

Asia Society Korea

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New Ambassadors Welcoming Dinner



March 15, 2017 - The diplomatic community plays a huge role in supporting Asia Society Korea and with many new ambassadors arriving in Seoul over the past 18 months, the Korea Center held a special dinner to welcome them. (Continued on Page 21)

Trump's First 100 Days



March 24, 2017 - The Korea Center continued its hosting of high profile events during the month of March with a special dinner at Habib House, the residence of the Ambassador of the United States to Korea. Asia Society's Executive Vice President **Tom Nagorski** made the trip to Seoul to lead a conversation on "Trump's First 100 Days"; the discussion was moderated by **John Delury**, renowned Chinese and North Korean historian, current professor at Yonsei University in

Seoul, and a fellow of the Asia Society's Center for U.S.-China Relations. Opening remarks for the evening were given by Chargé d'Affaires **Marc Knapper** before Mr. Nagorski delivered his fascinating and insightful comments on the new U.S. administration. The event welcomed many Asia Society members, including the Korea Center Chairman, Mr. Dong-bin Shin, and the Honorary Chairman Dr. Hong-Koo Lee. A special thank you should also go to the staff at the U.S Embassy Seoul for opening its doors and welcoming the Asia Society family.

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Monthly Luncheon Series

Korean Peninsular Issues in the United Nations



Ambassador Oh

February 21, 2017 – Asia Society Korea held its first Monthly Luncheon Lecture of 2017 at the Lotte Hotel Seoul with **Mr. Dong-Bin Shin**, Chairman of the Korea Center and Lotte Group, in attendance to give the welcoming remarks. It was great to welcome back His Excellency **Oh Joon** to speak about “Korean Peninsular Issues in the United Nations”. Ambassador Oh is a former ambassador and permanent representative of the Republic of Korea and was the guest speaker at our first ever Monthly Luncheon event back in June 2008. Retiring from the diplomatic service last month, Ambassador Oh was able to give a fascinating insight into peninsular issues based on his many years of experience at the UN in New York. His talk looked at the relationship between the UN and the Koreas from a historical perspective before looking at the current challenges in the region.

Following Korean independence from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the Korean Peninsula was immediately divided by Soviet and U.S military administrations; this split being formalized with the 1948 elections. The start of the Korean War in 1950 meant the United Nations had to deal with collective security for the first time and as the Soviet Union had boycotted the Security Council, the General Assembly had to implement its first ever “Uniting for Peace” resolution. From 1954 to 1975, the Korean question was discussed and a resolution was adopted every year in the General Assembly. In the early days of the UN, membership was mostly made up of European countries or nations friendly with the West, but with the addition of new members in the 1960’s and 70’s, the UN became more neutral. Ambassador Oh explained how in 1975, friends of both South and North Korea submitted two conflicting resolutions which were both adopted. As they both could not be implemented, Korean issues were subsequently dropped from the UN agenda.

No Korean questions were discussed in the UN between 1976 and 1991; South Korea had long wanted to become a member of the UN but was opposed by North Korea and officially blocked by the Soviet Union and China. After the Cold War ended, the North Korean allies changed their stance on membership applications and in 1991, seven new countries, including both South and North Korea, officially joined the UN. His Excellency spoke about how as there are no longer South Korean issues, when we talk about Korean Peninsular problems in the international arena, we are referring to North Korean issues. The three important issues are nuclear weapons, human rights, and humanitarian assistance to North Korea. During the past 11 years, North Korea has conducted five rounds of nuclear tests and each time, five resolutions were passed to strengthen sanctions that included banning arms-related activities, financial activities, and curtailing trade.

His Excellency finished his talk by talking about future challenges with North Korea, commenting how the DPRK will be the most difficult issue that the new Trump administration will face. He believes the current pressure of using sanctions will eventually “break the camel’s back” but is worried that political leaders may not have the appetite to wait to see the impact of these sanctions. The alternative to using sanctions would be confrontation and this would be dangerous to everyone involved. He also spoke about how this escalation may actually lead to renewed dialogue and the DPRK can improve ties with countries around the world for the benefit of all.

***This series is sponsored by Lotte Chemical.**

Monthly Luncheon Series

Election 2017: the Future of US-Korea Relations

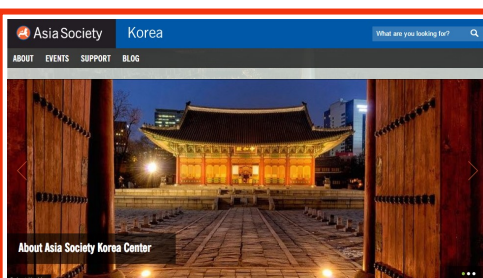


From left: H.E. Sung-Chul Yang, moderator John Delury, and H.E. Young-Jin Choi

April 18, 2017 - Asia Society Korea hosted its April Monthly Luncheon and panelists **H.E. Young-Jin Choi** and **H.E. Sung-Chul Yang** joined moderator **John Delury** to talk about “*Election 2017: the Future of US-Korea Relations.*” Board members **Dr. Hong-Koo Lee** and **Young-Joon Kim** were among the many distinguished guests in attendance. With the current tensions on the peninsula, the timing of the luncheon took on extra significance with North Korea being discussed at length by the two diplomatic scholars. In addition, the panel shared their thoughts on the upcoming election in Korea and the future bilateral relationship with the Trump administration.

Ambassador Yang is a distinguished professor at Korea University in Seoul and a former ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United States. From 1996 to 2000, he was also a member of the Korean National Assembly where he served as Vice Chair of the Unification and Foreign Affairs Committee. Ambassador Yang believes the new president elected on May 9th will first have to tackle the issue of foreign policy; this involves developing a strong relationship with the U.S. while also encouraging China to take a more proactive role in helping dismantle North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction. He believes that China can play a key role in encouraging North Korea to rejoin the International Atomic Energy Agency, help freeze Pyongyang’s development of uranium and plutonium and ultimately disarm their nuclear program.

The second panelist, His Excellency Young-Jin Choi, is also a former Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United States and the former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) appointed by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2007. Ambassador Choi also believes that the incoming South Korean president must put U.S. bilateral relations and the North Korean issue at the forefront of policymaking. This, however, will provide a huge challenge as South Korean diplomacy is under siege with the country having very few friends outside of the U.S. The THAAD deployment has ripped apart relations with China, while ongoing issues related to wartime comfort women has put Japan and Korea on hugely unfavorable terms.



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In the News

Park Geun-hye: Impeached



Park Geun-hye. Source: Reuters

By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

March 10, 2017 - Following months of political unrest and turmoil, South Korea's Constitutional Court has formally removed President Park Geun-hye from office and with the ruling, Park becomes South Korea's first democratically elected leader to be forced from power.

The political situation in South Korea has been in the spotlight ever since revelations surfaced on the president's role in a corruption scandal involving her close friend Choi Soon-sil and high profile Korean conglomerates. Weeks of public protest on the streets of Seoul led to parliament voting to impeach Park in December, and in the meantime, the highest court in the land has been deciding whether to uphold or overturn that decision. While her powers were suspended following the December decision, Park continued to live in the presidential Blue House wake of the unani-

mous decision for impeachment from the country's top judges.

So, what does this mean for South Korean politics? A presidential election will be held within the next 60 days to choose Park's successor, with Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn to continue leading political affairs until that happens. As for Park Geun-hye, her impeachment also opens the possibility for criminal proceedings as the decision also strips her of her presidential immunity. The reaction in Korea was generally one of celebration but angry scenes were seen outside the court as pro-Park protesters battled with police. The country remains split and nobody is quite sure what is next for South Korean politics, but one thing is certain; today's decision was unprecedented and will take its place as a defining moment in history.

Raising Sewol: Seeking Evidence and Closure



Family members looking on as the Sewol recovery process begin (Source: Getty Images)

By Tom Norris, Contributing Writer

March 27, 2017 - Three years ago, the nation watched in horror as the Sewol ferry slowly sank, claiming the lives of 304 passengers, mostly students. With efforts to recover the ferry beginning this week, authorities hope to discover new evidence as to why the ship sank and bring closure for the families of the victims.

In order to preserve key evidence from the wreckage, and to recover nine bodies thought to be still trapped inside, experts are attempting to raise the ship using a 'tandem-lifting' method. The lifting technique, which has never been tested before on a ship of the Sewol's size, will be used to recover the ship in one piece- a central demand of both investigators and family members of the victims.

Raising the 140-meter long ferry, thought to weigh 16,250 tons due to the water and accumulated sand inside, will be a two-week long process and depend heavily on weather conditions. If all goes smoothly, officials plan to hoist the wreckage and tug it to Mokpo harbor for inspection on April 5.

