

The ROK Presidential Election and the Destiny of the Korean Peninsula

By [Prof. Joseph H. Chung](#)

Global Research, February 15, 2022

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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Coming March 9 could be a terribly important day because it is the date for the presidential election in the Republic of Korea (ROK). The outcome of this election will decide the fate of the Korean peninsula.

There are four parties in the race, but the race is between the pro-Japan conservative party called People Power Party (PPP) and the liberal Democratic Party (DP). The candidate of PPP is Yoon Seok-youl, former prosecutor general, while that of DP is Lee Jae-myung, former mayor of Kyung-gi Province.

What is at stake is the survival fight between two South Koreas, namely the pro-Japan conservative South Korea and the liberal South Korea.

What comes out of this fight will have devastating impacts on the economy, people’s welfare and security, North-South peace dialogues, Korea-Japan relations, Korea-US relations and Korea-China relations. (1)

This paper is intended to discuss the nature and the historical significance of this election. First, I will examine how these two South Koreas have been fighting for the last 74 years. Second, I will discuss the impact of the outcome of this election on the fate of the Korean peninsula.

Historical Fight between Conservative South Korea and Liberal South Korea

The first conservative government was established in 1948 and, since then, it has ruled South Korea for 59 years. It has positive image abroad, especially in Japan, but in Korea they are regarded as a hostile group harming the interests of ordinary Koreans.

In the eyes of the Koreans, they were collaborators with Japan in stealing Koreans’ assets, recruiting girls to be sent to the camps of “comfort women”, sending Korean workers to work as slaves in Japanese mines and factories, sending young men to the most dangerous frontline to defend Japan, forcing Koreans to give up their Korean names and adopt

Japanese names and, above all, killing Korean patriots who fought the Japanese armed forces and police.

Koreans believe that they should have been punished for their participation in the Japanese oppression of Koreans, but they were not punished because of the American military government (1945-1948) and the Syngman Rhee government (1948-1960) which hired them in great number and which destroyed the list of those who were traitors in the eyes of Koreans.

In 1948, there was the first post-war presidential election and the fight was between pro-Japan group led by Syngman Rhee backed by Japan as well as the U.S. and Korean nationalists led by Kim Gu. The pro-Japan people knowing that they had no chance to win, they decided to commit two crimes to win the election.

First they assassinated Kim Gu, who was the president of the Provisional Government of Korea in China. Thousand of nationalists were arrested and incarcerated. The murderer of Kim Gu was amply rewarded later by the pro-Japan government.

Second, there was a committee for the production of the list of collaborators. The office was attacked and the list of collaborators was destroyed by the former Japanese police of Korean origin. The pro-Japan group won the election.

It is true that the conservatives have made a major contribution to the economic miracle of Han River. They formed the tripartite collusion composed of business, bureaucrat and politicians. The tripartite collusion was a combination of political will to develop the economy, risk taking entrepreneurship and planned mobilization of financial, human and material resources. There is no doubt that the tripartite collusion was the key factor of the take-off of the Korean economy in the 1970s and the 1980s.

However, the tripartite collusion was accompanied by the exchange of privileges accorded by the government to large businesses in exchange for bribes which are given to government officials. This lucrative exchange became worse as the Korean economy attained the stage of matures economy and eventually led to the formation of corruption community and corruption culture. (2)

When the corruption culture is formed, it is almost impossible to get rid of it. There are two powerful protectors of the corruption community and corruption culture. One is the judicial system and the other is the media.

The conservatives have been able to survive all these decades due to the corrupted police, prosecutors and judges. The role of the judicial regime in the corruption culture is the protection of its community members in exchange for bribes and the punishment of the people of opposition for promotion. The most notorious case was the condemnation for two years in prison of former Prime Minister Han Myong- suk of the Democratic Party (DP) on the basis of purely fabricated witness story by a couple of inmates who later confessed that they had lied under the threat of the prosecutor. This happened in 2015. The prosecutor and the judge involved in the case had big promotion.

The role of media is the marketing of the corruption community. In Korea, three major newspapers are the leading protectors of the corruption community, namely, the Chosun Ilbo, the Joong-ang Ilbo and the Dong-ah Ilbo (Cho-Joong-Dong). The master is the Chosen

Ilbo which is the richest and superior in media technology and edition skill. In fact, Western media, especially the Japanese media copy what the Chosen Ilbo reports as if it is the correct and unbiased report.

