korea's place in the world. Korea's geographic position rendered it on the periphery of the global economic networks that flourished over recorded history. This is not to say that Koreans were not active agents, but rather that they occupied a peripheral node on the spatial maps of the Silk Road or Indian Ocean trade networks rather than a critical hub. Unlike polities in modern-day India, China, Indonesia, or Central Asia, Korean states were never in a position to profoundly influence international commerce. Many key states involved in these historic trade networks produced or facilitated the shipment of critical consumer goods, such as silk and spices, which had practical, religious, and even political applications.

In most visual depictions of Silk Road and Indian Ocean trade networks, Korea is shown at the very end of the route through which goods moved into East Asia, if it is indeed labelled at all. Simply put, in discussions of early global economic systems of exchange, Korea is viewed as too minor a figure to merit significant attention, at least from a European perspective. Compared to the vast trade wealth of China, India, and Southeast Asian countries, Korea was too insignificant as to warrant explicit diplomatic missions to and from the European world, at least up until the 19th century. It was at this time when several European empires began expanding

their holdings in East Asia, and becoming interested in establishing bases for Christian proselytization. This is of course notwithstanding the case of Japan, that had long displayed an interest in Korea as the strategic gateway to China.

The French were the first European nation to throw their hat in the ring regarding Korea, sending their first missionary to the peninsula in 1836. These early activities were entirely clandestine, with discoveries by the Joseon court often resulting in arrest and execution. Tensions came to a head in 1866, resulting in the Byeong-in Persecution, which involved the deaths of thousands of converts along with 9 French priests. It was this event that sparked official French interest in Joseon, resulting in a military incursion that would become known as the French Intervention. While this was ultimately a minor incident on the world stage from which no direct consequences emerged, it serves as the first instance of direct state-on-state encounters between Europe and Korea. While earlier confrontations between European vessels and Koreans had resulted in civilian deaths, the Joseon state lodged most of its complaints through the Chinese bureaucracy rather than taking decisive action using their own military forces, looking to avoid direct confrontation as much as possible.[21]

Joseon isolationism remained standard practice, especially following the Opium Wars in the mid-19th century that wrought havoc in China. The unequal treaties that emerged from the Opium Wars set a precedent for how Asian states would be diplomatically managed, with the concession of territories strongarmed by internationally recognized treaties. This gave the Joseon state further incentive to prevent Europeans from interacting with Korea, denying trade missions in every instance, often with threat of force. The French Incursion would confirm Joseon's

[21] Park 8, 10-11.

anxieties, demonstrating that foreign presence invites foreign militaries. As such, to the Joseon court, the best strategy was to never allow such conditions to materialize in the first place, by blocking off Europe and the West. Of course, with the seeds of Christianity planted and the Qing in decline, this approach would be quickly abandoned in short order.

The elephant in the room that has remained mostly unaddressed is that of Japan. Japanese military leaders had never quite given up on their dreams to conquer China, through which Korea would serve as the initial beachhead. This was the ultimate design of both Japanese invasions in the 16th century, although they were routed by the combined Ming and Joseon forces on both counts. While there was limited continual contact between Japanese and Koreans through the waegwan near the port of Pusan, a Japanese mercantile outpost heavily regulated by the Joseon state, this presented limited opportunities through which to curry political influence.[22]

As Japan began to industrialize and model itself as a colonial power, Korea was placed squarely in its sightline. An emerging racialized Japanese worldview rendered Korea as a place in need of Japanese civilization, being fundamentally inferior. Western powers found themselves in agreement, likely recalling the experiences of both Hendrick Hamel and persecuted Christians in Korea. Unlike Japan that was adopting Western industry, architecture, and culture, Korea was much slower to do so, and when compounded with the litany of problems plaguing the Joseon state, was in no position to compete.

In 1875, the Japanese gunboat Un'yo would land a party on the shore of Gangwhan Island, the site of the 1866 French Incursion, in spite of knowing that Joseon policy called to fire upon all foreign vessels. The resulting exchange resulted in a total defeat for Joseon forces, who

[22] Peter Duus. (1998). The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea. University of California Press. 54.

were vastly outgunned in terms of arms. The Japanese, having engaged in trade with European and Western powers for decades, had accessed and implemented modern military technologies that the Joseon military could not hope to match.[23] The following year, in 1876, the Japanese were able to use this significant military advantage to coerce the Joseon state into signing the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876, which formally opened the Korean Peninsula up to the outside world.

The provisions of this treaty were naturally skewed heavily in favor of the interests of the new Japanese state. The terms opened up the entire country to Japanese commerce, which prior was restricted exclusively to the waegwan near Pusan. For the first time Seoul was rendered accessible to Japanese trade, with, one of the newly opened ports, Incheon, located just westward of the city. The treaty also enforced Japanese extraterritoriality, which effectively relegated the Joseon legal system to a subordinate position to Japanese law regarding the actions of Japanese citizens on Korean soil. The increased accessibility of the Joseon state to Japanese interests resulted in continuous efforts to meddle in the affairs of Joseon politics. The ascent of King Gojong following regent Daewongun was incredibly tumultuous, which presented an attractive chaotic climate through which Japanese interests could be more easily met.[24] For Gojong, the Joseon state was in dire straits, in need of drastic changes in order to maintain national sovereignty confronting both a rapidly industrializing Japan and crumbling Chinese authority in the face of European imperialism. The image of Korea needed to be remade in order to command respect on the international stage, with Seoul serving as the locus for these efforts.

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[23] Duus 31-34, 43.
[24] Duus 45-50.

Centuries of encounters and exchanges both within Asia and across Eurasia oriented Korea in a peculiar way. The isolation of Joseon was deeply entangled with broader developments in the Asian and Eurasian worlds, though direct meetings between Korea and Europe were rare. The role of Seoul as an international city emerges only in the 19th century alongside efforts to maintain Joseon as a politically and economically independent kingdom. Prior to this moment, it remained embedded within local East Asian contexts as it was largely closed off to the outside world. Although cultural transmission between China and Japan was ongoing, the global presence of Korea barely registered in the eyes of the West.

Joseon's historic encounters with the European world interface with Seoul, with the city serving as the critical backdrop through which the deliberate modernization efforts of the 19th century can be better understood. The competition for hegemony and influence in East Asia involved Korea as a key battleground, with its opening via the 1876 Japan-Korea treaty inviting a truly international presence for the first time to Seoul. It was this condition that would primarily motivate the extensive spatial and material reforms that would take place in Seoul during King Gojong's administration.

Chapter II
Seoul International City

The 1876 Korea-Japan Treaty marked the beginning of Korea's zoning as a prospect for future colonization. The agreement was forced upon the Joseon state through Japanese gunboat diplomacy, following the Gangwha Island incident that demonstrated Japanese military superiority. In the decade following the 1876 Korea-Japan Treaty, several Western powers would negotiate treaties with Joseon in order to facilitate trade. This included France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and the United States, who would in short order send legations to Seoul in order to establish formal relations.[25] This put the Joseon state in an uncomfortable position, undermining its self-imposed isolationism and exposing its feudal economy to the worst effects of capitalist forces. However, there was a recognition by Joseon leadership that Korea needed to modernize in order to stay afloat. This tension was not eased by the immense political turmoil of the Joseon court during this period, which allowed a greater deal of foreign infiltration than had ever been witnessed before.[26]

The hope shared by optimists such as King Gojong, was that widening Korean access to modern technology would stave off Japanese encroachment. Changing the perception of Korea as a modern power in conversation to the West was designed to encourage foreign investment in the Joseon state and thus ensuring its survival. King Gojong's efforts to bring industrial technologies and infrastructure to Seoul reflect this approach. Making independent trade agreements with other powers made Korea an international site, rather than one localized in East Asia. For Seoul, this meant inviting a permanent foreign presence that would modify the urban

[25] Duus, 147.
[26] Duus, 86-89.

landscape. No longer could Seoul afford to remain a staunch bulwark for Confucian principles, with foreigners bringing their own values and aesthetics to the Korean capital. The opening of diplomatic relationships with both Western powers and the Japanese would usher in the modern era for Seoul.

For the first time since 1650s, foreigners found themselves permitted to live in Seoul with extraterritorial status. Diplomats purchased estates from prominent families, many of which served as the initial housing for international legations during the 1880s and 1890s. These comprised of fairly large, typical Joseon constructions that had the capacity to be readily modified on account of their light, modular interior construction compared to more weighty and substantial Western building practices. By this period, Korean construction was dominated by the hanok, a term used to characterize a variety of indigenous forms, comprising of timber frames, earth walls, and thatched or tiled roofs. As Korean hanok construction had been refined over the centuries to accommodate the local climate, it its logical that a continuation of this form would lend to a more comfortable living experience, especially when factoring in the various costs required to construct an entirely new building.[27]

The American legation was the first such body to be established in Seoul, occupying the grounds of a neglected estate that was comprised of several hanok structures. It was purchased immediately after the arrival of US diplomats in 1883, suggesting that all parties involved were making use out of what was already at hand. A number of modifications, including glass windows and brick veneer, were installed in quick succession. By the early twentieth century, the American legation had transformed into a quintessential American dwelling, with a 1904

[27] Dae Young Ryu, "Understanding Early American Missionaries in Korea (1884-1910): Capitalist Middle-Class Values and the Weber Thesis," Archives de sciences sociales des religions, January-March 2001, 32-37.

photograph of its principal building show the initial changes, as well as the addition of a porch and bay window (Figure 8). While the legation buildings still resembled hanok in profile, they were being continually altered to meet the middle-class American sensibilities of its occupants. The typical Joseon form gradually transformed into one legible to an American gaze, with exterior elements such as windows and veneers integrating the buildings within an American visual language. On the interior, the floor plan was re-oriented around American conventions. The hybridization of the hanok form, at least during the earlier years of resident diplomacy in Seoul, was a fairly typical case, although many countries would soon finance the construction of larger, elaborate legations that strongly departed from any Korean aesthetics.[28]

The degree and nature of hybridization varied by example, with different design elements being constantly swapped out as Americans struggled to find a combination that matched their tastes. Opinions on Joseon architecture as a whole were quite varied, with some finding its qualities favorable and others finding them difficult to negotiate with their own preferences. Many Westerners lamented the fusion of Western architectural features with traditional Joseon forms, at least when it departed from their own offices and residences, extolling the "pure" and "untainted" qualities indigenous Korean construction. As the number of foreigners in Seoul increased, so too did the visibility of foreign architectural elements, which in turn led to their gradual adoption by native Koreans.[29]

The modified hanok buildings used for Western purposes acquired a unique character on account of their construction. The tradesmen involved in the construction and modification of buildings in Seoul were comprised of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese workers, many of whom

[28] Ryu, 23-26.
[29] Ryu, 20.

had limited encounters with Western architectural examples. Construction work was often a slow process, with clients waiting for extended periods for in-demand specialists to arrive at a work site. As such, foreign clients could not afford to be picky regarding the specific implementations of a given request. If one client requested the installation of a bay window, they would receive a version of the form influenced by East Asian construction sensibilities.[30]