The recovery, if successful, will bring new evidence for the investigatory team charged with determining the cause of the tragedy. At the same time, salvaging Sewol will bring some form of closure to the hundreds of families.

Some family members have been living in makeshift homes in Paengmok, the port closest to the site of the wreck, ever since the day of the tragedy. To them, a complete recovery of the Sewol may mark the beginning of the recovery from their immense personal loss.

In the News

Kim Young-ran Act: Impacting Corruption but Also Culture



By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

January 2017 – At the end of September, 160 elderly citizens enjoyed their annual sightseeing tour as part of a Seoul district’s community program. Nothing untoward here one may think, yet the following day the mayor of that district was under police investigation, accused of breaking the new anti-graft law that is now in force in South Korea. The Anti-Corruption and Bribery Prohibition Act, more commonly known as the Kim Young-ran Act, named after the former head of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, was enacted in South Korea on Sep. 28, 2016, bringing about sweeping changes to the Korean culture of gift giving and taking acquaintances out for food, drink, and other forms of entertainment.

The Kim Young-ran act directly affects about 4 million public servants, teachers, and journalists, along with their spouses; however, since these are people who play an integral role in the daily lives of South Koreans at schools, local government offices, and hospitals, it is safe to say that the Act will impact the lives of all 50 million people who live in the country. Put simply, the Act boils down to the “3-5-10” rule; only 30,000 won can be spent on treating someone to dinner, 50,000 won on a gift, and 100,000 won on a cash gift at weddings or funerals. The exception to this rule are teachers and police officers who are not allowed to accept even small presents; thus, the apple on the teacher’s desk has become a thing of the past.

People are taking this new law seriously and it is impacting society daily, nowhere more so than in the dining culture of the country. Going Dutch is very rare at restaurants in Korea where tradition holds that the host or the oldest person at a table picks up the tab. Yet, having one of the 4 million public servants or their spouse at your table, even a childhood friend, would put you in a situation where you and they may be breaking the law. Restaurants around government offices and buildings, usually jam packed with lunchtime trade, are quiet with many public servants opting to eat at in-house cafeterias. Other restaurants are having to take certain items off the menu, replacing them with set menus that fall below the 30,000 won threshold.

Across the country’s schools, signs warn parents not to bring gifts for teachers, a common practice in Korea’s education-focused culture. The flower industry saw sales plummet by 22% in October as people were wary of sending expensive blooms, a common practice of congratulations or condolence in South Korea; funeral directors have reported fewer wreaths being delivered to grieving families. Supermarkets have had to address the tradition of selling pricey gift boxes in the lead up to national holidays, instead downsizing to reduce the cost to below 50,000 won.

An unlikely winner in the early enactment of the law are convenience stores who have seen a spike in demand for alcohol and snacks as people opt to drink at home rather than in bars and restaurants. It is certainly going to take time to adjust to this new law and for now, public servants and their acquaintances are being careful as getting caught breaking the law is a real possibility. Members of the public, amateur paparazzi, are on hand to record evidence of crimes in the hope of receiving bounty rewards from the government and the Kim Young-ran Act has greatly expanded their hunting ground.

Healthy Food of Asia

The Death of Chimaek Diplomacy



By Tom Norris, Contributing Writer

While fried chicken and beer has become something of a Korean cultural export over the last decade, few expected it to be a diplomatic fulcrum point for the growing security crisis on the peninsula.

Extending well beyond its culinary bounds, “chimaek,” a combination of the Korean words for chicken and beer, has become a symbol for the fluctuating health of Sino-Korean relations and, with the highly controversial deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile system, an unlikely touchstone of diplomatic sensitivity.

Before the controversy over THAAD, Korean initiatives to boost tourism and trade with China often relied heavily on the allure of chimaek. For example, in October, the city of Sokcho hosted the Greater Tumen Initiative Trade and Investment Fair, a fair primarily aimed at boosting development in areas near the Tumen River between China and North Korea. To ensure strong Chinese participation, Sokcho city officials planned a huge outdoor chimaek party, treating around 1,300 Chinese buyers and tourists to free chicken and beer.

In addition, China-ROK relations deepened through the people-to-people aspect of chimaek diplomacy. Not only did Chinese tourists travel to Korea in droves to attend chimaek festivals but Chinese and Korean municipal government officials made annual visits to each other’s chicken and beer festivals as well. Daegu city officials travelled to Shandong province for the Qingdao Beer Festival and Qingdao city officials made visits to the Daegu Chimaek Festival.

While city government exchanges were steadily advancing so were interactions at the highest level of power. Former President Park Geun-hye’s visit to China in 2013 was described by the administration as one to “build trust from the bottom of the heart”. Returning the gesture in 2014, President Xi Jinping visited Korea and characterized the trip as “seeking relatives”. These trips were emotional displays and created the expectation that South Korea and China would develop a strong and growing bond.

This expectation was shattered, however, when THAAD was deployed, leaving many Chinese people with a sense of betrayal. With the increased visits and stronger relationship between the two countries, Chinese expectations were that South Korea may eventually pull away from its military alliance with the United States. With the deployment of THAAD, any chance of a South Korean realignment to China in the near future was dashed. Fueled by a sense of betrayal, China took implicit countermeasures by retracting participation in all chimaek events and blocking South Korean cultural imports to China. A Qingdao city official told newspapers, “We have called Daegu city government and told them we will not be sending any officials for fried chicken and beer. Meanwhile, we proposed to them politely that it would be better if they did not come to our beer festival, and they agreed.”

Chinese tourists have also been discouraged from attending Korean chimaek festivals. According to South Korea’s Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Chinese authorities have instructed travel agencies in Beijing to stop selling South Korean tours from March 15.

Chinese efforts to curtail chimaek diplomacy, however, are just the tip of the iceberg. To protest the deployment of THAAD, the Chinese government has launched a full-scale blockade of South Korean public diplomacy initiatives and cultural imports to China. K-pop performers have been mysteriously barred from entering China to perform, Korean TV shows and films have been blocked, and Korean actors and models have been replaced by Chinese stars in advertisements.

Despite the obvious pattern of this retaliation, the Chinese government, by blocking cultural exports and cancelling events, is able to deny accusations of official political retaliation. In November, China’s foreign ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang, claimed that he had “never heard about any restriction on the Republic of Korea”, and claimed that “the Chinese side is always positive to people-to-people and cultural exchanges”.

On the Korean side, it was not until December that Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs made any public acknowledgement of the obvious diplomatic spat, reporting that it had been “pointed out to Chinese officials that there are worries over recently reported bans related to Korean Wave events”. The timidity of this accusation indicated just how delicate of a situation the Korean government faced.

Healthy Food of Asia

The Death of Chimaek Diplomacy

(Continued) In the last three months, however, the severity of Chinese retaliation has escalated enormously. Lotte Group, the Korean conglomerate that agreed to hand over a golf course to the South Korean government for the THAAD deployment site, has been especially targeted. According to the company, 23 Lotte Mart stores across China have been shut down by authorities for dubious safety violations. A chocolate factory jointly owned by the Hershey Company and the Lotte Group was also ordered to be shut for a month, following the results of a fire inspection conducted by government officials.

Once again, despite the evident pattern shown by the closures, the Chinese government maintains its innocence, denying accusations of official sanctions against Lotte. Geng Shuang again denied the allegations this week, claiming that “the Chinese government welcomes foreign businesses including South Korean companies to invest in China, and protects their rights in accordance with the law.”

Explanations for the economic retaliations have been more forthcoming from other sources in China however. China’s state news agency, Xinhua, earlier warned that Lotte’s decision to give up its land for THAAD “could turn into a nightmare” for the company. In addition, the Chinese travel company, Tuniu, after ending sales of South Korean trips, issued a statement that it objected to the THAAD deployment and Lotte’s decision to make land available for the missiles.

With half of their stores in China closed and more investments under threat, the Lotte Group has turned to the South Korean government for protection. A far cry from the timid objections raised by the Korean government back in December, the Korean Trade Ministry said in a statement that the South Korean government will “seek international legal action against possible violations of the Seoul-Beijing Free Trade Agreement” and that the government is currently “keeping close tabs on retaliatory measures taken by the Chinese authorities and will deal with any discrimination or damages that South Korean companies are suffering from”.

However, it is not just the Chinese and Korean governments that are embroiled in the security crisis and ongoing trade disputes. In Zibo, a city in the Chinese province of Shandong, protesters stood in front of a Lotte store for hours, holding a 30-foot banner reading “the safety of our motherland cannot be violated.” And, in Korea, internet users have been calling for a boycott of Chinese products, in particular, Tsingtao beer, as a way of retaliating against Chinese sanctions.

