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A Nation's Duty: Restoring Order Amid a Rising Tide of Human Trafficking

Kim Young-jun

Government Neglect Amid a Crisis

Hundreds of South Koreans have fallen victim to abduction, forced confinement, torture, and employment scams in Cambodia. The crisis reached national attention when, in August, a South Korean university student was found tortured to death. His grieving family still awaits the return of his remains.

Throughout this tragedy, the South Korean government failed to assess the scope or urgency of the situation, offering only delayed and reactive measures. Today, the duty of the state is clear: rescue every victim without delay and dismantle the criminal networks profiting from human suffering.

A Nation's Outrage Reaches a Boiling Point

The killing of the university student, who had traveled overseas under the pretense of attending an international expo, shocked the nation. Upon arrival in Cambodia, his passport was confiscated, and he was held captive, beaten, and tortured to death. His family is left mourning not only his loss but the inability to bring him home.

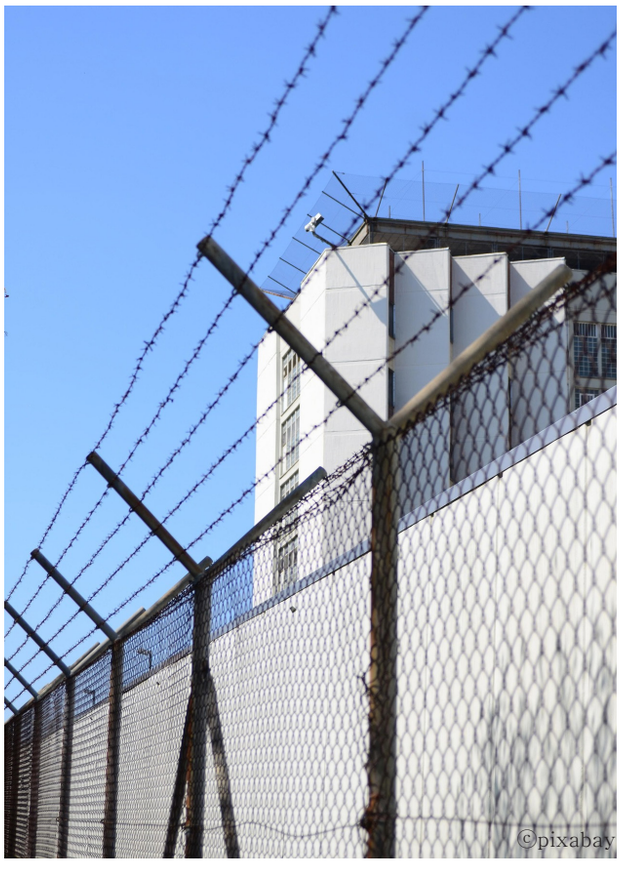
What's more alarming is that this isn't an isolated case—it has become a disturbingly common pattern.

A Regional Crisis Years in the Making

Cases of forced labor, detention, and cyber scams in Cambodia and across Southeast Asia have been escalating since the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2022, this had become a regional human rights crisis.

Criminal syndicates recruit young people—Koreans, Chinese, and Southeast Asians—by offering high-paying short-term jobs with accommodations. Once they arrive in Cambodia, their passports are taken under the guise of visa processing, and they're locked in substandard rooms instead of the promised hotels.

Local media reports indicate that victims were duped into thinking they would perform computer-related work for high pay, but were instead subjected to threats, torture, and 14-hour workdays running online scam operations. Victims were often forced to impersonate women to lure strangers online.



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Thousands have fallen victim, prompting governments in Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Taiwan to issue national warnings.

Why South Koreans Are Being Targeted

The South Korean government has come under fire for its delayed response. Similar crimes had been reported as early as 2022, yet officials failed to act until the problem became too large to ignore. While other nations launched awareness campaigns and conducted pre-departure interviews for outbound travelers, South Korea remained passive.

Official data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows just 11 reported cases in 2022. That number increased to 21 in 2023, soared to 221 in 2024, and reached 330 cases in just the first eight months of 2025.

One possible reason for the surge is that Korean nationals are seen as more lucrative targets. In August, police reported that a man in his 20s paid 35 million KRW (about $26,000 USD) in cryptocurrency to secure his release. Two others released in July reportedly paid 16 million KRW ($12,000 USD) each. For comparison, a Vietnamese victim in 2022 reported being ransomed for only $2,600.

Despite this alarming rise, the government was slow to respond. The foreign ministry's request to increase police personnel at the embassy in Phnom Penh was denied due to "no increase in workload." A joint task force was not deployed until October 14. A day later, several areas in Cambodia—including Poipet, Bavet, and Bokor Mountain—were designated travel-restricted zones. By then, reports suggested at least 60 South Koreans were still being held, and more than 80 remained missing.

International Rescue Operations and Repeated Warnings

In February 2025, Thai and Cambodian authorities raided scam compounds in Poipet, rescuing 109 Thai citizens and numerous others. That same month, Cambodian officials rescued 60 Malaysians who had been lured by fake job offers and forced into fraud operations. Since 2022, 80 Indian and 246 Taiwanese nationals have been rescued and repatriated from similar sites.

Despite multiple incidents being reported abroad and within South Korea, officials failed to prevent further cases or adequately warn travelers. This inaction raises questions about governmental accountability.

Brutality Beyond Borders: A Human Rights Emergency

This is not about singling out any particular country or people—but the methods employed by these criminal organizations are undeniably inhumane.

- Torture normalized: electric shocks, physical assault, starvation, and sleep deprivation.
- Identity stripped: passports and phones confiscated; victims forced to record blackmail videos or sign debt contracts.
- Coerced into complicity: victims pushed to commit fraud or launder money, then further extorted.
- Collusion and corruption: testimonies point to a chain involving compound operators, brokers, and local authorities.

These are clear and egregious violations of human rights.

Safety Checklist for Travelers and Families

To prevent future tragedies, the following checklist is recommended for travelers and their families:

Before You Travel

- Prepare your passport, visa, insurance, and enable real-time location sharing.
- Share your travel details and emergency contacts with family.

Red Flags to Watch For

- Be wary of offers involving "overseas high-paying jobs," "call centers," "cryptocurrency," or "foreign exchange" work.
- Immediately report such contacts to both your family and the consular hotline.

Upon Arrival

- Register with the Korean embassy.
- Share your accommodation and itinerary with a trusted contact.

If You Sense Danger

- Contact the Korean embassy before local police.
- Use both phone and messaging apps to communicate.
- At the embassy, request access to a safe room if needed.

After Returning

- Seek support for medical, legal, or psychological issues.
- Report any debt contracts or blackmail threats to the authorities immediately.

No More Excuses: The Nation Must Respond

There can be no more delay, no more excuses. With hundreds of victims, reports of murder and torture, and grieving families still waiting for justice, the government's failure to respond swiftly has allowed these syndicates to evolve and expand.

The criminals are getting smarter. Their operations are more organized. The risks are growing.

The state must act—not eventually, but now. Every last victim must be rescued. Every criminal network dismantled. Only then can the government say it has fulfilled its most basic duty to its people.



