[page 53]

**City Planning and Neighborhood Preservation in Seoul**

by Josh Moreinis

Seoul is again experiencing a transformation of built form only thirty years after the city’s initial post war reconstruction. Hillside neighborhoods with no structures above five stories several years ago are witnessing the increasing appearance of construction sites spilling out onto narrow streets and the continual disappearance of views of the surrounding mountains. Rethinking traditional urban patterns while preserving natural features is the challenge to Korean planners in the 1990s as the construction sector replaces export goods production as the driving force of the national economy.

Though planners and residents complain of a lack of guidance, Seoul actually has an extensive history of planning policy implementation. From the mystical principles of geomancy applied to the layout of Seoul in the 14th century to numerous comprehensive plans since the 1960s, the Korean government has been far reaching in its efforts to shape the city. Possibly due to the hierarchical nature of Korean society and governance,it has exercised a relatively free hand. Milestones include the capital region’s five new satellite cities (four year old Bundang has a population of 400,000), the nation’s 5,397 square kilometers of greenbelt, and the “Concept of Public Land,” or Gongaenium: 1991 anti-speculation legislation imposing limits on the amount of urban land that can be owned by an individual, a progressive land holdings tax and a high unearned capital gains tax.

Until recently, however, national urban policies have been growth-based, relying on the development of the Seoul-Busan corridor to fuel the economy. Result: overconcentration of population and resources in Seoul at the expense of rural areas like Cholla and Kangwon provinces. In Seoul, systematic land use plans have often been superseded by urban renewal or industrial development legislation. Environmental quality, urban amenities, and neighborhood [page 54] character were sacrificed on the altar of economic development as Korea’s economy has grown to be one of the world’s top 152 and contains one of the greatest concentrations of large corporations in the region.

Located on the southern edge of Seoul, the neighborhood of Shillim 9 Dong illustrates the impact of recent housing development on lifestyles. Many of the tightly clustered homes which banket the slopes of Kwanak Mountain in this relatively low income community developed rapidly following the Revised Seoul City General Plan of 1970 which sought to redistribute population from overcrowded Kangbuk north of the Han River to Kangnam south of the Han River. The nearby relocation of Seoul National University in 1973 and an influx of families displaced by urban renewal projects in other parts of the city also spurred the development of this area. Until recently, housing forms in Shillim 9 Dong have included a smattering of traditional tile-roofed hanok residence-no among two to four story brick apartment buildings which step up the hillside as a natural extension of the landscape. Many of the mid-rise apartment houses contain functional rooftops used commonly for the storage of large kimchi pots or even for small gardens.

The human scale of Shillim 9 Dong, the social role of its streets, and the proliferation of ground floor neighborhood stores among its residences represent some of the characteristic traits of established neighborhoods in Seoul. Immediate access to Kwanak Mountain with a 2,000 foot peak provides much needed recreational opportunities as well as maintaining ties to past agrarian life styles with small garden plots maintained at its base. Although the high mix of uses and many irregularly layed out lots suggest ad- hoc, unplanned growth and permissive development regulations, the community seems to function in an orderly fashion. Both old and young can be found on the busy streets of Shillim 9 Dong which lead up the slopes of the adjacent pine and acacia covered Kwanak Mountain.

Forming a western boundary for Shillim 9 Dong is the Shillim Market. This low scale stretch of tightly spaced stores reflects some of the essential qualities of the Korean shopping district with its onslaught of colorful signs, displayed goods, and admix of people. The compressed spacing of storefronts, diversity of shops and tight pedestrian spaces are reminiscent of more famous markets in Korea such as Seoul’s Namdaemun Market or Pusan’s Chalgakchi Market. The face to face interaction and local access to fresh foodstuffs which the market allows are important components of the daily routines of local households, with informal communication among neighbors and spontaneous interaction also contributing to the village-like quality of Shillim-Dong. [page 55]

Housing types in Shillim 9 Dong are representative of development trends in Seoul over the last several decades. Mid-rise six story public projects blend into the surrounding terrain adjacent to the Shillim Elementary School while walls of high rise towers have recently begun to line the southern edge of Kwanak Mountain. In the words of a seven year resident, “These awesome developments immediately catch your eye when you enter the community and have destroyed the once harmonious feeling of living next to Kwanak Mountain.”

Another form of new construction that proliferates is five-story rental apartment buildings rapidly constructed by small developers. Recently built, low scale housing in the area includes numerous two-story “villa” residences, which are more upscale than previously existing housing, and the more common Dan Dok Chu Taek, translated literally as “stand-alone-housing,” with a single family owner and possibly one or two rental units. While single-owner occupied housing has been the norm until recently in Shillim 9 Dong, rising heating and maintenance costs have led people to seek more modern arrangements such as high rise cooperatives or condominiums. Low scale owner occupied homes are increasingly being demolished and redeveloped with mid-rise construction.