After the deployment of THAAD and the resulting trade disputes, the question is not whether chimaek diplomacy is dead but, rather, if it can ever be revived. The spirit of togetherness and celebratory atmosphere that characterized local chimaek festivals seem a distant memory. While the chimaek festivals will certainly continue, it remains to be seen if they can once again become a symbol of Sino-Korean cooperation.

Thankfully, as chimaek diplomacy focuses on fried chicken as opposed to politics, it represents a logical first step for restoring wider cooperation and positive relations between the two countries. While a shared perspective on East Asian security will most likely remain elusive, perhaps, when the time comes, Sino-Korean trust will be rebuilt through a shared taste for chimaek.

Indian Food Festival 2017



H.E. Vikram Doraiswami

By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

March 2017 - As Korea becomes ever more multicultural, Seoul is developing into a city brimming with different cuisines from around the world. Food culture is something we are very big on at Asia Society Korea and we were delighted to have been invited to the 2017 Indian Food Festival hosted by the Embassy of India. H.E. Vikram Doraiswami, Indian Ambassador to Korea and Asia Society member, opened the dinner with comments about the richness and diversity of Indian cuisine and how he hopes its popularity will continue to grow here in Korea. The festival showcased various dishes from different parts of India prepared by renowned Indian chef Mr. Machinda Kasture.

Chef Kasture is the executive Chef at The Ashok, New Delhi, and he flew to Seoul especially for the event. Amongst other dishes, his menu included beef vindaloo, a spicy curry that is popular in the region of Goa; dal makhana, originating in Punjab and prepared using whole black lentil, red kidney beans, butter, and cream; and gulnar/tomato pudina biryani, a mixed rice dish which originated from the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent and is generally made with spices, rice, and meat. Those attending the Indian Food Festival joined a select list of diners as Chef Kasture has previously cooked for Barack Obama, Queen Elizabeth, and former UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon. His outstanding culinary career also includes eight years as the Executive Chef to the President of India.

UNESCO World Heritage Series by Matthew Fennell

Part I: Dolmens



Dolmen at Ganghwa

January 2017 - For many seasoned travellers, **UNESCO World Heritage Sites** provide the ultimate bucket list items for experiencing the Earth's cultural and natural heritage. While it would take many years of travel to see all 1052 designated sights around the world, a short trip to Korea would enable you to tick off at least twelve. South Korea is home to eleven cultural sites and one natural site. Over the course of the next few months, Asia Society Korea will be previewing selected World Heritage Sites through a historical, cultural, and travel perspective. We kick off our program in the south-western part of the peninsula by visiting **Gochang, Hwasun, and Ganghwa Dolmen Sites**.

You are probably reading this and thinking, what is a dolmen? It is the same question many people have when they hear about this World Heritage Site and the fact the Korean peninsula is home to 40% of the world's dolmens! Dolmens are thought to be burial sites that were built out of stone during the prehistoric era, usually in the shape of a table. These stone landmarks resemble the architectural style of Stonehenge and are mostly found in Northeast Asia. They are particularly abundant in Korea where the total number of known dolmen is estimated to be around 30,000. In dolmen areas, many artefacts, including human bones, stone objects, jade, and bronze have also been discovered.

So, why are these table shaped, stone graves so culturally significant? Well, dolmen are of significant archaeological value for the information that they provide about the prehistoric civilizations that built them. These stone tombs date back to the 1st millennium BC, forming an important element of Megalithic culture; the structures give an insight into the beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, and social and political systems of the time. How the stones were quarried, transported, and constructed also tell us a lot about humans during this period. Similar to the pyramids in Egypt, one can only wonder about how such large stones were moved, where they came from, and what kind of skills were used to build the dolmens.

Although the largest concentration of dolmens can be found in the south-western locations of Gochang and Hwasun, a third significant range of stones is situated on the island of Ganghwa, not far from Incheon Airport. For somebody wanting to visit South Korea's dolmens, planning is important as the sites are not geographically close to each other and are not well served by public transportation. On the plus side, the dolmens are located in rural areas of the country so you are generally left alone to explore these areas of significant cultural value. The Gochang, Hwasun, and Ganghwa Dolmen may well be the least populated UNESCO sites you visit.



Dolmen at Gochang

UNESCO World Heritage Series by Matthew Fennell

Part 2: Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes



Jeju Lava Tubes

The second installment of our World Heritage Series sees us take a trip to Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes, South Korea's only natural site to make the revered list of UNESCO World Heritage List. While Korea has 11 identifiable places of special cultural importance, if you want to visit a place of physical significance then you have to take a trip to South Korea's largest island, 130 kilometers south of the peninsula. Jeju Island has a mythical feeling for many Koreans, while its appeal to Chinese tourists is growing exponentially; the Seoul to Jeju Island air route is the busiest in the world with a staggering 11.1 million passengers making the trip in 2015. While the amount of tourists, theme parks, and attractions may threaten to take away a bit of Jeju's charm, there is no doubting the natural beauty that the island possesses.

Mount Halla (Hallasan) is the central feature of Jeju Island, along with the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System and the Seongsan Ilchulbong Tuff Cone, and is featured on the inscribed list under the title of "Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes". Halla Mountain is the largest in South Korea standing at almost 2,000 meters high, formed as a result of the collection of lava, which created a massive shield volcano and crater lake. Despite the numbers of people making the climb on a daily basis, the scenery on the way up, and the view at the top, certainly make it worthy of its World Heritage status. The same can be said about Seongsan Ilchulbong, or sunrise peak as it is locally known, which was created when an underwater volcano exploded more than 5,000 years ago. For Koreans, it is a long held belief that they should make the early morning hike to see the sun rise at least once in their lives.

While mountains may be already familiar to many people, a unique and impressive feature on the island is the extensive system of massive lava tubes that can be found just below the surface. These spaces through which hot lava once flowed are now empty caves, and some of the largest in the world. The World Heritage Convention describes Jeju's underground landscape as the "finest such cave system in the world, having an outstanding visual impact even for those experienced with such phenomena". The caves, along with providing opportunities for scientific research, are a highlight for many people who visit the island. Although only one kilometer of the cave system is open to tourists, the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System actually stretches for many kilometers. Along with taking its place on the World Heritage list, Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes is listed at number 23 on CNN Go's 50 natural wonders: the ultimate list of scenic splendor.

UNESCO World Heritage Series by Matthew Fennell

Part 3: Gyeongju Historic Areas



Anapji Pond

March 27, 2017 - We continue our World Heritage Series this month with a trip to Gyeongju Historic Areas, an area often labelled as “the world’s largest museum without walls”. Buy any guidebook on South Korea and a trip to Gyeongju is rightfully listed at the top of places to visit; the city holds more temples, pagodas, tombs, palaces, gardens, and Buddhist statuary than any other place in the country. In ancient times, the Korean peninsula was dominated by Silla rule for almost 1,000 years, and the dynasty is credited for many of the country’s cultural achievements. Gyeongju was the capital of Silla, hence the Historic Areas contain a remarkable concentration of outstanding examples of Korean art. Thanks to the preservation work which started in the 1970’s under Park Chung-hee, the cultural revival of Gyeongju is stronger than ever before. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is separated into five distinct areas, each with its own history and culture: Mount Namsan Belt, Wolseong Belt, Tumuli Park Belt, Hwangnyongsa Belt, and the Sanseong Belt.

Buddhism was first introduced to Korea in the 4th century and the Mount Namsan Belt area has some of the country’s best Buddhist artifacts. In addition to the pagodas and temples, various images have been sculpted into the rocks in the mountain and show the development of the religion over the years. The Wolseong Belt is home to the ruins of Banwolseong Palace and Cheomseongdae, one of the oldest remaining observatories on earth. The striking Tumuli Park Belt is famous for its Royal Tombs that dominate the area, built to house members of the Silla royal family after their deaths. Buddhist temples can be found in the Hwangnyongsa Belt, including the ruins of Hwangnyongsa, the largest temple ever built in Korea. Finally, the Sanseong Fortress Belt, the least known and visited of the five belts, is made up of defensive fortresses built to protect the city and stretches along the east coast.

In total, the ancient city of Gyeongju is home to 31 National Treasures and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in South Korea. In September 2016, the city was hit by the largest earthquake ever recorded on the Korean Peninsula and despite some 60 cultural assets being damaged, the area is now back to normal. To fully explore all five belts, at least three days are needed to take in the deep historical and cultural significance of the region. Gyeongju can be found in the south east part of the country and it easily accessible by train or bus.