Churches followed similar patterns. While congregations initially met in houses purchased by ministers, both growing local congregations and the arrival of diplomatic parties necessitated the construction of more substantial houses of worship. Concessions and adaptations were made in each case, as structural details of large building projects were best left to the hands of the skilled laborers actually building them. One of the critical challenges involved the management of multi-story structures, which sometimes fused Western framing systems with Korean roofing techniques, resulting in catastrophic failures as the weight of tiled roofs proved too great for conventional Western timber frames. Meanwhile, successful structures, notably the Church of the Advent and Chungdong First Methodist, were built using Korean geometries that integrated Western elements without compromising integrity. This was accomplished by constructing churches out of brick, allowing workers to realize Western designs using their own methods, resulting in building elements showing distinct East Asian craftsmanship while appearing entirely European in profile. In the eyes of Western preachers, these were immensely preferable over having to negotiate conventions of Western ecclesiastical architecture with the expertise of local craftsmen. The Pyeng Yang Central Church, constructed a short distance north of Seoul, is typical of what Korean builders would imagine, effectively resembling a large hanok with elongated windows (Figure 9). While agreeable in the eyes of Korean worshippers, the

[30] Ryu, 26.

immediate use of brick upon its widespread availability speaks to the aesthetic desires of Western Christian preachers. Many churches went through a series of chapels as congregation size increased, as was the case with the Saemoonan Church that employed 6 consecutive structures since its establishment in 1887.[31]

As Seoul began to establish trade routes for industrial materials in the 1890s, access to Western construction materials, techniques, and specialists also increased. This decade saw the construction of larger, more monumental legation housings that severely departed from the Joseon type. Countries such as Russia, France, and Germany sponsored such endeavors, resulting in tall, multi-story structures that shared little to no unifying elements with the surrounding buildings of Seoul, with the exception of minor details. The French legation to Seoul, initially built in 1888, develops into a contemporary French home by the turn of the century, completely departing from Joseon construction. Meanwhile, the Russians endeavored to build an imposing neoclassical structure, featuring arcades and porticos, and pediments. Both cases reflect how both countries saw a need to entirely replace the Korean spatial language with their own. While the Americans continued to make use of their villa, which would later come to be known as the Habib House, other countries were much more willing to impose their style on Seoul's urban landscape.[32]

The growing international presence in Seoul put mounting pressures on a Joseon state that found itself pulled in different directions by a multitude of actors. The infiltration of the royal court by pro-Japanese actors caused king Gojong to actively pursue any possible alternative to form meaningful partnerships. Even by the 1890s, the Joseon administration had

[31] Ryu, 8.
[32] Ryu, 9-10.

still not recovered from the turmoil brought about by Gojong's ascendancy. This problem was further exacerbated by the involvement of Japanese agents in the Joseon aristocracy, for whom a chaotic Korea was easier to manipulate and exploit. Gojong's refuge to Russia in the wake of Queen Myeongsong's murder, as well as his trade agreements with France and the United States regarding industrial infrastructure, were attempts to check the immense influence wielded by Japanese merchants and politicians.[33]

Throughout the 19th century, Joseon politics remained factional and immensely complicated. By the 1890s, it was apparent to all educated Koreans that their country lagged in terms of technology and economy.[34] The recognition of this position prompted intense political maneuvering among the Joseon aristocracy, organizing into different camps that argued for different solutions to this problem of development. Korea at this time was still a feudal society, with the arrival of globalized industrial systems in Korea presenting a challenge to traditional economic models. This compounded the factional issues plaguing the Korean bureaucracy, preventing the heavy-handed implementation of urgently needed reforms. Countries that had already begun the process of industrialization in the late 19th century struggled to catch up with mainland Europe. Even in spite of Japan's drastic Meiji Restoration and later invasions of the Asian mainland, Japan found itself technologically outclassed by the U.S. military, if not in terms of design, then in terms of infrastructural capacity.[35] The colonial system that birthed and supported Western industrialization proved too monstrous to engage with head on.

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[33] Young-lob Chung. (2005). Korea Under Siege, 1876–1945: Capital Formation and Economic Transformation. New York: Oxford University Press, 53.
[34] Chung, 98.
[35] Yumi Moon. Populist Collaborators: The Ilchinhoe and the Japanese Colonization of Korea, 1896–1910. Cornell University Press, 2013, 34-43., See Also Chung, 42.

The Joseon state, on the eve of the advent of the railroad and electrification, found itself cognizant of its position. It was understood that Korea would not be able to undergo modernization entirely on its own, and that concessions to colonial powers of some sort would have to be made. The ongoing question remained as to with whom it would be. In spite of the immense baggage carried between Korea and Japan, there was an increasingly large number of Korean scholars and politicians that urged for the pursuit of stronger ties to Japan, who by the late 1890s had emerged as the hegemonic power in the region. Following the defeat of both Russia and China, there was no longer any military deterrent to Japanese interference on the Korean peninsula. For some, the Japanese pursuit of regional independence from the West was attractive, and favorable over economic submission to Europe, or America.

It is understandable that this approach would be less appealing for Gojong, whose anti-Japanese politics were hardened following the assassination of Queen Myeongsong by Japanese agents in 1895. She had also been a staunch supporter of the anti-Japanese position, with her death solidifying the royalist camp against Japanese conspiracy. The known presence of Japanese agents in the Joseon bureaucracy spawned perpetual anxieties regarding Japanese-backed coups and revolts, motivating 1896 Gojong's flight to the Russian Empire. Although Gojong's negotiations with Russian and United States earned him significant ire from the Korean Independence faction, there was no sure path forward that would settle internal Joseon conflict. As long as Joseon remained independent, no true political resolution would be permitted by the pro-Japanese faction.[36]

[36] Duus, 84., See Also Jun Uchida. (2011). Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945. Harvard East Asian Monographs. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The innate structural problems of the Joseon state must also be addressed in conjunction with the actions of pro-Japanese actors. While Joseon had remained a fairly fixed entity in terms of its borders, it was far from a stable kingdom internally. Tensions between the nobility and the peasantry had resulted in dozens of uprisings and revolts over the centuries, with Korean political factions plying these events for influence. The threat of a coup d'etat was not new to Joseon leaders, with rival factions waiting in the wings to install their own members in positions of political power. With this factionalism in mind, Joseon statecraft was ripe for exploitation by expanding imperial powers. The economic and militaristic capitulation of China, its closest ally, made Joseon a prime target for equally unbalanced treaties and commercial agreements. Without the influence of Qing China, Joseon had few, if any, bargaining chips to bring to the table. Its military was outdated and underfunded, and its economy, while self-sustaining to a degree, was no match for the buying power of Western and Japanese capitalists.[37]

More and more powers were eager to gain a seat at the Korean table. With more foreigners entering the country in pursuit of new markets and cheap labor, Seoul's streets rapidly began to reflect foreign sensibilities. Western-style glass windows, brick veneers, and wide porches became increasingly common features of domestic construction across the city around the turn of the 20th century, introduced by the construction and modification of legations and churches. The planning and building of the Incheon-Seoul railroad, along with improvements to existing shipping infrastructure along the Han River, allowed for modern consumer markets to take shape, catering to both foreign as well as shifting domestic tastes. Competition between China, Japan, and Russia spurred the expansion and development of improved telegraph systems, while the Joseon state struggled for control over its own networks. The result was a Seoul that

[37] Duus, 87., Uchida, 47-52., Swope, 73.

was a frontline for campaigns for influence in Korea that mimic the Cold War in terms of scope and ambition.[38]

The existence of a sovereign Joseon was immensely important for both the Russians and the Chinese, especially in the wake of their defeats suffered at the hands of Japan. This was largely due to the strategic significance of the Korean Peninsula, and its middling position between the major powers of the region. As a noncompetitive power, it was perceived as more of a buffer state, whose allegiance afforded its partner states with military security. As such, control of the Korean Peninsula's new industrial infrastructure, financed and constructed with foreign assistance, created opportunities to control information. This meant that Seoul became the center for Joseon information systems linking Korea to its neighbors, with Korean, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese agents all competing for jurisdiction.

The groundwork for the installation of telegraph lines stretches back to the 1876, when Japan set plans into motion to construct a telegraph system linking Nagasaki to Pusan. This was completed in 1883 with the assistance of the Danish Great Northern Trading Company, and the resulting agreement afforded Japan with a monopoly on telegraph communications into and out of the country. As this was the quickest method of communication at the time, this allowed Japan to make political decisions much quicker than their Chinese or Russian counterparts.[39]

The Chinese quickly responded with their own telegraph initiative, linking the Chinese city of Lushun with Seoul, interfacing with the towns of Uryu, Pyongyang, and Incheon beforehand. This deeply frustrated the Japanese, who had been toying with a petition to expand

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[38] Jin Sangpil. "Telegraph Lines and Postal System: How Communication Systems Served as a Conduit for Korea-Major Power Relations from the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century." Acta Koreana 20, no. 1 (2017), 111-142.
[39] Sangpil, 123-126.

their own infrastructure from Pusan to Seoul. This is where the war for information in Korea began in earnest. Gojong was not content with having little to no control over the telegraph lines in his country, even if it was in the hands of the Chinese. As such, Gojong raised sufficient capital for an independent Korean telegraph line linking Seoul and Wonsan. By the turn of the 1890s, three nations were competing for control over Korea's telegraph lines. For both China and Japan, securing Korean communications was a vital priority for their own national interests. China, as the historic suzerain of the Joseon state, was attempting to reassert a dominant position as it recovered its power from the Opium Wars. Meanwhile, Japan wished to supplant China as Korea's effective suzerain state, gaining a vital foothold on the Asian mainland through which its own power could be projected.[40] The struggle over telegraphs in Korea maps neatly atop of longstanding regional conflicts and relationships between China, Korea, and Japan.

In spite of the modern infrastructure being introduced to Korea, Koreans did not get to control much of it. As negotiations with the Japanese were futile, Gojong endeavored with the Chinese to concede control of their telegraph systems in Korea to the Joseon state. However, following the First Sino-Japanese War all of the telegraph lines in Korea were consolidated by the Japanese. Although Korea was still technically sovereign, its ability to function as a modernizing nation was severely impeded by Japan's total control of Korean telegraph systems that were essential in facilitating modern diplomacy.[41] Korean staffers in telegraph offices in Seoul and elsewhere were only afforded junior roles, with Japanese agents occupying management and administrative positions, granting them complete oversight of all electronic communications in and out of Korea.

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[40] Sangpil, 129.
[41] Sangpil, 129.

Gojong quickly turned to Russia for assistance, which was growing increasingly interested in Korea as a colonial prospect. European politicians were envisioning Korea as a necessary buffer state to preserve order in East Asia and maintain peaceful relations between China and Japan. However, these aspirations conflicted with the observations of Western agents on the ground in Seoul, who found Joseon in need of rapid development in order to remain stable in the face of an industrializing Japan. By this time, Russia had acquired significant portions of Manchuria, resulting in a small land border shared with Joseon. While disputes between Russia and China reach back centuries, it had now truly entered the East Asian theater alongside the Japanese, with Japan now posing a direct security risk to its Pacific coast holdings. With Qing China on the back foot following its loss to Japan, Gojong was keen on building ties with Russia in order to win back control of its communication systems.[42]

These endeavors quickly reached significant hurdles. Proposals by Russia still involved Japanese management of any new infrastructure, which was undesirable to Gojing, driven by a vision of a fully independent and neutral Korea, hoping to establish a Switzerland in Asia. With tensions between Japan and Russia mounting, in 1903 Gojong employed every conceivable measure to bid for Korean wartime neutrality, fearing that siding with either would result in a total loss of sovereignty. Levying for international recognition and support, Gojong dispatched envoys to Italy, Russia, and the rest of Europe, operating outside of the Japanese-controlled telegraph system. Gojong himself sent personal letters to European leaders requesting recognition of Korean neutrality.[43]

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[42] Sangpil,122.
[43] Sangpil,128.

