

# Korea and Moon Jae-in: God Save Korea! God Bless the President!

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*For centuries, Koreans have been asking the Almighty to bless them with a true leader who would provide daily necessities, hope for the future, courage to fight for the justice and self respect for and self confidence in themselves.*

*During the 500-year of Choseon dynasty, many kings could not perform their duties as national leaders because of the corruption of the “Yang-ban” (aristocrats).*

*King Gojong, (Image below) the last king of the Joseon dynasty was a total failure, because he could not prevent Lee Wan-yong from selling Korea to Japan for his own political and financial greed.*

*During 40-year Japanese colonial rule, Korea was governed by pro-Japan Korean bureaucrats who collaborated with Japanese for the oppression of Koreans.*



*After 1945, Korea has been ruled, for 60 years, through all forms of dictatorship, by former pro-Japan collaborators and their descendents who regarded themselves as a superior race and who were primarily concerned with their own interests at the expense of those of the rest of the Korean population.*

Moon Jae-in came along and, for Koreans, he is the first true national leader they have been waiting for so long. He is the true leader who would give them their daily necessities, the hope for a better future, courage to fight for justice and respect for and confidence in

themselves.

President Moon will leave his office in little more than one year. Before he leaves, I thought that it is right time to discuss what and how he has accomplished his historical tasks.

President Moon had to overcome two sets of challenges: the internal challenges and the external ones. In this paper, I will discuss the internal challenges.

The internal challenges are those which are related to the liberation of Korea from deep rooted corruption culture of the conservative forces in Korea.

This paper has three parts. The first part explains the nature of the internal challenges, while the second shows how Moon's government has tried to meet these challenges. Finally, in the final section, I discuss what remains to be done to complete what President wanted to accomplish.

## 1. Nature of Challenges

During the election campaign in 2017, President Moon Jae-in promised to return the country back to the Korean people suggesting that Korea had been stolen by someone. Who was the thief? The progressive intellectuals, politicians and informed public have been saying that Korea was stolen by the pro-Japan conservative forces (chin-il-bosu-pa-진일보수파). In fact, the liberation from the conservative forces means the liberation from the corruption of these forces.

### Corruption Culture

The phenomenon of corruption is a universal problem and every country is exposed to it. However, the reality of corruption in Korea has unusual elements which are specific to Korea and difficult to deal with. It started with the establishment of Korean government in 1948 after WWII. In contrast to France and other countries which had punished the collaborators with enemies, the Korean government was formed with the Korean bureaucrats who had more than collaborated with the Japanese colonial government in stealing land and other assets of Koreans, sending students to the frontline to kill Koreans, capturing and sending teenage girls to comfort women camps and forcing Koreans to work in Japanese mines and factories as slaves.

Thus, in reality, the liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945 was followed by a new version of Japanese occupation through the pro-Japan government. From there on, Korea was divided between pro-Japan elite and anti-Japan Koreans. In the history of mankind, there have been many cases of internal division of population, but it has been rare that the division was generated by mutual mistrust and even reciprocal hatred as it has happened in Korea.

The pro-Japan elite were aware of their sins; they knew that they were hated. This created inevitably a situation in which they were enemies of Koreans and the Koreans were their enemies.

As a result, the pro-Japan elite had to develop a closely knit community capable of defending themselves and attacking the anti-conservative Koreans. To do this, they needed financial resources. To their advantage, they were in good position to get these resources. To begin with, while they were serving the Japanese masters, they enriched themselves by sharing the Koreans' assets, especially land, stolen by the Japanese. Moreover, they

appropriated the huge assets belonging to the Japanese who had to leave Korea after Japan's defeat in WWII.

If there is any positive aspect of the pro-Japan conservative camp's money, it facilitated the take-off of the Korean economy in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, the collusion between the pro-Japan businesses and the pro-Japan conservative government was surely one of the key variables of the sustained growth of the economy in the 1980s and the 1990s.

However, on the other hand, such collusion led inevitably to corrupted relations between the business and politics. Moreover, in the absence of balancing and checking mechanism, the corruption became so widely spread over and so deeply penetrated into the Korean society that it produced a corruption culture and formed a corruption community.