Royal Tombs

UNESCO World Heritage Series by Matthew Fennell

Part 4: Changdeokgung Palace



Changdeokgung Place (Photo credit: Jun Michael Park)

April 27, 2017 - In the fourth installment of our World Heritage Series, Asia Society Korea did not have to travel far as we made the short trip to Changdeokgung in downtown Seoul. For the many tourists seeking out royal palaces in Korea, the first point of call is usually Gyeongbokgung, the largest of the Five Grand Palaces built during the Joseon dynasty. However, it was its lesser known neighbor, Changdeokgung, that was awarded World Heritage Status in 1997 for having had great influence on the development of Korean architecture, garden design, and landscape planning over many centuries. The palace grounds are spectacular, comprising of royal buildings and a rear garden which boasts a 300-year-old tree, a pavilion, and a small pond. Construction of the palace began in 1405 and was completed in 1412.

Although it has remained as a focal point throughout Korean history, Changdeokgung has a checkered past. The palace was burnt to the ground during the 1592 Japanese invasion of Korea and it was reconstructed in 1609 under the leadership of King Sonjo and King Kwanghaegun. Unfortunately, the palace only lasted another 14 years before suffering a second arson attack, this time during the Injo Political Revolt against Kwanghaegun. Throughout history, the palace has shown remarkable resilience with each rebuild remaining faithful to its original design. While the neighboring Gyeongbokgung was being rebuilt because of its own fire damage following the Imjin War, Changdeokgung was the site of the royal court and the seat of government until 1868. Another interesting fact is that Korea's last emperor, Sunjong, resided in the palace until his death in 1926.

While the royal buildings are certainly impressive, it is Huwon, more commonly known as the Secret Garden, that is most alluring and the reason why many so many people visit Changdeokgung Palace in the first place. The garden, kept as natural as possible with little human intervention, was constructed during the reign of King Taejong and served as a resting place for royal family members when venturing outside the palace walls was deemed to be dangerous or difficult. The most popular times to visit the garden are during the spring when the flowers are starting to bloom or in the fall when autumn colors are at their peak and the sky is clear. When there is a full moon during this period, Changdeokgung opens its gates at night and offers a different glimpse of its beauty. Though damaged, destroyed, rebuilt, and replaced throughout its history, Changdeokgung Palace remains one of the best-preserved examples of Korean historical architecture.

North Korea Coverage by Steven Borowiec

Impeachment, Collusion, and the Economic Fu-



Steven Borowiec

January 2017 –The news out of South Korea nowadays makes the country sound like a somewhat chaotic place. The president has been impeached, Samsung’s top leader stands accused of crimes, and every weekend thousands of protesters fill public squares for spirited protests.

This past weekend, the numbers of protesters increased, despite the onset of colder weather, apparently out of discontent with a court’s decision to reject a prosecutor’s request to arrest Samsung’s de facto number one, Lee Jae-yong. Lee faces accusations that he provided a bribe to President Park Geun-hye’s confidante Choi Soon-sil in exchange for Park’s help in facilitating a merger that would help him take tighter control of Samsung Group.

In a column about the case, a Seoul-based journalist wittily described Samsung as “too big to jail,” playing on the old idea that the heads of South Korea’s corporate conglomerates are too important to the economy to be locked away. This sentiment, which has been used

to justify pardons or light sentences for business leaders, rankles many regular people who end up feeling like the rule of law doesn’t apply to the wealthy elite, that anyone with enough clout can get away with crimes.

With Park out of office and likely to have her impeachment upheld by the Constitutional Court, how to regulate the chaebol will be an important question for the next leader of this country, alongside the bigger question of how to improve a slow-growing economy. While no clear frontrunner has emerged, candidates are beginning to jostle for position ahead of a probable presidential election in the spring of this year. Ban Ki-moon has returned to South Korea, to great fanfare, after a ten-year term as United Nations Secretary General, and is expected to seek the presidency. Left-wing stalwart Moon Jae-in is currently leading in the polls, and a handful of liberal hopefuls, among them Seongnam Mayor Lee Jae-myung, are throwing their hats in the ring.

The next president will take office amid some of South Korea’s most serious economic jitters since the foreign exchange crisis of the late 1990s. Near term projections indicate little reason for optimism. In mid-January, both the International Monetary Fund and the usually optimistic Bank of Korea lowered their 2017 growth projections to between 2.5 and 3 percent.

Mainstay industries like steel and electronics are feeling the heat from Chinese companies that offer lower prices for increasingly competitive products. Many of the biggest South Korean companies, including Samsung, are carrying large amounts of corporate debt, and household debt is a growing problem. In South Korea’s affluent southeast, middle-class communities could be decimated if major shipbuilders such as Hanjin carry out large-scale layoffs.

Some of the signs of economic despair are quite subtle. In what could be an indication that more people are desperately grasping for a way out, in January the lottery industry announced its largest earnings ever. Young people are suffering disproportionately amid the downturn. According to Statistics Korea, youth unemployment stood at 9.8 percent in January, the highest figure ever recorded, and much higher than the overall rate of 3.7 percent. Among those who do find jobs, more are ending up in temporary positions that offer low rates of pay, alongside meager benefits and job security.

All over South Korean cities it is possible to detect another subtle indication of this underutilization of young people, a huge portion of whom are university-educated. In the coffee shops found on nearly every street one tends to find people in their early or mid-twenties, seated amid piles of textbooks, studying foreign languages or for company recruitment exams. Most young South Koreans spend their time preparing to seek jobs at the big conglomerates that dominate the economy, sometimes spending years applying each time the companies recruit. Competition for these well-paying, stable jobs is intense, and many never make it, creating the unfortunate phenomenon of the career test taker, South Koreans who live in small rooms near test prep facilities, spending their days studying and living off their parents well into their 30s.

This protracted studying for tests has always struck me as a misuse of energy and potential ingenuity. Surely many of these young people, if given the right kind of support, would have ideas that could propel the South Korean economy forward. A recent Bloomberg editorial posited that, “South Korea’s continued economic success depends on the cultivation of a more entrepreneurial culture, one that rewards companies for their ideas and their energy, not their size and political connections.” Though presidents are often credited or blamed for economic changes that take place under their watch, a president’s power over the economy is limited. Indeed, South Korea’s next president will have little power to control some of the forces reshaping the South Korean economy, such as the decline in the working age population and falling demand for exports. But in addition to implementing some firmer controls on collusion between the top tiers of society, he or she would be wise to find some way of putting the country’s young people to some more productive tasks than preparing for jobs most of them will never be offered.

North Korea Coverage by Steven Borowiec

Cutting Off Coal: China with a Firm Rebuke of North Korea

As the mysterious killing of a North Korean continues to dominate the news cycle, another piece of North Korea news may be of even greater significance: China has announced the halting of all coal imports from North Korea until the end of this year, which could signal a hefty blow to North Korea's economy. Coal is North Korea's main export, and this cutting off of imports, announced by China's Commerce Ministry, illustrates the economic power China still holds over North Korea.

The Commerce Ministry did not offer an explanation when announcing the ban, but it isn't difficult to come up with possible reasons why Beijing may be keen to rap Pyongyang's knuckles. Against China's wishes, North Korea recently launched a new ballistic missile, displaying continued development of its weapons capability. Also, the recently killed Kim Jong-nam had close ties to China, where he lived with family members under state protection. It is possible that China saw his killing as an affront to their efforts to safeguard him. Kim's death also leaves China with the question of what to do about Kim's wife and children who are believed to still be living in Beijing.

For an insight into China's possible motives, I spoke with Adam Cathcart, an expert on China and North Korea at the University of Leeds in the UK. Cathcart told me it's likely that the ban had its origins in the recently held meeting between the U.S. and China foreign ministers in Germany, writing in an email, "It seems likely that the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson discussed this in some detail in an hour-long meeting they had in Munich last week, and it is certainly in China's interests at this point to be seen to be making a concession on this front, if only in the interest of preemptively protecting themselves from Trumpian criticism on the matter."

China and North Korea have a long and cooperative, if at times contentious, relationship that goes back at least to the Korean War. But still, China sometimes feels the need to publicly reprimand the North on certain issues. Fair or not, China is often believed to hold the key to inducing more compliant behavior from North Korea, and the international community, particularly the US, has long been frustrated with China for its reluctance to crack down more heavily on North Korea for its missile and nuclear programs.

