

Nº 04. March 19 - April 2, 2014

Summary



South Korea is no stranger to vast and sprawling corporate oligopolies. Some of the world's most well-known companies are Korean: Samsung, Hyundai, and LG. As tax day approaches, the newspapers are busy publishing statistics and analysis about the salaries of corporate executives and the companies' profits. Equally prominent in mid-March were investigations of the troubling relationship between the South Korean state and the gambling industry, with the government giving the green light to plans for a major casino on the island that houses Incheon International Airport. There seemed to be some conflict about what the problem actually was. Elsewhere, the Left made a big fuss over broadcasting license renewals handed to some perennially divisive conservative cable broadcasters. Ahn Cheol-soo and Kim Han-kil of the New Political Vision Party announced their intentions to push for welfare reforms; and the latest in public opinion polls shows Park Geun-hye doing well on the North-South front.

Christopher Green @Dest_Pyongyang Mar 28

#시각 [KTV국민방송] 박정희·박근혜 두 대통령의 독일 방문: <http://youtu.be/4lqHfxCuvBk> via @YouTube

President Park Geun-hye went to Northern Europe during the second half of March, prompting this video by *Kookmin Bangsong* [People's Broadcasting; Korea TV], a channel intended to convey the policy decisions and messages of the government to the people of South Korea. Although the intention was to show how President Park is following in the footsteps of her late father President Park Chung-hee by traveling to Germany some 50 years after he went there in 1964, viewers might have rather pondered the nature of developmental change in North Korea. Pyongyang is now exporting labor to China in huge quantities to generate hard currency, which bears all the hallmarks of Park's wildly successful post-Korean War scheme to export miners and nurses to Germany in order to earn hard currency for the moribund South Korean economy of the day. Park, however, didn't then pump a potentially ruinous percentage of it into statues of his father, and therein may lie the difference between the two cases.

Christopher Green @Dest_Pyongyang Mar 18

Casino[d]rama: 경향신문 unsure whether to hate the foreign investment or the future as the "Republic of Gambling"... #시각 <http://bit.ly/OuAfq1>

Christopher Green @Dest_Pyongyang Mar 18

Casino[d]rama 2 @EnglishChosun: its all about gambling addiction + spot on call for casino industry privatization <http://bit.ly/InCedkY> #시각

On March 18, the South Korean government revealed its intention to allow a Chinese-US JV casino group to develop a casino complex on the same island that houses Incheon International Airport. Casino gambling is by and large banned in South Korea, and *Chosun Ilbo* leapt on the risks of gambling addiction in its morning editorial on the subject. For the progressive *Kyunghyang Sinmun*, the problem was the possibility of South Korea suddenly turning into the "Republic of Gambling." Any or all the arguments may have merit, but the most important call was probably made by *Chosun Ilbo*, which pointed out that state-owned companies (like Gangwon Land, the only casino in which South Koreans can currently gamble legally) have no place in such an industry, and urged privatization.

Christopher Green @Dest_Pyongyang Mar 19

Relicensing w/out reform angers left. #시각 [속보] 방통위, 종편 3사 JTBC·TV조선·채널A 재승인 <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/media/628917.html> ...

Progressive wrath was incurred on March 19 when South Korea's communications authorities renewed the broadcasting licenses of four cable broadcasters for the next three years. The political left accuses three of the four of blatant bias in favor of the ruling Saenuri Party and incumbent Park administration (and its predecessor). The four broadcasters were assessed for their output to date, and given a mark out of 1000: JTBC, which is run by the same conglomerate as the center-right JoongAng Ilbo, received 727.01, followed by News Y (Yonhap; 719.76), TV Chosun (Chosun Ilbo; 684.76), and Channel-A (Dong-a Ilbo; 684.66). Liberal hatred of JTBC, TV Chosun and Channel-A [is not news](#), of course, and the committee decision was taken as two out of its five members (the two selected by the left) left the chamber in predictable disgust. [An editorial](#) in the liberal *Kyunghyang Sinmun* the following day demanded that the government "at the very least" stop doing favors for the three "Jongpyeon" broadcasters, asserting that they have demonstrably failed to live up to their mandated remits in terms of different types of programming and the percentage of air time spent broadcasting repeats.

