The modern world arrived in Korea in force following Japan’s annexation of the Korean peninsula in 1910. Although Koreans were initially captivated by the prospect of modernity, the occupation soon brought a succession of miseries, causing those sentiments of wonder to be subsumed in feelings of anguish and humiliation. The occupation ended in 1945, and it was followed by the outbreak of civil war in 1950. In spite of this troubled history, Koreans have never stopped yearning for modernization. For this reason, recognition of modernity as a primary goal of Korean society must be included in any analysis of Korea’s history in the twentieth century. The development of modern architecture and urbanism in Korea can be defined as the path taken by intellectual and practical efforts to construct the country’s built environment in forms appropriate to the transformation of the traditional society upon which Korea’s national identity had been based. To extricate themselves from their historical bonds, Koreans have pursued modernization for over a century.

Colonial Modernism in Korea

When Korea was colonized in 1910, the newly dominant power, Japan, had already undergone its own modernization. Indeed, it had begun this process earlier than its neighbors, and this advantage enabled it to use the norms of a modern society, commonly identified as health, productivity, and efficiency, as tools for dismantling a traditional social order. The antagonism that resulted played out in two directions—between Japanese imperialism and Korean nationalism on the one hand, and between modernism and the premodern on the other. This confrontation of oppositional forces spawned complicated fault lines that fractured in different ways, forming the major themes of the architectural and urban discourse of the colonial period.

Because of this complexity, two contrasting views of the colonial period have been maintained: one is founded on a theory of colonial exploitation (sikminji sutalron); the other, on a theory of colonial modernization (sikminji geundaehwaron). Despite the emergence of postmodern criticism in recent years, the two approaches remain controversial because they are essentially concerned with a historical accounting of the colonial period. As Jonghoe Yang observes, “more nationalistic Korean scholars are prone to reject the colonial modernization theory by pointing to the contradictory and exploitative nature of colonial modernity. In contrast, more empirically oriented researchers, many of them are foreign experts on Korean history, tend to argue for the positive effects of the colonial legacy by analyzing statistical data on colonial industrialization.” According to these latter scholars, Korea’s transportation and communication infrastructure, together with some of the industrial facilities built in the colonial period, all contributed to Korea’s economic growth after liberation.

This book gives due weight to the recognition that the modernization of Korean society took place during the period of its colonization. Yet, as many scholars believe, the best conceptual account of the situation may be given from the perspective of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, which provides an analysis of the intention of the ruling class in relation to space. Gramsci’s theory reminds us that the ultimate purpose of the policies formed during the occupation was to consolidate Japanese colonial rule in perpetuity. Although colonial modernism was dependent on cultural control, including control of the built environment, the goal of modernization persuaded many Koreans to believe that Japanese rule was not entirely repressive but productive, allowing them to accept, adopt, and internalize foreign norms and values. This was a fundamental limitation that led to the fluctuation that can be observed in various sectors according to the degree of Japanese interest in them. The imbalance proved an impediment in the advancement of modernization in Korea.

Notwithstanding this limitation, a modern way of life did begin to emerge in Korea during the colonial period, with attendant impacts on the built environment. In
the West, the Industrial Revolution had brought about radical changes in the urban landscape. Until this point, most people had resided in villages set in a landscape sparsely dotted with houses, and this pattern of spatial dispersion dictated the forms of everyday life. When migrants from the countryside flocked to the cities to pursue employment related to the manufacture and increased availability of consumer goods, the housing that was available was incapable of accommodating the sudden increase in the population. In due course, city dwellers had to accept the prospect of living in large-scale housing complexes and high-rise buildings, a new built environment characterized by enormous investment in infrastructure. This built environment could not be constructed in the short term, however, causing many social difficulties.