China also garners criticism from time to time for not fully implementing United Nations sanctions barring various kinds of trade with North Korea. The coal freeze could be a sign of good faith on those fronts from China. It also amounts to "a tacit recognition that China has been lax in enforcing sanctions in the past," as Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein wrote in *The Diplomat*. A bigger question is just how much power China really holds over North Korea. Hazel Smith, a professor at the University of Central Lancashire, told me that Beijing's sway over North Korean politics is often overestimated, that China actually has little control over political developments in the North. Indeed, there is little indication that the Chinese government has any room to decide what policies are enacted in North Korea, who holds certain government positions, and how decision-making power is meted out.

But it's important to distinguish between political and economic power. While China is limited in the extent to which it can directly influence North Korean politics, China does hold significant economic power over North Korea in that most of the North's trade is with China. In recent years, as economic ties with South Korea have frayed, North Korea's economy has grown ever more reliant on trade with China.

China also keeps a hand on North Korea's windpipe by controlling its only active land border. North Korea imports much of what it needs to run its economy from China, and any prolonged stop to cross-border traffic would be extremely disruptive. I once asked a North Korean defector who grew up near the border with China how long North Korea's government would last if China sealed off the border. She answered, "One month". Coal is North Korea's main export, and while the state could presumably last more than one month without revenue from exports, a permanent stoppage of sales to China would be a sizeable loss for the North Korean economy.

The question then is, how long does China plan to keep the halt to imports in effect?

It is possible that China will keep the coal import ban in place long enough to inflict some hurt on North Korea and show that Beijing is serious, but not long enough to cause any severe disruption in North Korea. Let's not forget, it is still in China's interest to have a North Korea on its border that is stable and not extremely poor.

North Korea Coverage

De-frosting North-South Relations: How Hockey Can Smooth the Path to Reunification



North and South Korea face off on the ice

By Tom Norris, Contributing Writer

April 20, 2017 - Approaching the sparkling Gangneung Hockey Center, I felt a sense of anticipation that was somewhat out of the ordinary. As reporters and TV crews buzzed around conducting interviews, excitement grew as organizers hurriedly distributed match tickets and sweat-shirts to fans. I was witnessing the prelude to one of sport's most unusual encounters - North Korea versus South Korea.

Introducing myself to an organizer, I asked which team he would be supporting more passionately and what impact he hoped the match would have. Cheerfully, he explained that he would be supporting both North and South Korea equally and that hopefully his group's efforts

would lead to better North-South relations and eventually reunification.

After passing through airport-like security, I entered the stadium and found a seat alongside the unification supporters. I was handed a small Korean peninsula flag and two sheets - one with a list of names of all the North Korean players, and another with songs to sing throughout the match. With over 500 fans singing "We Are One" and "Nice to Meet You", the North Korean players were met with a warm and friendly atmosphere as they first stepped onto the ice.

Shortly after the match began I found that, although the organizer had told me the unification supporters would be cheering for the teams equally, it was the North Korean players who received the most vociferous support. Even when one of the North Korean players was penalized for unsporting conduct and sent to the penalty box, South Korean fans cheered the name of the player for a full two minutes. And, when a North Korean player suffered an injury later on, the fans chanted the player's name, willing her to find the strength to continue.

Despite this incredible support throughout the match, North Korea was unable to find a goal against the stronger South Korean side, with the match ending 3-0. Clearly dejected after the final whistle, the North Koreans lined up opposite their opponents for the post-match handshaking. It would be at this point that most fans at sporting events would make their way to the exits, eager to avoid the congestion. Those in attendance at the Gangneung Hockey Center, however, remained rooted to the spot. To this crowd, the match's concluding ceremonies were more important than any goal scoring or rush to get home.

The palpable tension of the stadium though, in an instant, was relieved and replaced with jubilation as the players high-fived. The crowd raised their unified Korean peninsula flags and continued to sing "We Are One", sensing that their encouragements was having an effect. Next, to mark the United Nation's International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, the president of the International Ice Hockey Federation took to the ice for a commemorative photo. As the players mixed and formed two rows for the picture, fans cheered wildly, with noise reaching an absolute crescendo. Listening to the fans, it was clear to me this match was not so much South Korea "versus" North Korea, but rather South Korea "with" North Korea.



Fans were given flags and sweatshirts emblazoned with the Korean peninsula (photo courtesy of Tongil News)



Fans erupt in applause as the players pose together for a commemorative photo

North Korea Coverage

De-frosting North-South Relations: How Hockey Can Smooth the Path to Reunification



The captured North Korean submarine, The centerpiece of Gangneung Unification Park

(Continued) South Koreans had come from near and far to attend this match, donning Korean peninsula sweatshirts and chanting unification-themed songs in the hope that their support would in some way benefit inter-Korean relations.

But leaving the stadium, I wondered whether the ice could provide any traction for future cooperation or whether reconciliation efforts would continue to slip. For a reminder of the formidable obstacles in the way of reunification, I did not have to travel far from the Gangneung Hockey Center.

A small coastal city, Gangneung is not best known as the future site of Olympic hockey but rather as the site of an infamous North Korean incursion in 1996. In September of that year, a North Korean submarine ran aground off the shore of Gangneung while attempting to retrieve a team of spies. Following an order to abandon the submarine, the North Korean soldiers aboard

made an attempt to return to the DMZ by land, leading to a 49-day manhunt in which 40 people were killed.

Today, the submarine is the centerpiece of Gangneung's Unification Park, a site dedicated to understanding the incursion and "fostering a desire for the unification of the North and South". Walking around the park and venturing into the captured North Korean submarine, however, I was not filled with the same sense of optimism I had felt during the previous night's hockey match. Gazing at the advanced weaponry, it dawned on me that reunification efforts paled in comparison to the efforts made to destroy one another.

The current security situation is no less severe than it was a decade ago. In fact, North Korea had fired a ballistic missile into the East Sea just one day before the all-Korea hockey match. Meanwhile, the South Korean government, unlike earlier inter-Korean sporting occasions, made no efforts to promote the hockey match as politically significant. These days, with a new South Korean president yet to be elected, the path forward for North Korean relations remains unclear. However, with the potential election of a more liberal successor to ousted president Park Geun-hye, it is likely that inter-Korean sports cooperation could once again play an important role.

Although it is unknown whether North Korea will even participate in the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games, one cannot help but feel that the incredible support of the South Korean people at Gangneung Hockey Center will influence the decision. Following the overwhelmingly positive public reaction to this memorable match, it seems certain that both governments will take note when weighing the potential of future sporting cooperation. If a picture says a thousand words then volumes can be written of the emotional image captured as the two teams posed for the final commemorative photo - a symbolic image of Korean hope for a unified future.



Korea

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North Korea Coverage

Kim Jong-nam's Murder



By Daniel Pinkston, Contributing Writer

February 23, 2017 - As the investigation into the murder of Kim Jong-nam, the elder half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, enters its second week, the evidence indicates that the North Korean government almost certainly is responsible. South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) was quick to blame the North, which was the most likely culprit even though other scenarios could not be ruled out pending the investigation by Malaysian authorities.

Kim was attacked by two young women in the departure area of Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13, and the North Korean embassy demanded immediate custody of Kim's body. The embassy has also refused to accept the results of the autopsy, which so far are inconclusive, and suggested that Malaysia was collaborating with external forces (South Korea) to distort the investigation. The accusations brought a swift rebuke from Malaysia's prime minister and the foreign ministry. The North Korean ambassador was called into the Malaysian Foreign Ministry and the Malaysian ambassador was recalled from Pyongyang. The future diplomatic fallout is uncertain, but Malaysia might sever diplomatic ties just as Burma did following the 1983 North Korean terrorist bombing in Rangoon. If Malaysia does sever ties, the decision would be appropriate.

The two female suspects accused of killing Kim told police that they had been duped, and believed they were pulling an innocent prank for a television program. However, their story quickly collapsed under the weight of too much contradictory and circumstantial evidence. For example, the video footage showed two women quickly walking away, heading in separate directions; according to police, they immediately went to the restroom to wash the poison off their hands. They were clearly informed about what was afoot. If they had pulled a stunt for a comedy show, they almost certainly would have stayed on the scene and taken pictures while laughing with Kim about the joke.

There are several other bits of suspicious information about the female suspects. Doan Thi Huong is Vietnamese and arrived from Vietnam on February 4, and Siti Aisyah is Indonesian and arrived from Indonesia on February 2, suggesting that their visits to Malaysia were timed. Doan reportedly received some training or education in pharmacology about 10 years ago, and Siti is known to speak English and Korean. Both women reportedly are somewhat estranged from their families; their parents seem unaware about the details of their jobs or living arrangements. Siti also has two identities. One identity card lists her name as "Siti Aisyah," an entrepreneur born on February 11, 1992, and her name on the second identity card is "Siti Aisah," a housewife born November 1, 1989.