By corruption, I mean illegal or immoral actions designed to maximize the interests of the person and those of the group of which the person is a part at the expense of the interests of the people. Remember that some of the laws are intended to legalize illegal activities. Such activities may be legal de jure but they are de facto illegal.

The corruption community is composed of the core group and the periphery group. The core group includes large corporations, leading politicians and elite bureaucrats. The periphery group includes those who are not in the position to influence the national policies; they are the beneficiaries of the corruption system. This group includes the core group's family members, relatives, friends and supporters of the pro-Japan conservative camp. The corruption community has several ways of acquiring and distributing the funds.

The system of generating and distributing the corruption money may be summarized as follows.

(See also my previous paper: [The Political Economy of Corruption in Korea](#), *Global Research*, March 14, 2020)

- Outright theft of tax money and government debts embezzled by presidents and people around the presidents. In fact, three of six presidents of the conservative government were imprisoned and two of them are now in prison for embezzlement of these funds
- Transaction of privileges: bribe money for the issuance of illegal construction permit; bribe money for illegal university admission; bribe money for government contract without bidding
- Theft of government subsidies by subsidy recipients. A part of government subsidies paid to private sector kinder-gardens is used for directors' personal use, personal cosmetics.
- Transaction of freedom: bribe money paid to judges and prosecutors for non-investigation of crimes, non-indictment and the reduction of prison terms
- Transaction of information: bribe money paid to government officials who provide confidential information on urban planning project or classified information on stock market
- Transaction of laws: bribe money paid to lawmakers who pass laws in favour of specific interests groups
- Theft of public funds through kick-backs and other means.

The interesting question here is about the amount of corruption money generated and

distributed. Nobody knows. But, there is one thing which is certain. The corruption community of the pro-Japan forces has been expanding and reinforcing itself for last 70 years. This gives you an idea about the amount of the money generated and distributed. Some well-informed people including lawmakers of the progressive party (the Democratic Party) suggest that hundreds of billions of USD have been generated and distributed within the corruption community. They also suggest that a good part of this money is hidden somewhere within and without Korea invested in real estate and other investment outlets.

The conservative pro-Japan camp's corruption community has more than enough financial resources to sabotage the progressive camp's battle to destroy the corruption culture. Therefore, it is imperative to find these funds and return it back to the government. General Chun Doo-hwan, the notorious military dictator, was ordered by the court to return a part of stolen money amounting to several hundreds of millions of dollars. He did, but he still has to return a few hundreds of millions of dollars.

In view of the seriousness of the hidden corruption money, the National Assembly is debating a law on the repatriation of stolen public money.

It goes without saying that the existence of the corruption community itself a national shame and threatens the very survival of the country. But what is more scandalous is the strategy deployed by the conservatives to protect the corruption community.

#### Strategy of Protecting the Corruption Community

The objective of the strategy is the perpetuation of the conservative government by means of the double strategy including on the one hand, the elimination of the progressive forces and, on the other, the pardoning of the wrongdoings of the conservative corruption community members.

#### Measures designed to eliminate the Opposition Forces

These measures include the eradication of opposition voice and the political assassination of opposition leaders:

#### Eradication of Opposition Voices

- Physical elimination of those who criticize the government or those who are suspected to do so.
- Illegal arrests
- Torturing of those who are arrested
- Citizen harassment by civil police, CIA, military intelligence services
- House search with no search warrant
- Refusal of progressives camp's access to government jobs
- Prohibition of anti-conservative government street demonstrations
- Tight collusion with the media.

It is impossible to know the number of victims of these harsh measures. However, during the 60 years of police dictatorship, military dictatorship, CIA dictatorship and other forms of subtle dictatorship of the conservative government, perhaps half of the population have been victims directly or indirectly.

However, there is one estimate of victims which is reliable. It is about the citizens who have been murdered by the conservative government; it is more than possible that more than three hundred thousand Koreans have been murdered for being “reds”, that is, for being suspected to be anti-conservatives. This happened especially, during the pro-Japan conservative governments of Rhee Syngman (1948-1960), General Park Chung-hee (1962-1979) and General Chun Doo-hwan (1980-1987).

