Residential mobility in the Seoul metropolitan region, Korea

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Abstract: The spatial pattern of residential mobility in Korea is found to be one of intraregional rather than interregional movement. Net immigration has taken place only in the Seoul metropolitan region (SMR) since 1970. People from the Cholla region have formed the main stream of net immigration into the SMR. The decentralization of population from Seoul to Kyonggi and Incheon has generated a transformation of the Seoul urban fringe since 1970. This metropolitanization process is accompanied by residential and employment suburbanization to 45kms from the center of Seoul. Residential mobility in the SMR is the result of metropolitan job opportunities, availability of housing, and the effects of the various regional policies. A availability of transportation between Seoul and its urban fringe encouraged the wide expansion of the urban areas and population redistribution within the SMR.

Key words: residential mobility, Seoul metropolitan region, intraregional movement, concentration, suburbanization, regional policies

Introduction

Korea has experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization since the early 1960s. During the period 1960–95, the population of Korea grew two times and the number of industrial jobs grew ten times. The ratio of the urban population was 50 percent in 1970 but reached 88 percent in 1995. Many people moved from rural areas to major urban areas, especially to Seoul and its surrounding areas, mainly for job opportunity (Kwon and Lee 1995).

As the 600-year old capital has been a strategic growth pole for the economic development of Korea, Seoul has rapidly grown to become one of the largest cities in the world in the 1990s. It has now more than ten million inhabitants, or one quarter of the nation’s population. The primacy of Seoul in the Korean urban system has been strengthened over time (Kim and Kwon 1988). The growth of Seoul has encroached upon its contiguous areas, which have eventually been formed into the Seoul metropolitan region (SMR) including Seoul city, Incheon city, and Kyonggi province (Figure 1). At present, the SMR contains about 21 million people which is 46 percent of the Korean population. The success of economic development and the growth of Seoul have caused high residential mobility in the nation in general and in the SMR in particular.

The objective of this study is to clarify the spatial characteristics and the underlying factors of residential mobility focusing on the SMR at the national scale and on the SMR scale for the period 1970–95.

The nation is divided into six regions for this study. The five regions in addition to the SMR are the Chungchong, the Cholla, the Kyongsang, the Kangwon, and the Cheju (cf. Figure 2), and each of them includes one or two province(s). These regions are se-
selected as the units, for the fact that each of them is traditionally regarded as a separate region and that they are similar to the SMR in terms of their size in territory and administrative level except for the Cheju. The Cheju is selected as a separate region because it is an island far from the Korean peninsula although its size is only about one-tenth of the average of the other five regions.

The SMR is divided into two parts, the central city and the suburban area: the central city is Seoul itself and the suburban area is comprised of Incheon and Kyonggi. In this study the rate of moving is defined as the ratio of the number of those who moved their residences in a particular year to the total population of that year and represented as a percentage (Figure 3). The annual report on migration (Annual report on the internal migration statistics 1970–1995) collects migration data based on residential registration, and the population and housing census (Population and housing census report 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995) records migration data based on actual residence between the time of the census and 5 years.

**Spatial characteristics of residential mobility**

**High rate of mobility**

The first characteristic of residential mobility in Korea is the higher mobility rate of intraregional mobility than that of interregional mobility. The average rate of mobility including both types of movement –

![Figure 1. Seoul metropolitan region.](image1)

![Figure 2. Migration streams for and from the SMR, 1970–1995.](image2)