Malaysian authorities have detained one North Korean male national, Ri Jong-chol, who had been in Malaysia since August 2016 and has lived in the country for three years. Ri is said to have a background in chemistry and had a work permit to do IT work with a Malaysian company, but he never showed up to the firm and never received any salary from the firm. These facts at least suggest that he was engaged in illicit activities.

Four North Korean men flew out of Kuala Lumpur immediately after the attack and Malaysian authorities believe they are now in Pyongyang. They flew through Dubai and Vladivostok before reaching Pyongyang, leading to speculation that they transited through the Middle East to cover their tracks. The police also named two other suspects—a second secretary at the North Korean embassy and an employee of North Korea's Koryo Airlines—who are believed to be in Malaysia. Authorities have asked for Pyongyang's cooperation in gaining access to these individuals, but that is unlikely. However, if their exit is blocked and they are still in the country they might be apprehended, with the issue of how Malaysia will handle the invocation of diplomatic immunity looming.

Fratricide in struggles for the throne has existed for centuries in past empires, and deadly purges have been part of the DPRK since it was founded. Kim Jong-un has repeatedly demonstrated his ruthlessness in purging challengers—real or perceived—and even had his uncle executed. Kim Jong-nam reportedly had a price on his head since 2012, so his murder should come as no surprise. But questions remain: Why now? Was this a long standing order that finally was carried out when an opportunity emerged? Or was something happening inside North Korea that made Kim Jong-nam's elimination urgent?

Media have reported that Kim Jong-nam expressed no political ambitions and that he was opposed to the third generation of succession, essentially eliminating himself as a potential North Korean leader. However, media often have reported that China has protected him in exile as a possible replacement to be installed through Chinese intervention if Kim Jong-un were ever deposed. That is an unlikely scenario, but the South Korean press also reported that Kim had considered defecting to the South, and that North Korean defectors in Europe contacted Kim over the last couple of years asking him to be the leader of a North Korean government in exile, but he declined. This idea is farfetched because South Korea and its Ministry of Unification already have plans to install a new government under the Committee for the Five Northern Korean Provinces, a "government in exile" with provincial governors in their Seoul offices.

North Korea Coverage

Kim Jong-nam's Murder

(Continued) While Kim Jong-nam may have posed a small direct political threat to his younger brother, the Kim brothers could have clashed over the control of assets and financial resources. In the 1990s, Kim Jong-nam reportedly worked for the Ministry of State Security, and he was responsible for managing the financial transactions linked to North Korean arms exports. In dictatorships, it is common for family members to handle state finances, and North Korea is no different. For several years, Kim had lived in Macau, which is the location of Banco Delta Asia (BDA), a money laundering entity that managed some of North Korea's illicit transactions.

In his personal life, Kim Jong-nam reportedly had two wives, at least one mistress, and children with other women. He had homes in Macau, Beijing, and Singapore. He travelled internationally and sometimes was spotted in casinos "living a playboy lifestyle." According to Malaysian authorities, Kim Jong-nam was travelling with a valid North Korean passport under the name Kim Chol, and he had two identities. How was he issued two North Korean passports with different names? We can only speculate whether Kim recently had been involved in illicit transactions, but if not, he almost certainly had put away plenty of cash throughout the years to maintain his lifestyle.

One of the main reasons Kim Jong-un purged his uncle Chang Song-t'aek was to seize control of assets from Chang so that Kim could use them to reward his coalition of supporters in exchange for their loyalty. Kim Jong-nam's fate could be similar to that of his uncle. The hit team who carried out Kim Jong-nam's murder had intelligence about his travel itinerary and other personal information. It's possible that Pyongyang could have retrieved the information needed to access the financial resources under Kim Jong-nam's control abroad. In that case, a great dictator like Kim Jong-un would have to eliminate his brother before he defected to South Korea or the United States, which he probably would do if he suddenly was out of cash or believed his life was in danger.

Kim Jong-nam is rumored to have discussed his defection with South Korean authorities in the past, but he reportedly declined after they could not agree on the terms. However, if Kim Jong-nam's money was cut off or about to be cut off, he might have had no choice but to defect in order to survive. A treacherous defection by a Kim from the Paektu hereditary line would have been an unacceptable embarrassment for Kim Jong-un, which could help explain why the regime might have decided to conduct such a risky and immoral operation.

The operation itself raises several questions about motives, capabilities, and training for such attacks and other possible illicit operations abroad. In particular, incorporating foreign women into the operation introduced risks of failure and discovery. North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) is responsible for these types of operations abroad, and the RGB is believed to be ultimately responsible for the operation to kill Kim Jong-nam. The last stage of the operation was not that difficult and the assailants succeeded in their mission. However, many things could have gone wrong. They could have been discovered beforehand or balked at the last moment. Furthermore, they could have contaminated themselves or someone else with the toxin prior to the attack. And if the attack had been botched in progress, Kim Jong-nam could have decided to defect and subsequently cause the very embarrassment Pyongyang wanted to avoid.

These risks, the lack of trust, and general barriers to transactions usually prevent states and non-state actors such as terrorist groups or organized crime gangs from cooperating in the execution of illicit activities. The underworld has no criminal justice system, no courts, and no legitimate third-party enforcers; therefore, the actors can always renege on their promises. For example, if two drug dealers decide to meet in a hotel room to complete a narcotics transaction, one party can simply refuse to carry out his part of the bargain and use violence to walk out with both the drugs and the cash, leaving his counterpart dead in the hotel room.

The same holds true for deals between states and illicit non-state actors. For example, if a terrorist were to show up to buy some nerve agent from a state supplier, the terrorist might not have the diagnostic equipment to verify the authenticity of the agent. And if the material is authentic, the seller could simply kill the potential buyer and walk out with both the cash and the (real or fake) nerve agent. Nevertheless, cooperation is not impossible. Repeated interactions and the possibility of future retaliation can lead to cooperation and successful transactions in the underworld. Narcotics traffickers are able to agree on shipment and states have been able to cooperate with criminal and terrorist organizations, but thankfully that illicit cooperation is not the norm. In the case of Kim Jong-nam's murder, the operation appears to have been carried out by North Korean operatives abroad with at least two foreign agents. This raises the question whether Pyongyang has sought or is seeking the employment of other foreign agents to carry out additional illicit operations while thumbing its nose at the international community.

In this case, the two foreign female assailants did not appear to have an effective escape plan, but the four North Korean male suspects were able to flee the country immediately. The North Korean masterminds did not seem to care about the Vietnamese and Indonesian patsies and whether or not they were apprehended. The suspects had a fabricated alibi, albeit one that quickly fell apart. Certainly the North Koreans knew the assailants could disclose the truth behind the plot, but maybe they wanted the operation to be discovered. Just like a doomsday machine, foreign hit squads are not an effective deterrent against potential North Korean traitors unless they know the hit squads exist.

North Korea Coverage

His Spirit Stays Alive: a North Korean Refugee's Reaction to the Assassination of Kim Jong-nam



Kim Jong-nam in May 2001. Source: Shizuo Kambayashi/AP

By Tom Norris, Contributing Writer

The motives behind the murder of Kim Jong-nam are being discussed all around the world but, within the North Korean refugee community, the assassination has provoked an entirely different reaction. To refugees like Mark Kim, the assassination was more than a singular act of terror, it was a wider attack on the refugee community. And while the murder of Kim Jong-nam reminded refugees that their lives are subject to the cold calculations of the regime, in Mark's view, it did not end hope for change in North Korea as Kim Jong-nam's spirit stays alive.

Kim Jong-nam was not a typical North Korean exile. As Mark points out, his first foiled escape was not a swim across the Yalu River under the cover of darkness but rather a visit to Tokyo Disneyland under the cover of a Dominican Republic passport. Once out of North Korea, Kim Jong-nam did not face the usual obstacles for a refugee either. Far from adapting to a new life at the bottom of society's totem pole, Kim Jong-nam lived a millionaire's lifestyle in Macau, where he was often seen in nightclubs and casinos.

But despite the man's playboy reputation and princely upbringing, Mark insists that Kim Jong-nam was a relatable figure to many North Korean refugees. Although his motivations were certainly incomparable, Mark believes that Kim Jong-nam "felt a similar need to see the outside." And that, like himself, once Kim Jong-nam "experienced freedom and capitalism, he became addicted and didn't want to go back."