The first urbanization of Korea occurred during the colonial period, apparently caused by similar factors. Korea’s population doubled, and the increase was largely absorbed in the cities. Overall, the urban population rose from approximately 3 percent of the entire population to 13 percent. In Seoul, the resident population increased approximately fivefold during the colonial period. In addition, new modes of transportation accelerated the process. Korea built its first railway in 1899, and railway routes continuously expanded thereafter. Inland cities such as Daegu, Gwangju, Daejeon, and Pyongyang underwent rapid urbanization during this period. Upon analysis, however, the roots of the urbanization of Korea can be seen to lie not in the industrialization process per se, as occurred in Western countries, but in Japanese colonial rule. Industrialization did not start in earnest in Korea until the 1930s. The main reason for the migration of population from the Korean countryside to the cities was the ruthless exploitation of Korean peasants by the Japanese. This meant that the increase in urban population did not occur through a typical “push-pull” process in which a growing demand for urban labor coincides with unused labor in the countryside. The demand for an urban workforce was actually meager, and new immigrants to Korean cities led a hand-to-mouth existence, looking to be hired by the day without prospects of finding a permanent job. Moreover, the increase in the urban population was also caused by a large influx of new Japanese residents. The Japanese colonial government had allotted large tracts of land at subsidized prices to Japanese families wanting to settle in Korea. With this encouragement, landownership among Japanese residents, which in 1916 stood at 36.8 percent, jumped to 52.7 percent by the end of the colonial period. These land distribution policies formed a significant part of the urban planning that took place in Korea during this period. In the early 1920s, Japanese residents made up about 30 percent of the urban population. With acute segregation the norm, Japanese residential districts inserted themselves into traditional Korean districts, splitting the urban fabric. Indeed, the most revealing aspect of Korea’s urban planning at this time was its total dependence on Japanese interests. For example, when the colonial government designated thirteen cities three years after the annexation, only three of those cities corresponded to traditional definitions of a city. The others were created for economic exploitation. Najin, built in the 1930s, was designed as a logistical and military base for Japan’s territorial ambitions on the continent of Asia. As a consequence, most of the cities that flourished in the colonial period did not develop further after liberation.

Despite these origins, there can be no doubt that the urban spaces created during this period were forms of colonial modernism. In particular, the street systems of Korean cities and their infrastructure became formative influences on subsequent developments. Even with land use plans being continuously deformed as cities continued to grow, the street systems remained largely unchanged. As we review the urban planning of the colonial period, we will have occasion to examine how these street systems were formed.

The Urban Planning of Open Ports

The first wave of urbanization in Korea dates back to 1876 when, under pressure from Japan, Korea dropped its long-held policy of isolation. The Joseon dynasty, which had ruled Korea for more than five centuries, opened its doors to foreign countries and signed treaties granting them commercial rights and the lease of a certain territory to support consular affairs and trade. Ten ports in Korea—Busan (1877), Wonsan (1880), Incheon (1883), Mokpo (1897), Jinnampo (1897), Gunsan (1899), Seongjin (1899), Masan (1899), Yongampo (1904), and Cheongjin (1908)—opened in succession, and five inland cities, including Seoul, Pyongyang, and Uiju, opened to trade. The opening of these ports brought a new way of life and a need for modern urban planning. Prior to the port openings, Korea’s major urban areas had been located inland. Although there were ports for marine transportation
and fishing, their scale was insignificant by comparison. The areas selected for the treaty ports had been chosen by the foreign powers, and their urban planning took place under the foreign concession system. This was a system developed originally in China and Japan “in which a certain tract of land within the treaty port is allocated for foreign settlements, and all or part of the local administrative power in the district is transferred to foreign governments (consuls), or the committee of foreigners residing in the district.”

Although the open ports in Korea followed in the footsteps of the Chinese and Japanese models, their urban space was organized somewhat differently. As Japan gradually consolidated its dominance in Korea during these decades, the formation of the open ports took place in accordance with Japanese planning models. Incheon, the third port opened, offers the clearest example of this. Because of Incheon’s strategic importance as the gateway to Seoul, three independent settlements—Japanese, Chinese, and general foreign—grew up at Incheon, and it became a model for the planning of the open ports that were developed later. The Japanese Concession was the first of the foreign settlements to be constructed. Indeed, preparations for it had begun even before the Joseon government agreed to open Incheon. There are eleven documents dating from September 1883 to November 1884 that reveal the planning process for the settlement. A drawing attached to the report sent by the Japanese consul at Incheon on September 8, 1883, shows us Japan’s original concept for the settlement. In a site measuring 43,627 sq m, the Japanese consulate was to be placed at the center with three layers of residential blocks laid out symmetrically. The dimensions of each block were 20–30 m x 120 m, with 12-m-wide roads inserted between the blocks. These dimensions and the partitioning scheme seem to have stemmed from the Japanese jobo system, on which the commoner districts in Tokyo were also patterned. A similar scheme was also discovered at the Japanese district of Yokohama.

