

## Ruptures and Conflicts in the Colonial Power Bloc: *The Great Keijo Plan of the 1920s*

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### Abstract

*Seoul, experienced a rapid transformation after the Russo-Japanese War from the traditional capital of the Joseon dynasty to a colonial city of the Japanese Empire, resulting in the establishment of Gyeongseong (Keijo), the capital city of the colonial Korean peninsula, in 1914. Initially, the city of Keijo took on an hourglass shape as a dual colonial city that juxtaposed two opposing pairs: the contrast between the northern town and the southern town in the downtown area as well as the contrast between the old town and the new one built around the Japanese military compound in Yongsan.*

*Entering the 1920s, the discussion between the Japanese Government-General in Korea and Japanese residents in Seoul as to how to develop Gyeongseong became more pronounced. The former pursued the “northern advance” with the aim of developing Seoul as a colonial administrative center, whereas the latter sought development centered on both the Namchon and Hangang river, in order to develop Seoul as a commercial city.*

*Debates over the Great Keijo Plan arose centered around two controversial issues: whether the northern or southern areas of Seoul should be developed as well as how to secure the financial resources for the development. These debates exemplify the rupture and conflicts in the colonial urban power bloc, which was comprised of plural agents concerning the colonial urban transformation.*

**Keywords:** Seoul, colonial city, colonial modernization, urban planning, urban history, historical city, urban space, Japanese imperialism, colonial power

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### Colonial Power and Urban Planning

Having developed in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, the theory and practice of modern urban planning (*Städtebau*, *urbanización*, *urbanisme*) is generally viewed as the historical product of a bourgeois reaction to the impoverished conditions of European cities, and it also played a crucial role in the global spread of an experimental form of modern urban planning—intended for the expansion of imperialist culture and large-scale development of colonial cities. Quite contrary to the prevailing engineering and technologist perspective, modern urban planning was, in fact, designed as a culturally discriminatory mechanism, concretely expressed as two similar forms of “otherization” in social power relations: the first is concerned with modern bourgeois culture’s attempt to “otherize” the proletariat as disorderly and unhygienic based on the former’s cultural superiority; and the second is the Western European white civilization’s strategy to “otherize” indigenous people in colonized countries as savage and uncivilized based on the former’s superiority to the latter. It was institutionalized, at least in its origin, in close relationship with the political and cultural ideologies of domination regarding the control of disorderly, dirty and disgusting “others” through “modernity” and “civilization.”<sup>1</sup>

According to genealogical analysis of modern urban planning, which was brought to light through the history of imperialism and colonialism, urban planning is a problem of “politics” rather than of “science” or as a problem of “power” rather than of “technology.” It is not reducible to the application of universal scientific principles or the willful realization of an idealistic plan. It is a product of the political transformation of urban spaces formulated in the complex

1. According to Françoise Choay, born as an attempt to bring a new spatial order—which he called “good form”—to European industrial cities, which were seen as “a pathological body stricken with herpes, cancer, and leprosy,” modern urban planning was a historical product of biological epistemology and sociological ideology specific to modern society.

dynamics of specific social power relations under specific historical conditions. Based on this awareness, this paper attempts to investigate how “urban planning” was introduced and applied to colonial Joseon society, where it was a subject of state-of-the-art scientific discourse and advanced practice at that time, focusing on the course of political and social disputes and conflicts over the issue of developing Seoul in the 1920s.

During its colonial rule, Japan implemented two urban planning projects in Seoul (then known as Gyeongseong or Keijo): the Keijo District Reform (Shiku-kaisei) Project, based on the District Reform Act promulgated in 1912 and the Keijo Urban Planning (Shikachi-keikaku) Project, which was based on the Joseon Urban Planning Decree legislated in 1934. Prior research on colonial urban planning tended to overlook political conflicts in the policy formation process and put sole focus on the resulting outcomes and their implementations;<sup>2</sup> thereby, the structure of confrontation and conflict over urban planning has been considered to be confined to a nationalistic, dichotomous perspective of dominating Japanese powers (including the Joseon Government-General) versus the dominated Joseon people. In short, it has been regarded by Korean scholars as common sense in the study of colonial urban planning history that Japanese urban planning carried out on the Korean peninsula during the colonial era was, in essence, “of the Japanese, by the Japanese, and for the Japanese” (Son 1990, 175). But urban society and politics were too complex and dynamic to be reduced to a nationalistic dichotomy and exploitive reductionism.

In this paper, the dominant power bloc, which was the leading force of the formation and implementation of urban development projects of Seoul in the colonial period, is viewed as a compound of

2. As for studies on urban planning, see Son (1990, ch. 2), Yi Myeong-gyu (1994), Kim Gi-ho (1995), Kim Yeong-geun (1999), Kim Baek-yeong (2003), and Goto Yasushi (1996, ch. 4). For studies on the Joseon district planning, see Son (1990, ch. 4), Yi Byeong-ryeol (1990), Yi Myeong-gyu (1994), Yeom (2001), and Goto Yasushi (1996, ch. 5).

two different power groups. One was the Government-General authorities who sought to reshape the city as a whole while trying to concretely manifest the ideology of assimilation, the governing ideology of Japan, in the landscape of Seoul. The other group was the Japanese residents in Seoul who deployed “interest politics,” openly pursuing their collective interests and gains through the development of Namchon (southern town),<sup>3</sup> their physical base. While the existing studies stress that those two power groups agreed and collaborated on the matter of developing Seoul, I draw attention to the fact that there were discrepancies and ruptures within the power bloc even as they worked in consensus and cooperation towards their goals.

With these in mind, I choose the decade of the 1920s for analysis. Most previous studies focus on district reform in the 1910s and urban planning in the 1930s and attach little significance to the urban development going on in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> But I have a different view. The transformation of Seoul under the colonial rule can be divided into two phases: the shift from a royal capital to a colonial city in the early phase (the 1910s) and the switch from a political to an industrial city in the latter phase (the 1930s). The change from “Hanseong” to “Gyeongseong” in the former can be seen as an urban “shrinkage” strategy, and the one from “Gyeongseong” to “Great Gyeongseong” in the latter, as an urban “expansion” strategy. In this context, the 1920s may be regarded as a transitional period. For the city, it was a period when different stances latent within the power bloc being voiced, exposing their differences as to the future of the city in

3. The area of Seoul was limited to north of the Hangang river, not including the area south of the river, unlike today’s Seoul. Therefore, Namchon (southern town), here refers to the area around today’s Namsan Folk Village.

4. Prior research on the urban planning of Seoul in the 1920s include Son (1990, ch. 3) and Bak Se-hun (2000). Bak holds that the Keijo Urban Planning Project was “a temporal and spatial interface of the international urban planning movement and the colonial Korean peninsula” (a spatio-temporal merge of the international urban planning movement and the colonial Korean peninsula), and it provided an important turning point in the history of Korean urban planning (2000, 168-170). However, his research is limited, as he confines his analysis to the urban planning campaign of the Keijo Urban Planning Association.

its transition to colonial urbanization. The urban policy shift in Gyeongseong, the epitome of colonial Korea, during this period is not just significant in the context of the history of urban planning or individual cities during the colonial period, but is the key to understanding the overall policy shift of colonial Japan.