High rise housing, first introduced by the Korean National Housing Corporation in the 1960s and transformed into a common lifestyle preference with the development of Kangnam, has been promoted with recent government subsidized housing developments. With the Korean Housing Corporation having virtual monopolistic control in the process of large scale residential development in Korea, the government’s vision of housing has led to a marked change in the way Koreans live.

As the explosive development of Kangnam has proceeded, representing to Seoulites” ...a movement toward the new world associated with opportunity, affluence, mobility and anonymity,”3 so has the community of Shillim 9 Dong experienced rapid change. A number of urban renewal projects over the past five years have introduced twenty story high rise apartment buildings bearing the names of their Chaebol development corporations such as Hyundai and Gun Young. Their configurations have generally obscured visual access to the surrounding terrain and, with the disruption of local street patterns, a separation from the adjacent community has been ensured. Reflecting intense housing pressures in this once affordable community as well as in the rest of Seoul, prices for an apartment in the Hyundai Apartments complex are geared towards professionals. While many residents of Seoul profess a preference for such high rise lifetyles, there are certainly less disruptive locations [page 56] for such development. Community opposition held up the construction of the Shin Dong-A project in 1991. On-site protests continue in the spring of 1994 in response to the planned replacement of a vacant three-story apartment complex adjacent to the Hyundai development with an extension of the high rises.

Public policy has encouraged such developments. Height and bulk regulations are relaxed at times to facilitate the reclamation and stabilization of land often previously occupied by squatters.

While the production of housing is certainly much needed—Seoul currently has a housing shortfall of 46%—the form of new development could be more sensitive to neighborhood scale, topography, and lifestyle issues without unduly increasing costs or restricting the number of units produced. A consideration of sense of place and preservation of natural features in the regulation of development is particularly warranted in areas which possess a consistent context or distinct natural features such as Shillim 9 Dong.

TRAOT URBAN PATTERNS IN SEOUL

Pusan, Korea’s second largest city, is nestled between and built around mountains and a harbor. Famous as a port city, with a small section next to the central railway actually containing as many Russian signs as Korean, Pusan’ s population has grown to almost four million despite the severe obstacles of the terrain. Downtown streets still accent rather than obscure the stunning surrounding natural features. Similarly, one of the characteristics which distinguishes Seoul is its topography of nine mountains and sixty two hills. Some mountains have become regional recreational and tourist attractions, such as Namsan and Kwanak Mountains, while others are accessed daily mostly by residents of nearby neighborhoods compensating for the comparatively low amount of recreational open space such as playgrounds or neighborhood parks .

Strong cultural meaning is also attached to the mountains of Seoul with the four main encompassing peaks represented as animal guardian spirits. Originally the city was oriented southwards at the base of Pugak Mountain with Namsan Mountain, now an inner city landmark containing the famous Namsan Tower, defining its southern border. As the growth of Seoul has spilled outward beyond these two, the larger peaks of Pukhansan and Kwanaksan have come to define the northern and southern reaches of Seoul.

The Korean landscape is an important part of the religious beliefs of the [page 57] country. Images of the mountain spirit, Samshingak, with his companion white lion can be seen in art works dating back to the 1500s and represent an important element of Korean shamanism. Buddhist and shaman temples and burial mounds can also be found among the hillsides of many of Seoul’s mountains. Shillim 9 Dong has several examples of mountainside, religious sites including Kwanung Temple on Kwanak Mountain and a well known shaman temple located in an impromptu complex of one-story buildings adjacent to the Gun Young apartment towers.

While hillside temples and images of Samshingak indicate the reverence for mountains in folklore and religion, the principles that formed the underlying pattern of the city of Seoul are also largely based on location in relation to natural features such as water and mountains. The Chinese art of Feng Shui, known in Korea as P’ungsoo, seeks to channel forces commonly known as Gi in the placement of homes, roads, walls, tombs, wells, and other facilities with cardinal points providing orientation. Although writings on the subject often speak of its mystical aspects, P’ungsoo’s application is quite practical. Along with assuring good fortune through the channeling of cosmic energies, the rules of P’ungsoo are effective in orienting views, arranging paths of movement and drainage, and in strategic military considerations. Chinese Feng Shui dates back over 3,000 years and began to affect Korean design practices by the late 600s when it was absorbed from Tang Dynasty China (618-906) during Korea’s Unified Shilla Period (668-935).