The construction of the Japanese settlement spurred China and the Western powers to speed up the planning of their settlements in Incheon. A Chinese settlement was established on a hill west of the Japanese settlement in December 1883. The site measured 26,700 sq m and was subdivided into irregular tracks. Based on this layout, Chinese soldiers stationed in Seoul undertook the construction of building lots and roads in April 1884 and finished the work in March 1885. The planning of the general foreign settlement, a concession shared by the Western powers, owed much to William George Ashton, who had been appointed British consul-general for Seoul in 1884, becoming the first European diplomatic representative to reside in Korea. Ashton had experienced the general foreign settlements in Kobe and Osaka and did not have any difficulty in drafting the land regulation and plan for the common concession. The land regulation segregated the lots into four categories to determine an upset price and rental value consistent with location and geographical features. The layout of the blocks and the street system were patterned after the existing Japanese settlement. However, the average size of each lot was 900 sq m, considerably larger than in the Japanese settlement. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the commercial value of the lots was a significant index of their importance to the Westerners, while the Japanese intended to develop their settlement as an outpost for the invasion of the Korean peninsula (figures 1.1, 1.2).
In the wake of the opening of the first three ports, the remaining ports were unilaterally opened by the Korean government, under pressure from Japan, rather than through diplomatic agreements with foreign powers. Regulations for the foreign settlements at Chinnampo (Jinnampo), Mokpo, and Kunsan (Gunsan) were promulgated in October 1897, and regulations for Masampo (Masan) and Songjin (Seongjin) were issued in June 1899. They all had the same form and contents. The location of the ports had been determined by Japan’s interests. Japan was intent on establishing its supremacy over Korea after its victory in the Sino-Japanese War, and it needed new ports to maximize the economic exploitation of the peninsula. Mokpo and Gunsan were opened to facilitate rice exports from Jeolla province. In the new settlements, the subdivision of urban space followed the precedent set by the general foreign settlement in Incheon. After removing all Korean houses within the settlements, the Korean government prepared, filled in, laid out, and subdivided the lots, selling them at public auction to the highest bidder. To ensure consistency in the public auctions, the lots were partitioned into grids of the same size. Land was sold in three categories: (a) village, rice-field, or low-lying lots not requiring filling in; (b) hill lots; and (c) foreshore lots requiring further filling in. The lots had minimum and maximum sizes: 500–1,000 sq m for Class A and Class C lots, and 1,000–5,000 sq m for Class B lots. In Mokpo and Gunsan, the block size was largely determined by these lot sizes. In Mokpo, there were two block sizes: one was approximately 60 m x 80 m, or 4,800 sq m; the other was approximately 90 m x 90 m, or 8,100 sq m (figures 1.3, 1.4). In Gunsan, the block size was 40 m x 60 m (2,400 sq m). These were blocks that were easily rentable if they were subdivided into four parts. Except for restrictions on building access and sanitary facilities, land use in the blocks was unregulated. Various buildings began to fill the blocks according to their partitioning, including public facilities such as consular buildings, customs offices, and warehouses, as well as Japanese-style housing called machiya to accommodate the Japanese who were rushing to the new ports. This general pattern became a common way to organize the urban space of treaty ports in Korea (figures 1.5, 1.6).

Fig. 1.3 Plan of Mokpo (Seok-Kyu Ko 2004, 58)
Fig. 1.4 View of Mokpo, ca. 1930? (Photo courtesy of Sam-Geon Han)
Fig. 1.5 Plan of Gunsan, 1902 (Ei-Won Kim 1982, 652)
Fig. 1.6 View of Gunsan, ca. 1930? (Photo courtesy of Sam-Geon Han)
Cheongjin was the last port to open in 1908. When Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, all of the open ports lost their original function and meaning. The Japanese government opened negotiations with the foreign governments over their concessions in Korea and completely abolished the system in 1914. Consequently, the urban planning that took place on the Korean peninsula after 1910 assumed a completely different character.