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“The Door to Space Closes” The Trump Administration’s NASA Budget Cuts

Kim Ga-young

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In May 2025, the Trump administration unveiled a budget proposal called the “One Big Beautiful Bill,” citing government efficiency and fiscal restraint as its key justifications. Yet hidden within the proposal was a decision the scientific community has described as “catastrophic.” The bill would cap NASA’s 2026 fiscal year budget at $18.8 billion—a 24% reduction from the previous year’s $24.9 billion, amounting to nearly $6 billion in cuts, the largest single-year reduction in NASA’s history.

Core Science Divisions Hit Hard

The cuts struck hardest at NASA’s Science Mission Directorate, which oversees planetary exploration, astrophysics, and Earth and climate sciences. According to internal reports, up to 47% of the directorate’s budget will be eliminated. More than 40 exploration and climate-related projects have been deemed “unaffordable,” facing cancellation or severe downsizing.

Mars Sample Return Canceled, Chandra on the Chopping Block

Among the hardest-hit programs is the Mars Sample Return (MSR) mission—a joint venture between NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) designed to bring rock samples collected by the Perseverance rover back to Earth. The new budget proposal explicitly withdraws $700 million in funding, effectively terminating the project and straining U.S.-European scientific cooperation.

The Chandra X-ray Observatory, launched in 1999 and instrumental in black hole and supernova research, was also marked for termination under “cost-saving measures.” Scientists condemned the decision as “blinding one of the 20th century’s greatest eyes on the universe.”

Other missions, including Juno (Jupiter) and MAVEN (Mars atmosphere), are under early termination review, while New Horizons, the probe that explored Pluto, lost funding for its extended mission. In short, the United States’ long-term exploration programs across the solar system are being systematically dismantled.

Climate and Earth Observation Programs Axed

NASA’s Earth Science Division, which monitors climate change and atmospheric pollution, faces sweeping cuts. Satellites such as PACE, GeoCARB, and CLARREO-Pathfinder were labeled “nonessential” and slated for cancellation. These satellites provide critical data on ocean plankton, atmospheric aerosols, and Earth’s radiation balance—cornerstones of climate system research.

Additionally, NASA's Green Aviation program, which develops environmentally sustainable aircraft technologies, saw its funding entirely eliminated. Experts called it "a decision that abandons the future of carbon-neutral aviation."

NASA's Office of STEM Engagement, which funds internships and scholarships for students in science and engineering, was also defunded. The move threatens to erase research opportunities for the next generation of scientists.

"Unconstitutional" Spending and Internal Whistleblower Warnings

Congress and the scientific community responded with outrage. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation—led by Democrats—accused the Trump administration of implementing cuts before congressional approval, calling it "a violation of constitutional authority."

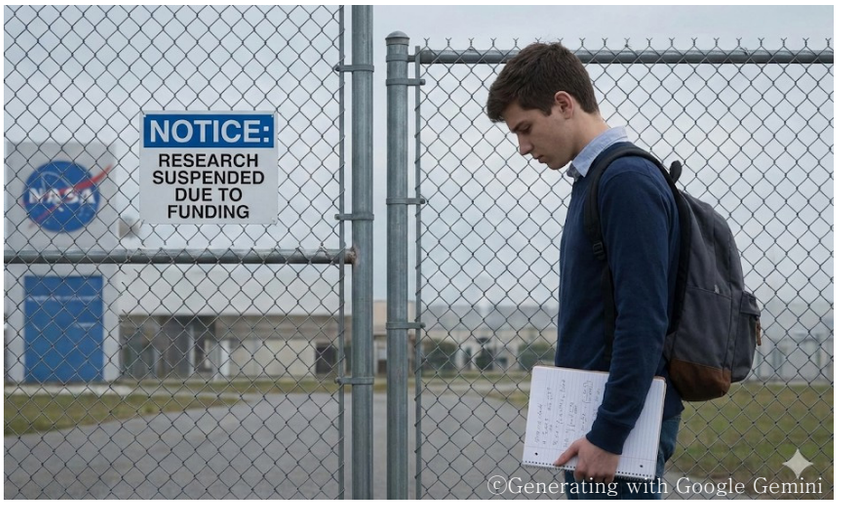
Inside NASA, whistleblowers have issued stark warnings, stating that "safety standards have reached a dangerous threshold" and predicting that "a fatal astronaut accident could occur within a few years." Reports cite reduced equipment maintenance, workforce downsizing, and diminished emergency training as direct consequences of the cuts.

Scientists Warn of an "Extinction-Level Threat" to Exploration

The global scientific community has described the situation as an "extinction-level crisis for space exploration." Science communicator Bill Nye remarked, "NASA's mission isn't just about human spaceflight—it's about understanding our origins and our planet's future.

Abandoning that vision would mean surrendering America's leadership in science."

The statement drew bipartisan support in Congress, which eventually passed a temporary resolution maintaining NASA's current $24.9 billion budget. However, it failed to overturn the administration's broader policy direction.



Trump's Justification: "A More Efficient NASA"

President Trump defended the move as a "strategic realignment toward human exploration." He argued that NASA had become "a bloated bureaucracy" focused too heavily on research and should instead collaborate with private industry through commercial space programs.

Indeed, funding for Artemis and other moon and Mars crewed missions was increased, strengthening partnerships with companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin under a vision of "human-centered exploration." The administration claimed this marked "a new golden age of American space enterprise."



A Journalist's Reflection

As a journalist, I have long respected former President Trump's direct leadership and decisiveness. Yet this particular decision is deeply troubling. Science and technology thrive not on short-term efficiency, but on long-term accumulation of knowledge. This move feels like sacrificing the future for the sake of immediate cost savings.

NASA is more than a rocket agency—it is humanity's window into understanding where we came from and where we are going. Halting missions, silencing satellites, and stripping students of their opportunities is, in essence, blinding that vision.

This controversy underscores a fundamental clash between Trump's "efficiency-driven space policy" and the scientific community's commitment to preserving basic research. The Science Mission Directorate's budget has been halved, and dozens of exploration and climate research projects now face uncertain futures.

Whether Trump's decision will truly bring "efficiency," or extinguish humanity's spirit of exploration—perhaps that answer is already quietly watching us, from somewhere beyond the sky.



Visa-Free Entry for Chinese Tourists Sparks Debate

Lim Min-woo

South Korea is witnessing a growing public debate as the government pushes forward a plan to expand visa-free entry for group tourists from China. The tourism and retail sectors are enthusiastically welcoming the policy, viewing it as a long-awaited opportunity to revive domestic demand after years of economic stagnation. Meanwhile, critics worry that opening the borders more widely may generate an excessive burden on public administration and raise issues related to social order and safety. These sharply contrasting reactions reveal the fundamental tension between economic incentives and possible social risks.

Proponents of the policy highlight the immediate economic benefits. Chinese tourists have historically accounted for the highest proportion of foreign visitors to South Korea. According to the Korea Tourism Organization, Chinese tourists represented about 28 percent of all foreign arrivals in the first half of 2024, a figure significantly larger than any other nationality. With international travel rapidly recovering, the Korean government sees visa-free entry as a way to attract even more visitors and accelerate domestic consumption. For retailers, travel agencies, and duty-free shops—particularly those that suffered during the pandemic—the policy has the potential to be transformative. According to estimates provided by the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), analysts expect the economic impact to be significant. Estimates based on average spending per Chinese tourist suggest tens of trillions of won in combined direct and indirect effects. Particularly, when young female travelers with strong interest in cosmetics, fashion and Korean food increase, certain consumer industries are expected to benefit immediately. Because passport issuance in China remains relatively restrictive, those who can travel overseas tend to be financially able, meaning the policy may attract a high-spending customer base rather than simply increasing tourist volume.