The ultimate goal of this research is not to reilluminate or reassess the “Keijo Urban Planning” of the 1920s in the history of colonial urban planning in a narrow sense, but to analyze the ruptures and conflicts within the colonial power bloc regarding how to develop the colonial capital in the 1920s, widely known as the “Great Keijo Plan,” as well as to investigate how and with what pragmatic significance the discourse on “Great Keijo” and “urban planning” was socially constructed in the political and social context of the colonial society.<sup>5</sup>

The main text of the paper is divided into three parts. The first examines the social backdrop against which the interactive discourse on “urban planning” was newly created in colonial Joseon in the 1920s, placing special focus on the dual aspects of the urban planning campaign led by the Keijo Urban Planning Association (KUPA). The subsequent two parts analyze social conflicts over two controversial issues regarding the Great Keijo Plan. One had to do with the the framework under which town expansion was pursued during the early 1920s, and the other concerned the question of how to secure funds for urban planning project in the second half of the 1920s.

### **The Keijo Urban Planning Association and the Duality of the Urban Planning Movement in the 1920s**

The emergence of the discourse on “urban planning” in the early

5. The Great Keijo Plan, which is the subject of analysis in this paper, does not refer to an officially designed or implemented urban planning proposal (or project). The term was widely circulated in the public at that time, despite its vague meaning, referring to the overarching development plans underlying various policy directives to transform Seoul into a metropolis.

1920s generated a sea change in the debate on urban development of Seoul. Considering that industrialization and population growth in Joseon cities had not yet reached a level that would cause serious urban problems at the time, it was primarily due to “external,” rather than “internal,” factors that the idea of urban planning was introduced to Joseon.<sup>6</sup> In Japan, the campaign to legislate the Urban Planning Act had been quite active in the 1910s and bore fruit as the act took effect in 1919; in turn, an “urban planning boom” swept across Japan in the 1920s as the Imperial Capital Revitalization Plan for Tokyo was formulated as a reactionary measure to the 1923 Kanto Earthquake (Ishida 1987; 1992). This brought direct influence to colonial Korea, triggering nationwide social movements and policy initiatives that claimed implementation of urban planning projects. Gyeongseong, the colony’s capital, was where the movement was most active and fruitful in producing tangible outcomes, with the KUPA playing the leading role.

The KUPA was a half-government/half-civilian organization established on August 27, 1921, chaired by Vice Governor-General Mizuno Rentaro and vice-chaired by Yi Wan-yong, the top figure among pro-Japanese Koreans.<sup>7</sup> It was organized to “conduct research needed for the urban planning of Keijo (Seoul) and foster an environment for the construction of Great Keijo.”<sup>8</sup> The mission statement of the KUPA drafted at the time of its foundation writes that the urban planning proposal of the Government-General represented by urbanization plans should be criticized for its incompleteness, and the organization was created to push ahead with urban planning to build a metropolis with a population of a million.<sup>9</sup> If we try to read between the lines, the KUPA took a critical stance on the urban planning proposal of the Government-General in two ways. First, the pro-

6. In this regard, the urban planning movement that started in Korea in the early 1920s was a direct “transfer” of the Japanese urban planning movement of the 1910s (Bak 2000, 176).

7. *Maeil sinbo* (Daily News), 31 August 1921.

8. Rules of KUPA, Clause 2, Society for Research on Korea (1925, 11-12).

9. Society for Research on Korea (1925, 11-12).

posals needed to adopt comprehensive and full-scale “scientific” urban planning, without merely changing the face of the city with street improvements. Second, at it was solely concerned with “old districts within town walls,” it failed to plan for the expansion of city areas and construction of new urban districts in preparation for future population growth. In view of its mission statement and main activities pursued on the surface, the KUPA was probably Korea’s first professional association, a pioneering one that actually introduced the concept of modern urban planning.

However, contrary to the original intent of the association, its activities appeared to be more those of a “political interest group” than of a “professional research organization.” Until the mid-1920s its members included few experts in the field of urban planning, many of whom were former representatives of the Association of Japanese living in Seoul during the Protectorate period, and were now businessmen or men of means and had clout in the city’s Japanese community or in commerce and industry. Many of them were also active members of the Keijo Council or the Keijo Chamber of Commerce.<sup>10</sup>

This all raises the question: To what extent were the specific contents of urban planning voiced by the association in the early 1920s “rational” or “scientific” in light of the reality of the day? In order to answer this, we need to review the urban policy of the Government-General in the 1910s, which was the target of severe criticism by the KUPA in its early days, and the resultant changing profile of Seoul.

In the initial period of the Japanese annexation of Joseon, the Government-General wanted to downgrade, in both the practical and symbolic sense, the status of Hanseongbu, Joseon’s royal capital, which had been overly developed due to the concentration of political, economic, social, and cultural power of the peninsula in one place. At the same time, however, it still had to function as the politi-

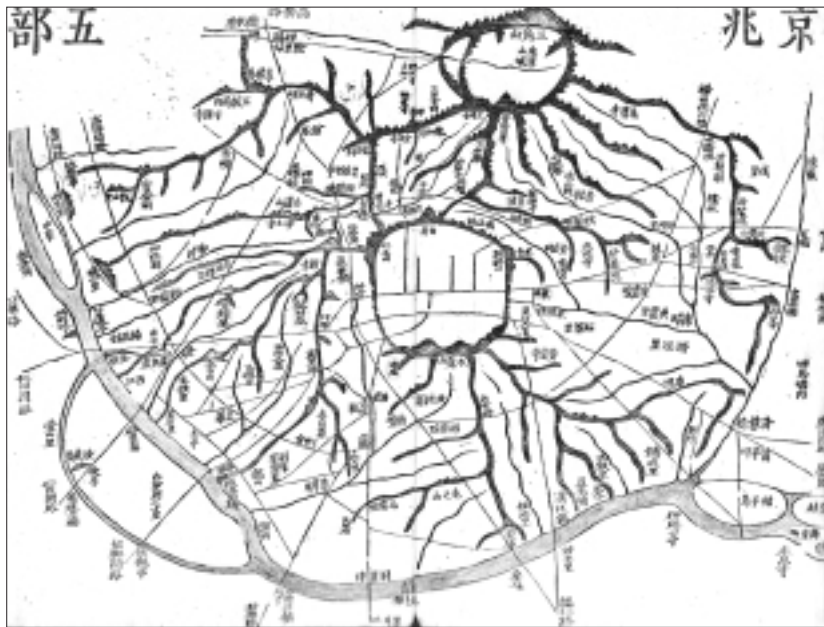
10. On KUPA’s organization and members, see Society for Research on Korea (1925, 13-21). Regarding its main figures’ professional careers, see Bak (2000, 186). On influential people of Seoul under the colonial rule, see Im (1997).