#### Political Assassination of Opposition Leaders

The most serious conspiracy undertaken by the penal and judicial system is the political assassination of the present and potential leaders of the progressive camp. The process of political assassination of opposition leaders proceeds by step.

First, select the opposition leader who is or will be a threat to the power of the conservative camp.

Next, undertake investigation designed to find any weakness of the prey. If the prey does not have any weaknesses, the prey’s family, relatives, friends are investigated to find out any proof of wrong doings involving the prey. If there are no proofs of wrong doings in the prey’s world, the prosecutor fabricates proofs by forcing prison inmate to make false witnessing. If there is a slight proof of wrong doings, the prey is immediately indicted.

Finally, the interrogation lasts months, even a year until the prey has no more resources to defend oneself.

One of the notorious cases was the imprisonment of a former prime minister of a progressive government. The prosecutor forced one of the inmates of the prison to declare that he had seen the former prime minister receiving bribe money. The inmate was promised to have shortened prison terms in return of false witnessing. The former prime minister has spent two years in prison. Now, the inmate confessed that he was forced to lie.

There are more cases where the prominent leaders of the progressive camp were indicted for fabricated misconduct or groundless violation of election law. All these cases have been revealed to be groundless. But the inevitable result is the fatal destruction of their image and their political career.

Recently, one of the key leaders of the progressive camp was respected to have killed himself because of the groundless accusation by a conservative lawyer for sexual misbehaviour. It is possible that the whole drama was politically motivated by the conservative camp to eliminate the eventual rival for the presidency.

#### Measures to pardon the wrong Doings of the Conservative Corruption Community Members

The wrong doing of the conservatives, in general, and the members of the corruption community, in particular, are seldom punished because of the prosecutor’s biased leniency. The prosecutor’s office is the best guardian of the corruption community. In fact, the prosecutors are the key members of the corruption community. The main ways of protecting the corruption community members may be summarized.

- Disregard or invalidate the police investigation results. In Korea, the prosecutor has the right of criminal investigation and the right of indictment, while the police have only the investigation right. Moreover, the prosecutor has the right

to supervise police investigation

- If the police investigation looks valid, the prosecutor will take over the investigation and make it invalid.
- If there is ample proof for the crime, the prosecutor delays the indictment until the legal delay of indictment is expired.
- If the proof of crime is convincing, the prosecutor will send the case to the court with recommendations for reduced punishment.
- In the case where the accused are key leaders of Chaebol groups, it is very rare that they are condemned to prison confinement; they pay small amount of fine and they are freed on bail for a few years.

In the Korean penal and judicial system, the members of the pro-Japan conservative corruption community seldom go to prison, unless the crimes are so obvious that the public opinion forces the system to condemn the accused.

### Consequence of the Corruption Culture

So far, we have seen how and why the conservative camp has created the corruption community. It is of course important to know this unfortunate phenomenon. But, what is more important and relevant is to know its harmful consequences on the society. To be sure, there can be a host of ill impacts of the corruption community on the Korean society. But, two types of impacts stand out.. One is the impact on the national economy and the other is the social impact.

### Economic Impact

The conservative government's pro-Chaebol and pro-exports policy has, undoubtedly, contributed to the miracle of Han River. But, it has a few serious ill effects on the national economy. On the other hand, this policy has the effect of enriching the conservative corruption community and, on the other hand, impoverishing the rest of the population. Here is why.

First, the excessive reliance on exports and high technology has resulted in increasing unemployment.

Second, the pro-Chaebol policy has brought about a situation in which national financial and other resources have been allocated mostly to Chaebols at the expense of SMEs. The generous tax allowance for Chaebols, countless grants, and bailouts of Chaebols have meant shortage of resources for the SMEs preventing them from developing normally, creating jobs and generating income for the ordinary people. Remember that the SMEs create 85% of all jobs in Korea. Remember also that most income of the ordinary people comes from the SMEs.

Third, the Pro-Chaebol policy has accelerated the concentration of wealth and income in the hands of the conservative elite.

Fourth, the combination of unequal income distribution combined with increasing unemployment has ended up by shrinking consumer demand and contracting domestic market. If this continues, in the long run, decades-long depression of the economy may follow. In other words, the corruption culture can ruin the economy.