Architecture and urbanism in Choson Dynasty Korea (1392-1910) were guided by P’ungsoo. Seoul, established as Hanyang in 1394, is a unique site for situating a capital according to P’ungsoo theory. Propitious features include its mountain-sheltered basin containing a winding waterway. King Tajo, the Yi Dynasty Founder who moved his capital to Seoul 600 years ago, used a geomancer, or P’ungsoo expert, to design the city. Ulchiro and Chong-no are still the central business district’s main east-west running streets and Sejongno, the broad north-south running corridor, still connects their eastern ends and is the focal point of the city’s main cultural and administrative landmarks, such as the National Museum, the Sejong Cultural Center and City Hall. Extending southward from the Royal Palace, or Kyongbok Gung, Sejongno originally contained civilian government offices to the right and military offices to the left, illustrating the city founders emphasis on order and the importance of location. Other key features of the original layout of the city are still reflected in the underlying organization of downtown Seoul with its 17 kilometer long royal palace complex being the second largest in Asia after Beijing’s Forbidden City.4 In many cases, street patterns of subsidiary [page 58] roads also follow established thoroughfares from Choson Period Seoul.5

The practice of Feng Shui recently became publicized in the west with reports of the 1985 redesign of the Hong Kong Bank. The building’s elevator and entrance were moved at great expense after it became apparent that the original layout was considered unlucky according to Feng Shui principles. The adaptation of the practice of P’ungsoo in modern Korea has largely been restricted to the countryside, but one recent case in Seoul makes the redesign of the Bank of Hong Kong seem like a minor adjustment.

The National Museum of Korea, a romanesque, white limestone building designed by a German architect in 1926, occupies a central site at the base of the city’s original focus, Mount Pugak. The building is slated for demolition in several years both due to the negative symbolism associated with the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) during which it was built, and also because it is aligned with prevailing natural or geomantic energies in such a way as to bring bad luck according to P’ungsoo Theory. Despite its architectural grandeur, the building overshadows and separates the customary symbol of authority, the royal palace, from Kwanghwamun Gate, traditionally representing the connection of the throne to the people. The huge sums of money and time that will be expended on the building’s demolition and reconstruction illustrate the persistence of symbolism and traditional views toward the land-scape in shaping modern Seoul.

Other examples of Japanese colonial period architecture can be still be seen in Seoul such as the Seoul Railway Station and City Hall, although their continued use has not been questioned. Aside from these prominent landmarks, the origins of modern city planning methods in Korea can be found in Japanese techniques originally imposed during the occupation period but continued voluntarily after liberation. The first modern Korean planning laws from the early 1960s were based on Japanese colonial style laws. The Korean use of zoning, street widening, and a hierarchy of often grid-patterned streets all reflect the methods of the 1934 Japanese Keiji-Fu plan for Seoul, which was the first modern city plan for Seoul. The 1934 plant set a target population of 700,000 by 1959 and designated land use categories and a hierarchy of road widths over the city’s then 108 square kilometers.5

Prior to the late 19th century opening of Seoul to the outside world, the capital city’s population had remained stable. The construction of railways and modern infrastructure during the occupation allowed the rapid growth of Seoul starting from early in the century. Land readjustment techniques, whereby modern urban land use patterns were established and applied to either farmland or through urban renewal, was a method used by the Japanese [page 59] and dated back to 19th century Prussian city planning.6 This technique was continued by the Korean government in the modernization and expansion of Seoul. The standardized form of land readjustment projects results from the government’s taking private lands through eminent domain, improving them with regular streets, and returning rectangular parcels after subtracting the portion used for widened streets and public lands.

The built legacy of Japanese planning in Korea can also be seen in two cities which were designed as new towns by the Japanese early in the century. These include Najin in North Korea and the southern coastal city of Chinhae. Just west of Pusan, Chinhae continues its function as a naval home port, but is also quite a pleasant city with its tree-lined streets and famous springtime cherry blossom festival. Forty thousand of the butgot, or cherry blossom (trees), were replanted after liberation. Aside from glimpses of early-in-the century wood-sided Japanese buildings with their horizontal line emphasis, this city of 130,000 has a street layout and urban design reminiscent of 20th century Japanese city planning.7 The grandiose street network focuses around three central rotaries with broad, sidewalked boulevards intersecting the grid pattern streets that stretch out toward the mountains to the north.