cal center of the peninsula and the new stronghold of Japanese colonial power. For this, the Government-General adopted the municipal government (*bu, fu*) system<sup>11</sup> in 1914 and incorporated the “Keijo Municipal Office” into Gyeonggi-do Province in an attempt to downgrade its status. Reducing the municipal area of jurisdiction to one-eighth of its former size, the Government-General excluded the Korean residential area within a distance of ten *ri* from the Four Gates, while including the newly developed Yongsan area, where the Japanese residents lived, into the city. This resulted in the formation of an abnormal hourglass-shaped city. At the same time, the Government-General injected enormous amounts of money and effort into urban planning by reorganizing streets, destroying symbolic places of traditional royal power, and creating new symbolic urban spaces. This exhibited Japan’s aggressive intent in the early years of domination to annihilate the traditional appearance of Seoul and turn it into a base for colonial conquest in a short period of time. Therefore, it may be said that the colonial powers’ urban development initiative in the early period ignored the possibility of developing Gyeongseong into an industrial metropolis and stressed its function as a political center instead.<sup>12</sup>

11. In 1913, the Government-General designated 12 *bu*, or municipal governments: Seoul, Incheon, Gunsan, Mokpo, Daegu, Busan, Masan, Pyeongyang, Jinnampo, Sinuiju, Wonsan, and Cheongjin. Of them, only three (Seoul, Daegu, and Pyeongyang) were cities in the Joseon dynasty; they became key inland bases of Japanese colonial domination. The rest were ports and fishing villages that began to be urbanized after Joseon opened its doors to foreign powers in the late 19th century. Traditional cities with a strong indigenous power base, such as Gaeseong, Jeonju, Jinju, Haeju, and Hamheung, were completely excluded from the municipal government designation, whereas places with a large Japanese community (more than 5,000 Japanese residents) or with a large proportion of Japanese residents (Sinuiju and Cheongjin) were included (Kwon 1990).

12. At the time, there was a prevailing perception among Japanese that Gyeongseong was “a city of politics with little potential to develop as an industrial city.” For example, the *Maeil sinbo* ran a series of articles titled “Views on the Economic Geography of Joseon Cities” in 1921, and one author commented that Gyeongseong “lacks sufficient natural advantages to be an economic center, compared with Daegu, Pyeongyang, or Busan,” and it could only be a city of politics. . . . so investments should be directed to non-economic fields” (*Maeil sinbo*, December 16-20,

Figure 1. *Gyeongjo obudo* (Map of the Five Districts of Seoul).  
Kim Jeong-ho (1910).

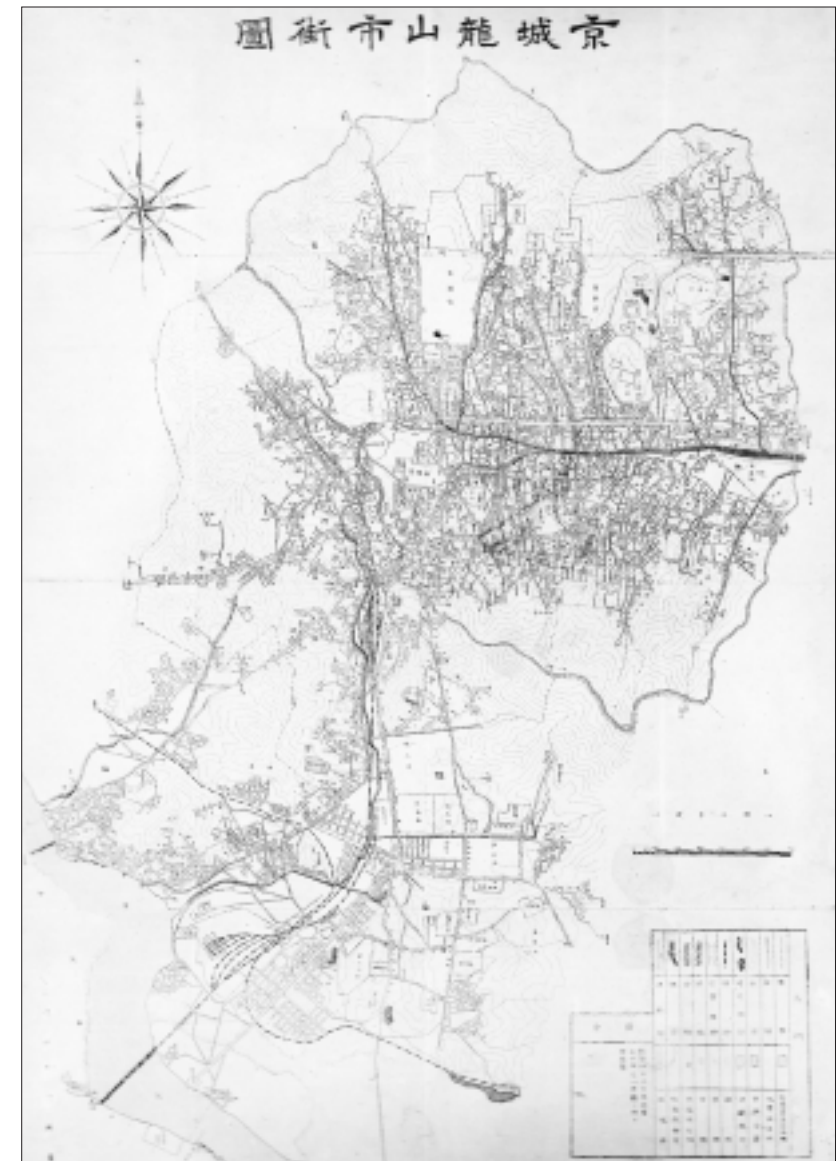


\* This map shows the location and terrain of traditional Seoul.

However, neither Koreans nor Japanese gave a favorable response to the Government-General's drive to rebuild Gyeongseong into a colonial city of politics during the military rule (*mudan jeongchi*; *budan seiji*). Koreans living in the Bukchon area of the city inwardly expressed strong discontent and hostility—unable to express it openly—toward the Government-General's invasive and discriminatory policy of slighting and destroying Joseon's history and traditions and building only new “civilized” places in the Namchon area. When freedom of expression was allowed to a limited extent after the

1921 editions, from articles written by Tamura Ryūtarō). The same year, the *Donga ilbo* also printed articles on this matter in Section 2 over eight days from September 7 to 15, 1921, authored by Saito Otosaku, director of Research Unit 7 of the KUPA.

Figure 2. Map of Urban Area of Yongsan



\* Japan tried to form an hour-glass shaped colonial city while combining the old city center with the Yongsan area in 1910.

Source: *Joseon* (Seoul: Government-General of Korea, 1925).