These efforts ultimately failed, with Japanese troops occupying Korean telegraph offices in Seoul on the eve of the war, forbidding the operation of any non-Japanese telegraph lines connected to the Korean capital. Japan would win international recognition for its control of Korean telegraph systems, effectively ending Gojong's campaign for an independent, neutral Korea to exist. Had Korean telegraphs been able to communicate internationally, the Joseon state would have been afforded a great deal of mobility that it simply was never afforded under Japanese surveillance. In the late 19th century, the telegraph was a vital instrument of diplomacy and statecraft, and by 1905, every single telegraph line in Korea was managed directly by Japan. By this point, Korean foreign policy had essentially ceased to exist. Even the most well-connected networks of envoys and diplomats could not outpace the speed of telegraph communications, with Japan now exerting unchecked influence over Joseon state operations. By 1905, Gojong and the Joseon state had nowhere left to turn, with Japan in full control of Korea's modern infrastructural projects, each of which revolved around Seoul. Although by technicality Korea was still independent and sovereign, Seoul had taken a crucial step into becoming a colonial administration center.[44] Japan's official annexation of Korea in 1910 marked the end of the Joseon state, precluding decades of increased industrial expansion designed to maximize resource extraction.

Over the span of three decades, Seoul had transformed from an insular capital city into one populated with legations and churches, foreign buildings that towered above the traditional urban streetscape. Meanwhile, the modern infrastructure of Korea, oriented around Seoul, was entirely owned and operated by foreign powers. Western relationships with Joseon were largely predicated on both the decline of the Qing and the ascent of Japan, two phenomena directly tied

[44] Sangpil, 134-136.

to European colonial expansion into Asia. Given the limited capabilities of the Joseon state, the neutral position that King Gojong envisioned was incompatible with the imaginations of new imperial powers. Appealing to international audiences proved a futile measure, with all manners of transnational bureaucracy suited in the interest of the very empires exacting military dominance. With its envoys shut out of the Hague in 1905, it was clear that Joseon would not be permitted a seat at the table regarding its own future.

Chapter III

Seoul Industrial City

King Gojong employed a variety of strategies in order to assert Korean sovereignty, with the most obvious and bold facing being the declaration of the Korean Empire in October of 1897, internationalizing the presence of Joseon beyond merely a simple kingdom. The move came alongside a variety of efforts to modernize Seoul, projecting an image of progress and development in order to combat Joseon's image as a backward culture. King Gojong was intent on catching up with the rest of East Asia, but lacked sufficient capital in order to truly do so. The long-term stability of the Joseon Dynasty proved to be a hindrance in the long run, preventing the level of dramatic reform needed in order to motivate the adoption and acquisition of industrial technologies.

Korea's relative stability contrasted greatly with the situations in China and Japan, with series of wars and internal political strife incentivizing European colonial powers to bring industrial infrastructure overseas. Although some technologies were readily adopted, particularly in the manufacturing of arms, others such as the railroad were heavily resisted, especially in China. This was because European industrial practices were seen as incompatible with Chinese urbanism, especially by local nobility influenced by Confucian principles.[45] Meanwhile, Japan's Meiji Restoration saw a wholly new government installed that was able to effectively mobilize the country's resources to become competitive with Europe and America. Each country's political situation invited foreign technologies, while also affecting how they could be

[45] Madeleine Yue Dong. (2002). "Chapter 8: Defining Beiping – Urban Reconstruction and National Identity, 1928–1936". In Esherick, Joseph W (ed.). Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950, 5. University of Hawaii Press.

implemented and mobilized. Although the Joseon Dynasty did see its fair share of political struggle, it never suffered so dramatic a change such to facilitate the sorts of drastic reforms taking place in Japan during the Meiji Restoration.

The situation in East Asia put King Gojong in a difficult position, who sought to bring Western industrial infrastructure to Korea. Only a handful of countries were interested in partnering directly with Korea, and almost all partnerships created lopsided agreements that further indebted the Joseon state. However, the political encroachment of Japan resulted in the need for industrial infrastructure eclipsing the need for financial pragmatism.[46] Without these efforts, Korea would be doomed to absorption. Among Joseon's partners were Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the United States, each eager to consolidate their existing holdings in East Asia through political relationship with Korea. Most international players already had footholds in East Asia, particularly along the Chinese coastline, so Korea was never a place of significant investment.

Prior to the last decade of the 19th century, the majority of Europeans and Americans in Korea were conducting missionary work rather than building up Korean industry. Meanwhile, the Joseon regime lacked the political teeth necessary to pass reforms that would have been necessary in order to directly implement European industrial practices, on account of political factionalism and infighting.[47] As such, King Gojong had to source funding for Seoul and Korea's modernization through a relatively conservative administration. Despite being the head of state, Gojong had to negotiate with the Korean nobility, who were hesitant to invest funds in projects

[46] Uchida, 48.
[47] Moon, 37-38.

that would not necessarily benefit their own dominions or political factions. Some projects ended up entirely funded by King Gojong personally.

Rather than an indicator of a stagnant economy, this seems to instead serve as a marker of a fairly stable state. The potential negative consequences of implementing modern industrial practices may have dissuaded would-be supporters of more dramatic modernization efforts who already had a good thing going. Local governments in China made several efforts to shut down the building of railroads in the late 19th century, decrying steam locomotives as too noisy and dirty for Chinese cities.[48] The earliest of these were successful, physically driving out an element of European industry from the Chinese landscape. While China and Korea are not necessarily comparable, attitudes towards mechanized industry were likely shared to some degree. It is important to remember that European industrial technology, noise, and pollution strained heavily against the principles of Confucian urbanism.[49]

King Gojong was not content with being simply a stable country. He was right to recognize the imminent threats that surrounded the Korean peninsula from all sides. It was no secret that Korea lacked the sufficient means to repel a military incursion from any of its neighbors, especially as its neighbors increasingly industrialized, leaving Korea behind in terms of development.[50] As such, starting in the 1880s King Gojong spearheaded efforts to implement modern technologies in Korea, starting with Seoul.

Seoul was an idea testing ground for Gojong's implementation of new technologies. As the Joseon capital, the king could directly oversee the construction and installation process,

[48] Dong, 5.
[49] Dong, 13.
[50] Uchida, 18., Swope, 121.

ensuring that work was done well. In some cases, this occurred directly on palatial grounds. The first building in Seoul to receive electric lighting was the Geoncheonggung residence, a manor built at the northern end of the Gyeongbokgung palace complex, the principal seat of the Joseon kingdom.[51] This development occurred in 1887 and was the first of a chain of technological implementations pushed by Gojong.

The electrification of Gyeongbokgung necessitated the construction of some level of infrastructure in order to feed the residence power. This was addressed by the construction of a power station within the palace grounds, which would be used to provide electricity to all the buildings within the royal court. The need for an electrified royal residence was incredibly important for Gojong, with electricity being synonymous with the very idea of modernity. It was crucial for any visitors to see the Joseon state engaging with the most up-to-date technologies, even if it was restricted to a royal residence.[52] Rendering the Joseon state as an early adopter of modern technologies made the country more attractive to diplomats, serving to amend its image as a regional backwater. As the vast majority of emissaries and diplomats would be staying in Seoul, even small-scale electrifications could prove effective in promoting a modern image. It is also likely that financial strain on the Joseon treasury prompted a more gradual initial approach to electrification. Since the project was entirely funded by Gojong personally, there was little contestation or room for political maneuvering to interrupt it.[53]

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[51] Taehwa Lee, Youngho Lee and Sun-Jin Yun. "Energy–environment–society Relations In Early Modern Korea: Lessons Learned From the Electrification of Seoul, 1876–1905." Energy & Environment, vol. 31, no. 7, 1 Nov. 2020, pp. 114-15.
[52] Lee et al, 114-15.
[53] Lee et al,114-15., See Also Moon-Hyon Nam (3–5 August 2007). "Early history of Korean electric light and power development". 2007 IEEE Conference on the History of Electric Power, pp. 192–200.

The electrification of Seoul, however piecemeal, was a massive step forward. It allowed for the urban fabric of the city to be perceived in new ways. Prior to this development, it was difficult to visually perceive the city as in conversation with the rest of the world, especially in the eyes of diplomats upon whose backs rested significant potential investments. Early visits to Seoul were often accompanied by extensive complaints of poor conditions and the hopeless lag of Korean culture compared to Europe, as well as its neighbors.[54] The illumination of Geoncheongung, while a small space, represented the first projection of Korea's modernity to the outside world. It would not be long before more changes would follow suit. In spite of Korea's popular image as a backwater steeped in tradition, it was fairly quick on the pickup of new technologies. Electricity arrives in Korea less than a decade after the invention of the lightbulb. By the turn of the century, electric, telegraph, and telephone lines run down the length of Seoul's main throughfare, Jongro, towering high above most of the Hanok buildings in Seoul. However, coordinating industrialization efforts on a larger scale remained a challenge. Among the highest among Gojong's list of priorities was to construct two types of railroads: tramways and freight lines.

Tramways would come first, with electric trams beginning to operate in 1899, two years after the birth of the Korean Empire.[55] The crucial foregrounding of initial electrification efforts can be seen in the construction of a large power station adjacent to the Dongdaemun gate on the eastern end of the city.[56] This was financed by the Hanseong Jeongi Heosa (Seoul Electric Company), which was backed in its entirety by now-emperor Gojong.[57] The Seoul Electric

[54] Lee et al, 194.
[55] Nam, 192-200.
[56] Lee et al, 114-115.
[57] Lee et al, 115, Moon-Hyun, 192-200.

Company would contract American businesses to manufacture components for its infrastructure, including wiring, telephones, lights, and the tram cars themselves.[58] This connection was facilitated by the significant American missionary presence in Seoul, who in many ways served as clandestine diplomats, especially during the last few decades of the 19th century.[59] American missionaries often came to occupy positions within the American legation, with their experience and fluency in Korean making them appealing as emissaries.

Seoul's tramways, while spearheaded by Emperor Gojong, were also a product of opportunity. The declaration of the Korean Empire spurred the renovation of several facilities in the royal court that had fallen into varying states of disrepair, which necessitated the transport of large quantities of building material inside the city.[60] It was deemed fitting that a tram line should be constructed in order to more easily ship materials towards the royal court, which was likely fed by the original power station in Gyeongbokgung. After the construction was completed in 1899, the line continued to be used before eventually being retrofitted and integrated into the tram network as it neared full operational capacity. This formed a part of the earliest iteration of Seoul's tramways that would see use well into the 20th century.