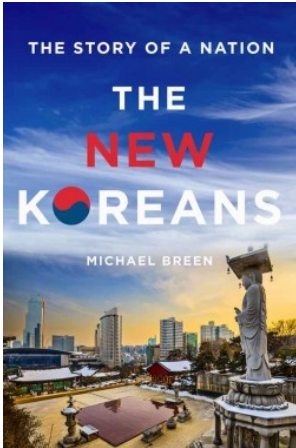
Like other North Koreans in exile, Kim Jong-nam was critical of the North Korean government, calling for economic reforms and an opening of the country. To North Korean refugees and to North Koreans living along the Chinese border with access to news, Kim Jong-nam's calls for reform and rejection of his half-brother's regime were a source of hope. And, to those most vocal about their disapproval of the Kim regime, Kim Jong-nam was even something of an inspiration. However, his death proved to the refugee community just how easily the regime can silence such dissent.

Mark believes that Kim Jong-nam's assassination was not a sudden event and that his murder should be seen as a final step of the regime's tactical response to dissent. A response strategy that, according to Mark, all North Korean refugees are potentially subject to. Prominent members of the refugee community, especially those most vocal about North Korea's human rights abuses, have previously been spied upon and their remaining family members in North Korea targeted for punishment. As Mark explains, these dangers are fully understood by the refugee community but now, with Kim Jong-nam's assassination, dissidents are even more acutely aware of the lengths the regime will go to silence their criticism.

Kim Jong-nam may have been seen by the world as more of a reject than a refugee. Nevertheless, his vision for a reformed North Korea strongly resonated with the North Korean refugee community and his acts of dissention served as inspiration for others to do the same. He is now the latest victim of the Kim regime but his hope for an open North Korea has not been extinguished with his death. It lives on with Mark and all the other North Koreans who dream of a better future for their country.

Meet the Author

Interview with Michael Breen: The New Koreans



By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

April 21, 2017 - **Michael Breen** is a journalist and consultant in Korea who first arrived in the country in 1982. His critically acclaimed 1998 book, *The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies*, provided a fascinating, in-depth portrait of the country and its people. Almost 20 years later, and as Korea has continued to change dramatically, so too have Breen's perceptions and observations on the nation. His latest publication, *The New Koreans*, focuses on these changes, and the Korea Center caught up with Breen to discuss his new book.

Your first book was very well received by people with an interest in Korea. What made you want to write a sequel almost twenty years later?

The prosaic answer is that my agent told me to. "Korea is hot right now," she said. Of course, "right now" in publishing, even in the 21st century, is three years before any book is going to come out. And the hotness in 2014 was North Korea, whereas my interest was in the South Koreans. I was also hesitant to do a new book because, when I wrote the first one, I had anticipated the sequel as "The Unified Koreans" and that was not happening. But my agent was insistent that it was a relatively untrodden field. **Daniel Tudor** and **Andy Salmon** had written or were writing books on South Korea, but publishers felt there was room for more.

How much has Korea changed in the twenty years since the release of your first book?

Such is the pace of change that looking back just 20 years is like digging out old sepia photos. You can't believe things were in color then. Of course, they were and not everything has changed. Spring still follows winter, people still speak Korean, park their cars on sidewalks, and walk in the road. The phone numbers for the Foreign Correspondents Club and the Chosun Hotel are still the same. But so much else is different. For example, hair color. The old joke – Which one is Mr. Kim? He's the guy with the black hair – doesn't work anymore. Also, while foreign faces in Seoul and Busan are very common, the same can now be said for the more rural areas too. That's because of international marriage and foreign workers in factories and in local businesses. Overall, the changes form the outward expression of advanced nationhood, increased wealth, and sense of rights. With it has come a confidence in being Korean that wasn't there before.

Have some of your own analyses and predictions also changed over the years?

Yes. I'm not sure how important this is because my predictions are always wrong. I forecast, for example, that re-unification would happen in 1992. This one has been revised. More than once, in fact. A fortune teller told me around the time the last book came out that **Kim Jong-il** would die in three years and that there'd be unification. I tell you, if you can't trust a fortuneteller, who can you trust? As for analysis, I remain optimistic about the economy and improved democracy. One of the biggest changes in my thinking is that I no longer see re-unification as the coming third miracle. This could be the result of fatigue. But I find myself thinking that the real third miracle, after economics and democracy, that completes the Korean arrival to global center stage is cultural – nothing specific, like the Gayageum or the group 2NE1, but rather the broader fact that the world now finds itself becoming as familiar with the Koreans as it is with the Australians, the French, and other advanced societies. When you cast back just a few years and remember what Korea was like, you can see why this has the feel of a miracle. In this context, I see re-unification as a matter for the Koreans. Of course, it'll get written about and excite people and change things. But it's not an example of anything to the world, except perhaps Korean fractiousness. If anything, the world will go, "So, you developed quicker than anyone in history, became a democracy and all that. How come you couldn't reconcile with your own people?"

The timing of the book's release meant that you did not get a chance to talk about the recent political scandal to hit Korea. Do you have plans for an updated edition?

Not yet, but I'm sure that it'll soon be in every home and every hotel room – not to mention the movie – so I'll have to keep updating. For this first edition, I wanted to slip in the impeachment on December 9 last year but was told it would delay publication until September 2017. I'll get it in the next printing. By then, of course, something else will have happened.

Tensions are currently high on the peninsula. How do you see relations with North Korea playing out in the future?

For 25 years now, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a cycle with North Korea of yelling and threats, followed by talks, then a walk-out by the North Koreans, concessions to bring them back, a more complete walk-out, then yelling and threats again. If this holds, we're due for talks. One day, the pattern will break and there will be a power shift that prompts the North to focus on its economy over security. It could be tomorrow, it could be 30 years from now. Whenever it comes, it will be the starting point for reconciliation and, possibly a long time later, merger. Let's hope the trigger is not violent and chaotic. But, I hasten to remind you, my predictions are always wrong, and I know I've missed something that will be the key to whatever it is that actually happens.

Meet the Author

Interview with Geoffrey Cain



Geoffrey Cain

By Matthew Fennell

Geoffrey Cain first arrived in South Korea in 2009, and spent a lot of time in Uijeongbu and Yangju, two military towns north of Seoul. As a journalist, he was eager to get out of the city and cover life outside the capital; these gritty camp towns became a bed of coverage for his writing at Time magazine. In more recent times, these areas, along with the Itaewon district in Seoul, have experienced a tremendous amount of gentrification. Documenting how and where this gentrification was happening, who was behind it, and whether it was truly helping everyone became the inspiration for Cain's book which will be released later this year by Munhak Dongnae in English and Korean. Cain spoke with Asia Society's **Matthew Fennell**.

What were your first impressions of Korea's military towns that surround Seoul?

When I first showed up, the camp towns still had a culture of dingy bars, prostitution, and live music catering to American GIs -- as well as political protests by South Korean residents who wanted a bigger say over how the bases affected their homes. But this was quickly changing. Within a couple years, the center of Uijeongbu -- a poor industrial town built around military bases -- was gutted and gentrified into a shopping area, and its subway station linked to a giant luxury department store, one of the biggest in the country. I became fascinated with how quickly this gentrification was happening, and how uneven it was. The typical resident didn't seem to be getting richer, but it felt like Uijeongbu was on a campaign to mask history, to show that it had overcome hard times. The result was gentrification in patches. Coming out of the subway, you'd see high-end shoppers, and then within walking distance there'd be metal shacks that housed a red-light district and then a charming old church built by US soldiers, and further out near the US base, the Filipina hostess bars.

You later moved to Seoul to another military district. How was this in comparison to living in Uijeongbu?

I moved to Haebangchon, a once-impoverished hill that juts northwest off the US's army headquarters, and saw the same effect: the military-inspired heritage of Itaewon rapidly being replaced with trendy restaurants and coffee shops. Since Itaewon was looking much more like Seoul's posh district, Gangnam, I started calling this "Gangnamization" and wrote columns in the Korean-language media about it. (Koreans, I should add, had already coined similar terms.) I had mixed feelings at first. Longtime residents, despite their poverty, told me they weren't eager to see these changes. Fast-rising rents and evictions, they said, were killing a talented community of musicians and entrepreneurs who had built their lives around US base culture. They were concerned that Itaewon was becoming like any faddish neighborhood, devoid of the heritage they had spent their lives creating.

What is the cultural significance of Itaewon to South Korea?

Itaewon is an ironic place. The neighborhood carries the legacy of a military culture -- people used to call it a "GI's Kingdom" -- and yet it's one of the freest places in the entire Korean peninsula. Just as the off-duty soldier steps out of the base and leaves behind a regimented daily routine, young Koreans can also become anonymous and freer here, away from the eyes of a conservative and hierarchical society. I'm not sure there's anywhere else in the world where you can stumble onto a street of brothels next to a street of gay bars next to a street of halal shops leading up to the country's largest Muslim mosque -- and all outside a US military base in one of the world's most racially homogenous countries. It's a surreal place, and naturally a vortex for the misfits and outsiders of Seoul.