However, the optimism is not shared universally. Critics argue that the visa-free policy introduces considerable risks, starting with illegal overstays. Visa-free entry simplifies admissions procedures, making it easier for individuals to enter the country with little prior verification. According to data from the Ministry of Justice, South Korea already had approximately 390,000 undocumented foreigners in 2024, representing nearly 15 percent of all foreign residents. Immigration authorities have acknowledged that illegal overstays frequently occur among group tourists when individuals break away from their tour groups and disappear into local communities. Local governments worry that they lack the manpower to monitor tour schedules, verify accommodations, and respond to sudden cases of noncompliance. Some civic groups argue that before expanding admission, authorities should first establish a system that requires advance submission of itineraries, hotel information, and the identities of travelers, and impose accountability on travel agencies in case of violations.



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Social media and certain political figures have contributed to a perception that increased entry may correlate with higher crime rates, even if the evidence is inconclusive. In districts that attract heavy tourism, such as Myeong-dong and Dongdaemun in Seoul or Haeundae in Busan, residents and business owners have reported concerns about overcrowding, noise, and the need for additional security personnel and surveillance infrastructure. Some local merchants express ambivalence: they welcome the economic boost, yet simultaneously fear that poorly managed tourism could undermine community safety and quality of life.

Concerns also extend to tourism quality. If poorly managed, visa-free entry may incentivize low-end mass tourism dominated by cheap package tours. In past years, Korea experienced issues with tours that pressured participants into shopping, where profits flowed to brokers rather than local stores. Such tours produced congestion and waste without meaningful benefit to regional communities.
Experts warn that Korea could repeat these mistakes unless quality control measures accompany the increase in visitor numbers. Tourism researchers propose shifting the focus from sheer volume to value—promoting regional tourism dispersion, cultural experiences, and programs that allow visitors to interact with local businesses and residents. Sustainable tourism, they argue, cannot be achieved by simply filling buses and funneling tourists through shopping districts.

Policymakers are starting to recognize that economic benefits and social stability must be pursued simultaneously. To allow the visa-free program to succeed, a balanced regulatory framework is needed. Suggested strategies include mandatory advance registration of accommodation and itineraries by travel agencies, increased monitoring capacity for immigration officers, and a more responsive safety protocol coordinated with local governments. At the same time, the tourism industry is encouraged to develop premium and experience-based programs that guide tourists into diverse regions rather than concentrating them in a few overcrowded districts. Continuous statistical monitoring—tracking overstays, spending patterns, and local economic impact—will also be essential to evaluate the policy's effectiveness and mitigate unintended consequences.

The debate surrounding visa-free entry reflects the broader challenge South Korea faces in navigating post-pandemic economic recovery. There is no question that increased tourism from China could deliver a powerful stimulus to consumption-driven industries. Yet, without complementary measures to maintain order, protect local communities, and uplift the overall quality of tourism, the policy risks causing social fatigue and diminishing public trust. Ultimately, the success of visa-free entry depends not only on attracting more travelers but on managing them effectively. If the government and industry stakeholders cooperate transparently and enforce consistent standards, increased tourism can coexist with a safe, sustainable social environment. If not, the short-term economic boost may come at the cost of long-term instability. Visa-free entry is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful; the outcome will depend on how responsibly the policy is implemented.



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National Data Center Fire Halts Korea's Digital Infrastructure — Government Faces Scrutiny Over Visa-Free Entry Delay

Ju Se-eun

A massive fire that broke out at the National Information Resources Service (NIRS) data center in Daejeon on the morning of September 26, 2025, has crippled hundreds of core government information systems and triggered nationwide administrative disruption. The incident has quickly escalated from a technical failure to a major governance crisis, raising questions about infrastructure resilience, administrative preparedness, and national security.

Fire Incident and Recovery Efforts

According to government reports, the blaze disabled 647 government IT systems, 96 of which suffered direct damage. The remaining 551 systems were shut down as a precaution to prevent further spread. Firefighting efforts lasted nearly 22 hours.

Early investigations indicate that the fire likely originated in the Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) or lithium-ion battery room. Analysts suspect thermal runaway caused by abnormal current or voltage spikes. Some reports suggest that a battery unit, temporarily disconnected during relocation work, may have ignited due to residual charge.

The government activated an emergency restoration framework immediately after the incident, but the recovery rate remains low. In a tragic development, a civil servant overseeing the restoration efforts was found dead after an apparent suicide at a Sejong Government Complex building — a grim sign of the immense pressure surrounding the crisis.

Underlying Causes and Prevention Failures

Experts point to structural vulnerabilities in Korea's centralized IT architecture. Concentrating critical systems in a single data center makes nationwide disruption likely when a major incident occurs.

Further scrutiny has emerged over the adequacy of safety compliance. Government inspections of private data centers in past years revealed 265 violations across 88 facilities, including failures to separate battery and server rooms, inadequate safety distances, and the absence of remote power-cut capabilities.

Backup systems were also found insufficient. Reports indicate that G-Drive, a cloud storage platform used by roughly 750,000 public officials, lacked an external backup system, resulting in loss of some government documents.

The incident echoes previous large-scale IT disruptions, such as the 2022 Kakao data center fire in Pangyo and the 2014 Samsung SDS data center fire, which caused widespread service outages.

Administrative Paralysis and Economic Fallout

The shutdown of 647 government systems has frozen essential administrative functions nationwide, including resident registration, tax processing, welfare services, and civil applications. Some financial and payment networks experienced delays, complicating both personal transactions and business operations.

Because many companies depend on government-linked authentication, procurement, and regulatory platforms, the IT paralysis has created direct economic losses. Analysts warn that such instability could damage investor confidence, with global firms viewing national digital infrastructure as a key indicator of operational reliability.

The government is expected to face significant long-term costs in system restoration, service compensation, and the construction of backup facilities.

Security Concerns and the Visa-Free Entry Debate

The fire has also reignited debate over the government's plan to expand visa-free entry for Chinese nationals. With parts of the immigration and identity verification system still degraded, critics argue that launching the policy now would create unacceptable national security risks.

Experts warn that incomplete identity screening could lead to increased illegal stays, organized crime infiltration, and potential attempts by foreign actors to exploit weakened verification processes. Some analysts even raise the possibility of security threats such as disguised operatives or terrorist elements entering the country undetected.

Expert Opinions and Public Reaction

A cybersecurity specialist interviewed anonymously stated, "A national digital infrastructure must be designed on the assumption that even a single point of failure is unacceptable."

IT infrastructure analysts argue that while centralized systems are efficient, future proof models must adopt distributed and modular architectures to reduce risk concentration.

Public sentiment is overwhelmingly critical. Social media discussions show strong opposition to the visa-free entry plan under current conditions, with many calling it "reckless" when "a single fire can shut down the entire national system." Political parties have also moved to form emergency task forces demanding accountability and a full investigation.

Conclusion

The NIRS data center fire is not merely an IT accident — it is a systemic governance crisis that tests the nation's digital resilience, security posture, and public trust. As one editorial stated, "A fire may happen only once, but the damage it leaves can last far longer."

Amid ongoing instability, critics urge the government to prioritize national security and administrative stability over rapid policy liberalization. The consensus is clear: Korea must rebuild on a more secure foundation before pursuing further openness.