At the turn of the twentieth century, electrified interurban transport was considered as standard amongst prominent urban international cities, meeting the expectations of foreign visitors accustomed to such conveniences.[61] Seoul's tramways were another component of Gojong's image improvement campaign, importing Western industry and infrastructure to create what were imagined as long-term partnerships to check against the Japanese. As foreigners

[58] Lee et al, 111., Moon-Hyun, 114-115.
[59] Moon-Hyun, 192-200.
[60] Moon-Hyun, 114-115.
[61] Moon-Hyun, 113.

accustomed to electric conveniences arrived in Seoul, the demand for electricity increased alongside them. The establishment of an industrial power station, a vital consequence of the tramway, afforded residents with means to electrify their homes. The Seoul Electric Company would itself in a position where it had a full monopoly on electricity within the city of Seoul.[62] Following the construction of the Dondaemun station in 1898, the company began to offer service to prior homes within just a year of operation, coinciding with tramway operations.[63]

Although the tramway beat the railroad to the punch, Korea's first railroad was well under construction by the mid-1890s. While it was well within the purview of Gojong to fund a smaller project like a tramway, which in its earliest iteration only featured four lines, a truly massive enterprise like a railroad required a degree of capital that the king/emperor alone just did not have. This was apparent from an early stage, as talks began with American and Japanese investors in 1891 over the rights for a railway that would connect Seoul with the port facilities at Incheon, located just to the West of Seoul.[64] The first iteration of these was a "Railroad Construction Treaty" with one James R. Morse, who was associated with Horace Newton Allen, who at the time was both a missionary and secretary to the American legation to Korea.

This treaty effectively granted the American investors a percentage of the future income made by the railroad, with the goal of paying off construction costs and making a profit in the long term. However, in spite of what looked to be an ideal situation for both parties, the construction of Korea's first railroad would turn out to be particularly messy. in spite of the fact that it would initially constitute only one line connecting two cities.[65] Construction did not begin

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[62] Moon-Hyun, 192-200.
[63] Moon-Hyun, 192-200.
[64] Patrick R. O'Donnell. (2021). Seoul & Chemulpo Railroad : the First Railroad of Korea. Honolulu, Hawaii: Prentiss Publications, 23-29.
[65] O'Donnell, 42.

in earnest until 1897, with Morse breaking ground on March 22 at 9AM. The six-year delay between the initial treaty can be easily explained by the First Sino-Japanese War that took place between 1894 and 1895. The war was the result of rising tensions between Qing China and the Japanese Empire, with Qing jurisdiction over Korea conflicting with the demands imposed by the internationally recognized Korea-Japan Treaty of 1876. Coupled with political unrest in Korea, the Japanese Empire effectively forced the hand of King Gojong in signing a joint agreement, which resulted in the transfer of rights to the Seoul-Incheon railroad to the Japanese in 1894.[66]

The initial partnership with American businessmen was an act of resistance against increased Japanese consolidation of foreign infrastructure. Although Gojong truly desired independent Korean management of her own transportation and communication networks, this ideal was impossible to realize given the sheer amount of capital required to fund any major infrastructural project. As a result, King Gojong opted to partner with Americans on several occasions, as the United States proved to be an effective business partner in the short term. However, not every Korean shared this same perspective. Both Americans and Japanese were competing on the ground in Korea for favor in the deal, creating a political split that was easily exploited. As the Japanese worked to sway the allegiances of various ministers and officials, the Americans, largely seeking long-term profits, worked directly with Gojong, giving them the initial advantage in negotiations. This reflects the general political climate in Korea, with the Japanese attempting to encroach upon Korean sovereignty at every opportunity in pursuit of eventual annexation. In fact, it was over the 1894 Donghak Peasant Rebellion that the First Sino-Japanese War broke out in the first place, as both powers sought in intervene to install their own

[66] O'Donnell, 73.

favorable administration. This fact demonstrates the significance of Korea as a battlefield through which hegemony of East Asia was contested.

What emerged from a Japanese victory against China was a Korea that was firmly within the Japanese sphere of influence. Many of the nobles and officials within Gojong's administration, in the wake of the Rebellion, sought backing from Japan. This presented opportunities for the Japanese government to push for policies that favored Japanese interests. A particularly explicit example of Japanese meddling in Korean affairs came with the assassination of Queen Min (Myeongseong), carried out in 1895 by the explicitly Japanese-backed Daewongun in a coup état, with the aim to eliminate what had been a stalwart obstacle against Japanese progression in Korea. It was this event, coupled with a series of poorly received policies delivered by the cabinet, that swung popular favor against the Japanese in short order.[67] For the moment, it seemed as if favor between East and West swung like a pendulum.

In the wake of the assassination, King Gojong sought refuge in Russia, where he governed in absentia for a year, before returning to Seoul in 1896. Upon his return he ended the Gabo Reforms, proclaiming total separation from Japan and establishing the Korean Empire in 1897.[68] Only once Gojong had securely returned to power did work actually begin on the Seoul-Incheon Railroad. Given that he was the major impetus towards the industrial reforms in Seoul, the pause between initial construction efforts and actual groundbreaking becomes much more understandable.[69]

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[67] Uchida, 274-278.
[68] Uchida, 294.
[69] O'Donnell, 97-102.

Despite owning the rights to the Seoul-Incheon Railroad from 1894 through 1896, the Japanese had made no headway on the project. However, when Gojong returned to Seoul and sold a patent to the Railroad back to Morse, the Japanese government filed protest against Korea for violating the 1894 Joint Provisions Agreement that promised the contract to Japan. This resulted in clandestine efforts by the Japanese to undermine the project, spreading word of Korean political instability to Morse's investors in America.[70] Ultimately the ploy was successful, with Morse losing all investor support just a year into the project, forcing a sale of the patent. Morse recognized what was happening and attempted to sell the bid to the French instead, but this deal fell through, and the railroad was sold to Shibusawa Eiichi, a critical figure in Japanese industrial development after the Meiji Restoration.[71]

The complications brought about by political instability and economic espionage explain the long delay in the construction of the Gyeongin Railway, which took less than a year to actually build. Opening in 1899, the railroad would operate twice a day, mainly shipping freight traffic between Incheon and Seoul. Prior to the railroad, all goods were shipped along the Han River. The railroad allowed larger vessels to more frequently traffic Korean ports, as well as increasing economic traffic to and from Seoul. Although rail operations would expand quickly, the Gyeongin Railway initially operated two American 0-4-2 steam locomotives that were sold to Korea while the deal with Morse was still in effect. What resulted was a Japanese-owned railway operating on Korean soil stocked with American locomotives and rolling stock. The initial phase of the railroad was a product of Korea's unique political situation at the end of the 19th century.[72] Meanwhile for the Japanese, the ownership of this railroad served as a critical instrument for the

[70] O'Donnell, 120-122.
[71] O'Donnell, 124.
[72] O'Donnel, 185, 188-190.

colonial designs, undermining Korean sovereignty by seizing the infrastructure designed to maintain economic independence from Japan. For Seoul, the railroad allowed for larger quantities of goods to be imported to and from the city, as well as facilitating military activities along the corridor between Seoul and Incheon. Larger construction projects could be facilitated as well, with the railroad and its subsequent expansions allowing the shipment of large quantities of building materials that previously required shipment via wagon roads.

Although the railroad bid was lost to the Japanese, Gojong was still intent on maintaining separation between Japan and Korea. This culminated in 1897 with the declaration of the Korean Empire, which was followed by the Gwangmu Reforms, which in many ways mirrored the attitude of the earlier Gabo Reforms. The difference between the two comes from the source, with the former coming directly from Gojong and the latter mainly from the royal cabinet.[73] The aims of both resolutions were to advance the position of Korea in terms of development, differing on which foreign camp should be partnered with.

This resulted in a Seoul that was experiencing periods of rapid development while being a hotbed for political unrest. While Gojong pushed for elaborate plans for a modern capital, including electrification, sewer systems, tramways, and railroads, Korea was in contest for its very existence. By the end of the 19th century, all of these projects would come to fruition, earning Seoul the status of a modern, respectable capital city. That any of these projects were accomplished at all, especially those administered by the Joseon state, is testament to Korean efforts to maintain economic and political independence. By this point Korea had become a

[73] Uchida, 200.

critical interest for foreign powers, including domestic empires like Russia, as well as aspiring powers like the United States, especially as Japan appeared an increasingly capable threat.

Between 1897 and 1907, any authority the Korean Empire had gradually declined. Efforts from Gojong to fashion a meaningful military alliance with the Russian Empire fell through, and his conservative tendencies as Emperor resulted in the growth of a substantial political opposition that pressured closer ties to Japan. This emergence of this faction resulted in the signing of the Eulsa Treaty, which placed Korea under formal Japanese oversight.[74] Under the terms of the agreement, all foreign policy would be handled by Tokyo rather than Seoul. The treaty was signed without Gojong present, an indicator of the dissatisfaction within the Korean political establishment with his rule.[75] The treaty served as a natural extension of earlier agreements that colonialized Korea under international law.

Following the defeat of the Russian Empire by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War, it seems that Gojong's ministers placed the future of Korea under an East Asian power rather than a European or American one. It would have taken severe intervention from a foreign power to preserve Korean sovereignty, but its two neighbors, China and Russia, were not in position to provide military aid.[76] As opposed to fighting a war against the Japanese, signing the Eulsa Treaty presented a more peaceful option. Popular resistance against the Japanese, explicitly backed by Gojong, resulted in his forced abdication in 1905. Just two years later, the Korean Empire would be formally annexed by Japan, although its ultimate fate was sealed following the defeat of the Russian Empire, with whom Gojong maintained friendly relations.[77]

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[74] Duus, 146-150.
[75] Duus, 146.
[76] Duus, 146-150.
[77] Duus, 146-150.

Although the changes brought about by Emperor Gojong did not result in the long-term sovereignty of Korea, they did plant the seeds for the sweeping changes that were to come for the city of Seoul. All of the elements mentioned in this synoptic history would come to majorly factor into the future growth and expansion of the city following the Japanese annexation. Although the Japanese colonization of the Korea would be very loud, invasive, and destructive, it was ultimately efforts from the last Korean administration that would lay the blueprints for the development that would follow for the next half century. This initial period of modernization can be characterized by efforts spearheaded by the Joseon head of state, facilitated through relations with Western powers, and Seoul serving as a testbed for their implementation.

Chapter IV

Seoul Colonial City

The annexation of the Korean Empire was inevitable in the eyes of the West, with many diplomats believing that Korea was better off under direct Japanese control.[78] Those deployed on the ground in Seoul would have witnessed Japan coming to control Korean infrastructure and seeing large projects like the Gyeongjin Railroad to completion. From the perspective of Western agents, the modernization of Korea could only be enabled via outside sources, both material and financial. Although the impetus for Seoul's infrastructural projects came from the Korean state, they were all tied directly to foreign parties that all desired control over them. Documents from American consul William Dickerman Straight that predate the direct annexation express the American position that without outside intervention, that Korea was effectively a lost cause. Although Japan and the United States were amicable for a period, Japanese expulsions of Westerners from the Korean peninsula quickly changed the mind of Straight, who by 1905 came to decry the regime of what he called "devilish little monkeys".[79] This flip-flopping was directly linked with both the American and European colonial gaze through which the world was read. White Europe rested at the top of this system, with Asia occupying a middle position above Africans in the eyes of the West. Within the localized Asia group, Koreans, lacking both the

[78] Kongregation von St. Ottilien, host institution. Sŏng Penedikto Sangt'ŭ Ot'illien Sudowŏn sojang Sŏul sajin = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul.성 베네딕도 상트 오틸리엔 수도원 소장 서울 사진 = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul. Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi : Sŏul Yŏksa Pangmulgwan, 2014.서울 특별시 : 서울 역사 박물관, 2014.