The “five essential elements”is another concept borrowed from the Chinese which can be seen in the indigenous architecture and form of Seoul. With its natural construction materials of wood, straw, stone, and earth, the traditional Korean style house, or hanok, emphazes integration with nature and can still be seen scattered among modern brick and metal buildings. Traditional residential architecture of Korea has much in common with neighboring Chinese and Japanese styles. Several distinctly Korean features include the heated and raised ondol floors and the solid, low scale of the hanok. In many cases, these distinct qualities represent responses to the country’s severe climate and topography. The heavy tiled roof of the hanok follows the contours of the land rather than emphasizing the verticality of the structure as does upward-tilted Chinese roof design. While the layout of Korean palaces and residential complexes have their roots in Chinese styles, traditional Korean urban design principles are more reliant on aesthetics and integration with natural features than the rigid symmetry exemplified by the layout of Beijing’s Forbidden City.

Historically a respect for context is a key feature of Korean urbanism. Residential streetscapes of Choson period Seoul had consistent rows of lined- up eaves and a careful match between adjacent homes. Predating the modern concept of bulk and height zoning regulations, Choson Period sumptuary laws were based on the Neo-Confucian disdain for ostentatiousness and a rever- [page 60] ence for order and hierarchy. These laws, as in Edo Period Japan, limited both the size of ordinary peoples’ homes and exterior ornamentation. Homes for other than royalty had a size limit of 99 kan. Kan refer to the size of the space between two pillars. Preserved areas in Seoul such as Insa-Dong and Ka-Hoe still have streetscapes which approximate views of this earlier period although their backdrop is one of high rise offices.

The layout and flexibility of rooms in old style homes, as with Japanese residences, promotes interaction among family members with rooms often being accessed through other rooms rather than being located off of a central hallway. The impact of architecture in the social realm takes on critical importance as housing patterns shift in Korea during the 1990s. As modern apartment lifestyles become more widespread, family structure and the communal nature of Korean society may also shift to a convergence with western norms.

Buddhist architecture and temple construction has also influenced the built form of Korean cities. One of the most notable features of Korean Buddhist architecture is the use of brightly colored wooden structural members. A radiant mixture of colors sets Korean Buddhist architecture apart from the rest of Asian temple construction. Another distinct feature is the use of intricate wood carvings such as triple-tiered bracket structures below temple roof lines and the elaborate geometric patterns of window and door woodwork. The Chinese Sung and Yuan Dynasty styles which influenced Korean Buddhist architecture were also transferred to Japan via the Korean Peninsula. The Paekche Korean character of Japan’s oldest temple, Horyuji, which was built in the 8th century in the ancient capital of Nara, illustrates Korean influence at a very early stage in the development of Japanese architecture.

While some of the features of traditional architecture obviously cannot be duplicated with contemporary construction, there are many examples of modern architecture in Seoul which refer to these earlier forms. The Sejong Cultural Center is one of the most famous examples which uses the proportions of traditional architecture such as its pronounced roof design. More common is the use of rows of clay tiles around the perimeter of low scale apartment roofs or other references to traditions in contemporary vernacular architecture like intricately molded tile ends or hanging a pujok, amulette, outside of a door.

[page 61]

NATIONAL PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN KOREA

A review of planning policies in Seoul would have to include an overview of national physical planning in Korea as the two are closely linked and the capital region’s planning has been dictated by the central government. Korea’s greenbelt, open space system, entailing over five thousand square kilometers of land, is one of the nation’s most outstanding accomplishments in the area of urban planning. Established in 1971, this extensive network of preservation zones focuses on the major urban centers around Seoul and Pusan with development restricted to recreation related development and the existing agricultural and residential uses scattered among the mostly mountainous open spaces. Of the world’s major cities, few can claim to have maintained a greenbelt system comparable to that ringing Seoul, with Japan having abandoned its greenbelt in 1969.

When the greenbelt was established in 1971, the government’s primary consideration was strategic. Secondly it was intended to prevent the spread of real estate speculation by protecting enclaves of established housing around Seoul and lastly for recreational open space use. While it failed to contain the city’s growth or prevent two decades of subsequent land price escalations, its accomplishments in the last area are noteworthy, as it allowed a continuation of the Korean attachment to nature in the midst of what has become one of the world’s ten largest cities. With the increasing vocalism of residents which has accompanied the shift to local autonomy, however, land owners have led a movement to relax greenbelt regulations to allow a greater profit from the use of their properties. Over the past several years changes in the greenbelt regulations have been considered, first by allowing recreation related uses, later with minor additions to existing residences permitted and further changes to be announced.