March First Independence Movement of 1919 and the start of the “cultural rule” (*munhwa jeongchi; bunka seiji*) in the early 1920s, Koreans expressed their dissatisfaction profusely.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Japanese residents in Seoul and a small number of powerful Koreans were also critical of the Government-General’s urban construction plans, though in a different context from the majority of the Koreans in Seoul. They claimed that, for urban development, the city needed to replenish the basic urban infrastructure (water supply, sewage, sanitary facilities, etc.) and cultural facilities (parks, libraries, public centers, theaters, etc.) in order to raise the living standards in the short term, while expanding the growth potential of industry and transportation (in particular, the construction of a Seoul-Incheon canal) for transformation into an international commercial center in the long term.<sup>14</sup>

The discourse on “urban planning,” which was imported from mainland Japan in the early 1920s, was utilized as a powerful political instrument to translate these private and collective desires into a public debate of privileged status, equipped with the rational and objective character of “science.” Those who needed it the most were the Japanese settlers in the Namchon area and the Yongsan area, who were seeking to meet their personal needs. Initially, they made their demands in combination with the Yongsan residents, who were calling for a lasting remedy to the habitual flooding of the Hangang river. When the Great Floods of the Hangang river in the 1920s

13. Examples of famous writings that denounced and criticized the contrasting realities of the dual city, being made up of the “civilized world” in the south and the “primitive world” in the north, are: “Brothers, Why Is the Northern Town So Out of Sync with the Southern Town?” *Gaebyeok* (Beginning of the World), March 1922; June 1924, and “Flourishing Streets of the Southern Town vs. the Miserable Downfall of the Northern Town.”

14. See *Bando siron* (Contemporary Inquiry on the Peninsula), October 1918 issue. Published as a special edition on “Great Keijo,” this volume had articles written by some leading Japanese residents in Seoul and influential pro-Japanese Koreans demanding specific things for the development of the city, including “Construction of Great Keijo” by Takeuchi Ryokunosuke, president of *Bando siron*, and “On How to Develop Seoul” by Min Won-sik, magistrate of Goyang-gun county.

caused severe damage to all of Seoul, Yongsan residents and influential Japanese organized a campaign to create Great Keijo, with a population of about 600,000 to 700,000 people, by developing the Hangang river area through a systematic alliance between the Association for Swift Action for Flood Control and the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>15</sup> Although it was scrapped due to the non-cooperation of the Government-General, the Keijo Municipal Office tried to release the urban planning proposal to “expand the city in preparation for the future, 30 years down the road,” building on the KUPA’s urbanization proposal.<sup>16</sup>

Although the demands were made on the borrowed authority of the new scientific discourse of urban planning, many of them were too far-fetched in view of the contemporary reality of Seoul. As a matter of fact, the population growth of Seoul was “at a standstill” from the time of annexation to the early 1920s.<sup>17</sup> Not only Koreans, but also the urban authorities were well aware that the most pressing issue was not city expansion to the outskirts through the introduction of a new urban planning project, but overhauling of underdeveloped parts of the city. The main proponents of the expansionist urban planning discourse that led public opinion in Seoul in the early 1920s were not the Government-General, the Keijo Municipal Office, or Koreans. Those who sought the spread of urban planning discourse as well as its institutional and practical realization, and hence pursued the campaign most actively, were neither colonial authorities nor Koreans, but were influential Japanese residents who allied themselves around the newly created KUPA. Then, why did they want urban planning so badly?

15. “Yongsan Flood Control and Mega-city Construction Plan.” *Maeil sinbo*, August 30, 1920.

16. “Details of the Keijo Urban Planning Proposal.” *Donga ilbo*, December 27, 1922; and “Preparation of the Keijo Development Plan.” *Donga ilbo*, January 14, 1923.

17. “The Keijo Municipal Office’s Urban Planning and the Population Issue (II).” *Donga ilbo*, September 13, 1924.

### Controversy over the Location of Development of Keijo in the Early 1920s

#### *Responses of the Bukchon and Namchon Areas towards the Government-General's Northern Advance Drive*

The hot potato of Seoul urban politics in the early 1920s was the “northern expansion” of Japanese residents or the “northern advance” of the Government-General symbolized by the transfer of the Government-General building to a location near the Gyeongbokgung palace. To a majority of Koreans, rather than raising expectations of the “civilizing” benefits of “development” finally reaching the long-neglected northern town, it instead magnified anxiety over “pillaging,” that is, fears that the Japanese might drive Koreans out of the area and take it over.<sup>18</sup> There were implicit but clear spatial borders formed along the Cheonggyecheon stream, which divided the residential areas of the two ethnic groups, “exclusively Japanese *machi*” and “Korean *gol*, the final retreat of Koreans, i.e. the former masters.”<sup>19</sup> Faced with the fear that the borderline that separated one ethnic group from the other could crumble, Koreans living in Bukchon believed that a crisis was imminent and that they might lose their residential base and be pushed back to the periphery.

However, this shocking “change” impacted both sides, and the northern expansion drive of the Government-General sent huge material and psychological shocks to the Japanese community in Namchon, too. The concerns of the Japanese residents that the center of Seoul would move from Bon-jeong to Jongno street, with the transfer of the Government-General building from Waeseongdae located in Namchon to a new building near Gyeongbokgung palace in Namchon, turned out to be more than rumors, and was confirmed and

18. “Land Price Hikes in the Northern Town.” *Donga ilbo*, May 26, 1924; and “Bakdori, gyeongseong-eun ilnyeongan eolmana byeonhaenna?” (Mr. Bak, How Much Has Gyeongseong Changed within a Year?). *Gaebyeok* 64 (December 1925).

19. Jungganin (1924, 48).

Figure 3. Changing Landscape of Seoul (1923)



\* While the Government-General building neared completion, the new Gyeongseong City Hall has yet to appear.

reported in newspapers.<sup>20</sup> It was an important matter of concern to the wealthy Japanese residents in Seoul who owned land in Namchon and Yongsan areas and were paying keen attention to the Government-General's urban development policy.<sup>21</sup> The Internal Affairs

20. *Maeil sinbo*, December 7, 1922.

21. According to Kang Byeong-sik's analysis of land ownership of Seoul under the Japanese rule, the “Japanese imperialists” (the Government-General, individuals, businesses and other organizations combined) owned about 70% of the total land in Seoul in the 1920s, while Koreans (including Yi Wangjik [Yi Royal Household] and Changdeokgung Palace) possessed about 27% and foreigners of other nationalities, about 3%. Land ownership of Korean and Japanese individuals remained at a similar level, at about 20% each. Among the six districts of Seoul (Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern, Central and Yongsan Districts), Koreans had a considerably larger share in the Northern and Central Districts, while Japanese owned an overwhelmingly high proportion in the Southern and Yongsan Districts and a slightly higher proportion in the Western District. The Eastern District showed a

Bureau of the Government-General drew up plans to build and move to new residences of the Governor-General and Vice Governor-General behind Gyeongbokgung palace with funds appropriated from the 1926 budget, after it moved into its own new building.<sup>22</sup> It was predicted that if the plans were put into action, the areas near the new Government-General complex would become a city center through the development of government-owned lands around Mt. Samgak for building new Western-style houses for government officials, the construction of a belt streetcar route near the new Government-General building, and transformation of Gyeongbokgung palace into a park.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as the new Government-General building neared completion, the authorities hurried with the improvement of arterial roads in the northern part of the city, quickly bringing a sea change to the landscape of the backwards Buckchon neighborhood.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in land price hikes in the city's northern area, and the standard land prices of the area centered around Jongno came to exceed those of Bon-jeong. Thus, the popular prediction that "the center of Seoul will gradually move to the north and never return to the south" only heightened the sense of crisis among Japanese people in the south.<sup>25</sup>

In reaction to this, Japanese in Namchon pitched a claim for urban development centered on Mt. Namsan and the Hangang river, highlighting the scientific authority of urban planning as an advanced discourse. To the Government-General, which was absorbed with the

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roughly equal share (Kang 1994, ch. 6 and 7). Based on these facts, it is suspected that the Japanese had a collective interest in the urban development of the southern town and Yongsan area.