[79] Kongregation von St. Ottilien, host institution. Sŏng Penedikto Sangt'ŭ Ot'illien Sudowŏn sojang Sŏul sajin = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul.성 베네딕도 상트 오틸리엔 수도원 소장 서울 사진 = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul. Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi : Sŏul Yŏksa Pangmulgwan, 2014.서울 특별시 : 서울 역사 박물관, 2014.

perceived cultural sophistication of China and the industry of Japan, comprised the bottom rung of the ladder. They were either beyond saving as a backwards culture or helpless victims in the face of Japanese colonialism.

For the Japanese, Seoul was the first step in expanding their colonial apparatus to the Asian mainland. Meanwhile for the West, Seoul ceased operating as a diplomatic center, continuing internationally as a base for Christian missionary operations on the Korean peninsula. In spite of the drastic regime change that occurred, Seoul continued to operate in much the same manner as it had under the Korean Empire, now with the increased capacity for industrial development funded by the Japanese. Of course, these developments were oriented towards the colonial metropole in Tokyo, with most of the Korean population continuing to live in poverty.[80]

The efforts made by King Gojong to internationalize Seoul initiated processes that endured through the Japanese occupation. The hybridization of Korean architectural forms with Western elements and motifs continued, fueled by an influx of Japanese architecture directly inspired by contemporary European design. Japan had undergone its own process of industrialization and modernization, bringing its own interpretation of Western influences to the urban landscape of Seoul. Buildings such as the Government-General of Chosen Building, Keijo Station, and Keijo City Hall all embody this influence.

While foreign diplomats were largely expelled from Korea, sizable foreign populations continued to live in Seoul, many of whom were connected to the Christian infrastructure there. Decades of Christian missionary work resulted in a network of churches that continued to operate during the Japanese occupation. By 1907, the construction of foreign architectural forms

[80] Uchida, 321.

had become a common occurrence, with Seoul's city center becoming dominated by buildings legible to an international clientele.[81] This trend was exacerbated further during the colonial period, with Japan bringing its own Western influences during its colonial administration.

It is important to remember that both China and Russia had thrown their hats in the ring for Korea. While they were ultimately unsuccessful to secure or maintain a direct partnership, this can be attributed to their respective defeats to Japan rather than an unwillingness to expend resources in Korea. The international community's complete rejection of Korean diplomats at the Hague and its recognition of treaties that violated the terms of international law demonstrate a Eurocentric imperial worldview that was forced to accommodate Japan. The struggle over control of Korea's telegraph infrastructure, taking place largely without Korean actors, demonstrates a disregard for Korean sovereignty compared to the interests of powers directly engaged with colonial machinery (Figure 6).[82] No matter who ended up taking control of Korea, the fact remains that Koreans would not be granted an equal seat at the table. This would be true of both the Japanese and American occupation governments and their derivatives.

The Japanese were quick to transform Seoul from the center of the Joseon Dynasty into a colonial administrative center. This included the construction of new civic facilities such as Keijo Station and Keijo City Hall, as well as the adoption of sites of royal authority into the colonial administration. The replacement of Korean structures with colonial ones re-oriented the city around the Japanese colonial regime. Palaces were turned into residences for colonial officials, with Gyeongbokung being largely demolished. The Government-General Building of Chosen was erected in its place, becoming the monumental symbol of Japanese colonial authority in

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[81] Nate Kornegay. (12 May 2019). "The Influence of Giyōfū Architecture and 19th Century Japan on Early Modern Korea". Colonial Korea.
[82] Sangpil, 128.

Korea. The building was used to showcase Japanese imperial power, hosting exhibitions that showed off Japanese industrial capabilities. Seoul then became a stage for the Japanese to perform their imperialism, following patterns of similar exhibitions put on in Europe and North America. Buildings such as the Government-General Building became powerful visual images of the Japanese state, being disseminated on visual media designed to market the empire, including postcards (Figure 6). This speaks to the Japanese cooption of European imperial language that manifested in consumer goods.

The annexation of Korea was accompanied by a military occupation, with this presence resulting in sprawling new complexes designed to accommodate the security needs of the Japanese colonial government. These were built on the southern end of Seoul in order to address any security threats by way of the Han River. Artillery batteries, barracks, and an expanded railway depot were all put up in short order, visible as early as 1910 on official plans. With Seoul positioned on the Western end of the Korean peninsula, these facilities would later serve to springboard Japanese military incursions deeper into the Asian mainland (Figure 2). Military installations appear on Japanese colonial maps from the 1920s, directly adjacent to the railroad (Figs 2 and 3), with the maps themselves arguably being centered on them.

While the Joseon state had long been tributary to Chinese dynasties, it was always afforded a degree of practical autonomy, allowed to organize and maintain its own military. Seoul was always a military city, featuring walls, gates, and a continuous armed presence, with the level of militarization brought about by the Japanese speaking to their understanding of how Korea would function in the Japanese Empire. Although it was a key strategic gateway to China, and an opportunity to exercise their own racialized imperial worldview, Korea was only one

component of Japanese ambitions.[83] As the first significant conquest of the Japanese Empire, Seoul became the testbed for their systems of colonial administration.[84] Unlike many other cities in Asia that already featured great Western influence, Seoul provided a canvas on which Japan could leave its own impression. The contrast between the majority of traditional Korean buildings and the modern Japanese buildings doubtlessly served as living proof of Japan's dominance and superiority over Korea.

In addition to military infrastructure looking outward, the Japanese colonial administration also built inward, creating a law enforcement system designed to privilege the Japanese and stifle Korean resistance. Several large prison complexes were constructed in Korea, with the infamous Seodaemun facility built in Seoul in 1908. Unlike some later prisons built to house prisoners of war, this prison was specifically intended to house Korean independence activists, growing into a large complex that housed thousands of inmates by 1945.[85] The prison was built on the Northwestern end of Seoul towards the edge of the city, its multistory buildings and towering walls visually dominating the landscape.

The Japanese occupation not only saw the further industrialization of Seoul, but the entire Korean peninsula as well. Railroads would spread across the peninsula, supporting newly built factories dependent on the large-scale movement of materials.[86] Following the general Western colonial blueprint, Korea became a source of both natural resources and human capital for the Japanese imperial machine. Much in the same way as European industry was tied to colonial exploitation, Japanese industry in the 20th century was linked to the exploitation of Korea.

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[83] Uchida, 290.
[84] Uchida, 290.
[85] Uchida, 300.
[86] Chung, 221-224.

The cultural proximity of Japan and Korea made the colonial relationship unique. Unlike the colonial encounters between Europeans and peoples from separate cultural spheres, Japan and Korea were a part of the same cultural network, being intimately related with each other across the historic record. While the annexation of Korea was about gaining territory and resources, it also had much to do with the image of Japan as a modern empire in conversation with the West.[87] Just as Korea had to confront its perception in the eyes of the West, Japan had to do the same, earning its place at the table of Western empires through demonstrations of military strength rather than cultural and racial acceptance. It is clear from Straight's testimony that Americans did not deem the Japanese trustworthy, on account of what he attributes as their scheming nature. While they did not rank as low as Koreans on the East Asian hierarchy, Japan was not equated with white Europe, in spite of all their imperial dressage.[88]

As a result, Japan did everything in its power to distinguish itself from its cultural and historic neighbor, architecturally, spatially, legally, in all manners creating the Korean as a perpetual subject. This was exacerbated by the international attitude towards Korea since the 1870s, that gave Japan preferential treatment in light of its military victories against major regional powers. While Gojong and his supporters made significant efforts to make themselves visible, these efforts could not overturn the image imposed on them by the colonial West. The fact that Korea was in need of foreign interference to facilitate its development was widely acknowledged, rendering the idea of a sovereign Korea a long-term impossibility. For the

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[87] Uchida, 122-128.

[88] Kongregation von St. Ottilien, host institution. Sŏng Penedikto Sangt'ŭ Ot'illien Sudowŏn sojang Sŏul sajin = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul.성 베네딕도 상트 오틸리엔 수도원 소장 서울 사진 = Benedictine Congregation of St. Ottilien photography collection on Seoul. Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi : Sŏul Yŏksa Pangmulgwan, 2014.서울 특별시 : 서울 역사 박물관, 2014.

Japanese that found themselves in charge in Korea, this logic meant that there had to be a stark contrast between themselves and Koreans. In this way, the developing fabric of Seoul became an index for the image of a superior Japanese culture to project itself on. The contrast between the new colonial constructions and Korean buildings thus became racialized.

In the early phases of direct Japanese involvement in Korea, some of the transitory elements towards this endgame are visible. Giyofu-style architecture, a hybridization of Japanese and Western designs, was popular in the late 19th century in Japan. Although it had fallen out of fashion by the turn of the 20th century, it still figured into Seoul's cityscape through earlier constructions. As Japan shifted towards more holistically Western designs, Giyofu represented a link between Japan as a modernizing state and Japan as an imperial power. Giyofu can be compared to the integration of Korean architecture and Western forms seen in both the residences and churches in Seoul. The example of Peng Yang Central Church relative to its more visibly Western counterparts exemplifies the tension between Giyofu aesthetics and Western conventions (Figure 9).

Giyofu can also be traced directly through the administrative buildings of the Japanese colonial administration, beginning from its trade buildings that went up shortly after the opening of Joseon in 1875. This included major trade hubs such as Busan and Daegu, alongside Incheon and Seoul. Surviving plans from these buildings show a direct inheritance of the Japanese hybrid forms of the time, somewhat laggard compared to what was ongoing in Japan. The Daegu Customs Office from 1905 exhibits an explicitly Japanese method of roof framing that was largely outmoded on Japan itself (Figure 7), having shifted its architectural practices more fully

within a Western paradigm.[89] Most of the buildings that would be used by the Japanese colonial government in Korea were designed during the first decade of the twentieth century, temporally aligning with the architectural developments in Japan.