**Annexation and the City Ward Improvement Plan**

After winning the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Japan focused its national force on the colonization of Korea. It concluded a treaty for the first Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902, which laid out an acknowledgement of Japanese interests in Korea. In the peace treaty ending the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), a defeated Russian empire acknowledged and henceforward deferred to Japan’s military, political, and economic interests on the Korean peninsula. A separate agreement, signed in secret by the United States and Japan, recognized both the Japanese interests in Korea and the American interests in the Philippines. With this recognition, the Japanese government sought to formalize its sphere of influence by forcing the Korean cabinet to sign the Protectorate Treaty, giving Japan complete responsibility for Korea’s foreign affairs and placing all trade through Korean ports under Japanese supervision. The treaty was signed in November 1905, allowing Japan to set in motion a large number of urban policies aimed at extending its power in Korea. It would only be a matter of time before it seized full control of the apparatus of government.

**Railways and Fortress Walls**

The Japanese colonizers consolidated their control of inland cities by constructing railways. Japan had obtained the right to construct railways in the Korean peninsula in 1894 but transferred the license for the Seoul-Incheon rail line to an American businessman, James R. Morse, in 1896, amid soaring anti-Japanese sentiment in the wake of the assassination of the Korean empress the previous year. Two years later, when construction of the line was halted due to financial difficulties, Morse relinquished the rights to a Japanese firm, and the first rail line was opened in September 1899. Japan continued to operate the Seoul-Busan line in 1905 and the Seoul-Sinuiju line in 1906, which served as a stepping-stone for Japan’s invasions of Korea and Manchuria. As newly constructed railways and roads became operational, inland Korea began to see how a new transportation system would open a new era of growth. Several new cities arose at the intersection of the newly established railway lines. Daejeon, the sixth largest city in present-day Korea, took form to facilitate the settlement of Japanese workers who took part in the railway construction. With the expansion of railway lines, railway stations became new centers of urban growth, triggering a great increase in land prices. One result was the surfacing, in the 1920s, of sharp conflicts between Koreans and Japanese over the relocation of railway stations in Daegu.

Along with the opening of the railways, the electric streetcar brought great changes to the perception of urban space. In 1898, King Gojong had authorized the creation of a joint venture with two American businessmen, Henry Collbran and Harry Rice Bostwick, called the Hanseong Electric Company. The new company, of which the king owned 50 percent, was charged with establishing an electrical lighting network in Seoul and an electric streetcar system as well. Hanseong Electric completed its first power plant in 1899 at Dongdaemun, and, by the end of that year, had successfully launched its streetcar service from Seodaemun to Cheongryangri. In later years, the streetcar service was extended into the surrounding suburbs of downtown Seoul, such as Mapo, Ahyeon, and Yongsan.

As the wave of modernization began to overtake traditional urban structures, the demolition of fortress walls became symbolic of the disintegration of premodern urban space and the emergence of a new urban order. With new regulations for land and building certification taking effect in 1906, making it lawful for Japanese to own land throughout Korea, large numbers of Japanese rushed into Korean cities to form new settlements. The resulting tensions intensified with the demolition of the city’s fortress walls. To the Japanese, the walls blocked off not only a smooth stream of traffic, but also Japanese commercial penetration of the old city. They began to demolish the fortress walls as part of a campaign to construct new roads and improve the urban infrastructure. This began in Daegu in 1906, and Jeonju fortress followed in 1907. In Seoul, fortress walls to the left and right of Namdaemun Gate were demolished in 1908. In all, about 140 fortress walls had played an instrumental role in the local administration of the Joseon dynasty, and their demolition marked the death of a traditional spatial order and the birth of a new one.
**Military Cities**

The urban planning undertaken between 1905 and 1910 was closely tied to the Japanese military’s plans to advance into Korea and China. The one-sided expansion of Seoul amply demonstrates this fact. During the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), two divisions of the Japanese army had been stationed on the Korean peninsula, one of them in Yongsan, a southern suburb of Seoul. Ten years later, with Korea falling under its control at the end of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan made Yongsan the headquarters of its occupational forces. It purchased all the land at dirt-cheap prices, installed barracks for Japanese soldiers, and built Yongsan Station as the starting point of the Seoul-Incheon railway line. Yongsan, which had been nothing but a sandy plain near the Hangang River, became a place of strategic importance. Two arterial roads from downtown Seoul to Yongsan were constructed after 1906 to improve access to the area, and many residences for military officers were established around the base. As a military camp, Yongsan stood in the way of normal urban expansion, and this became a decisive hindrance in Seoul’s development.