22. *Chosento kenchiku* 朝鮮と建築 (Joseon and Architecture) 4-7 (July 1925): 52. The construction of the official residence of the Governor-General was delayed until 1939 for budgetary reasons. After the nation's liberation, it was used as the presidential residence called the Gyeongmudae.

23. *Maeil sinbo*, May 15, 1925; September 19, 1925.

24. *Donga ilbo*, March 4, 1924; Anon. (1927).

25. *Donga ilbo*, May 26, 1924. Transfer of the High-Grade Standard Area and Jongno-4-ga street as the New Center of Great Keijo. The major groups of Seoul who settled down in the heart of Jingogae moved out and go north and further north, from Myeongchi-jeong to Namdaemun-tong to Jongno-4-ga street. The land price over there is as high as 1,200 won per *pyeong*!

layout of plans to build the symbolic landscape of Seoul using new landmarks, including the splendid new building of the Government-General, Gyeongseong Station, the building of the Keijo Municipal Office, and the Chosen Shinto Shrine, development in the southern part of the city was only something for a distant future, with very little chance of realization. Aiming to change Seoul into a colonial capital of politics from the early years of domination, the top priority on the agenda was pulling out of a cramped Jingogae<sup>26</sup>—where road reconstruction would cost hefty sums of money and where clashes with Japanese residents would make work almost impossible—and use the Gwanghwamun boulevard to build "a showcase city" to flaunt the Government-General's authority and power. Practicality, this would create "a boulevard of power" similar to the Haussmann boulevard in Paris. Besides, places singled out as being in need of immediate urbanization were not located in the south, which was exposed to constant threats of flooding, but in the eastern and western parts of the city, which were experiencing rapid population growth with the influx of new Korean settlers.<sup>27</sup>

#### *An Abrupt Turn in the Course of the Debate after the Great Floods of 1925*

The Government-General's ambitious plan of a "northern advance" began to falter when it was faced not only with negative responses from both the Japanese residents living in Namchon and Koreans in living in Bukchon, but was also confronted by the idea of Namchon-centered development advocated by the Japanese (mainly KUPA members). This unexpected obstacle was compounded when a natural disaster broke out which would prove to be an important turn-

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26. Not quite up to its fame as the "Ginza of Keijo," the streets in Bon-jeong (Hom-machi) underwent little improvement since the reconstruction work in 1897 and in 1901 and were still very narrow, 3.8 to 6 meters wide till the 1930s (Jeon 2001).

27. "Great Gyeongseong Plan—Stop Operating Streetcars outside the City Limit." Editorial, *Donga ilbo*, October 15, 1922.



ing point in the whole discussion. "The great floods of the year of Eulchuk," which hit the entire Korean peninsula hard, including Seoul, occurred in the summer of 1925.<sup>28</sup> It turned out to be an opportune moment for the authorities aiming at northern advance to counter the Japanese residents' strong demand for the development of a Hangang river-centered Great Keijo.

At the time, the urban planning of Great Keijo was "temporarily cut in the middle" due to controversy over its timing and budgetary problems. Only a rough plan had been formed to develop Yeongdeungpo into a factory area, while developing Seoul and Yongsan into commercial zones, and the northeastern section into a residential zone. Yeongdeungpo, Yongsan, and Cheongnyangni were submerged in the 1925 flooding, so the Government-General exploited the public sentiment of it being "best to avoid the Hangang area" right after the disaster to muster up support for its northern area development plan using the media.<sup>29</sup> It was an attempt to transform the existing "two-dimensional" development plan of Keijo into a three-dimensional one, using the momentum created by the flooding of the Hangang river.<sup>30</sup> Until then, the Keijo development plan was modeled on flat cities such as London, Paris, Tokyo, and Osaka; but now the idea was that "considering the terrain features of the city, the flat city plan should be discarded and be modeled on high-altitude cities such as Hong Kong and Nagasaki."<sup>31</sup> As the idea of developing residential areas near the Hangang river ran out of steam due to flood damage in low-lying areas, the northern area development plan took flight again, the core of idea of which was to develop the piedmont of Mt.

28. Flooding of the Hangang river was virtually an "annual event" that took place almost every summer. Particularly in August 1920 and July 1925, Seoul experienced a record-level downpour, 535.9 mm and 748.9 mm, respectively, suffering severe damage across the city (Observatory of the Joseon Government-General 1926).

29. "Disillusioned Hangang River-Centered Urban Planning Needs Radical Change Considering the Flood Damage." *Maeil sinbo*, August 12, 1925.

30. "Urban Planning in Piedmonts and Hills, A Switch from 2D to 3D." *Donga ilbo*, August 8 (evening issue), 1925.

31. "Gyeongseong Urban Planning Changes to High Area-centered Development Planning." *Donga ilbo*, August 12, 1925.

Bugak into a residential hub.<sup>32</sup>

However, in reaction to this move by the Government-General, influential Japanese residents in Namchon immediately waged a strong countermovement, derailing the northern area development plan, which had been announced through the media only a few months before, as reported in the following newspaper article:

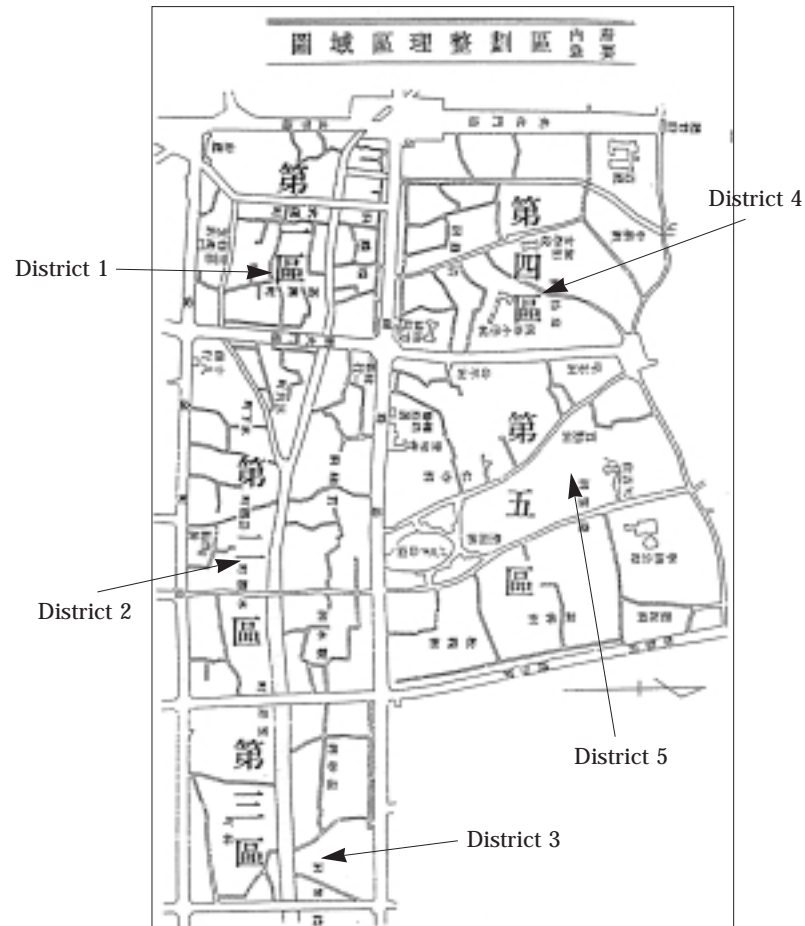
Originally, what the KUPA planned was the development of the southern area around Yongsan. However, after experiencing severe damage from the great flood this summer, Yongsan proved unsuitable for development into a city center due to its proximity to the Hangang river. So the original plan was given up and a hilly city development plan that included no measures in the event of flooding drawn up, with research having been conducted in this direction. When the plan was announced, residents around Jingogae, the current site of the Government-General building, thought that the area had no hope of further growth, especially with the planned move of the Government-General, and treated it as a life-or-death issue, mounting fierce resistance against the Government-General and the Keijo Municipal Office. The authorities of the Government-General and the Keijo Municipal Office used to hold the same view, so they had several meetings with them. It is expected that they will come up with a Mt. Namsan-centered Seoul development plan and sell off government-owned lands near the mountain to build roads.<sup>33</sup>

Thereafter, with regard to the urban expansion of the Great Keijo Plan, controversy continued over the questions of now to expand and when, but the overall framework of Mt. Namsan- and Hangang river-centered development was firmly established. The urban planning scheme announced by the Keijo Municipal Office in 1926, which

32. "Government Village at the Bottom of Mt. Bukak to Lead Future Growth." *Maeil sinbo*, September 19, 1925.

33. "Toward South-centered Urban Planning, Residents of the South Group in the Dark." *Donga ilbo*, November 11, 1925.

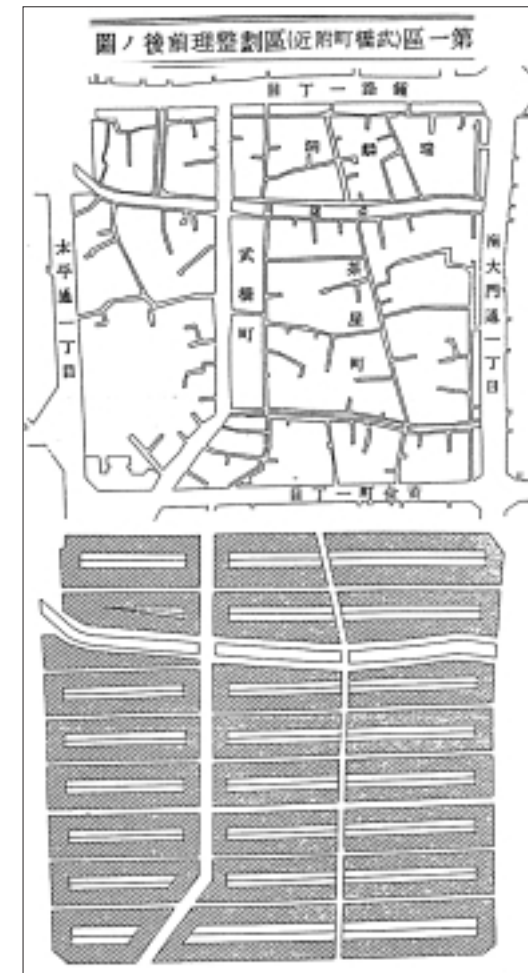
Figure 4. Gyeongseong District Reform Plan



District	Total Area	Residential Area	%	Road Area	%
I	61,775	50,539	81	9,018	15
II	107,700	89,781	83	12,707	12
III	61,700	48,788	79	8,602	14
IV	87,925	78,057	89	8,223	9
V	147,650	123,944	84	20,373	14

\* This figure presents the project plan to reorganize the old city center, including Jongno, in the Bukchon area.

Figure 5. Gyeongseong District Reform Project (a part of Fig. 4)



Before the Project			After the Project		
Land Use	Area (pyeong)	%	Land Use	Area (pyeong)	%
Total area	61,775	100	Total area	61,775	100.2
Residential area	50,539	81.8	Residential area	49,930	80.8
Road area	9,018	14.6	Road area	10,152	16.5
River area	2,218	3.6	River area	2,694	3.7

appeared to have been made by accepting the KUPA proposal, presented the blueprint of “a city of fantasy” to be launched with the injection of a phenomenal 100 million won. The plan “has Seoul and every part of Noryangjin and Cheongnyangni outside the city in the picture. It projects the image of an ideal city having industrial sites in Noryangjin and Cheongnyangni, commercial districts in low-lying areas, and residential homes in high areas. In the second phase, for the future of the city hundreds of years down the road, a canal will be built between Seoul and Incheon and streetcars will operate on both sides. Seoul will be developed as a commercial city and Incheon as an industrial one with a total budget of 250 million won.”<sup>34</sup>

From then on, there was no further discussion made regarding the “northern advance.” This might have been not only because Japanese living in Seoul wielded more power, but because the Government-General had become gradually drained of the will, need, and capacity to push ahead with its original urban development plan due to changes in the political and economic conditions in the second half of the 1920s. It is worth exploring the reasons behind this shift.

### Controversy over Financing for the Great Keijo Plan in the Second Half of the 1920s

#### *The Authorities' Response to Urban Expansion*

The Great Keijo Plan proposed by KUPA in the early 1920s was unrealistic in many ways not only because it was driven by mere political needs without sufficient prior research, but also because it amounted to little more than an armchair theory that was a far cry from the “most pressing issue”<sup>35</sup> that had to be addressed by the Keijo Muni-

34. “A City of Fantasy, Ichon-dong as Growth Center, Canal Construction between Gyeongseong and Incheon.” *Donga ilbo*, May 7, 1926.