The Yellow Envelope Act: A Question for the Next Generation

Jeong Gu-hyeon

One of the most fiercely debated issues in South Korea today is the "Yellow Envelope Act," an amendment to Articles 2 and 3 of the Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act. The bill is drawing national attention not simply because it reshapes how labor unions and employers interact, but because it represents a potential turning point in the overall structure of Korea's labor landscape.

The law traces its origin to the 2014 SsangYong Motor mass layoff incident. Following a long and bitter strike, the company filed massive damage suits against participating workers, demanding billions of won in compensation. In response, one citizen — seeking to support the dismissed workers — delivered 47,000 won, symbolizing the 4.7 billion won in damages ordered in the first-instance ruling, inside a small yellow wage envelope to a media outlet as a gesture of solidarity. This act became the symbolic beginning of what is now known as the Yellow Envelope Act. The tragedy that followed — a series of suicides and sudden deaths affecting 30 workers — revealed how easily workers could be cornered and defeated by overwhelming corporate power. That outrage later ignited the push for legislative reform. The bill has passed the National Assembly and is scheduled to take effect on March 10, 2026.


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Three Axes of Change — What the Yellow Envelope Act Redefines

1. Expanded Definition of "Employer"

The current law defines an employer as "a business owner, a person responsible for managing a business, or any person acting on behalf of the business owner concerning matters related to employees."

The amendment expands this definition to include "any person who, although not a contracting party to employment, is in a position to substantially and specifically control or determine the working conditions of the worker."

In other words, even a parent company may be legally recognized as an employer if it effectively controls the working conditions of subcontracted workers.

2. Broader Scope of Legitimate Industrial Action

Under the current law, labor disputes are recognized only when they concern

disagreements over working conditions such as wages, hours, dismissal, or treatment. The amendment widens this scope to include disagreements over "business management decisions" that affect working conditions, such as restructuring, mass layoffs, plant closures, relocations, or mergers and acquisitions. This means major managerial decisions could become lawful subjects of collective bargaining and strike action.

3. Limits on Corporate Damage Claims

The amendment newly stipulates that "an employer shall not exercise the right to claim damages for the purpose of undermining or interfering with a labor union or its activities," and also prohibits claims for damages "arising from collective bargaining, strikes, or other labor union activities." As a result, companies will face higher thresholds when attempting to impose financial liability on unions or individual workers for strike-related losses.

Two Competing Views

Supporters view the Yellow Envelope Act as a corrective measure to prevent excessive damages lawsuits from being used as a tool to suppress union activity and to give real meaning to the constitutional labor rights of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and collective action.They argue that past large-scale damage claims have effectively chilled legitimate industrial action and pushed workers toward despair.

Opponents, however, argue that the Act could paralyze legitimate business decision-making. They warn that the expanded definition of employer and the broader scope of labor disputes could expose firms — especially conglomerates with multi-layered subcontracting systems — to unpredictable legal risks. Some predict that rather than easing disputes, the Act could generate a new wave of litigation.

A Question for the Next Generation

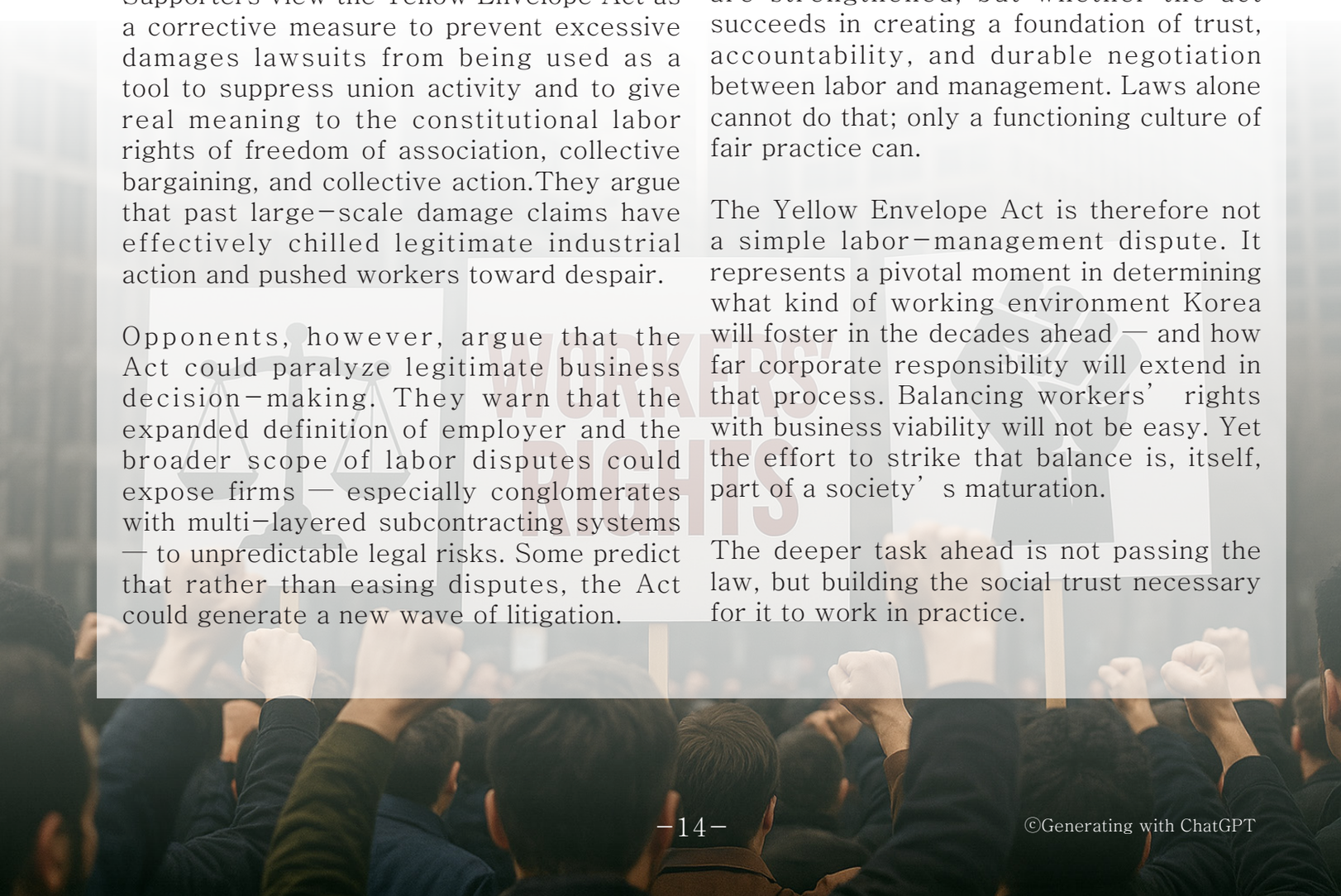
How, then, should young people regard this law? For students who have yet to enter the workforce, the debate may seem distant — but in practice, the Yellow Envelope Act is closely tied to the future in which they themselves will soon be workers. The law is not merely about regulating unions; it has the potential to shift the balance of power in the labor market and alter how companies design and manage their employment structures.

In an era of expanding platform work, freelancing, and nonstandard employment, the Act may serve as both a shield and a force of pressure — strengthening labor protections while also tightening legal obligations on employers. As the labor ecosystem is reorganized, the next generation must consider where they stand: What kind of equilibrium between protection and flexibility should define the future workplace?