Nanam and Jinhae were two new cities built for military purposes. Nanam, located 550 km northeast of Seoul and next to Cheongjin, was surrounded by mountains. In 1907, Japan began construction of the new city on an empty site measuring about 3,300 ha, judging the area to be strategically advantageous in several respects. Located 90 km from the borders of China and Russia, it would be ideally located for the rapid mobilization of soldiers following any outbreak of hostilities, and it could facilitate the direct import of war materials from Japan by ship. It remains unclear exactly who initiated the city planning, but well-trained urban experts clearly had a hand in it. The planners divided the city into two parts, making the northern sector a site for military barracks and the southern sector an urban area. The urban area contained two blocks 150 m wide and 160 m deep, each of which was subdivided into 40 m x 15 m street blocks. A notable feature in the plan was X-shaped avenues with a park placed at the center. The Japanese army would later praise Nanam as “a highly civilized example of city planning.”

The planning of Jinhae in 1910 was carried out in a similar manner. After Korea was obliged to become a Japanese protectorate in 1905, the Japanese navy forcibly acquired an enormous tract of land to build a military port and a new city. Little is known about the men who carried out the planning. However, their methods appear similar to the way the South Manchuria Railway Company (Mantetsu) planned the construction of cities around railway stations in Manchuria. Analysis of the urban formats of Changchun and Mukden (Shenyang), and of other Chinese cities planned by the railway company in the first decade of the century, reveals several similarities (figures 1.7, 1.8). First, they commonly placed railway stations at the center of urban areas, allotting the front half to public, commercial, and residential areas, and the rear half to factories and warehouses. Second, a regular grid-shaped street network was employed if the ground was flat, and radial streets were added with railway stations at the center. Third, planners attempted to avoid creating an undifferentiated urbanscape by inserting large-scale buildings around the railway-station squares. Fourth, urban amenities such as parks and water reservoirs were built to be self-contained. Last, the average ratio of road coverage in the entire urban area was never less than 23 percent. These formats are significant
because Japanese urban technocrats applied them to the planning of Korean cities until the enactment of the Urban District Plan Decree of 1934. Jinhae Railway Station was located at the center of the city, with a frontal area subdivided into grid-shaped blocks 60–80 m long, and radial streets were formed by connecting three urban centers (figures 1.9, 1.10). The Japanese settlement at Pyongyang, planned in the 1910s, shows a similar scheme.

The urban planning of the Manchurian railway company was closely associated with the ideas of Goto Shimpei, the first director of the company, who had implemented urban improvement projects as the head of civilian affairs in Taiwan. These experiences had taught him that the success of colonial rule depended on the establishment of balanced, advanced urban planning, supported by infrastructure built to the standard to which the Japanese had grown accustomed. He therefore emphasized scientific and statistical surveys and conducted in-depth research on the urban planning methods of Western countries. The predominant urban planning methods of the time had been developed in Europe and applied to new American and Australian cities since the late nineteenth century. Cerda’s plan of Barcelona showed a typical method of creating a modern urban space. In his network-oriented approach, street layout and grid plans were optimized to accommodate pedestrians, carriages, horse-drawn trams, urban railway lines, gas supply, and large-capacity sewers to prevent flooding without neglecting public and private gardens and other key amenities. Urban planners in the United States, particularly Daniel Burnham, looked to the European models and concentrated on working out an elaborate system of infrastructure rhythmically punctuated by public monuments. Burnham’s plan of Chicago was a typical American example, and the methods he followed provided a template for developments in Manchuria and colonial Korea, albeit with some regional modifications. Jinhae exemplified this kind of adaptation.