The hybridization of forms is a natural consequence of cultural exchange, prompted by extended contacts and relationships between two cultures with distinct architectural traditions. Although both Korea and Japan exhibited this phenomenon, on the eve of Korea's annexation the Japanese had fully adopted Western influence in their building, helping create the expressed cultural divide that colonialism necessitated. Compared to the emergent modern Japanese style that was almost indistinguishable from European designs, Giyofu was imperfect. With the elevation of Japanese culture being an ideological priority, Giyofu represented an earlier, less developed practice that remained reserved for use by Korean subjects. Many Koreans would adopt vernacular Japanese techniques into their own constructions, creating ripples of Giyofu that long outlasted its direct influence.[90]

Japan's early involvement and annexation of Korea is not only representative of its own territorial ambitions, but its desired international recognition as an imperial power. As much as Korea needed to be imagined as a subject, Japan needed to be imagined as a ruler. It is clear that the West encouraged this paradigm, one that echoed their own experiences in East Asia administering unequal treaties and settlements, and one that fit into their model of race-based colonialism. Although Korean efforts to win international favor failed, they demonstrated an awareness of their impending status being relegated as a colonial subject. Meanwhile, Japanese

[89] Kornegay
[90] Kornegay

actions on the ground fit those of an aspiring empire attempting to establish its right to rule, walking the walk of its desired peerage.

The post-liberation period saw Koreans free of their oppressors, eager to build a new Korean state free of foreign influence. To their dismay, Koreans now found themselves divided, subject to the global political situation brought about by the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and the United States saw the Korean peninsula as a necessary strategic holding to check each other's influence in East Asia. While the Northern Soviet-adjacent state saw the construction of a communist administration, the Southern US-occupied zone saw the building of a military state that borrowed most of its bureaucracy from the Japanese colonial administration. Though Korea was nominally free from Japanese colonialism, Japanese colonial officials were still largely in charge, working in concert with American occupiers.[91]

The Americans continued to view Korea as a problem, with Koreans perceived as being fundamentally incapable of administering their own state. These prejudices would manifest strongly during the Korean War, with the infantilized Korean fanatic becoming a popular image to describe Koreans in general, regardless of which side they were fighting on. Rather than entertaining any anti-colonial political factions sympathetic to the Soviet Union, the American military government instead opted to make use of the existing Japanese colonial administration that could not only aid in U.S. military operations in Korea but facilitate the recovery of Japan. After all, the colonial machinery that fueled the Japanese war machine was still largely in place.[92]

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[91] Kornegay

[92] Monica Kim, The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History. (2019).

Seoul had always been a hotbed of political dissidence, particularly for Korean independence, serving as a stage for protests and rallies during the period of direct American occupation. The persistence of Koreans in demanding their own agency continually frustrated the Americans, who had hoped for a more accepting and docile crowd. In reality, it was the continued administration of Korea by Japanese colonial officials that was a real sore issue for working-class Koreans. Many wealthy Koreans, including landlords, aristocrats, and Japanese collaborators, found themselves courting the Americans, eager to preserve their lofty positions in Korean society.[93] In this way, the domestic unrest in American-occupied Korea can be read as a response not only to Japanese colonialism, but also the traditional Korean monarchy that was ostensibly a feudal society. For many Koreans, the defeat of the Japanese did not only represent an opportunity for national liberation, but for a new Korean nation to emerge entirely. As far as they were concerned, the Americans merely replaced the Japanese as their colonizer.

That the United States coopted the imperial Japanese apparatus in Korea is far from surprising. From a pragmatic approach, it can be easily rationalized as making use of an existing system that works rather than crafting an entirely new one from scratch. After all, both the United States and Japan at one time shared the idea of a colonial Korea. Considering the American interests in Korea and the region, a capitalist imperial administration was much more favorable than one organized around populist people's committees that were clandestinely organizing throughout Southern Korea. The post-Japanese Korean administration could also be readily tooled to handle security threats with force, being legible to the Americans that understood how the Japanese imperial administration functioned.

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[93] Kim, 78-90.

The Korean War can be characterized as pure destruction. Just about all of the industrial infrastructure built up by the Japanese was destroyed. Millions of Koreans perished, with major cities lying in ashes. Just as the Koreans were seen as helpless to administer their own state following Japanese liberation, they were also helpless to do so following the ceasefire. The South Korean government that emerged from the Korean War was constructed and backed by the U.S., a puppet state that would quicky turn into a military dictatorship.

In the aftermath, Seoul was reimagined by American planners, with one particular concept map showing incremental expansion of the city center, eventually flooding across the Han River to its southern bank (Figure 10). This diagram makes of the term “Special City”, continuing to demarcate Seoul as something other than a capital. Crucial to these visions were American military installations and infrastructure, coopting the Japanese framework laid out over half a century earlier. The continuity between the Japanese and American visions of both Seoul and Korea speak to their shared imperial character, and a shared worldview from which they operated.

Conclusion

Post-Colonial Seoul?

Under the South Korean military government, Seoul would see massive redevelopment efforts to address the issues brought about by the Korean War. The widespread destruction of the Korean peninsula prompted the movement of thousands of refugees into a city that was not equipped to properly house them. Informal housing developments would emerge, operating without the direct oversight of the Korean state. The seeds of Korean fascism sowed by the American occupation did serve to revive a Korean national spirit, resulting in the process of reclamation for some Korean cultural sites. However, economic and political contest with North Korea motivated the retention of elements imposed by both the Japanese and the Americans. The Governor-General of Chosen Building, one of the most egregious examples of Japanese colonial imposition on Korea, remained standing on the site of Gyeongbokung Palace until 1996. The site Changgyeongung, made into a zoo by the Japanese, continued to operate until 1983. While the destruction brought by the Japanese resulted in the loss of Korean cultural capital, it did provide the new government with tools and resources that were needed to administrate a state in accordance with American interests.[94]

Just as Europe was partitioned following the World War II, the Korean peninsula was partitioned along ideological lines, with the Soviets, Chinese, and Americans using Korea and Koreans to demonstrate the virtues of their political and economic systems. In the decades following the ceasefire, both North and South Korea were engaged in direct competition for

[94] Todd A Henry. “Ch’anggyŏng Garden as Neocolonial Space: Spectacles of Anticommunist Militarism and Industrial Development in Early South(ern) Korea”. Journal of Korean Studies 16 March 2016; 21 (1): 32-37.

international attention, each in desperate need of foreign investment to accelerate their own reconstruction and development efforts. The Korean struggle to catch up to the West thus continued through the second half of the 20th century.

As a result, Seoul was positioned as a tourist-friendly destination, with plenty of English-language maps and brochure guides evidencing Korean efforts to attract Americans to the city. What was still a very foreign urban landscape needed to be rendered intelligible to Western visitors, with the complex streetscapes being distilled to much simpler abstract geometries marking only principal sites rather than any minutia (Figures 1, 4, 5). Even maps from the late 1950s exhibit this trend, targeted to more local East Asian demographics, featuring little to no English in a period when most visitors were coming from China and Japan. As the twentieth century marched onward and more English speakers were anticipated as tourists, both the written and visual language of tourist maps shifted, accommodating an Anglophone public unfamiliar with an East Asian urban landscape. Ready comparisons with tourist maps around the world are warranted, that engage in a similar method of reducing the urban landscape to what the city believes are its most attractive elements.

The colonial role of the international exhibition was not lost either, in fact it was the chief object of media contest between North and South Korea. Large-scale events that attracted a global audience afforded a global gaze on their hosts, providing advertising to their country's industrial and cultural capabilities. This was a crucial step in rehabilitating the image of a developing country into a modern economy, with both the U.S. and Japan demonstrating this transition in their own 19th century histories. Rather than hosting national expositions, international sporting events have become the primary means for a regime to demonstrate its qualities. The construction of sporting facilities, lodgings, and transportation infrastructure could

be offset by the promised income that resulted from hosting a prestigious tournament. However, the legitimacy of international games was contingent on their global character. Any boycotts of an Olympic games would forever tarnish their reputation in the historic record. As such, with the Cold War in full swing, bids for hosting took on explicitly political dimensions.

Seoul won its bid to host the 1988 Summer Olympic Games, coming at a time of internal political strife and economic uncertainty. Earlier games had already experienced massive boycotts by both Soviet and U.S. led blocs, delegitimizing them. As such, there was a pressure on the next games to be held without problems. This prompted North Korea to issue a proposal for the co-hosting of the games between Seoul and Pyongyang, banking on both support from the Soviets and formerly colonized countries in Asia and Africa to force the hand of the Olympic Committee. However, the stakes involved proved to be too great for all parties involved, with North Korean demands being overshadowed by the priorities of both China and the Soviets, whose cooperation was essential for a truly successful boycott to take place. Meanwhile, the South Korean state refused to concede an inch, understanding the gravity of their impending victory over the North.[95]

The resounding success of the 1988 Seoul Olympics was a political knockout blow for North Korea, abandoned by its politically adjacent allies and continuing to suffer from economic decline. Having lost the competition for the international spotlight, it instead focused inward on its military capabilities, accelerating its development of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, South Korea had entirely transformed the city of Seoul to make accommodations for the massive international crowd. Developments along the Han River expanded the urban core, as well as

[95] S. Radchenko. (2012). It's Not Enough to Win: the Seoul Olympics and the Roots of North Korea's Isolation 1. The International Journal of the History of Sport, 29(9), 1243–1262.

ridding the city of unsightly growth that resulted from postwar reconstruction. Seoul's metro rail system was expanded to meet projected demands, with the circuitous line 2 designed to facilitate movement towards the new Sports Complex across the Han. The promised arrival of thousands of foreigners resulted in a complete overhaul of the city, what is often referred to today as the "miracle on the Han". Considering the unstable climate in Korea at the time of its bid, it is certainly remarkable that the event went so well for the South Korean state.[96]

The importance of the Olympics reflects the vital role of image in international politics. Just as Korea was imagined as a colonial subject, dooming it to subjugation by both America and Japan, now Korea was now recognized as a participant in the international arena, becoming an agent standing toe to toe with its Western peers as an Olympic host. The Olympics allowed for South Korea to perform the dressage of a successful modern state, regardless of any political unrest going on behind the camera. The threat of a North Korean terrorist attack put authorities on high alert, but nothing ever materialized.[97]

Prior to the Olympics, South Korea was not widely recognized by the international community, on account of Cold War politics and the ceasefire. Many socialist countries refused to acknowledge the South Korean state, with North Korea's military struggle being admired by many leaders of postcolonial states. The success of the Olympics marked the beginning of South Korea's acceptance into the international community. Only a handful of socialist countries ended up joining North Korea in its boycott, including Cuba, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua. It is clear that many socialist states put aside their political sentiments in order to benefit from the Olympic spectacle. Participating in Seoul's Olympic games was tantamount to a recognition of its regime.

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[96] Radchenko, 8-10.
[97] Radchenko, 12-13.

Comparisons may be drawn with the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, where many skeptics to the new Nazi regime were won over with its grand display.

As the Korean War is still technically ongoing, the Korean peninsula remains the largest American military stronghold in the world. Although the South Korean government is no further abstracted from direct U.S. influence, it is still largely beholden to the whims of its benefactor. As China menaces global American interests, the Korean colonial project continues, borne out of centuries of historic encounters between East and West. The ways in which Europeans engaged with the world shaped their understandings of how to deal with Korea. Ancient understandings of the mythical Orient, compounded with the more modern colonial experience, relegated Korea to being a node in the colonial machinery, in service of first Japan, and then the United States. The struggle for Korea transformed Seoul from an East Asian Confucian capital into an outwardly oriented modern city.