Steven Denney @StevenDenney86 Mar 27

LMB-PGH diff. in pub. opinion? "Enormous, statistically significant, perception of improved [SK-NK] relations." <http://ow.ly/v3D8O> #시각

Marcus Noland [reports on a recent TNS Korea poll](#) that finds "over the past year... an enormous, statistically significant, perception of improved relations between North and South Korea." The poll shows that 33.9% of the respondents think that North-South relations have "improved" under the Park administration. This is a 32.5pp increase from the Lee administration which clocked in at a paltry 1.4%. Only 16.4% thought North-South relations worsened; at 78.7% for the Lee administration, this is a 62.3pp decrease. Despite [domestic woes](#), [some have suggested](#) favorable perceptions of Park's North Korea policy have helped keep her presidential approval rating abnormally high—despite South Koreans viewing North-South relations as [a low national priority](#).

한겨레 @hanitweet Mar 27

새정치민주연합이 '복지사각지대해소법' 3개를 1호 법안으로 발의하기로 했습니다. 안철수·김한길 공동대표의 첫 외부행사도 복지 취약계층 방문으로 잡았습니다. <http://is.gd/lmCX1a> 이승준 기자 pic.twitter.com/BmdMtEHBLk [#시각]

Following the family suicide in Songpa-gu (송파구 세 모녀 자살 사건), the dual representatives for the New Political Vision Party (새정치민주연합), Ahn Cheol-soo and Kim Han-kil, announced their intentions to propose welfare reform bills, according to the *Hankyoreh*. Specifically, they intend to expand coverage under the Emergency Aid and Support Act and the National Basic Living Security Act, as well as adjust the social security system to better support those in need. Branded as an effort to improve the livelihoods of the people in an era where "welfare is in the national interest" (요즘 복지는 국가안보), the announcement is interesting for many reasons. In the last decade, South Korea has been given an increasing amount of attention (from within and internationally) as a country with [mounting social problems](#): distressingly low welfare provisions and high suicide and divorce rates, amongst other things. More recently, political rhetoric has shifted in a way that takes into account the perceived need to address these issues. For example, Park Geun-hye ran for president on pledges to [increase pensions for the elderly](#) and [cut college tuition by half](#). The announcement by Ahn and Kim for welfare reform, albeit more detailed and substantive than Park's, is another indicator that welfare reform is becoming an important, and thus politicized, issue.

Peter Ward, 워드 피터 @rpcward89 April 1

Hankyoreh is reporting that the four largest Chaebol have net profits that make up 90% of the top 30 corps http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/economy_general/630818.html ... #시각

Hankyoreh notes that the gap between the top four Chaebol—Samsung, Hyundai Cars, SK telecom and LG—and the other top 30 conglomerates is widening. The top four now account for 90% of the profits of the top 30, this up from just 58% in 2010. This has led to some calling for a new set of policies to address the seemingly ever widening gap between the big and the gargantuan in the corporate world. At present, as noted in the article, corporate groups of a certain size are forbidden from cross-subsidization (Mutual Investment) within the group, and from cross underwriting of loans within the group. Such restrictions, however, have not stopped the top four from getting this large.

Peter Ward, 워드 피터 @rpcward89 April 2

Chosun notes the obscenity of massive pay for two execs who were doing jail time this year <http://chosun.com/tw/?id=2014033104210> ... #시각

With tax season upon us, this year, for the first time, South Korean corporations are releasing information about their executive compensation. *Chosun Ilbo*, noting the controversy that surrounds the numbers, points out that the salaries paid to executives are broadly in-line with global standards, except for two particular executives: Choi Tae-won (of SK Telecom) and Kim Seung-yon (Hanhwa Group). Choi is currently on remand pending appeal after being convicted of embezzling company money, and Kim also was only released from prison this February after doing time for criminal malpractice. Both were very well compensated while away from the board-room enjoying life in prison.

Contributors: Christopher Green (@Dest_Pyongyang); Steven Denney (@StevenDenney86); and Peter Ward (@rpcward89). All Tweets cited above can be found on Twitter at #시각.