

Voicing the Seoul Metropolis: *The Other Side of Urbanization in Korea*¹

Abstract

That the Republic of Korea is a phenomenal economic success story is not in doubt. That the country shot up from poverty to prosperity within a decade is also not debatable. President Park Chung hee (1961 – 1979) is credited with this economic miracle through his policy of *saemaul undong* (New Movement). What is missing in this glamorous story is what his critics call the ‘dark side’ of urbanization in Korea. This paper employs oral history as a method to understand how individuals make meanings out of their personal life histories in the Seoul metropolitan region (SMR) from Japanese colonisation through the ‘New Movement’ to the present. The paper discusses urbanization in SMR as remembered by the informants. The concluding section of this paper is a critique of urbanization in Korea. It addresses what Han calls “the dark side of modernization” evidenced in the loss of Korean traditional values, and communal spirit, lack of shelter, urban poverty and environmental degradation.

Key words: SMR, oral history, new movement, urbanization, dark side

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