The jewelry shops across from Jongmyo demonstrate the urban continuities in the face of these dramatic changes. Although new forms and materials had usurped the Hanok form, merchants continued to operate as they always had in the places they always did. The contrast between the traditional and modern on either side of the street reflects the global processes at work in shaping the histories of both Korea and Seoul. Encounters between East and West shaped how Asia, and Korea, were to be perceived. Once the balance of power tipped significantly in favor of the West, Korea's fate was sealed. If not for Japanese expansion, it would have undoubtedly been consumed by some other imperial power in short order. Efforts to maintain Korean sovereignty motivated the modernization of Seoul that was carried on by both Japan and the U.S. to streamline their colonial administrations. Although both Japan and the

United States imposed their own visions for Seoul and Korea, Koreans continued to live in spite of them.

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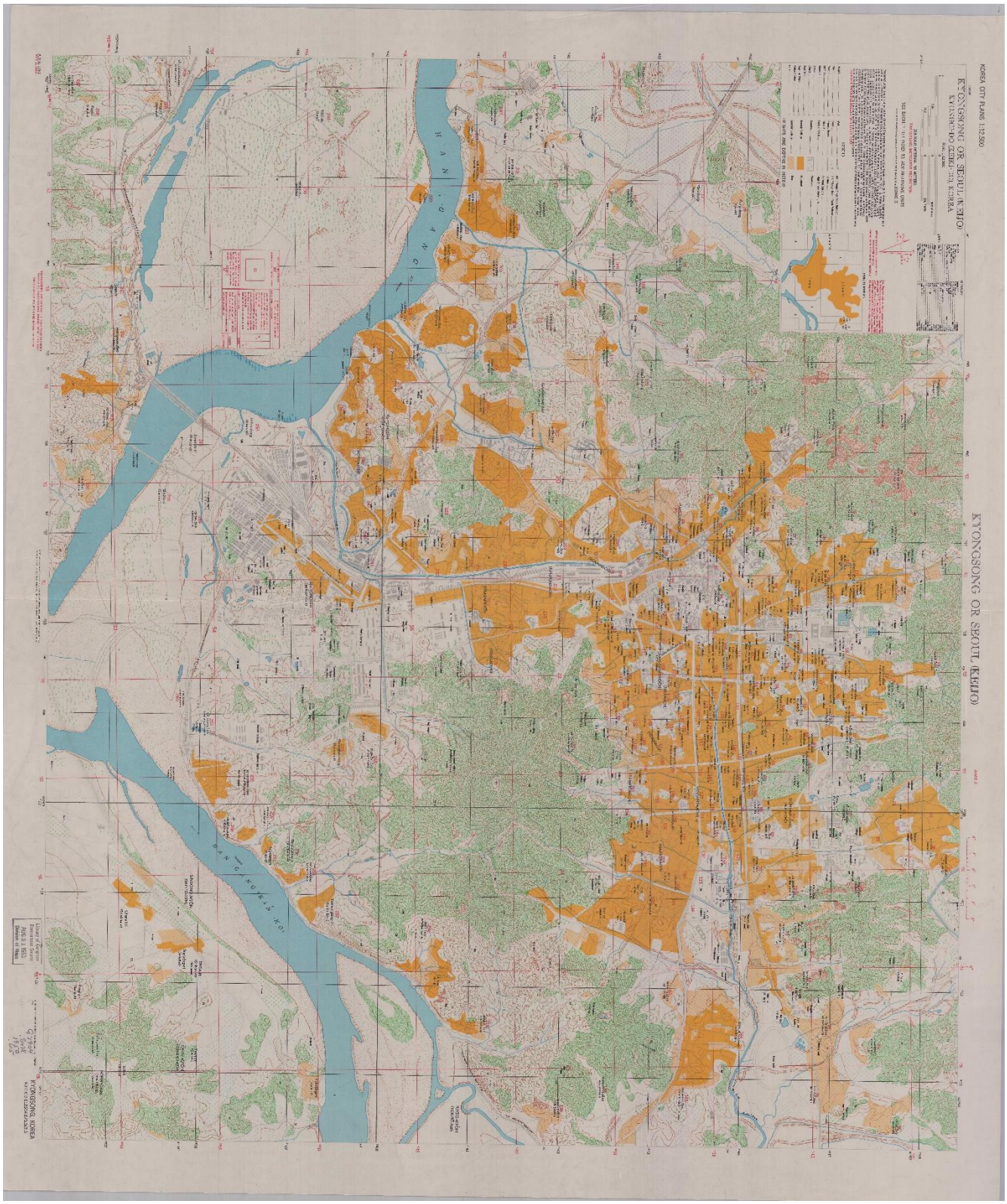
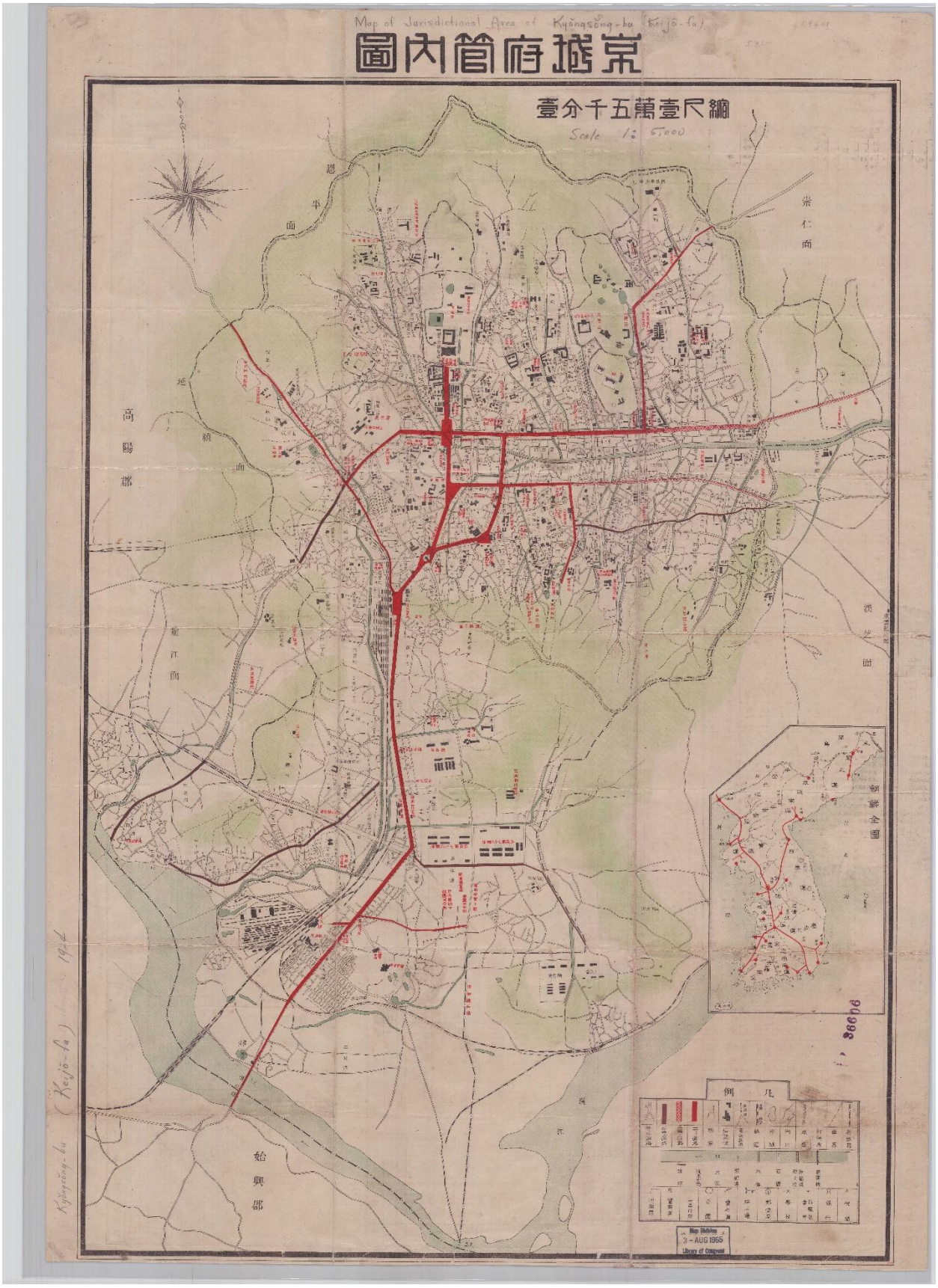


Figure 1 – U.S. Army Map of Seoul (Kyongsong). 1950. Library of Congress.



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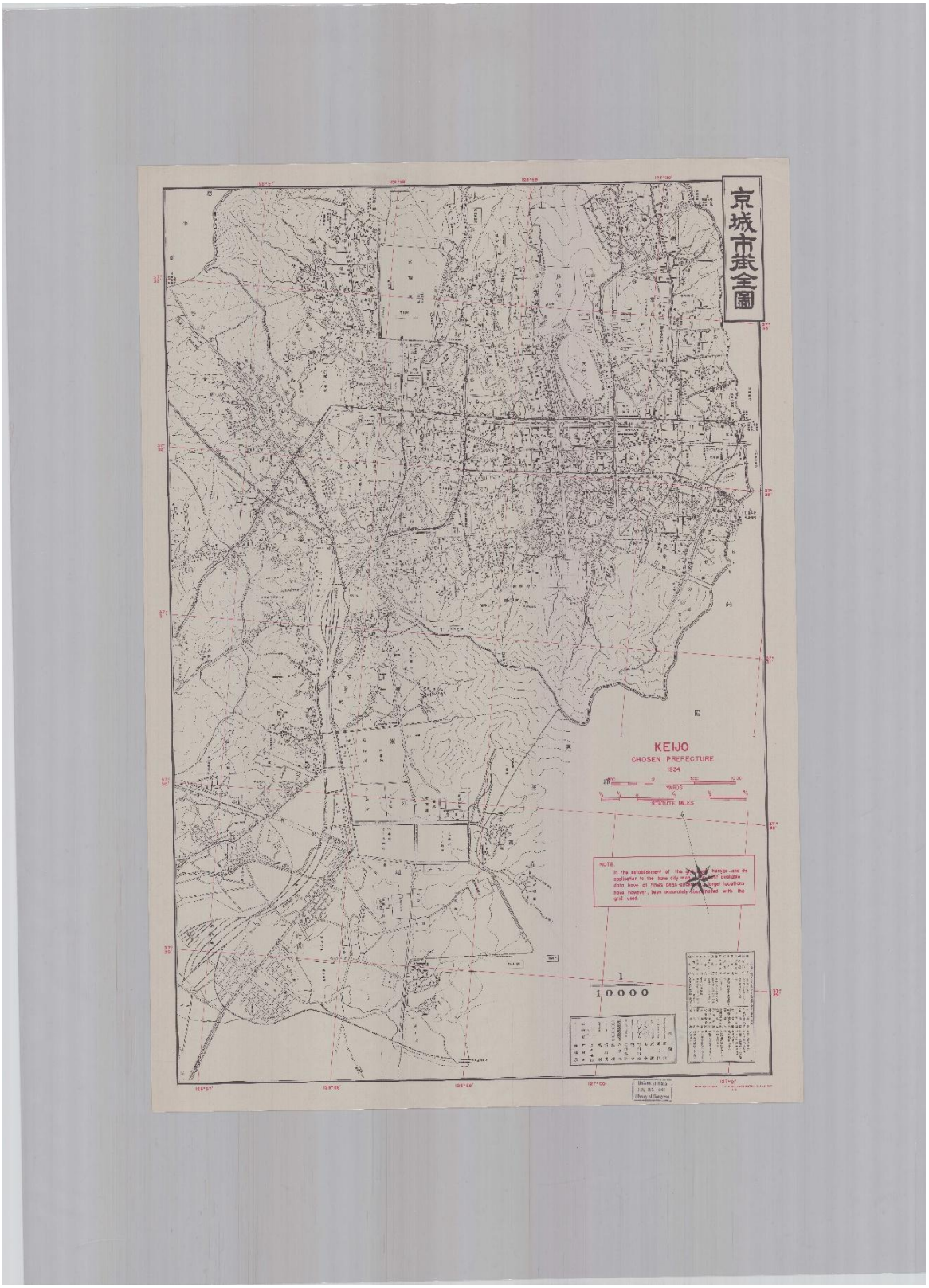