What ultimately matters for young workers is not only whether labor rights are strengthened, but whether the act succeeds in creating a foundation of trust, accountability, and durable negotiation between labor and management. Laws alone cannot do that; only a functioning culture of fair practice can.

The Yellow Envelope Act is therefore not a simple labor-management dispute. It represents a pivotal moment in determining what kind of working environment Korea will foster in the decades ahead — and how far corporate responsibility will extend in that process. Balancing workers' rights with business viability will not be easy. Yet the effort to strike that balance is, itself, part of a society's maturation.

The deeper task ahead is not passing the law, but building the social trust necessary for it to work in practice.



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Connected Society, Isolated Humanity — What Have We Lost in the Digital Age of Relationships?

Lee Ji-hye

The average person now spends more than six hours a day on their smartphone. from the moment we open our eyes in the morning until we fall asleep at night, our lives unfold within the digital world. We check our friends' updates, chat, and exchange smiling emojis. Yet, paradoxically, despite seeing and talking to so many people every day, we feel lonelier than ever. Human relationships in the digital age bear two faces at once — constant connection and emotional disconnection.

Many Followers, Few Conversations

We have countless friends on social media, yet few with whom we can share our true feelings. In a world where likes and comments have become the entirety of human interaction, the quantity of relationships has grown — but their quality has faded.

Kim ○○ (21), a university student in Gangneung, puts it this way:
"Dozens of people view my stories and chat with me every day. But when I'm having a hard time, there are only one or two people I can actually reach out to."
A 2023 study published in the Journal of Mental Health and Social Behavior found a clear correlation between the amount of time young people spend on social media and their levels of loneliness. Researchers noted that while SNS platforms may promote social connection, they can also deepen feelings of isolation when they replace real, face-to-face relationships. Beneath the surface of digital connections lies an emptiness — a sense of connection without sincerity. The countless followers on our screens can never truly fill the absence of genuine friendship.
Source: "The Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Loneliness Among Young Adults," PMC9817115, 2023.

Used to Being Alone, But Not Free from Loneliness

Across college campuses, a culture of solitude — captured in phrases like hon-bap (eating alone), hon-sul (drinking alone), and hon-camping (camping alone) — has become part of daily life. While this trend reflects independence and self-sufficiency, it also hides an emptiness born from weakened social bonds.

According to the 2023 Social Indicators of Korea released by Statistics Korea in March 2024, 16.3% of young adults aged 19 to 29 reported feeling lonely — a higher rate than other age groups. This highlights that loneliness has become a pressing social issue among the younger generation.
Lee Hyun-woo (22), a university student in Seoul, shared:
"I'm comfortable eating alone, but when the weekend comes, I suddenly feel empty and end up opening my social media."
Such feelings are more than personal emotions — they symbolize an era where social connection has weakened. The "loneliness in the crowd" that once described modern urban life is now a familiar reality for today's youth.
Source: Statistics Korea, "2023 Social Indicators of Korea," March 2024

The Unhappiness Born of Comparison — The Rise of "Instagram Depression"

Social media is no longer just a space for communication — it has become a stage for displaying one's life. Some post travel photos, others share their perfectly curated dining tables. As we scroll endlessly through others' happy moments, we inevitably begin to compare. Over time, those comparisons breed discontent and sadness.

A 2022 study titled "Instagram Use and Mental Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Social Comparison" reported that higher levels of Instagram use are associated with greater feelings of depression and anxiety, particularly among people with strong tendencies toward social comparison. Korean media and mental health experts have labeled this condition "Instagram depression."

An official from a youth mental health center explained:

"SNS helps people stay connected, but its very structure encourages comparison. The more you see others' happiness, the easier it is to feel inadequate about your own life."

As we continually consume others' successes and smiles, we start viewing our own lives through a distorted lens. Social media, originally designed for connection, paradoxically eats away at our self-esteem. When likes and follower counts become measures of personal worth, relationships grow superficial, and our hearts slowly empty out. The space created to share happiness has ironically become one that fosters unhappiness — a stark portrait of digital society today.

Source: Tandoc, E.C. et al. (2022). "Instagram Use and Mental Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Social Comparison." PubMed.

Face-to-Face Relationships — A Value Worth Revisiting

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have grown accustomed to communicating without meeting in person. Yet this very shift has reminded us of the irreplaceable value of face-to-face relationships. Smiling directly at someone, making eye contact, and engaging in genuine conversation are forms of human connection that no digital screen can replicate.

In the summer of 2024, Yonsei University's Baekyangnuri Hall in Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, hosted a "Digital Detox Camp." The program encouraged participants to spend a day without smartphones, focusing instead on offline activities and analog experiences that helped them reflect on the essence of human connection.

Participants shared:

"At first, it felt uneasy to be without our phones, but for the first time in a long while, we had real conversations with our friends."



The camp served as an experiment in rebuilding human relationships in the digital era — not by rejecting technology entirely, but by pausing to reconnect with one another in person.

Ultimately, the first step toward restoring relationships is meeting. In an age when genuine conversations are dwindling, we must make a conscious effort to look each other in the eye and truly connect.

Digital Detox — Restoring Balance in Our Connections

The movement for digital restraint, which began largely on university campuses, is now spreading throughout society. From Yonsei University's Digital Detox Camp to initiatives by youth organizations and local governments, programs that encourage people to temporarily step away from their smartphones are gaining popularity.

This trend reflects growing awareness that we live in an era in desperate need of a pause in connection. Experts emphasize that the goal is not to abandon technology entirely, but to restore balance between humans and the digital world. A counseling psychologist noted: "Digital devices are tools meant to assist human communication — the problem arises when we allow them to control us."

Ultimately, digital detox is not about disconnection but rebalancing. When we pause and reclaim time for ourselves, we begin to see our relationships with others in a new light. In an age of constant connectivity, the courage to unplug is emerging as a new social value. True connection, after all, has always existed beyond the screen.

Toward Genuine Connection

Dozens of times a day, we open and close our screens to glimpse other people's lives. Yet amid all that scrolling, the time we spend truly seeing ourselves and those around us is fading away. The digital age has given us the convenience of instant connection — but it has also dulled the warmth of sincerity. Still, the essence of relationships lies in human warmth and empathy.

Now we must ask ourselves: In this era of constant connectivity, am I truly connected — or am I becoming more isolated within the endless scroll?
Perhaps it's time to put the smartphone down and start a real conversation with someone nearby. That small gesture could be the first step toward mending the disconnected hearts of our digital society.



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Should we allow tasks using AI?



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Choi Seo-yoon

With the recent rapid development of AI, the public's use of AI has also increased, and this influence is also increasing in university education. Recently, college students are using AI to write assignments, and according to AI company Muhayu, about 56% of the 1.74 million documents inspected by the AI detection program last year were written as ChatGPT, and 70% of them were university assignments. Accordingly, university professors are using 'GPT killers' to determine whether students use AI indiscriminately.

The reason why tasks using AI have a negative impact is that as students become excessively dependent on technology, creativity and problem-solving skills decrease, which can also reduce learning achievement. Nevertheless, in the current situation where the development of AI technology continues, responding in a way that simply prohibits this phenomenon may be an attitude that lags behind the trend of the times. Therefore, we need to learn how to use AI smartly.