The Presidential Decree which established the greenbelt system was accompanied in 1971 by the country’s First Comprehensive National Physical Development Plan. The theme of this major strategy and the two subsequent ten year plans has been decentralization, in an attempt to alleviate concentrated population growth which has resulted in the Seoul region’s 40% share of the national population. Their effectiveness has been limited against the strong pull to the capital region of businesses and migrants. Seoul maintains a stable yet high rate of primacy over other Korean cities, having almost triple the population of the next largest city. As opposed to the middle and upper class exodus common in American patterns of suburbanization, suburbaniza-tion around Seoul has proceeded largely due to residents escaping the rising [page 62] costs of inner city living as new rapid rail transit opportunities are introduced Development has leap frogged over the greenbelt to form a remarkably large urban sprawl. Cities with the highest growth rates in Korea are also located in the capital region.

The transition of Korean urban policy from a growth-based paradigm to current concerns with quality of life issues can best be traced in the past three decade’s Ten Year National Physical Development Plans. These documents have set the far-reaching targets and bold goals for infrastructure which, once achieved, seem remarkable to western observers used to political gridlock and fiscal restraint regarding public works.

The First National Physical Development Plan, covering the period between 1972 and 1980, succeeded in promoting impressive levels of national growth although territorial imbalances ensued as a result of the plan’s approach. Its goals included the improved efficiency of national land use and the expansion of transportation, power and utility systems. Investment was concentrated in areas where scales of economy were already in place, namely, Seoul. Seoul’s growth, originally targeted at 6.3 million in 1980, had actually reached 8.5 million by that time, while population and investment in the Seonam and Taebeak areas and Joongbu Province continued to decline. Large scale export oriented industrial complexes were developed along the Seoul- Pusan cornaor and along the southern coast at Pohang, Gumi Yeochon, and Changweon with major expansions of transportation and communications networks and water and energy supplies necessary for industrial development such as the Honam and Namhae expressways and the construction of multipurpose dams on the Soyang River at Andong.10

The First National Comprehensive Physical Development Plan represented a break from the previous five year plans of Park Chun Hee’s Administration with its integration of spatial and economic approaches.11 Yet while its deliberate focus on imbalanced development in the interest of the nation’s overall progress activated economic growth, the loss of population and investment in Seonam, Taebeak and Joongbu provinces which it facilitated became the focus of the two subsequent national physical development plans. Environmental degradation resulting from overconcentration has proven to be the most critical issue perceived by Korea twenty years later.

While the Second Comprehensive National Physical Development. Plan was also based on a growth paradigm, the imbalances brought on as a result of the first plan were recognized and measures were established to promote regional balance. The 1982 document opens with a description of the shortfalls of the previous ten year plan, including the bi-polarization of the country. [page 63]

At the heart of the second plan’s strategy was the relocating of central management functions and industrial development to what were called the “Induced Growth Centers”of Kwangju, Taejon, and Taegu and twenty eight integrated regional settlement areas around the country, each with its own central city.

The other side of the balanced development strategy of the Second Com-prehensive National Physical Development Plan was growth control in Seoul and Pusan. These measures included the relocation of administrative func-tions, including the ongoing relocation of government offices to the adjacent city of Kwachon, a graded tax system for enterprises, curbs on new industry, and the promotion of land use efficiency. Industrial policies represented a shift away from large-scale industrial estates to small-to-medium sized industrial estates and particular industrial uses designated, such as textile and electronics around Taegu and Gumi cities and machinery around Kwangju and Mogpo cities.

While many of the decentralization measures of the second plan were ineffective due to a lack of specific implementation measures, housing was one area which saw concrete results, both literally and figuratively. Three and a quarter million units were projected for the time period, with 42% slated for high-rise multi-family structures to economize on land use.12 While the plan discouraged slum clearance, the legacy of housing development in Seoul during this period was one of unrestrained and insensitive urban renewal often resulting in violent protests. Preparations for the 1988 Olympics included measures to improve the image of the city such as ridding it of the illegal squatter settlements, or “moon villages,” which most commonly occupied hillside land in the center of the city.

In the 1960s, squatters accounted for one third of the city’s population. They currently account for approximately one tenth of the city’s total population.13 With their narrow alleyways substituting for automobile accessible streets and poor plumbing and electric systems falling short of safety and convenience standards, the “moon village”squatter settlements of Seoul do provide a sense of community and security lacking in much of the recently built housing in Seoul. While the strong-armed approach to clearing squatter areas has passed, an upcoming deadline at the end of the decade for the designation of squatter areas for redevelopment has led to a sudden increase in new high rise developments, particularly on hillsides where squatters have tended to locate. The rapid progression of these projects, which are generally beyond the control of the underlying zoning’s size limits, raises concerns over environmental impacts to topographically sensitive sights,disruptions of social [page 64] networks and existing lifestyles, and the loss of housing for low income residents.