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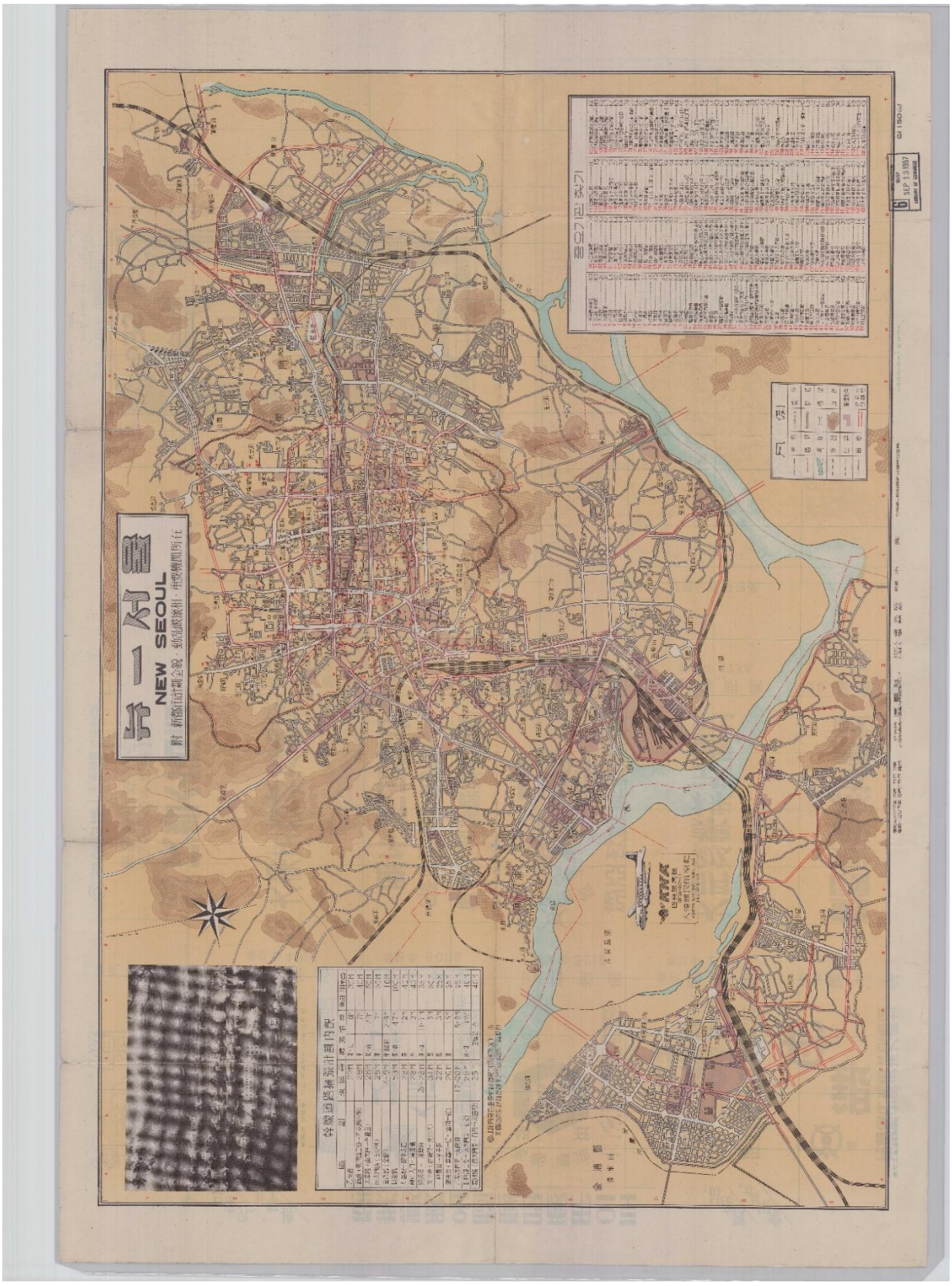

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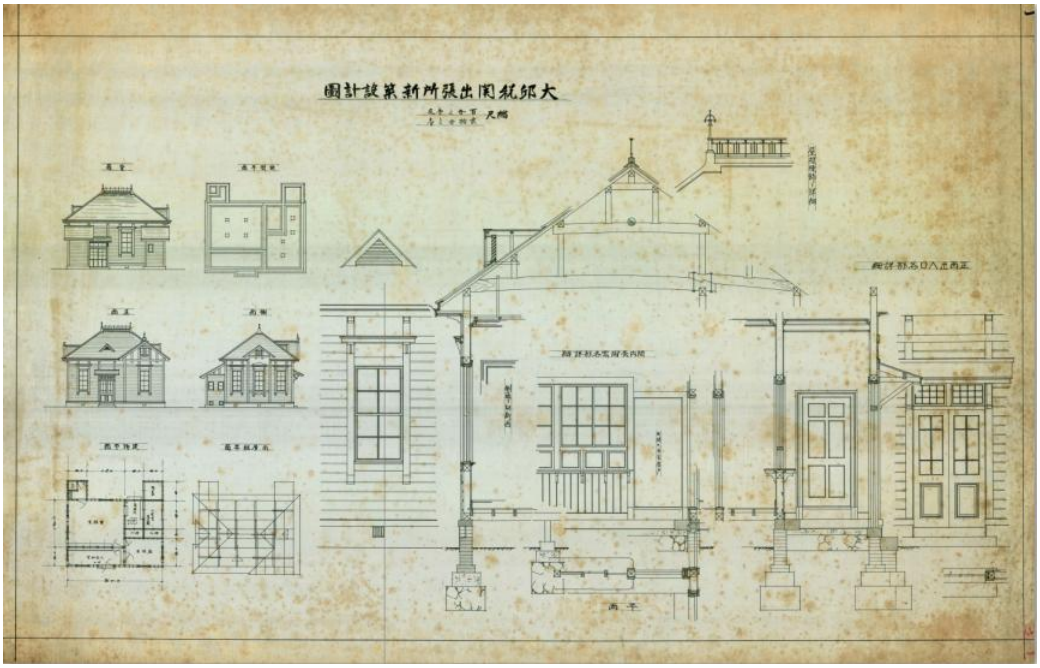

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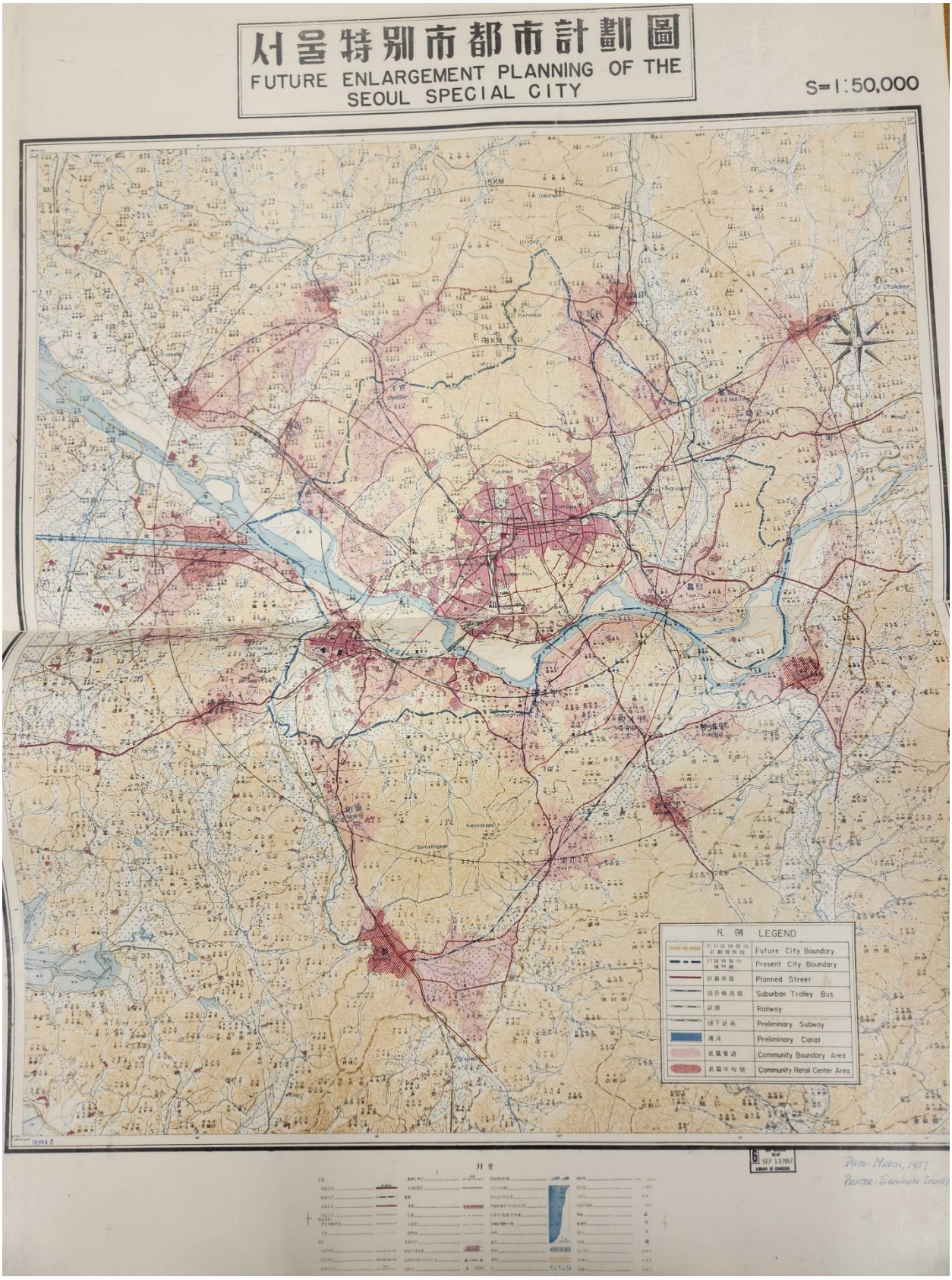

Figure 10 – Map of Seoul outlining future plans for expansion. 1957. Library of Congress.

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