In some universities, there are cases in which AI is properly utilized to enhance the learning effect. In a Kent State University study, 83% of university students said their academic performance improved after using AI learning tools, 48% of whom said they felt significant improvements.It has been shown to be useful when used for purposes such as data retrieval, guideline design, and explanation of difficult concepts, rather than leaving tasks entirely to AI. Students' level of comfort with AI technology was also very high, with an average of 4.31 out of 5 and significantly fewer negative responses.

In order to realize this, it is necessary to prepare appropriate AI utilization guidelines for students and apply digital ethics education parallel to students. If AI is used properly, it will be possible to present a vision of a new education system that is not constrained by time and space. We also need to be careful about AI's errors. Generative artificial intelligence appears to produce the correct answers on the surface, but it also generates answers that do not make sense, and may respond with fictional or erroneous information. Ultimately, rather than just relying on artificial intelligence, individuals need to look for papers or find and check data once again. Therefore, students should be informed of how to use AI with an appropriate balance, such as ensuring ethical guidelines and student autonomy. After all, AI is not a threat to education, but it can be a 'tool of cheating' or a 'catalyst of learning innovation' depending on how you use it. What the university should do is not to monitor students' creativity, but to suggest a direction that will lead to responsible use.



The Truth Behind the "Zero" CrazeWHO: "Aspartame is a possible carcinogen." but however Is 'Zero Sugar' Really Safe?

Shin Jae-gyeong

Since the debut of Zero Coke, the "Zero" craze has swept the food and beverage market. Phrases like "Zero Sugar," "Sugar-Free," and "Zero Calorie" have become more than just a trend; they are now a go-to option for health-conscious consumers. This is especially true for the 20s-30s demographics, who show an almost blind faith in these products, believing they can enjoy sweetness without sacrificing their health.But is "Zero" really synonymous with "Health"?

Does "sugar-free" truly equal "healthy," and does "zero-calorie" mean "harmless"?

Many consumers intuitively believe "sugar-free" means "good for you." However, this label hides a loophole that can mislead. "Zero Sugar" products, for instance, don't use actual sugar, but they achieve sweetness using artificial sweeteners or other sugar substitutes. While they may be low in calories, that doesn't directly mean they are harmless.

Furthermore, "Zero Calorie" doesn't mean exactly 0 kcal. According to South Korean food labeling standards, products under 4 kcal per 100ml can be labeled "Zero Calorie." Based on this standard, a single 355ml can of a "zero" beverage could contain as much as 14 calories. This implies that drinking multiple servings or consuming various "zero" products can lead to an accumulation of not just calories but also various artificial additives.

So, why is sugar considered so bad?

Sugar, a disaccharide (a combination of glucose and fructose), is a sweetener that enhances appetite and makes food taste good, bringing joy to our diet. But behind this lies a significant problem. This simple structure is absorbed much faster than complex carbohydrates.

As a result, our blood sugar levels spike like a roller coaster, forcing the pancreas to actively secrete insulin. Insulin's job is to move glucose from the blood into cells, often storing it as triglycerides. If this pattern continues, this can lead to "insulin resistance," where cells stop responding to insulin, becoming a direct cause of Type 2 Diabetes.

An even bigger problem than sugar is high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS). This artificial sweetener is made by enzymatically breaking down corn starch. In HFCS, glucose and fructose are mixed but remain separate (not bonded). The fructose component, while not directly triggering insulin, is more easily converted into fat than used for energy.



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It’s can be absorbed faster than glucose and synthesizes fatty acids. It also fails to provide a feeling of fullness (satiety) and may even stimulate appetite. Excessive consumption of these simple sugars leads to obesity, which is a primary risk factor for diabetes.

Does Sweetness Breed More Sweetness?

Artificial sweeteners cause physiological issues like diarrhea, but they also create a psychological problem: they “trick the brain.” The brain registers “sweet” and expects calories (energy) to follow. When a zero-calorie sweetener arrives instead, this confuses the body’s reward system. Studies consistently show this can, paradoxically, increase appetite or intensify cravings for sweetness.

This phenomenon is particularly noted in individuals with obesity. Brain MRIs have shown that after consuming a zero-calorie drink, the hunger center of the brain becomes active in obese individuals, whereas normal-weight individuals do not show a similar increase in desire for sweet foods.

The tongue’s adaptation is another factor. The tongue is one of our most sensitive organs. When constantly exposed to intense sweetness, the number of sweet-detecting receptors can decrease. This dulls our sensitivity, leading to stronger cravings for even sweeter foods. Even if artificial sweeteners are “healthier” than sugar, it’s necessary to reduce artificial sweet tastes and manage the total intake of sweetness.

The Marketing Trap: “Sugar-Free” Does Not Mean “Harmless”

The food industry has successfully branded “Zero” and “Sugar-Free” with a positive image. As a result, many consumers buy products based on the simple equation “Sugar-Free = Health” without ever checking the nutrition label on the back. In reality, some “Zero Sugar” energy drinks or coffee beverages still contain a host of synthetic sweeteners, artificial flavors, and phosphates.

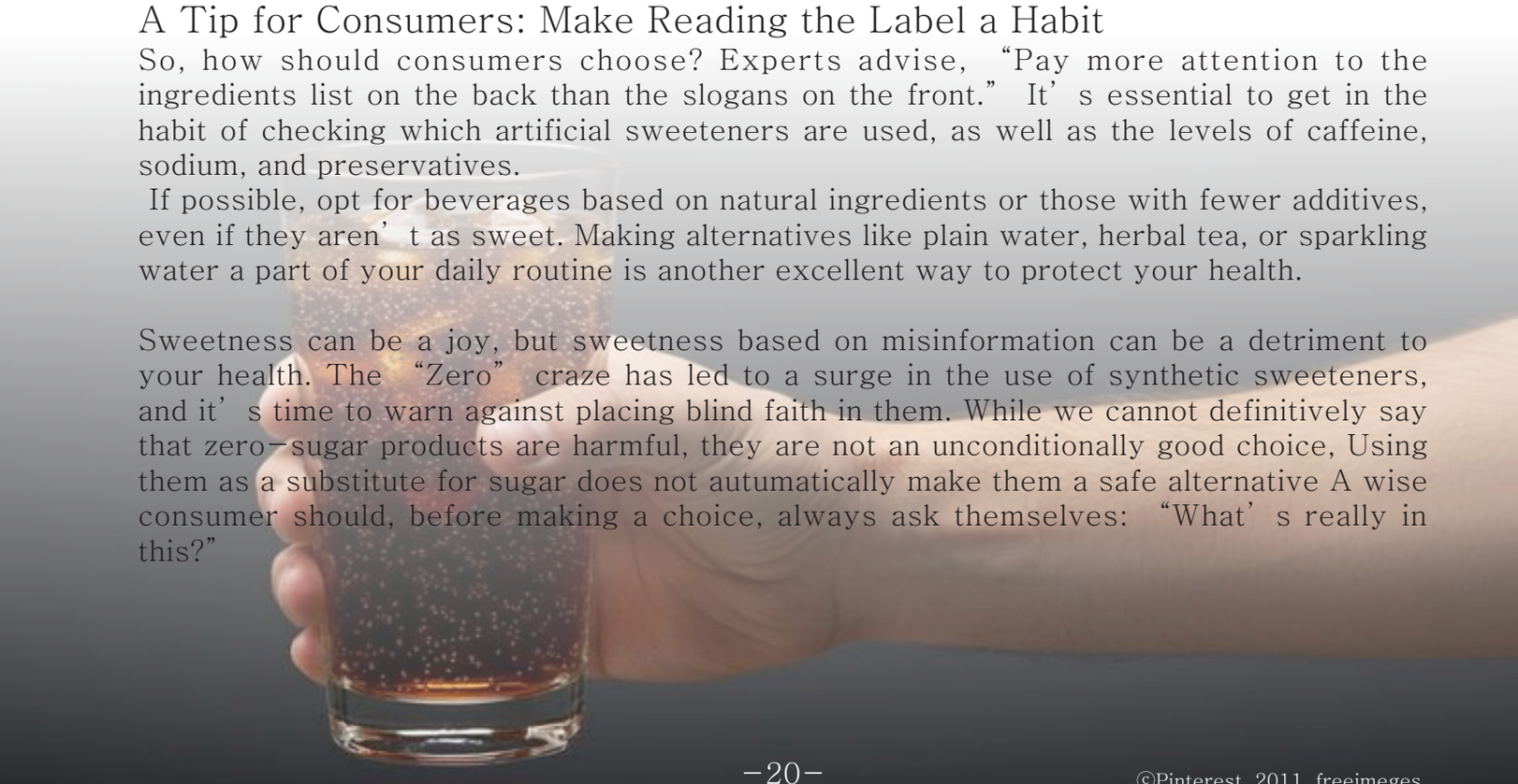
In short, we shouldn’t mistake a product for a “health food” based on marketing alone. This “Health Halo Effect” surrounding “Zero” products often leads to unnecessary overconsumption, driven by the thought, “It’s zero, so one more can is fine.” Children, diabetic patients, and individuals with liver or kidney conditions should be especially cautious, as they may be more sensitive to certain sweeteners.