The Third Comprehensive National Developments Plan, covering the period between 1992 and 2001, continued the theme of balanced development, increased the emphasis on improved living environments and added a theme of “unity” through the establishment of foundations for reunification with North Korea. This last goal included transportation links, improvements to the border region and planning for joint projects for the post-reunification period. Many sweeping changes have been ushered in with the plan including a shift to a system of local autonomy rule. Other goals such as balanced development have been more illusive and the implementation of “unity” has slowed as issues over nuclear weaponry have surfaced and lessons from the recent German transition slow the speed at which South Koreans are willing to accept unification.

As with the second ten year plan, one of the most tangible accomplish-ments during the period of the third plan has been in the area of housing. This can be seen in the recent and ongoing construction of five shindoshi, or new towns, around Seoul. Astounding in the magnitude and speed of their construction, these include Pundang, a sprawling complex of high rises one hour by car outside of Seoul. While Pundang’s central park and mixed use exhibition area attest to the details of this new town’s design features, residents complain of a lack of attractions such as a preferred shopping area and report a dissatisfaction with the overly standardized nature of these living environments, Recent newspaper polls have also reported a shift in preference away from the lifestyles of high rise apartments.

The rapid growth of the new towns and other capital region cities has helped to alleviate overconcentration although projected functional roles, such as a high tech industry town, have not been achieved with these largely bedroom communities. Seoul’s population is stabilizing despite massive construction projects and ambitious government-set goals for housing production. A half percentage decrease in Seoul’s population occurred in 1993, now estimated at just under eleven million people.

Five and a half million housing units have been targeted for construction during the period of the third ten year plan in an attempt to achieve a housing supply rate of 86% by the end of the century. The Seoul region is slated to absorb over 40% of these units.15 While planning for the increasing trend of he nuclear family and decreasing housing overcrowding are certainly necessary, the lofty projections for construction in the Seoul region run counter to the theme of regional decentralization set forth as one of the plan’s main goals. [page 65]

Environmental conservation was also proposed as one of the plan’s main themes but, as with the second plan, a lack of specific measures has limited its effectiveness. Broadly stated goals of environmental preservation seem to contradict land use measures proposed in the plan such as the reclamation of 1,180 square kilometers of coastal tidelands. This level of coastal development will undoubtedly put a severe strain on the ecosystem with one example being the proposed New Seoul Metropolitan Airport on Yongjong Island off Inchon. Double the size of Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, the proposal has raised protests from environmentalists over impacts on bird migration patterns and ocean life. While there currently seems to be a burgeoning vocalism concorn- ing the environment, there are also continuing pressures to loosen environment policies for the sake of future growth. Hopefully, Korea’s signing of the Rio Summit Pact signals a commitment to wildlife and environmental protection which will spill over into the realm of land use.

The National Comprehensive Physical Development Plans fall under the purview of the Ministry of Construction with the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlement, a planning think tank, providing policy guidance, yet implementing the plans has been hindered by the fragmented nature of governmental jurisdiction over land use matters. Sixteen separate ministries and bureaus have partial control over land use decision making such as the Ministries of Construction, Environment, Defense, Transportation, and Finance. This has led to conflicting goals in some instances and has prevented the establishment of one single land information system to guide policy decisions.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN SEOUL

Apart from the national level physical development plans, Seoul has been the subject of a series of comprehensive master plans. The most far reaching impact of the earliest of these plans, including the Revised Seoul City General Plan of 1970, was shifting development south of the Han River into Kangnam. Increased bulk or size limits were used as well as land read-justment policies in an attempt to alleviate congestion in the established Kangbuk area. Laying down the one kilometer-spaced grid pattern streets of Kangnam also brought on waves of real estate speculation as witnessed in fashionable districts such as Apkujong and Shinsa. Some observers, however, felt that the rigid imposition of grid pattern superblocks, without consideration of natural features or the resulting streetscape, has created a built form in [page 66] Kangnam which lacks coherence and has little connection to the history, con-text, or landscape of the city.

Prior to the late 1960s, efforts to guide the growth of Seoul were directed at developing the infrastructure to lay the foundation for the city’s economic expansion. Four bridges were built over the Han River in the 1960s, there were 10 by 1977, 16 by 1988, and construction of new bridges is ongoing. The concept of selectively restricting facilities and development in the capital was introduced in the 1971 Revision of the City Planning Law.