City Ward Improvement Planning
After the annexation of the Korean peninsula in 1910, the Japanese empire implemented new urban policies to strengthen its hold over Korea. It introduced city ward improvement planning to transform the traditional cities of Korea where thatched-roof houses were clustered together in a disorienting fashion, separated by snaking alleyways. Historically, the city ward improvement plan carried out in Tokyo was the Japanese government’s first intervention to improve premodern urban structures. Its model was a modernization program in Paris led by Georges-Eugène Haussmann between 1852 and 1870. At that time, Tokyo was already overcrowded. The population was close to 1 million and the density of some wards exceeded 500 persons per hectare. After years of studying the issue, the government enacted the Tokyo City Ward Improvement Ordinance (Shiku Kaisei Rei) in 1888. Its contents covered roads, rivers, bridges, railroads, public parks, markets, crematoriums, and graveyards. The project was never carried out, however, because of insufficient revenue, and a new scaled-down plan was announced in 1903. The major achievements of the revised remodeling program included the construction of thirty-two parks, seven canals, new waterworks and sewage systems, and the improvement of 123 roadways up to 1919. Once the program demonstrated its adequacy, it was applied to other cities such as Osaka, Kyoto, Taipei, Seoul, and Pyongyang.
According to Iwao Miake, who published *Urban Studies* in 1908 after surveying the extensive literature on Western urban planning, "the first requirement of the system lies in the widening of roads, and the second in the unified, technical design of an entire street network." His statement pinpointed what the program of city ward improvement entailed. The term itself contained strong overtones of urban improvement, a notion often allied in England with town planning. Accordingly, the goal of city ward improvement was the enhancement of urban functions in old towns rather than the development of new towns, and its most conspicuous feature was an emphasis on the construction of urban infrastructure, as opposed to a comprehensive account of overall land use.

To ensure effective implementation of the program, the Government-General of Joseon (Joseon chongdokbu in Korean, Chousen soutokuhu in Japanese) created a variety of legal and institutional structures. A comprehensive land survey of Korea had been carried out from 1910 to 1918 to systemize land registration and make land—particularly agricultural land—a secure and easily marketable item for anyone, whether Korean or foreign. As a result, many Korean farmers were forced to become tenant farmers because they could not produce any documented proof that they owned their land. Together with the land survey, the Government-General of Joseon issued several decrees concerning architecture and development of the cities. The Land Expropriation Decree (Toji Suyong Ryeong) and Road Regulations (Doro Gyuchik) were promulgated on April 17, 1911, as the colonial government’s first steps in the implementation of its urban policies. The first decree allowed the government to expropriate, subject to the governor-general’s approval, any estates required to facilitate the construction of military installations, public buildings, educational facilities, railways, roads, and bridges. The Road Regulations specified in detail the planning and construction methods of roads, breaking them down into four categories. The City Ward Improvement Decree (Sigu Gaejeong Ryeong) was issued on October 7, 1912, to regulate the development of urban areas. It ordered the Korean people to seek permission from the Government-General of Joseon whenever any remodeling or expansion of main urban districts was desired. This law well illustrated the repressive nature of Japanese urban policies. The following month, the Japanese colonial government announced a plan to improve twenty-nine routes in Seoul. In accordance with the plan, castle walls were demolished and new roads were established in a grid formation alien to the existing urban environment. Water supply facilities and sewer systems were also installed at the same time. On February 25, 1913, the Government-General of Joseon made public a set of Regulations for Urban Architecture (Sigaji Geonchuk Chwije Gyuchik) intended to regulate building activities in urban areas. Together, these laws served as the basic legal foundation for maintaining control of all urban development in Korea until the Urban District Plan Decree (Joseon Sigaji Gyehoek Ryeong) of 1934. On October 10, 1913, the Japanese empire began to implement its “bu” system (buje), enabling local governments to establish a level of expenditure for urban projects in their budgets. This meant that a local government could invest part of its finances in city ward improvement projects. On October 12, 1914, the Government-General of Joseon sent written instructions to provincial governors regarding the authorization of city ward improvement projects. From that time on, local governments had the authority to conduct their own city planning in accordance with their financial situation.

The Record of Civil Works in Korea (Chousen doboku jigyoushi), published by the Government-General of Joseon in 1928, itemized in detail the construction process and expenditures for public works ranging from roads, rivers, harbors, and urban renewal projects to water supply and drainage systems. The evidence contained in this record verifies that city ward improvement projects were civil works intended to reorganize the colony’s territory in accordance with Japanese interests. Urban remodeling occurred in thirteen Korean cities from 1913 to the early 1930s with significant transformations at the center of major cities such as Seoul, Daegu, Busan, and Pyongyang. In these projects, the colonial government paved the most frequently used roads, making them straight, separated sidewalks from carriageways, and installed the needed infrastructure for water and sewage systems.