Money commands public opinion

As the date of the election approached, the number of poll businesses skyrocketed; now there are more than 70 of them; they have been created for the election and to make money; they publish poll results which are in favour of the pro-Japan conservative hoping that the public opinion will follow the trend of the poll results. The conservatives have a lot money, which the liberals do not have.

The pro-Japan corrupted conservatives have been piling hundreds of billions dollars through the embezzlement of public money and bribes. Money has been the chief reason for ruling Korea for 59 years; the money can be mobilized to prevent the liberal Koreans from taking power. The money is very visible; the money talks aloud; the money is threatening the current electoral fight.



The conservatives are not liked by ordinary Koreans for other reasons. To begin with, the conservatives have prepared the list of the Korean patriots and descendents and persecuted them by labelling them as “reds”, “non-desirable” in the name of the National Security Law, by preventing them from having job, by harassing their children at schools and by alienating from the collective life. As a result, most of these people are poor and less educated. Since President Moon Jae-in took over the power in 2017, various measures have been taken to help them.

There is another reason why ordinary Koreans do not like the pro-Japan conservatives. It is the fact that they have been working with Japan to hide the Japanese atrocities committed in Korea.

It is understandable, because they were co-offenders against Koreans. Many academics, religious leaders, politician and bureaucrats are descendents of the collaborators. In particular, there is so called “New Right” movement led by some pro-Japan religious leaders and a large number of academics who have been suspected to be generously funded by Japan. One of the tasks of these people is to make Korean to feel inferior to the Japanese and even to justify Japan’s Korea invasion by arguing that the invasion was for the good of Koreans. Under Lee Myong-bak and Park Geun-hye, the New-Right scholars have re-written the high school text books in which the story of Japan’s war-time crime of sex slavery and labour slavery were taken off.

Now, liberal Koreans represented by the Democratic Party (DP) have been fighting to survive the oppression by the pro-Japan community. They rose up in huge numbers against the pro-Japan government.

There were several huge uprising

- The uprising against the oppression of the government of Syngman Rhee on April 19, 1960 (Student Revolution 4.19),
- The huge protest assembly against the plan for permanent presidency of military dictator, General Park Chung-hee on October 16, 1979 in the region Busan-Masan region (BUMA Democratic Protests 10.16),
- The uprising of May 18, 1980 against General Chun Doo-hwan, military dictator (Kwangju Democratic Movement 5.18)
- The huge assembly for the amendment of the constitution on June 10, 1987 (Democratic Protests 6.10)
- The Candle Light Revolution of 2017-2018.

Each uprising was attended by hundreds of thousands of angry citizens. In the Candle Light Revolution which lasted for six months, 27 million citizens participated. The cost of these protest movement was heavy; several hundreds of thousands of lives were sacrificed. But, they won battles, if not war.

These uprising have succeeded in punishing the heads of the corrupted pro-Japan conservatives. South Korea had six presidents of the pro-Japan governments. Each one of them ended their political career with shame.

- Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) was chased out in 1960 by students for corruption and abuse of power.
- Park Chung-hee (1962-1979) was assassinated by his KCIA director in 1979 for Park's scheme for permanent presidency.
- Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1987) and Rho Tae-woo (1987-1992) were imprisoned for corruption and abuse of power.
- Park Geun-hye (2013-2017), daughter of Park Chung-hee, was impeached for her incapacity to govern and imprisoned for corruption and abuse of power but recently pardoned by President Moon Jae-in for health reason.
- Finally, Lee Myong-bak (2008-2012) is serving 17-year imprisonment for corruption, embezzlement of public funds and abuse of power.

This shows how the pro-Japan Koreans are corrupted and put South Korea in the danger of weakening democracy and risking decade-long economic depression.

Impact of the Election Results on the Fate of the Korean Peninsula

Now, the presidential election next March will be won either by Mr Lee Jae-myung of the DP, former mayor of Kyong-gi Province, or Mr. Yoon Seok-young of the PPP, former prosecutor general. Depending on who will win, the future of the Korean peninsula and regional security will go through important changes.