35. Sawamura Kōjirō, then director of the Interior Division at the Keijo Municipal Office, mentioned the following as the most urgent agendas of the city: new construction of the Keijo Municipal Office building, district planning, that is, comple-

pal Office to resolve actual urban problems. However, in the second half of the 1920s, the urban expansion became more urgent due to the rapid population growth in the adjacent areas of Seoul. Between 1915 and 1927, the growing population in the seven *myeon* adjacent to Seoul (Yonggang, Yeonhui, Eunpyeong, Sungin, Hanji, Buk, and Yeongdeungpo) was four times that of the city itself. That is, there was a dramatic increase in population of nearly twenty times from 5,800 to more than 100,000 during the same period.<sup>36</sup>

In response to this, the Keijo Municipal Office adopted the urban expansion in neighboring areas as a must-do task and ordered its Urban Planning Section to gather information relevant to timing and scope.<sup>37</sup> The Temporary Urban Planning Unit<sup>38</sup> established within the Keijo Municipal Office in 1926 operated on an annual budget of 4,000 to 5,000 won for collecting information for urban planning.<sup>39</sup> The unit played a leading role in drafting the Great Keijo Plan, producing the first volume of the *Keijo toshi keikaku chosasho* (Survey Report on the Keijo Urban Planning) in March 1927 and the second volume in September 1928.<sup>40</sup> Spurred by the Keijo Municipal Office's multi-

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tion of principal roads of the city, flood control, and drainage in Yongsan, renovation of sewage, extension of the water supply, improvement of waste treatment, transfer and/or upgrade of slaughterhouses and crematoriums, new construction of a central market for the supply of daily necessities and price adjustment, and expansion of retail markets (*Maeil sinbo*, January 7, 1923).

36. “Population Expands into Adjoining Counties, Farm Areas Transform to Commercial and Industrial Districts.” *Donga ilbo*, October 3, 1928.

37. “Urban Planning Concludes, Urban Planning Unit Begins Activity, Collects Information in Neighboring Counties.” *Donga ilbo*, December 15, 1928.

38. See KUPA (1936).

39. *Maeil sinbo*, August 19, 1928.

40. The Temporary Urban Planning Unit of the Keijo Municipal Office produced two reports on the Great Keijo Plan. One was *Keijo toshi keikaku chosasho* 京城都市計劃調査書 (Survey Report on the Keijo Urban Planning) (469 pages) released in September 1928 and the other was *Keijo toshi keikaku shiryō chosasho* 京城都市計劃資料調査書 (Collection of Statistical Information on Keijo Urban Planning) (402 pages) prepared from 1927 to 1932. Meanwhile, the Government-General (the Construction Division) published *Keijo toshi keikakusho* 京城都市計劃書 (Proposal on Keijo Urban Planning) in March 1930. The second report is basically a collection of statistical information, so there exist only two sources of documents concerning the Great

year data collection activities and by pressure from the urban planning movement led by the KUPA and the Korean Architecture Association, the Government-General finally embarked on preparatory work for the execution of the Urban Planning Act in the second half of the 1920s.<sup>41</sup>

As urban planning became an actual political agenda and not just a topic for armchair discussion, its financing became a point at issue. As a matter of fact, in the course of making the Urban Planning Act, financing became the subject of a pitched battle in Japan as well. In Japan, important articles and provisions relating to funding (government subsidy, tax on capital gains, extra land buy-off, etc.) were all deleted in the review process of the act, consequently requiring citizens to shoulder the whole burden.<sup>42</sup> In colonial Joseon of the 1920s, the authorities had to come up with financing under more adverse conditions, due to the absence of the Urban Planning Act. Officials at the “poor” Keijo Municipal Office, who used to say that “there are tons of things to do but nothing is possible without money,”<sup>43</sup> consistently held on to the view that expenses for urban development should be paid out of residents’ pockets by introducing a profit tax.

What made the matter difficult was that the Keijo Municipal Office’s “user-pays” plan was not based on fair and consistent principles, but on purposefully discriminative ones, with the Japanese being privileged over the Koreans. At the beginning of the urban planning project, the southern part of town was given top priority in road construction with resources coming entirely from the national

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Keijo Plan that were produced before the promulgation of the Keijo District Planning Act in 1936. On the features of these two reports, see Son (1990, 147-170).

41. “Construction Division of the Government-General Prepares the Urban Planning Act.” *Gyeongseong ilbo* (Gyeongseong Daily), March 14, 1928.
42. The act was passed, but “in rags” with real teeth removed. On account of this, urban planning projects in Japan continued to be controlled by landowners seeking their own interests (Kosijawa 1998, 27-28; Ishida 1987, 119-120).
43. “Overview of the Keijo Municipal Office’s Construction Projects for Next Year.” *Donga ilbo*, December 5, 1925.

treasury, while the north was virtually ignored.<sup>44</sup> Now, as the main road improvement project started in the mid-1920s, the authorities suddenly discussed the need to apply the user-pays principle to it. As rumors spread that users would have to pay about half of the road construction costs in Bukchon, Koreans, who were already feeling victimized, ferociously condemned the Keijo Municipal Office’s biased administrative practices.<sup>45</sup> Eventually, the profit tax proposal was put on hold and failed to be adopted, not only because the authorities were pressured to heed the strong opposition of Koreans, but because they made the realistic assessment that even if it went as planned and a tax was levied on residents, it would not produce any tangible outcomes, considering that the impoverished Koreans could not afford to pay the tax.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Conflict between the Keijo Municipal Office and the Government-General over the Financing Issue*

The Keijo urban planning project was proposed three times in the latter half of the 1920s and the idea of a profit tax began to be discussed as a viable option when the issue of how to finance the project was raised. The first draft<sup>47</sup> of the Great Keijo Plan, aiming to build a city with an anticipated population of 600,000 in thirty years time, was drawn up in June 1926, and the project was slated to start the following year, with two-thirds of the cost to be covered by state subsidies and one-third by issuing bonds.<sup>48</sup> This was possible as the Govern-

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44. The Keijo urban planning project had three phases: phase 1 (1913-1917), phase 2 (1918-1928) and phase 3 (1929-1937). The first and second phases were carried out by the Keijo Construction Branch Office of the Government-General with funds procured by the national treasury, whereas the third was taken over by the Keijo Municipal Office and financed by the Keijo Municipal Office and the state treasury (Kim Baek Yung 2003, 90).
  45. *Donga ilbo*, June 2, 1925.
  46. According to *Donga ilbo* (June 24, 1925), there were approximately 48,000 Korean households in Gyeongseong in 1926 and 35,000 of them were too poor to be taxed.
  47. For a brief overview of the proposal, see Son (1990, 146).
  48. *Donga ilbo*, June 16, 1926.

ment-General already had a plan in the early 1920s to execute urban planning in four cities (Gyeongseong, Pyeongyang, Daegu, and Busan) and give Gyeong-seong top priority in construction.<sup>49</sup>

However, as the Japanese economy suffered the “Showa Depression” in the late 1920s—the Japanese government forced the colonial Government-General in Korea to freeze or reduce its budget. Thus, the Government-General came to change its stance on this issue, saying that it had to give up on urban planning projects in Korea, thus making it necessary to cut down on financial support for the Great Keijo Plan.<sup>50</sup> So the Keijo Municipal Office reviewed two options to make up for the shortfall created by the state subsidy reduction. One was to get government-owned land from the Government-General and use it toward the project; and the other was to tax the people who would benefit from it. The Keijo Municipal Office dispatched staffers to Tokyo and Osaka to study how the cities introduced municipal profit tax law<sup>51</sup> and conducted land surveys for district planning of the northern part of town, the center of which was Jongno street. An ambitious plan was formed based on thorough research carried out over an extended period of time.<sup>52</sup>

At the end of 1927, the Keijo Municipal Office completed its urban planning proposal, in which Great Keijo would be constructed over ten years on a continual basis with an annual budget of ten million won. In the second Keijo urban planning proposal, published under the title of *Survey Report on Keijo Urban Planning*, financing

49. *Donga ilbo*, December 1, 1926.