In Seoul, the Government-General of Joseon designated twenty-nine roads as targets for remodeling on November 6, 1912. The plan was revised five times until 1928 when its scope was finally extended to forty-four roads (figure 1.11). Yet only twenty-five of the forty-four roads were actually completed before liberation. Prior to the city ward improvement planning, street networks in Seoul had not departed very much from a framework that dated back to their medieval origins.
In fact, main roads in old Seoul were never intended to be crossed at right angles, apparently for military and geomantic reasons. The first city improvement plans for Seoul showed an intention on the part of the colonial government to change this closed street system into an open system as part of the city's transformation into a modern metropolis. The city center of Seoul was composed of blocks approximately 200 m to 300 m in size. The plan intended to place the Government-General of Joseon's headquarters at the center of power (figure 1.12b), so radial roads were created that led out from the headquarters building, centering the axis of the urban scheme on the building. As a way of expressing political power in urban space, similar schemes had been adopted in Versailles and Washington, D.C. The plan was changed, however, when it was decided that the colonial headquarters building should be relocated directly in front of Gyeongbokgung Palace, requiring significant changes in the street system. The newly prepared plan of 1919 reflected these changes. Radial streets moved to the front of Gyeongbokgung Palace, and all the radial streets and plazas at the old building site disappeared (figure 1.12c). The 1919 plan still maintained a grid-pattern layout of street networks; as in the 1912 plan, minor streets continued to be aligned with the linear patterns of the old streets. Most of the arterial roads in the old center of Seoul were built at that time.

Pyongyang, the present-day capital of North Korea, offers a glimpse of how old walled towns

![Fig. 1.12 Changes in the urban structure of downtown Seoul: (a) city fortress of Seoul before modernization; (b) city ward improvement plan, 1912; (c) city ward improvement plan, 1919; (d) present-day urban structure of downtown Seoul]

1. Gyeongbokgung Palace
2. Changdeokgung Palace
3. Jongmyo (the ancestral shrine of the royal family)
4. Gyeonghuigung Palace
5. Deoksugung Palace
6. Sajik (altar to the state deities)
7. Government-General of Joseon headquarters building before the relocation in front of Gyeongbokgung Palace
in Korea were transformed into colonial cities through city ward improvement projects. As a place of strategic importance in the northwestern region of the Korean peninsula, Pyongyang had formed its urban core within four layers of fortress walls between the Daedonggang and Botonggang rivers. However, after the opening of a railway line between Seoul and Sinuiju in 1906, the old town began to dissolve. In addition, when the construction of Japanese army barracks near Mt. Seogi ignited a Japanese rush to Pyongyang, the city government formulated a plan for a new town to meet the urgent demands of the Japanese settlers. Its design resembled the Chinese cities conceived by the Mantetsu with streets laid out in a grid and arterial roads radiating from a railway station at the town center. It is intriguing to contemplate how the plan also reflected a traditional urban layout from the sixth century, imitating ancient Chinese urban formats characterized by a clear division into distinct city blocks or wards. The size of each block in the new town was 84 m x 84 m. Prior to the construction of a Japanese supply base in 1917, the site to the rear of the station was left empty, existing only in traces on maps. By maintaining the existing layout, Japanese planners had intended to link the new town to the old fortified city of Pyongyang.

Afterwards, Pyongyang underwent two major changes that prompted the overhaul of its urban structure: the introduction of streetcar service in 1922 and the construction of Daedong Bridge in 1923. Of the two, the construction of Daedong Bridge provided momentum for the expansion of the city’s boundary into the east bank of the Daedonggang River. Until then, both the old and the new town had been contained by the west bank. However, in spite of the rapid population growth that industrialization brought to the city, the city government had trouble selecting suitable sites for the expansion of urban space because many ancient remains surrounded the city. The Government-General of Joseon decided to span the river with a bridge to resolve these problems. The construction of the streetcar track also had a substantial impact on the urban structure. In 1922, the city government established a five-year plan for the first city ward improvements to meet the new requirements. However, the initial plan to widen and straighten the existing roads in accordance with the new traffic system was not accomplished within the expected timeframe, only reaching its conclusion in 1927. Through these projects, the new town was directly linked to the old town of Pyongyang. The second round of city ward improvements were carried out from 1927 to 1933, remodeling four roads to renovate the old town (figures 1.13, 1.14).