Using a concentric ring theory of growth, plans for Seoul from the’60s and’ 70s targeted zones ringing the city for types of uses and levels of development. Resembling the Greater Plan for London and the Metropolitan Regional Development Plan in Japan, early plans also designated more land for development than could be planned for. Loop roads and rail lines through-out the capital region extended development and the population soon exceed-ed projected targets.

Later plans for Seoul sought to redistribute uses by emphasizing a sub- core strategy. The Olympic Stadium’s Chamshil Core and the Yeong Dung Po District are several of the thirteen sub-cores designated in the 1984 General Plan for Seoul. Each had approximately 1 to 2 million residents and major facilities for government and enterprise centers. The 1984 plan also stressed a grid versus a radial transportation network.

Following two decades of comprehensive plans the 1990 Master Plan for Seoul represented the first legal master plan for the city. Youido Island is an important aspect of the functional division of Seoul and is one of the main focuses of recent planning efforts. Designated as the legislative ana international finance center of Seoul, the skyscrapers and office buildings of this football-shaped land mass on the southern banks of the Han River give its skyline a Manhattan-like appearance. Youido is a showcase of corporate power and a symbol of modern governance including the 63-story Daehan Life Insurance Building and relocated government offices.

Behind the impressive series of master plans and national physical development plans in Korea are several hindrances to growth control. One is the overly centralized control over land use matters. Zoning throughout the country is based on a centrally dictated system with 10 land use zones applied to 70% of the country’s non-urban lands while the remainder are under the jurisdiction of the Urban Planning Law, also with centrally dictated zoning districts. Municipalities can only adjust bulk or size limits within the upper and lower limits specified by the central government. This system has resulted in cities throughout the country having a homogenous appearance. Major land [page 67] use decisions from all provinces are ultimately reviewed by the central City Planning Commission although there are individual city planning commissions at both the municipal level and, in the case of Seoul, at the Gu, or ward level. The underlying zoning of Seoul is generally not oriented toward guiding growth. As in Japanese and American systems, zoning in Seoul can be accused of being a post facto mapping of existing uses and has a central mandate of protecting property rights rather than the compelling guidelines for urban growth found in European zoning models such as in Holland or Great Britain.

IMPACTS OF PLANNING POLICIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN SEOUL

Shillim 9 Dong is an example of an area where the underlying height and bulk limits for development permit new construction which is drastically changing the neighborhood’s character. Most of this community falls under the zoning ordinance’s General Residential Zone designation which encompasses over three quarters of the Seoul area. Representing an overly broad categorization of the city, there are only three basic residential zones as compared to ten in New York City’s zoning code. In May of 1991, as decisions over local land use matters began to be transferred to munipalities, three subdivisions of the General Residential Zone were written into Seoul’s building code/zoning ordinance although these distinctions specifying single-family detached, low to mid rise or high rise building configurations at particular locations have yet to be applied. On the average, Seoul’s zoned density can be considered quite high compared to permitted densities in similarly sized cities in Japan and the West. The amount of floor area permitted into General Residential Zone is equal to four times the amount of lot area, or a “Floor Area Ratio” of 4.0 with height and setback regulations allowing tower style construction on large lots regardless of the existing context.

The permissive nature of use regulations in Seoul’s zoning ordinance is illustrated by recent commercial development in Shillim 9 Dong. Having easy access to stores and the round-the-clock activity, which the corner “Kagae” provides, give typical neighborhoods in Seoul a vibrancy that is often lacking in rigidly zoned cities in America where land uses are more strictly separated. Yet commercial intrusions in residential areas also illustrate the Korean tradeoff of living standards for economic development. Foreigners living in Seoul often point out the nuisances involved in unwanted commercial uses in their neighborhoods. The general residential district permits neighborhood retail [page 68] and service establishments at any location in the community rather than restricting them to major streets as with western-style zoning regulations.

Aside from the common juxtaposition of residences and commercial uses which would be relegated to commercial or industrial zones in western cities, one portion of Shillim 9 Dong has been an influx of entertainment related uses including bars and coffee houses. These have promoted complaints from some residents over negative impacts on neighborhood character, and they raise the question of the compatibility of permitted non-residential uses. In addition, a recent government plan to create a regional business and cultural node within the larger Shillim-Dong community suggests that additional nonresidential uses are likely.

Zoning regulations are also often superseded in Seoul as in the case of urban renewal projects. An example is the innovative Cooperative Redevelopment Program begun in 1986 and accounting for a portion of the recently built, publicly subsidized, high rise housing in the city. This program joins unions of squatter residents with real estate development companies to produce both market rate units and replacement housing for these previously squatter residents. To allow an adequate return for the developers, bulk and density regulations are relaxed, permitting larger buildings.

