Administrative Regions

Changes in Administrative Regions since Independence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Map</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Map 1946" /></td>
<td>Initial map showing the administrative regions before independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Map 1965" /></td>
<td>Map showing changes in administrative regions after independence.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Map 1975" /></td>
<td>Continued evolution of administrative regions.</td>
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Administrative districts are governmental units for local administration, but at the same time, they define regional and local identity. Since the nation’s founding, Korea has promoted administrative efficiency and aligned living spaces and administrative units through many administrative reorganisations. During these changes, the hierarchical (province-assisted) administrative district system used during the Joseon Dynasty became the basis for Korea's modern metropolitan administrative system. The administrative system was comprised of one special city, 15 do (provinces), 23 han (cities), and 218 gans (counties) in 1945. The following year, Seoul had been separated from Gyeongbuk, and in 1946, Jeju-do was replaced by “je.”

In 1962, the Korean government carried out a comprehensive reform to rationalise the living spaces and administrative districts. For example, Gangwon-gu and Jocheon-do were reclassified to Changcheong-nam-do, and Ulsan in Gyeongsangbuk-do was merged into Gyeongbuk-do. Reform after 1960 mainly took place due to urban expansion and the associated urbanisation. Small towns and cities were increased in number and size, and major cities were promoted to directly-controlled municipalities so that the central government could manage them directly. During the 1960s, as Busan was promoted to a directly-controlled city, Korea consisted of 1 special city (Seoul), 1 directly-controlled city (Busan), 1 directly-controlled city (Seoul), 2 provinces, 10 gans (counties), and 218 gans (counties) in 1963. The 1990s, large provincial cities, like Incheon, Ulsan, and Daegu, were reorganised into metropolitan districts. In 1995, an overall provincial administrative reform was carried out. This reshuffling integrated cities and counties, aimed to balance development between growing urban and declining rural areas, ensured land for urban development, promoted administrative efficiency, and addressed inconsistencies between spaces of daily life and administrative districts. Since 1965, cities merged with neighboring counties and directly-controlled municipalities have been recognised into metropolitan cities by combining neighboring areas. In 1965, forty urban-rural integration cities were established, and the following four metropolitan cities were created: Busan, Daegu, Daejeon, and Daejeon. In 1995, urban administrative city status. After 2000, a continuous merging of cities and counties took place, and Jeju Island was raised to the status of a separate special self-governing province in 1993. Lastly, a provincial administrative city became the Gyeong Metropolitan Autonomous City in 2012. Now, the Republic of Korea has 17 metropolitan cities, which include one traditional city (special city), six metropolitan cities (metropolitan cities: Gwangju, Daegu, Daejeon, Busan, Ulsan, and Incheon), one traditional city (Jeju) and one traditional city (provincial self-governing autonomous province: Jeju).
Seoul has experienced a rapid increase both in population and land area over modern times. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897), Seoul was surrounded by a fortress wall and consisted of Hwaseong and five bacs, which together formed the political and administrative center, its inner districts, and outer districts (Seongjeosimni). The outer districts stretched approximately 4 km beyond the city wall. By the end of the 18th century, the city’s population hovered above 200,000. From the end of the Joseon Dynasty through Japanese colonial rule, the city’s boundaries grew as railroads and streetcar routes were constructed. A massive residential area was built to house Japanese immigrants and farmers who migrated to the city during this period. Following its liberation from Japan, Seoul’s population increased sharply before industrialization, and the rise in population density accelerated as urbanization rapidly grew after the 1960s. The concentration of the population resulted in the development of the outskirts of the city, and the opening of subways further facilitated urban expansion.

Seoul has modified administrative areas eight times since the 19th century. The center, its inner districts, and outer districts (Seongjeosimni) were reorganized by integrating surrounding areas and local area. In 1995, metropolitan cities, serving as hub cities in the urban plan. Therefore, the land area of Seoul has been 605 km² by integrating the four districts of Sungin, Cheonsu, Yongsan, and Jongno. In 1936, which was the area when Seoul was designated as a city in 1882, the planned population was converted, and Gwangmyeong-si, Gangseo-gu, Gangnam-gu, and Seongdong-gu were separated from Seoul. As the gateway city to the capital region, Incheon has spurred population growth. In 1960, Busan had more than one million inhabitants, and in 1986, it became a directly-controlled city. As the southernmost part of the country, Busan has become a major international harbor, and the continuous development has spurred population growth. In 1981, Daegu was elevated to a directly-controlled city. As the gateway city to the capital region, Incheon has spurred population growth. In 1960, Busan had more than one million inhabitants, and in 1986, it became a directly-controlled city. As the southernmost part of the country, Busan has become a major international harbor, and the continuous development has spurred population growth.