Korea should not repeat what has happened in Japan. The three decades-long depression of the Japanese economy was primarily attributable to the corruption culture.. (See my previous paper: "[Japanization and Abenomics](#)": the Saga of the Falling Japanese Economy, *Global Research*, November 4, 2019).

## Social Impact

Two types of social impacts of the corruption culture deserve our attention: the destruction of the social ladder and the "Hell Korea".

The corruption community is so rich and so powerful that it has erected an invisible wall so high that the ordinary people cannot come into their community. In other words, the social ladder of the people cannot go over the wall. In the old days, a boy from provincial town with modest family background could go to Seoul National University, marry a daughter of a rich family and go over the wall, have a nice job and lead "successful life". In other words there was a time when vertical social mobility was possible. Now it has gone.

There are many ways of keeping the wall high. One way is to send the kids abroad and study at expensive universities and get top jobs on return. Ordinary Koreans have no means to send their kids to study abroad. Another way is the promotion of intra-community marriage. The popular pattern of intra- community marriage involves the kids of Chaebol groups, high ranking politicians, judges and prosecutors. You can see why the conservative corruption community is so rich and powerful.

In this situation, most of the young people who are not connected to the corruption community end up with low paying jobs or part time jobs or no job at all. Thus, for decades, under the corrupted conservative rule, Koreans have lived with uncertain future, fear of being suspected to be anti-conservative, despair of being jobless, the sorrow of having to give up what the life offers and, in particular, the self pity for not being capable of looking after their elderly parents. Korea has become "Hell Korea" for many.

Here is how Hell Korea affects the Korean youth. The Hell Korea consists of several "Give-UPS". or Po-gi (포기) in Korean, simply "PO".

- 3 POs: dating, marriage, children.
- 5 POs: 3 POs plus social relations, dwelling
- 7 POs: 5 POs plus, dream and hope
- 9 POs: 7 POs plus, physical health and physical look.

At first, the youth give up dating, marriage and having children. But, as the situation gets worse, they gave up nine basic youth desires, even physical look. This alarming picture of Korean youth is heartbreaking and infinitely sad.

The Korean youth spend their entire youth period to prepare university entrance exams; they go to universities; they get papers saying that they have completed their 4-year studies. They go to the labour market but nobody hires them, unless they went to the Korean Ivy League Universities (SKY universities: Seoul National University, The Koryo University, the Yonsei University) where the kids of the corruption community have much better chance to go.

Many young people kill themselves. There is one particular bridge connecting the North

Shore and the South Shore of Seoul City, called Mapo Bridge. This is the bridge where the young people take their last action on the earth; they fall down to their death in the dark water of Han River. There are so many youth suicides that the police have established a watch-post near the bridge. Many young people kill themselves by falling from the roof of high-rise apartment building down to the parking lot below.

Many workers spend a year, risking frozen death, on the roof of 24-five story building to protest unfair firing, non-paying of wages, refusal to recognize labour union and other illegal and immoral treatments of workers by the employer. This is the horrible picture of Hell Korea; this is the tragic consequence of the corruption culture.

Even if they get the job after their studies, they are the object of employers' abuse of workers' rights and the violation of human rights. There are no labour unions which could protect the workers' rights. For the sake of labour market flexibility, the conservative government has been forbidding the unionization of workers. The rate of unionization in Korea is only 9 %. Furthermore, most of these unions are unable to protect workers' interests because of anti-labour policy of the government authorities. The conservative government considered labour unions as an obstacle to the enrichment of the corruption community.

Many workers become human torch and burn themselves to death. They do this in order to appeal to the world their tragic lot. For them, it is only way to show injustice reigning over the Korea society under the conservative regime. They choose such desperate way, because the media heavily bribed by the conservatives do not report the suffering of the workers.

The elders are also members of Hell Korea. The rate of suicides of the elderly is one of the highest in the OECD countries. They have had to sacrifice their own happiness all their life by working long hours with neither vacation nor over-time pay. By the time they retire, they have no savings, because they have had to carry out parents' sacred duties of sending kids to expensive academies (hak-won), paying university fees, buy or rent a dwelling house for marrying children and finance expensive wedding of children.