Since city ward improvement planning left a lasting influence on the urban structure of Korean cities, a look at the historical context of its implementation may be instructive. Above all, there was a significant difference in purpose between its development in Japan and its application in Korea twenty-four years later. In Japan its purpose was the remodeling of premodern cities, especially the capital of Japan, into modern ones; in Korea the same program was carried out to extend colonial rule. This difference can be verified by history. When Haussmann transformed the old center of Paris into a modern city, incorporating wide avenues and open spaces, the population of Paris was more than 2 million, and its density, at a maximum, was 340 persons per hectare.40 Haussmann’s planning was in fact a response to dire urban conditions resulting from overpopulation. In contrast, when the improvement work for 31 routes was undertaken in Seoul, the population of Seoul was 250,000, with a density of only 69 persons per hectare. The housing shortage was less than 6 percent. Therefore, it can be argued that the City Ward Improvement Ordinance was not introduced to solve urban problems but to strengthen colonial rule. Along with a comprehensive land survey conducted between 1910 and 1918, the ordinance aimed to establish a strict spatial partitioning of the national territory, and its main purpose was to make an accurate map that could be used to consolidate political power. As Arie Graafland has pointed out, a perceptual apparatus is never neutral to its observation, but can be used for other purposes.41 In their promotion of urbanism, the common aim of Japanese colonial officials was to make urban spaces identifiable and more easily governable rather than to solve, like Haussmann, serious urban problems stemming from overcrowding.

City ward improvement planning followed a distinctive path in Korea because of its sponsor, the colonial regime. That is to say, while the plan focused on improving street networks, it was never part of a comprehensive urban planning scheme like Haussmann’s renovation of Paris or the initial city ward improvement plan in Tokyo. Because the city ward improvement plan in Korea focused on road works for Japanese new towns, delaying any large-scale intervention into traditional urban tissues, it caused severe imbalances in the urban domain. For example, there was a widespread shortage of access to a water supply. According to a 1925 survey,
The First Urbanization

The water supply access rate for Korean households living in Seoul was no more than 28 percent whereas that of Japanese households reached 85 percent. Such disparities accounted for the inadequate sanitation in the areas of Korean residence in the 1920s.42

The Experience of Modernity in Colonial Cities

Subtle signs of change began to appear in the urban discourse of the early 1920s, for several reasons. First, there was an apparent change in the style of Japanese rule, shifting from the iron-fisted domination of the early years to a more cultural approach, because the former was seen to be undermining the long-term stabilization of the colonial society. An uprising on March 1, 1919, expressing a nationwide outcry against the intolerable aggression, oppression, and plundering of the Japanese colonialists, had been a watershed event. In the urban domain, one of its outstanding results was a transfer of power from the Japanese government to local governments. As a result, most urban plans in the 1920s were drawn up by local governments, and planners and civil engineers were usually invited to participate. The reason local governments came to the forefront at that time was the necessity of adjusting the conflicting interests of residents before urban projects could be executed. In particular, a sharp conflict between the Government-General of Joseon and Japanese residents in Seoul over the expansion of Seoul reveals how different segments of the Japanese ruling class took differing stances toward urban issues. At that time, the Government-General of Joseon had planned to develop the northern districts of Seoul, where most Koreans lived, in order to secure its command of the entire urban area. But the Japanese, who mainly lived in the southern districts, opposed this plan and insisted on expanding Seoul toward Yongsan and the Hangang River.43 This debate sparked a fierce controversy because the direction of urban development decisively influenced land prices.

Second, technocrats of the colonial government were researching a wide range of urban methodologies and coming to the conclusion that the city ward improvement plan did not effectively handle expansion of urban space, because its priority was the renovation of old, degraded urban centers. In this research, diverse urban theories and methodologies were energetically discussed. It was the early 1920s when Ebenezer Howard’s idea of a garden city and Le Corbusier’s urban theory were introduced in Chousen to Kenchiku, the colony’s only architectural magazine.44 The urbanism of modern American cities provided an important template. Another significant reason for the appearance of different urban perspectives was the influence of Japan itself. A huge earthquake struck Tokyo and the surrounding Kanto region in 1923, providing sudden

Fig. 1.13  City ward improvement planning of Pyongyang (Redrawn from a 1915 map of Pyongyang)

Fig. 1.14  Through road from Sinchangli to Botongmun, the western gate of the old city of Pyongyang, 1923 (National Archives of Korea, CJA0013073)