50. *Maeil sinbo*, September 27, 1926.

51. *Keijofuno shuekizei jorei* 京城府の収益税條例 (Ordinance on Profit Tax of the Keijo Municipal Government); *Chosento kenchiku* (Korea and Architecture) 7-12 (December 1928): 35; and Anony. (1927).

52. That is why the Keijo Municipal Office’s second proposal on Keijo urban planning, released in September 1928 under the title of *Keijo toshi keikaku chosasho* (Survey Report on the Keijo Urban Planning Project), addressed the financing issue with importance, which *Keijo toshi keikakusho* (Proposal on Keijo Urban Planning) produced by the Government-General of Korea in March 1930, did not, and it included detailed maps of district planning with a systematic approach in overall planning methodology (Son 1990, 160-161).

was supposed to be jointly provided by the state treasury and the Keijo Municipal Office budget. But this plan suffered a setback as the Government-General obstinately insisted that it could not dole out as much as five million won because of its reduced budget policy.<sup>53</sup> The Keijo Municipal Office’s Urban Planning Unit then immediately submitted a revised proposal to the Government-General,<sup>54</sup> suggesting a reduction of state funding to one-third of the total amount and provision of government-owned land in Keijo from the Government-General free of charge to finance the execution of principal road construction that would cost ten million won annually. But the Government-General rejected it again, frustrating the second of the Great Keijo Plan. Thereafter, the same process was repeated almost every year that a new proposal would be submitted, discussed, and then scrapped due to financing, until the adoption and execution of the final Keijo urbanization plan in 1936.<sup>55</sup> While the Government-General held on to the position that “the enactment of urban planning law in Korea would be too premature,” the Keijo Municipal Office demanded legislation of a profit tax ordinance and the free granting of government-owned land while emphasizing that colonial capital should be treated favorably. Nevertheless, the Government-General turned it down each time, mindful of the political burden that would be caused by such ordinances and its reduced budget policy.

In order for Gyeongseong to develop, based on the trinity formed among the three parties of the state, municipal government, and citizens, the colonial government first needed to “strive to pass urban planning laws and release government-owned lands to provide a

53. When the Government-General indicated its changed position on the financing issue at a meeting with the Keijo Municipal Office Council, the council members objected to any increase of its share. Therefore, “all the efforts put forth for several years: by the Keijo Municipal Office’s Urban Planning Unit came to nothing” (*Maeil sinbo*, August 19, 1928).

54. “Use Government-Owned Land as a Funding Source for the Great Keijo Plan.” *Donga ilbo*, August 22, 1928.

55. *Chosento kenchiku* (Korea and Architecture) 9.3 (March 1930): 38; 9.4 (April 1930): 50; and 9-7 (July 1930): 41.

means for the building of Great Keijo”; second, the Keijo Municipal Office needed to “implement land policy and public projects”; and third, the people of Keijo needed to be “willing to pay a profit tax.”<sup>56</sup> But the ideal of the Great Keijo Plan was frustrated, faced with the baffling reality of a colonial society where none of the three conditions could be met. As a consequence, due to the “inability” of the authorities to foresee the population increase, urban problems such as inadequate housing, poverty, transportation problems, and poor sanitation worsened from the mid-1920s. Gyeongseong’ road to a metropolis was viewed by many dwellers as a disaster, and the chasm between Japanese and Koreans deepened due to the biased practices of the colonial government and the exploitativeness of Japanese residents. Eventually, the Great Keijo Plan was implemented, though only partially, in 1936 with the passage of the Joseon District Planning Decree in 1934, but it would only enlarge and multiply conflicts and ruptures within the colonial city of Gyeongseong.

### **Rupture of the Colonial Power and Oscillation of Its Strategy for Domination**

Modernity is inseparable from the development of capitalist urban civilization and the universalization of urban life. Colonial cities were modern in the sense that it pursued an urban, civilized mode of life, marked by hygiene, cleanness, and order. However, the discourse and practice of “modernity and modernization” led by colonial power in colonial society was the product of out-of-context and violent acts of speech, in which the signifier did not match the signified, or the content of speech contradicted the mode of speech, or the discourse was estranged from the place of speech. Colonial power did not use the discursive mechanisms of enlightenment, emancipation, and universalization, but instead relied on the hidden physical mechanisms of domination, repression, and discrimination. Therefore, the more it

56. “Will Great Keijo Be Born?” *Gyeongseong ilbo*, February 2, 1927.

tried to assert the universality of modern power, the farther it was removed from the threshold of colonial particulars and tossed back due to the intensifying dissonance between its political and organizational reality and the moral and technical discourse. As reviewed in the previous sections, the reality of what went on with regard to the Great Keijo Plan in the 1920s was characterized by the overwhelming “coloniality” of the social circumstances that surrounded the plan, rather than by the clear, though partial, “modernity” that permeated the discourse on the urban planning.

Throughout the entire colonial period, the Japanese master plan to transform the 500-year royal capital into a colonial capital was based on a policy of total assimilation, an attempt to completely “Japanize” the historical city. But it was not followed up on consistently because of the financial fragility and weak policy drive of the colonial power and the naked collective selfishness of Japanese residents in Seoul. By the time the symbolic architecture of colonial power, as represented by the new Government-General building in Gyeongbokgung palace and the Joseon Shinto Shrine in Mt. Namsan, was erected in the mid-1920s, Seoul was transformed from a crumbling traditional city into one in which capitalist urban expansion and development was actively underway. Thus, the Government-General came to consider the institutionalization of urban planning. But it was delayed due to a lack of support from the Japanese government, the uncooperative stance of Japanese residents in the city, and the opposition of the Korean community, which only deepened the division of the colonial urban space. Urban planning was institutionalized later with the Japanese government’s adoption of wartime expansionist policy, but its realization was destined to be postponed indefinitely with the onset of the total war system in the subsequent period.

Inconsistency and failure exhibited by the Japanese colonial authorities in the course of making and implementing urban planning policy of the colonial capital of Gyeongseong cannot be explained solely by the two opposing forces of the colonial society, that is, the Government-General’s inability or incapacity to achieve hegemonic

governance and the colonized Koreans' lack of cooperation or excessive hostility. The colonial power exhibited constant confusion and indecision in its domination strategy, the range of which vascillated amidst a chronic lack of support from the colonizing Japanese government and the lack of collaboration from the Japanese community in Korea. In the swirl of transformation throughout the world during the inter-war period, especially during the 1920s, the colonial power of imperialist Japan began to collapse. Expanded research to illuminate how this collapse took place remains a task for future study.

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