In the absence of proper old-age pension system, it has been the duty of kids to look after their parents. But the kids do not have jobs. No boy looks after the elderly. Normally, it should be the duty of the government to look after the elderly. But, the conservative governments have not spent enough money for people's welfare because of the fear of increasing the fiscal burden of the conservative elite.

To sum up, the conservative corruption culture not only have increased the danger of the economy's falling toward the depth of decade-long depression but it also destroyed the *raison d'être* of the society. It has brought about the unrecoverable divide between the conservative and progressive; it has created mutual distrust; it has destroyed the hope of the youth; it has undermined the people's confidence in itself; it has hurt the people's pride of being Koreans.

## 2. Moon Jae-in's Response to the Challenges

Thus, the task of President Moon Jae-in is enormous and difficult. However, he has done a lot. His reforms comprise the anti-Corruption measures, economic policy measures and social policy measures.



## Anti-Corruption Measures

- Abolishment of some selective public security authorities which have been oppressing the public. This will, to some extent, stop harassment of the people and the violation of human rights
- Modification of the law on CIA (now National Information Service: NIS) so that it will limit itself to the management of foreign intelligence and that it should not gather information on citizens
- Imprisonment of two conservative presidents (Lee Myong-bak and Park Geun-hye) who are in prison for their abuse of power and corruption.
- Imprisonment of a large number of high ranking civil servants for abuse of power and corruption.
- Modification of laws on government's subsidies so that the subsidy- recipients cannot embezzle the subsidy funds

## Measures to strengthen the Economy

Measures to strengthen the economy include the policy of development of SMEs, the promotion of labour unionization and the increase of minimum wage. These policies are designed to expand and reinforce the domestic market.

The government of Moon Jae-in has created the Ministry of SMEs and appointed, as its first minister, Mme Park Yeon-sun, one of the innovative and courageous ministers. Mme Park has made the Chaebols to establish new value chains in which the SMEs can receive proper rewards for their new technology and products. In the past, the Chaebols used to exploit unfairly the SMEs and in many cases they even stole the technology invented by the SMEs. Now, owing to new pro-SME policy, the SMEs have a new hope, confidence in themselves and they have increased their international competitiveness. This is a well balanced industrial policy allowing both large corporations and SMEs grow together and assure sustained growth of the economy.

President, Moon has encouraged labour unionization and reinforced the voice of labour in economic policy in general and labour policy, in particular.

Moon's government has increased the minimum wage, which is now above the American minimum wage. Moreover, some provinces have introduced a regime of "basic income" whereby every citizen can receive a given amount of income provided that the money is spent in the locality.

## Measures to improve social Welfare

The government has substantially increased the welfare budget including funds for pensions, medical insurance, housing allowances and other income assistance.

Moreover, Moon's government has decided to nationalize regional hospitals, kinder-gardens, professional high schools and several other institutions which are important public good producers.

Finally, the government has decided to expand public welfare budget even with public debts, which the conservatives had been avoiding by fear of their increased fiscal burden. Given the size of Korean GDP, it is not too early to expand the welfare budget.

### 3. Remaining Challenges

For a government which took over the power only four years ago, the government of Moon Jae-in has done a lot. What it has done so far may be summed up by saying that the corruption community is still alive but it has lost some of its force. The precarious industrial structure has been improved. The SMEs are finding their right place in the economy. The welfare of the people is improving and it will continue to improve. In short, Moon's government has done a good job.

In addition, the government's handling of the corona-virus crisis has been so successful that Korea's model has become a global model.

But, President has two difficult challenges to overcome before he leaves. One is the further advance in the reform of the judicial reform. The other is the media reform.

#### Reform of the Judicial and Penal System

The prosecutors in Korea should exist to protect laws and assure the judicial fairness and justice. But, in reality, they are most powerful law breakers. We saw above how they violate laws. There are less than three thousand prosecutors but, they form the most powerful and most fearful organization. What is tragic is the fact that they think they are special people; they think they are above the law. The tragedy is this. They think that they can topple the government by judicial coup d'état. In fact, what they are doing now is precisely a judicial coup d'état.