Aside from being frequently superseded, Seoul’s zoning regulations lack measures to tailor future development to the needs of individual communities. Insensitivity to local conditions can partly be attributed to the lack of local control over decision making in the process of community development. While protests against one of the new high rise developments in Shillim 9 Dong by a group of women from the community actually held off the project several years ago, there here was no institutionalized framework for their input and construction was eventually resumed.

While zoning regulations and planning approaches to community devel-opment have recently been reassessed, significant changes in the planning process will most likely come about as a result of the implementation of Local Autonomy Rule in 1991 and the eventual implementation of direct elections at the municipal level in 1995. Following 1988 demands for Local Autonomy Rule by the Seoul City Council, the preliminary 1991 elections of ward level leaders were the first of their kind in thirty years. Gu level planning decisions have, until recently, been relegated to minor actions such as street widening for collector roads below approximately 30 meters wide. Greater powers will now be given to the Gu level City Planning Commissions including the ability to propose local comprehensive plans for approval by the city and central governments. Providing local level decision makers with a [page 69] greater level of control over land use matters and hopefully allowing citizens to be included in the process will eventually shape a more-rational approach to neighborhood change.

While other municipalities in Korea have been reluctant to take on responsibilities relating to local land use planning resulting from the implementation of Local Autonomy Rule, the rise of municipal control over planning policy in Seoul is epitomized by the 1992 creation of the Seoul Metropolitan Government’s city planning research institute, the Seoul Development Institute (SDI). While SDI is often caught up in immediate issues and in fact often absorbs responsibility for politically sensitive policy decisions, its mandate is one of long range planning with the city’s Department of City Planning having a strictly legalistic role in bringing plans and projects through the review process. SDI’s recently created Center for Urban Design is now grappling with a fine tuning of the city’s zoning. A lack of coordination or communication with the central government, however, limits these efforts with SDI’s recommendations having to fit within the framework of changes to the national zoning anticipated from the Ministry of Construction.

If development proceeds at its current pace and form in areas such as Shillim 9 Dong, the distinct lifestyles of Seoul’s neighborhoods, with their balance between nature and urbanism and close knit social structures, may be jeopardized in addition to more obvious impacts on light and air. While using P ‘ungsoo to guide the growth of Seoul today might seem impractical, some of its most basic concepts could be helpful to planners. Specifically, the underlying notion that we should not alter the topography or contours of the terrain should be taken up in the form of hillside preservation legislation and mandating new development which respects Seoul’s mountainous character. As Seoul celebrates the 600th Anniversary of its founding, preservation of its history and culture should be recognized not merely as preserving landmarks and national treasures, but also as protecting the scale and distinct features of its neighborhoods which nurture the character of its people and provide a refuge from the standardization of its modernized downtown.

[page 70]

NOTES:

1. Kim, Sung-Bae, “Recent Trends on Korean Land Policy,” In Technical Training Program on Human Settlements, Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements, Seoul, Korea, 1993, pp. 157-160.

2. Laney, Dr. James, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, “Perspectives on Korea” presented at the Korean-American Educational Commission’s March 17, 1994 Fulbright Forum, Seoul, Korea.

3. Kim, Jinai, Seoul, With All Her Beauties, Seoul Forum, Organized by the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul，Korea，1991, Part II, p. 23.

4. Bartholomew, Peter, “Walking Tour of Choson Seoul,” Sponsored by The Royal Asiatic Society, Seoul, Korea, March 20, 1994.

5. Nilson, Robert, South Korea Handbook, Moon Publications, Chico, CA, 1988,

p. 117.

6. Seoul Metropolitan Government and Seoul National University Institute of Environmental Studies, Seoul City Planning 1394, 1991, Seoul, Korea 1991.

7. Li Taek-Il, Lecture at Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, November 18, 1993.

8. Ibid., Nilsen, p. 393.

9. Ibid., Bartholomew.

10. Park, Woo-Suh, “The Nature of Suburbanization in Seoul Metropolitan Region and its Impact on Land Price,” Social Science Review, Social Science Research Institute, Yonsei University, Vol. 17, 1986, p. 153.

11. Korean Ministry of Construction, First National Comprehensive Physical Development Plan, Seoul, Korea, 1971.

12. Park Woo-Suh, Lecture at Yonsei University, Seoul，Korea November 1993.

13. Korean Ministry of Construction, Second National Comprehensive Physical Development Plan, Seoul, Korea, 1981.

15. Korea Herald, November 1993.

16. Korean Ministry of Construction, Third National Physical Development Plan, Seoul, 1991.