A Tip for Consumers: Make Reading the Label a Habit

So, how should consumers choose? Experts advise, “Pay more attention to the ingredients list on the back than the slogans on the front.” It’s essential to get in the habit of checking which artificial sweeteners are used, as well as the levels of caffeine, sodium, and preservatives.

If possible, opt for beverages based on natural ingredients or those with fewer additives, even if they aren’t as sweet. Making alternatives like plain water, herbal tea, or sparkling water a part of your daily routine is another excellent way to protect your health.

Sweetness can be a joy, but sweetness based on misinformation can be a detriment to your health. The “Zero” craze has led to a surge in the use of synthetic sweeteners, and it’s time to warn against placing blind faith in them. While we cannot definitively say that zero-sugar products are harmful, they are not an unconditionally good choice, Using them as a substitute for sugar does not autumatically make them a safe alternative A wise consumer should, before making a choice, always ask themselves: “What’s really in this?”



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“One Province, One National University” in Gangwon — Synergy or Restructuring?

Kim Seung-hwan

Gangwon Province’s national universities are becoming one. Gangneung-Wonju National University and Kangwon National University are going to merge to form the new “Integrated Kangwon National University” in March 2026. On May 29, the Ministry of Education held Consolidation review committee meeting and officially approved the merger plan.

This decision is being hailed as a key example of the government’s “Regional University Innovation” and “Glocal University 30” initiatives. On the surface, it appears to be a bold move aiming at strengthening regional balance and enhancing university competitiveness. Yet beneath that surface lies a fundamental question: Is this true synergy—or mere restructuring?

Background of the Merger - A Matter of Survival, Not Choice

In 2023, the two universities signed an agreement to realize the goal of “One National University per province” in Gangwon, and began step-by-step organizational, financial, and academic restructuring.

The move reflects the stark reality facing regional universities: declining student populations, centralization around the Seoul metropolitan area, and severe talent outflow.

Ultimately, the merger was not a “choice” but a matter of “survival.”
However, the path to merger has been far from smooth.

At Kangwon National University’s University Council meeting on April 1, the revised merger proposal was voted down (8 in favor, 12 against). Some faculty and staff held protests, and student opinions were deeply divided.

After rounds of internal coordination and administrative adjustments, both sides finally reached an agreement at the end of April this year Yet key issues—such as the location of the main administration, departmental restructuring, and personnel reassignments—remain unresolved. These are likely to become “seeds of internal conflict” even after the merger takes effect.

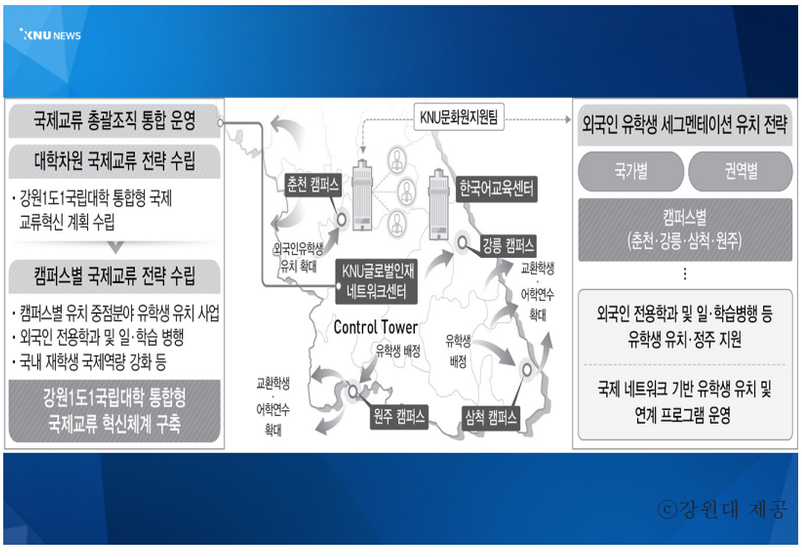
Operation Plan for the Integrated Kangwon National University

The new Kangwon National University will operate across four main campuses: Chuncheon, Gangneung, Wonju, and Samcheok. Each will focus on specific regional strengths—Chuncheon on education and research, Gangneung on marine and tourism studies, Wonju on industry-academia cooperation, and Samcheok on energy and engineering.

The administrative system adopted a dual governance structure, with a central president and campus presidents. With approximately 30,000 students and 1,400 faculty members, the university is expected to rank among the top five national universities in Korea. For the 2026 academic year, the new institution will admit 6,517 freshmen, combining Kangwon National University (3,899) and Gangneung-Wonju National University (1,717)—the largest freshman intake among national universities.

The plan also includes joint operation of overlapping departments, interdisciplinary programs, and restructuring of academic fields in connection with local industries. A Ministry of Education official stated, "This will be a model that simultaneously enhances the competitiveness and balanced development of higher education in the Gangwon region. The government will continue to provide administrative support to ensure stability."

While the division of roles appears reasonable, many worry about regional imbalance. If the administrative headquarters are concentrated in Chuncheon, other campuses could become marginalized. In the worst case, the merger could create "one core and three peripheries" rather than "one unified university."



ⓒ강원대 제공

Lessons from Other University Mergers - "If It's Only in Name, It's a Failure"

A notable precedent is the 2006 merger between Pusan National University and Miryang National University. Although Miryang became Pusan National University's Miryang Campus, criticism quickly arose that it had been "downgraded to a branch campus." Personnel disputes and administrative conflicts delayed stabilization, and it was not until 2019 that symbols and logos were fully unified—showing that even after formal integration, establishing a shared identity takes time.