First, the most important stake of this election is the fate of the corruption community and corruption culture. Under the 59-year rule of the pro-Japan conservative governments, the pro-Japan conservatives have been able to build a solid community which has been well protected by the corrupted judicial system and the dishonest media. Since he took power, President Moon Jae-in has done a lot to fight the corruption culture by reforming the judicial system, especially the Bureau of Prosecutors and affiliated institutions such as KCIA and military intelligence services. He was successful in creating the Corruption Investigation Office for High Ranking Officials. But, the reform of the judicial system is far from being over.

If Yoon wins, the corruption culture which has been a little weakened for last five years will be restored and not only Korea's economic growth but also people's welfare will be adversely affected. What is frightening is that Korea will become the Republic of Prosecutors and terror will rule the country as it did for 40 years. On the other hand, if Lee wins, the reform of the judicial system will be accelerated.

Second, Moon Jae-in had no means to reform the media, Unless the media is reformed and depoliticized, the corruption culture will prosper and human right violation will be the order of the day with no means to prevent it. And, as long as the corrupted media rules the world of information, the democracy, the justice, the equality will retreat and the economy will stagnate. These will destroy the country of morning calm; the country will become no more calm.

The media reform is urgent. If Yoon wins, the media will remain the press agent of the corruption community. On the other hand, if Lee wins, his first priority will be the media reform.

Third, the macroeconomic policy will have a fundamental change. If Yoon wins, the neo-liberal economic policy will come back and the GDP might increase but the income of the ordinary will not increase and this will weaken the domestic demand and impair long-run GDP growth. On the other hand, Lee's victory would mean the emphasis put on the "income-based" growth through more equitable income distribution and the growth of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Fourth, if Lee wins, the inter-Korea peace dialogue will be restored and the basis of eventual reunification will be established. On the other hand, if Yoon wins, the cold dark clouds of hostility will be over the sky of the peninsula and the possibility of unification will retreat.

Fifth, if Yoon wins, the Japan-Korea relations will be easily restored and the Japanese neo-colonialism will return. However, if Lee wins, the Japan-Korea relation will be based on the mutual sovereignty and it will be the relations of equal to equal.

Sixth, as for the US-Korea relations, if Yoon wins, it will be a relation of master-vassal

relations and Korea diplomacy will suffer from serious lack of credibility. If Lee wins, the Washington-Seoul relations will be mutually beneficial and Korea can be a good partner in establishing global peace and prosperity. The OPCON is a regime in which the U.S. has the right to command Korean armed forces in war. This treaty was signed by Syngman Rhee in 1950. If Yoon wins, this system will continue (3). If Lee wins, the negotiation of the return of OPCON to Korea will be intensified.

Seventh, if Yoon wins, the China-Korea relations will receive heavy blow, because he is ready to take side with Washington and ignore China. He even promised to bring in more THAADs. He seems to have forgotten China's trade reprisal when the first THAAD came in 2018. If Lee wins, he will do his best to promote further bilateral trade with China, while cooperating with the U.S. for regional security.

To conclude, Yoon has too many weaknesses to be the head of a country. While he was a prosecutor and, later, prosecutor general, he has abused the authorities of his office to protect the corrupted pro-Japan conservatives, his own ambition and his family interests. He is well known for his ignorance about economics, politics and foreign relation. He is surrounded by fortune-tellers (Mu-dang) who exert influences on his major decisions (4).

Nevertheless, Yoon might win. We cannot ignore this possibility. No less than 30% of Koreans still back him up. This is illogical and tragic. But, these people are those who are benefitting from the corrupted community and they are eager to restore their lost privileges.

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Dr. Joseph H. Chung is professor of Economics at Quebec University in Montreal (UQAM), member of the Study Center for Integration and Globalization (CEIM) of UQAM.

He is Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

Notes

(1) Jung Da-min "No matter who wins, 2020 election will be turning point for Korea. koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/01/356_321472.html

(2) Joseph H. Chung. "The Political Economy of Corruption in Korea: Corruption kills people, Ruins the Economy and Violates Human rights" Global Research December 28, 2020. globalresearch.ca/political-economy-corruption-in-Korea-corruption-kills-people-corruption-ruins-economy-corruption-violates-human-right/5703558

(3) Victor Cha. "Why South Korea Election Matters the U.S.?" foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/26/south-korea-presidential-election-candidate-biden-administration

4) Ko Dong-hwan. "Fortune Tellers Swirl Around Presidential Election" koreatimes.co.kr/2022/01/113_323054.html

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