

## **Growth and spatial structure of cities: Memo 1**

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### **Reflecting urban growth theories of Mumford, Jacobs, and Harvey in the context of Seoul**

#### Introduction

Urban growth can mean many things in different times. However, the magnitude of both physical and economical urban growth seemed to have been the greatest during industrialization. This is why I thought it would be interesting to focus on urban growth during the industrialization period. Because many readings already touched quite extensively on industrialization of western cities, this essay looks at the urban growth of Seoul.

However, this memo's focus is not about describing the urbanization process of Seoul. Rather it attempts to compare and reflect three different urban growth models of Mumford, Jacobs, and Harvey in the context of Seoul. Because Seoul was industrialized in different manner and in different time frame, hopefully it will trigger different reactions or thoughts about the models that stem mostly from western cities.

#### Mumford

What is striking about Mumford's description of 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrializing cities is that it seems similar to the urbanization process that took place in Seoul during 1960s to 1970s. He describes how vast number of people kept moving in to the city as industrialization occurred, and how that resulted in rapid and chaotic growth of cities. "It was the change of scale, the unrestricted massing of populations and industries, that

produced some of the most horrendous urban effects” (Mumford, p.456)

It is true that the ‘urban effect’ Mumford describes is not literally same as what happened in Seoul in mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It wasn’t dominantly built railroads that fragmented and deteriorated city environment, but roads and highways in Seoul.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Mumford’s ‘industrial housing’ that was out of reach of mass production benefits, Seoul was being rapidly being filled up with identical mass produced, matchbox-like looking apartment buildings that provided housing for people of all classes. However, as Mumford also mentions, the deterioration of the environment was great, and the speed of building and rebuilding the city was enormous. Mumford would as well be describing rapidly urbanizing Seoul when he said, “men built in haste, and had hardly time to repent of their mistakes before they tore down their original structures and built again, just as heedlessly.” (Mumford, p.449)

What differed about Mumford’s theory and the case of Seoul is that Mumford blamed market force and utilitarianism’s emphasis on individual freedom for the drastic urban consequences of industrialization, while in the case of Seoul, it was strong military government that led the industrialization as well as projects that shaped Seoul. In other words, rather than the private market force, it was military state with strong determination to economically develop in rapid manner that led to arbitrary physical growth. However, both market force, and the government motivated to economically develop, are not very different from each other. They both focus primarily on economic growth, and tend to disregard other factors of urban life. The contestation that comes out of this is what

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<sup>1</sup> A good example that shows how recently Seoul has been trying to recover from such consequences of industrialization is the recently finished Chung Gae Chun (Chung Gae stream) project. It was about recovering the natural stream that used to run under the cement cover and the high level road that was built over it in 1971.

Mumford criticizes, and also justifiably applies to the industrialized growth of Seoul, necessitating an action plan for better planning of cities.

### Jacobs

Jacobs emphasizes import-replacing process as a fundamental driving force behind economic growth of cities. It is only when cities are able to constantly diversify its economic base and self-generate that cities are able to sustain their growth. Being a capital, Seoul had advantage of easily diversifying and magnifying its spill over effects of import-replacement into its local economy, in the state driven economic development.<sup>2</sup>

Because the economic development of Korea was state controlled, the effect of growth tended to concentrate in Seoul. As the center of Korea, Seoul benefited concentration of infrastructure development, as well as industries and labor.<sup>3</sup> In other words, most of the resources that became available were poured into Seoul wherever they may be from, because the power controlling economics was highly concentrated. Jacobs mentions good market, and existing workers and skills as two factors required for import-replacement to take place.(Jacobs, p.146) Seoul had strong qualities of both, mainly because of its role as central capital. People came to Seoul to find jobs, and at the same time firms sought to locate in Seoul, where there were abundant labor and infrastructure resources, as well as easy access to government.<sup>4</sup> With more labor and firms coming in, Seoul gained further capability to diversify and import-replace, leading to its explosive

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<sup>2</sup> Jacobs denies the importance of capital role for city's growth, even comparing it with company towns (Jacobs, p.144) However, when the economic development was so strongly controlled and promoted by the state, the advantages of locating in the capital became more pronounced.

<sup>3</sup> For example, when the government tried to increase the local market for automobiles, it built massive amount of roads and highways in Seoul.

<sup>4</sup> Having strong and good relationship with the government was a crucial factor for firms during initial stages of industrialization, because economic development was led by the state.

growth.

Jacobs focuses on explaining the mechanisms of how city grows through import-replacement, but not so much on why some cities are successful at import-replacement while others are not. There are probably many factors that influence successful import-replacement, and the case of Seoul shows that those factors could be quite determining.

### Harvey

Unlike what Harvey states as the hallmark of urbanization Asia,<sup>5</sup> Seoul was able to match the surplus of labor power with capital surpluses. Capital surplus however was strongly created by the state, instead of the free market. Many state driven economic development projects, with protection from foreign competition, led to possible employment of labor surplus that gathered around Seoul. The wages rose, creating large middle class population, and the surplus was added to infrastructure development, to create further room for more capital accumulation.

One of many examples of such cases would be the state initiated development in the South of Han River. Seoul is divided into northern and southern part of the Han River, and majority of historical development were in the north, while south was composed mostly of vacant land. Coupled with increasing population, middle class formation, and increasing capital, the state sought to develop southern part of the Seoul. It built major express bus terminal in the south and bridges crossing the river. It also incentivized modern housing developments that were to attract middle class to the new riches. This spurred real estate boom in the south, creating further capital, which in turn helped greatly to accelerate capital accumulation in Seoul as a whole.

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey described the hallmark of Third World urbanization as “capital shortage and labor power surpluses”. (Harvey, p.193)

Harvey's theory of urban growth is the process of shaping landscape for capital accumulation. The case above is just one of many examples of this process of shaping the landscape. His model argues that there is a system in which all the factors and players of growth, including the agency, are under the capitalism's dynamic. As the model suggests, the state that initiated the formation of such landscape can be seen as a mere factor of the system fostering capitalism. However, what led Seoul into the system in the first place was also the state. It was the state's strong eager to economically develop that distinguished Seoul from other, still undeveloped cities with idle labor surplus. The state in this case seems to have much more importance than what Harvey has acknowledged.

### Conclusion

One model can not dominate when trying to understand the growth of a city. The models of Mumford, Jacobs, and Harvey all help to better explain different, or sometimes even same aspects of the urban growth of a complex city, in this case Seoul.

Because the urbanization of Seoul was so heavily dependent on the role of the state, the state as an agency provoked some thoughts in all of the three models. In Mumford's model, the characteristic of the state that focused only in economic development showed how it could lead to same problematic contestations as in free market. In Jacob's model, the consequences of the state's involvement in the economy triggered to think more about the facilitating factors behind the import-replacement model. Finally in Harvey's model, the role of the state initiating urbanization of capital that otherwise would not have occurred, questioned Harvey's argument of the passiveness of an agency acting only as part of the system.