The land area of Seoul city was 135 km² in 1910, which was doubled to 269 km² by integrating the four districts of Sungin, Cheonsu, Yongsan, and Jongno. In 1936, which was the area when Seoul was designated as a city in 1882, the planned population was converted, and Gwangmyeong-si, Gangseo-gu, Gangnam-gu, and Seongdong-gu were separated from Seoul. As the gateway city to the capital region, Incheon has spurred population growth. In 1960, Busan had more than one million inhabitants, and in 1986, it became a directly-controlled city. As the southernmost part of the country, Busan has become a major international harbor, and the continuous development has spurred population growth. In 1981, Daegu was elevated to a directly-controlled city. As the gateway city to the capital region, Incheon has spurred population growth. In 1960, Busan had more than one million inhabitants, and in 1986, it became a directly-controlled city. As the southernmost part of the country, Busan has become a major international harbor, and the continuous development has spurred population growth. In 1981, Daegu was elevated to a directly-controlled city.
Special Administrative Region Jeju

Jeju is Korea’s largest island and is famous for its beautiful natural landscape and unique cultural heritage, which attract many tourists. Jeju Island was created by volcanic action and is characterized by volcanic topography, such as Hallasan Mountain, which is located at the heart of the island along with numerous possible, caves and coves surrounding it. Jeju was designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2002 and as a World Natural Heritage Site in 2007. Jeju was also certified as a Global Geopark in 2018, which made it part of the natural heritage the entire world should protect and conserve.

Jeju’s well-preserved natural environment, unique ecosystem, and cultural background made it an ideal location for various natural and international facilities. An autonomous region city is the island every year, the second largest city, Jeju Island, has become one of the fastest-growing cities in the world.

In 1962, Jeju became the first Special Self-Governing Province to facilitate regional development that focuses on unique regional attributes. The plan to build an international city of Jeju to facilitate this task has been established and enacted. Jeju is one of the metropolitan cities and provinces. However, unlike any other metropolitan cities and provinces, the Jeju Special Self-Governing Province has a high level of autonomy in education, legislation, and finance. Specifically, the island is attracting foreign visitors, investors, and immigrants as the autonomy implemented administrative deregulation and introduced international standards while setting up various policies ensuring free enterprise. One policy makes it a reality as the most possible in Jeju. After the branch of the Special Self-Governing Province, foreign investment increased, and many foreign educational institutes have been established under its administrative regulations. At the same time, Jeju has been integrated into Jeju-do, and Nampodong was integrated into Seogwipyeong. Jeju’s population has increased by around 1% every year since 2010. The current population is 680,775.

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Since the 1960s, Korea has experienced rapid economic growth. One of the factors behind the success has been a statewide development plan that controlled the speed and direction of industrialization and urbanization. The two major pillars were the National Development Plan and a Economic Development Plan, which focused on human and natural resources on Seoul, the Seoul Metropolitan Area (SMA), and the Southeastern Coastal Region. Urban development between these regions, in particular the metropolitan areas, has become one of the most urgent challenges that Korea needs to address. Many strategies to address overpopulation in the capital area and to promote balanced development have been implemented. An effort to address these issues through the relocation of the national capital dates back to the late 1970s. Former President Park Chung-hee made a plan to relocate the capital to Gongju-si as the national capital, and the National Assembly passed the legislation relocating and building a new administrative capital in the Young-Do area in Chungcheongnam-do.

In 2006, the new city was named “Sejong.” Sejong was formally created on July 1, 2012. Sejong is located in the central part of the Chungcheong Region and borders Cheongju-si, Chungcheongbuk-do to the west, Daejeon metropolitan city to the south, and Cheonan-si, Chungcheongnam-do to the north. Currently, the city is comprised of one eup, nine myeons, and 14 dongs. The relocation of administrative branches resulted in many massive projects, such as new city development and the construction of government buildings, as well as developing the city’s infrastructure. At the beginning, administrative branches announced their respective relocation plans except for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Unification, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. As of 2019, 16 central government branches and 20 government-related organizations have moved into the city. Thanks to the relocation of some administrative branches of government, the population flowing into Sejong has increased continuously, and as of July 2018, it reached 7,56,138. 5,528 foreigners. The population is expected to reach 880,000 by 2030.