A year and half ago, President Moon Jae-in appointed Professor Cho Guk to the post of Minister of Justice. The Minister of Justice is the boss of the chief prosecutor. Professor Cho is a well known expert in judicial affairs. He was nominated for the realization of the judicial reform. Therefore, this nomination has meant, as far as the prosecutors are concerned, a serious threat to their cosy and very lucrative prosecution business.

In order to prevent Cho's judicial reform, the chief prosecutor, Yoon Suk-yeol, mobilized a large number of prosecutors to find something to justify Cho's indictment. The prosecutors have used, in the name of investigation, every possible legal, illegal and immoral tactics such as intimidation, harassment, threats, fabrication of false witnesses, illegal house search, and outright lies. The prosecutors have investigated the Minister Cho, his family, his relatives and all individuals who might have relations with Cho and all institutions which might have been involved in Cho's personal and professional activities. This ordeal lasted more than a year; it is still continuing. But, they have found nothing to indict Minister Cho and find his culpability. The idea of discrediting Professor Cho as Justice Minister was intended to discredit President Moon for having appointed a wrong person as Justice Minister. In other words, the ultimate objective of the prosecutors is the toppling of Moon's government.

The successor of Minister Cho is Mme Choo Mi-ae, one of the most expected jurists and one of the most able politicians; she has made significant progress in reforming the prosecutors system. But, she has met persistent resistance of the prosecutors under the leadership of the chief prosecutor, Yoon Suk-yeol.

Choo has found out that the illegal activities of the chief prosecutor are so many and so serious that she has nominated the Committee of Discipline of the Ministry of Justice and, on

December 16, the committee has recognized the culpability of the chief prosecutor. This is the first time that the chief prosecutor becomes the target of discipline. He is given two-month suspension of work.

Furthermore, President Moon has created another historical institution which will surely speed up the reform of Korean judicial system. The National Assembly adopted, on November 10, 2020, the establishment of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials (CIOHRO). This is indeed one of many historical achievements of President Moon. Moreover, there will be another law which will be adopted. By virtue of this law, the prosecutors will lose most of the criminal investigation right; this will decrease considerably the prosecutor's power.

### The Media Reform

There is one reform which is even more difficult to realize. It is the reform of the media. Normally, we all expect that the media would produce and diffuse information which is professional, objective, critical, unbiased and useful for public policies designed to promote the welfare of all citizens.

Unfortunately, the Korean media do not have these virtues for the simple reason that for last 70 years they have been created and managed by the conservative governments. The conservative government's media policy is to glorify the conservatives and demonize the progressives.

The core of the conservative media policy may be summarized.

First, it maximizes the number of media outlets so that the production of pro-conservative information and the anti-progressive information be maximized.

Second, it encourages the creation of small media outlets so that they depend on the conservative corruption community for their income.

Third, it sets up a mechanism of information coordination. The Chosen Ilbo, the Jung-ang Ilbo and the Tong-ah Ilbo (Cho-Jung-Tong) have the function of producing information which is often fabricated and distorted or lies in order to discredit the progressive camp. The reports of Cho-Jung-Tong are copied by most of the media.

Fourth, the main source of media income is the conservative corruption community, especially the major Chaebols.

Fifth, illegal and immoral activities of the media are seldom punished because of the collusion between the conservative camp and the penal and judiciary system.

Sixth, if the prosecutor decides to condemn an innocent person for political or financial reason, the media describes the person in such a way that the person looks guilty so that the person deserves criminal investigation and indictment.

In many cases, the media report what the prosecutors ask the media to report. In this way, the media plays a role condemning innocent people by means of fabricated public opinion.

In fact, the media is the most formidable enemy of the anti-corruption war of Moon-Jae-in. And, the reform of media has not yet begun. The future of media reform depends on which

camp will form the next government. If it is the conservative camp, nothing will happen. If it is the progressive camp, the media reform will have the policy priority, but it will be a tough task.

To conclude, President Moon Jae-in has prepared the way to a new era of prosperity, justice, safety and security for all citizens. Koreans thank him, respect him, love him and admire him for what he is and for what he has done for them.

Yes, he is the leader Koreans have been waiting for so long.

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