Since Itaewon is suspended from the normal rules of society, it's thrived for decades as a hotbed of ideas that start at the edges before going mainstream. The camp towns were always a testing ground for the foreign trends that would sweep Korea, like rock and roll, breakdancing and hip-hop, spam and sausages in Korean cuisine, and craft beer and craft cocktails. Even the K-pop audition system has a lot in common with the US Eighth Army's old audition process for Korean rock stars. Itaewon provided outcasts and homosexuals, like actor Hong Seok-cheon, with a refuge away from the strictures of the mainstream in addition to an abode of low rents and open minds to practice their culinary crafts. Hong and many others started out in Itaewon and, from there, reshaped Seoul's urban culture in ways we haven't seen.

Meet the Author

Interview with Geoffrey Cain

Historically, the once run-down neighborhood was often avoided by Koreans for fear of crime and lack of safety. How true is this widely-held perception?

As I wrote the book, I could find no evidence that US soldiers and foreigners, as the stereotype goes, were committing a disproportionate number of crimes here. Some of the evidence showed the opposite -- that at least today, soldiers and foreigners were committing fewer crimes than the population at large. The old Itaewon, however, was definitely a hub of crime, drug trafficking, illegal gambling, gangs, and prostitution, and a lot of this circled around the bars catering to US soldiers. And crime statistics are only one side of the reality. In the early 1970s, the US military reported about 25,000 cases of venereal diseases among 35,000 troops in a single year. That's a huge number.

Do you have any memorable stories of Itaewon from your research?

If there's one consistency, it's that the stories of Itaewon carry the extremes of human experience -- they're uplifting and crushing at the same time. One of my favorite meetings was with Tommy Shim, a rock guitarist who started out playing for US troops in Vietnam, and who was deeply inspired by Jimi Hendrix and that era of musicians. He returned to Itaewon and started a psychedelic band called Phoenix, which combined Korean musical scales and styles with psychedelic rock. This was common in Itaewon in the late 1960s, and it was a blossoming period, since the US military's demands for musical talent and professionalism rivalled today's Korean music industry. The rockers were a rebellious bunch who openly challenged authoritarian rule. In the 1970s, Park Chung-hee retaliated with crackdowns on marijuana and long hair, and Tommy and his peers were arrested, accused of peddling a corrupt and decrepit "foreign culture." Some of them were told they were mentally ill and put in asylums. This was pretty much the end of their careers. Tommy ran off to Guam and later opened a rock club in the US.

The shift in the ratio of Koreans to non-Koreans visiting Itaewon has increased dramatically in recent times. Do you think Itaewon will ever lose its identity as being the "foreign district" of Seoul?

I don't think Itaewon will lose its heritage as the "foreign district." It's more that different groups of people are all being elevated to the same playing field. Itaewon used to be a place for GIs to get stoned and cruise with rock bands and sex workers, and there wasn't much more to it. These days, more foreign nationals are settling down in Korea than ever, and bigger numbers are coming from places like South Asia and Africa. Add to that the waves of Koreans visiting Itaewon, and you can see this place is becoming much more inclusive. It's not perfect, but I think overall, it's a much healthier environment now than ten years ago.

What are some future challenges you see in maintaining the heritage of Itaewon?

The government will need to get serious about rent controls and zoning laws, or else Itaewon will lose its inclusiveness, becoming an overpriced shell of its former self. Already Psy, the Gangnam Style rapper, has kicked out an artists' space from his property in Hannam to open a generic coffee franchise -- which is ironic since Psy was parodying that kind of thing in "Gangnam Style." But gentrification is not always a bad thing. Studies show that, when done right, it raises the quality of life for the poorest residents. But in the process, we must not forget the parts of our heritage that make this place special. One dying craft is live music. It requires hard work, high costs, low payouts, and isn't a stable career path -- but it's a healthy activity that brightens up any neighborhood. Itaewon's musicians were once subsidized by the US base concerts, but this no longer has the same appeal. I

New Ambassadors Welcoming Dinner

By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

(Continued from page 1.)

The event was hosted by Mr. Dong-bin Shin, Chairman of the Korea Center, at the Lotte Hotel Seoul. Board members H.E. Hong-Koo Lee, H.E. Sung-Joo Han, and Mr. Young Joon Kim joined Executive Director Yvonne Kim in introducing the 17 ambassadors to Asia Society, explaining the history, objectives, and programs of the organization. The Korea Center looks forward to working closely with the new arrivals in promoting a deeper understanding of Asia around the world.

Ambassador Interview

Interview with H.E. James Choi



H.E. James Choi

By Matthew Fennell, Contributing Writer

March 31, 2017 - The Korea Center has always received fantastic support from the Australian Embassy in Seoul, developing a particularly strong relationship in recent years. While we were sad to say goodbye to former **H.E. Bill Paterson** last fall, we are very happy to welcome his successor to Korea, **H.E. James Choi**. After arriving in December, Ambassador Choi became the first ever Korean-born Australian to assume the position since the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1961. Asia Society Korea caught up with Ambassador Choi to discuss his first few months in office.

1. You migrated to Australia from Korea when you were only four years old. Do you have memories of your early years in Korea, and how does it feel to be back?

I still have vivid memories of my childhood years in Korea. My father was a helicopter pilot in the Korean army, so we moved house quite frequently. While it must have been difficult for my mother, I enjoyed the sense of adventure when we moved from city to city.

For some reason, my family's stay in Kwangju remains clear in my memory. I think it was due to the friendliness and warmth of our neighbours at the time.

Aside from my early childhood years, I've visited Korea many times for work and holidays. I was posted to Korea as a junior officer at the Australian Embassy in Seoul from 1995-1997. So there is a sense of homecoming - or a sense of belonging - in returning to Seoul. I feel very much at home in Seoul.

2. How much of an honor is it to be the first ever Korean-Australian to take up the role as Ambassador to Korea?

It is a privilege to be appointed as the Australian Ambassador to Korea. There is no greater honour than to represent one's country. I am also proud of my Korean heritage so it is wonderful to be posted to the country of my birth.

I think my appointment reflects the strength of Australia's multicultural society. We welcome people from around the world and draw on their talents and contributions. Australia's diplomatic service reflects Australia's diversity - around 40 percent of Australia's Ambassadors are children of first-generation migrants.

3. Your previous posting was as Australian Ambassador to Denmark. Have you encountered any culture shock or challenges in settling here in Seoul?

It's been an easy adjustment to life here. Being able to speak Korean does help, as does an understanding of Korean culture and history. The greatest challenge has been grasping the significant changes in the city. I recall the wonderful little Hanok houses and restaurants lining Pimatgol behind Kyobo Building, which are no longer there. I was disappointed to find that my favourite Kal-guk-soo restaurant has disappeared. In its place is a large new office building.

But with change comes the new. Wonderful new architecture proudly graces the Seoul skyline. And Seoul now has a great food and coffee culture, even with Australian "flat whites" on the menu. Seoul is so much more diverse and cosmopolitan than the city I experienced 20 years ago.

4. Seoul is a city known for being energetic, vibrant, and dynamic. How have you been enjoying whatever free time you have

I've enjoyed re-exploring the places I used to frequent 20 years ago - Daehak-no, Hongdae, Apgujeong. They are more vibrant than ever. But some things have stayed the same. The beautiful Changdeok and Gyeongbuk palaces remain as stately as ever.

As a keen music fan, I'm very interested in exploring Korea's contemporary music scene, from classical to jazz and K-pop. I'll have to see if there are any upcoming Big Bang concerts!

I intend to travel as much as possible, especially to the regions outside of Seoul. I've already visited Chungchongnamdo and Busan. But I would like to explore more of Korea's regions, especially to understand Korea's rich history and culture, and the strong sense of regionalism that seems to pervade politics.

5. What are some things that you hope to achieve during your role as Ambassador over the next few years?

My main priority is to maximise the trade and investment opportunities provided by the Australia-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA). We've already had some good results since the FTA came into force in 2014, but there's significant scope to enhance our bilateral services and investment relationship.

At this point of great uncertainty in global affairs, especially with China's continuous rise and the increasing isolationist and protectionist policies emerging from the United States and Europe, I believe that like-minded Asia-Pacific countries such as Korea and Australia need to work more closely together to protect the rules-based global order.

As Korea faces an increasingly challenging security environment, I hope to play a role in convincing Korean policymakers of the value in enhancing the Australia-Korea strategic partnership. In these uncertain times, Australia and Korea are natural partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

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