The Integrated Kangwon National University must learn from such experiences: true success will depend on building internal cohesion and pride, not merely merging administrations.

Both universities already have past merger experiences. Gangneung-Wonju University was created through the 2011 merger of Gangneung and Wonju National Universities, and Kangwon National University merged with Samcheok National University in 2012. Having experienced both the benefits and challenges of integration, they must approach this merger with strategic care to avoid repeating past mistakes.

A Merger Without Funding Is a Castle Built on Sand

The Ministry of Education emphasizes that the merger will enhance the competitiveness of higher education in the Gangwon region. However, university mergers require massive financial investment. In fact, in 2024, the ministry warned that part of the "Glocal 30" funding could be cut due to deficiencies in the merger process. This demonstrates that the merger cannot be sustained by "agreement" alone.

Without adequate funding to support personnel adjustments, academic restructuring, and IT system integration, the merger could weaken both institutions instead of strengthening them. Strong policy commitment must therefore be matched by sufficient and continuous financial support.

Three Conditions for a True Merger

−Integration of Identity

A merger is not just the combining of names − it is the unification of pride and philosophy. As the Pusan−Miryang case showed, if members do not share the sense that "we are one university," the merger remains a hollow shell.

−Establishment of a Decentralized Operating System

Each regional campus must have autonomy, fostering education and research linked to its local industry and culture. A centralized, top−down structure will only deepen regional inequality.

−Sustainable Government Support

Financial assistance must extend beyond the initial merger phase. Without long−term investment in infrastructure, research, and regional cooperation, any short−term synergy will soon fade.



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HERALD After the Integration: The Future of Our University Press

Kim Seung-hwan, Lim Min-woo

A Historical Crossroads for a Regional National University: The 79-Year Trajectory of Gangneung-Wonju National University

Gangneung-Wonju National University (GWNU), which has grown with Gangneung and Wonju as its dual pillars, has walked alongside the local community since its establishment, guided by the founding principles of freedom, truth, and creativity. Its seventy-year journey is more than the story of a single university—it chronicles the balanced development of higher education and the advancement of research capacity in the Gangwon region.

The history of the Gangneung Campus begins with the opening of Gangneung Normal School on November 11, 1946. Following closure and restructuring in 1963, the institution was elevated to Gangneung Junior College in 1977 and to a four-year college in 1979. In 1987, approval was granted for establishing a graduate school, strengthening the university's research capabilities. By March 1991, it became a full-fledged comprehensive university under the name Gangneung National University, marking the firm establishment of Gangneung as a regional hub of higher education.

The roots of the Wonju Campus go back to the opening of Wonju Nursing Technical High School in 1967. Founded to cultivate local talent in healthcare, the school was upgraded to Wonju Nursing College in 1972, expanding its role and scale. It shifted to a junior college system in 1982, and in 1999, with the government's approval for institutional name changes, it adopted the independent title "Wonju National College." With a distinctly different origin from Gangneung, the campus developed as a specialized higher education institution embedded in the regional community.

The two historically separate institutions merged on March 1, 2007, forming what is now Gangneung-Wonju National University. The integration was not a simple combination of names but a strategic effort to improve regional balance and consolidate educational and research resources. After organizational adjustments and further discussions on naming, the university was rebranded as "Gangneung-Wonju National University" in 2009.

Since the merger, GWNU has strengthened its educational and research functions, solidifying a dual-campus system. The Gangneung Campus specialized in marine science, tourism, and natural sciences, while the Wonju Campus focused on health sciences and industry‐academic cooperation—models closely aligned with regional economic structures.

Leveraging its geographical advantage along the East Sea, GWNU has emphasized research in new materials, marine resources, tourism, and IT. The university has also expanded international engagement by signing agreements with more than 70 universities in over 20 countries.

In 2009, GWNU achieved national recognition by ranking first in Korea and sixth in Asia in the Asia University Rankings based on citation impact, demonstrating strong research competitiveness. The university has also been repeatedly selected for major government-funded projects—including those for industry - academia cooperation and educational capacity enhancement—further reinforcing its ties with local industries.

40 Years of The Gangneung-Wonju Herald: The Role of a University Press Approaching Its Final Issue



Within GWNU's seventy-year history, the development of university media has played an equally significant role. At the center of this narrative is the English-language newspaper, founded in 1984. Evolving alongside the university and grounded in its founding ideals, the newspaper has helped foster linguistic competence and global awareness among the campus community, establishing a unique identity amid the growing demand for foreign-language media.

The history of the English-language newspaper began on November 26, 1984, when the English Section of the Gangneung University Newspaper published the inaugural issue of The Kangnung Herald. Responding to the rapid expansion of international communication, the English Section established its bylaws to pursue both academic rigor and journalistic professionalism. The first issue was printed in standard broadsheet format. In 1986, the paper shifted to a tabloid format, and on October 27, 1989, it returned to the standard size, maintaining a triannual publication schedule.

For four years, the English newspaper operated under the English Section before it was officially recognized as an independent organization by a faculty meeting on September 22, 1988. This separation acknowledged the practical need for independent management, as the Korean- and English-language newspapers had long been functioning separately despite being administratively combined. From that point on, the English-language newspaper gained a stable foundation as an autonomous student-run media organization.

With increased autonomy came organizational renewal. In October 1994, marking its 10th anniversary, the 31st issue adopted a magazine-style format similar to weekly current-affairs publications. This shift was more than a visual redesign—it aimed to deepen coverage of campus and regional issues while enhancing editorial quality and design.

These transformations continued through the institutional integration that created GWNU. Following the 2007 merger of Gangneung and Wonju campuses and the official adoption of the name "Gangneung-Wonju National University" in 2009, the newspaper changed its title to The Gangneung-Wonju Herald. The publication schedule was adjusted to twice a year, with 28 pages per issue and a circulation of 1,000 copies. Throughout these changes, the paper remained a key medium for global engagement, serving both the increasing number of international students and the university's expanding international initiatives.

The Final Issue of an Era: Knocking on the Door of a New Future



As of 2025, GWNU stands on the threshold of integration with Kangwon National University—a major development shaped by national efforts to reorganize regional higher education. At this historic turning point, we prepare the final issue to be published under the name The Gangneung-Wonju Herald. For over forty years, the newspaper has broadened international perspectives and expanded the possibilities of regional university journalism. Now, as a new educational system approaches, the publication quietly reaches its concluding chapter.

The path walked by GWNU's English-language newspaper represents the essence of university media: connecting campus and community, cultivating informed dialogue, and nurturing global awareness. Although the title will soon fade with the institutional merger, its accumulated value and legacy will endure. They will become part of the foundation of the new integrated national university system, guiding future generations of campus journalism and shaping the educational landscape to come.



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Vegetarianism: An Ethical Choice or a Risk of Nutritional Imbalance? — An Analysis of the Two Sides of the Spreading Vegan Trend

Kim Se-hyeon

A New Lifestyle Beyond a "Good Diet": The Growing Vegetarian Population

In today's society, vegetarianism has evolved from a mere dietary choice into a lifestyle that reflects various values, including health, protection of the environment, and animal rights. What was once practiced by a few has now become common among people of all ages and social classes. Vegetarianism has become a new trend that combines the desire to improve one’s own health, protect the environment, and Consume food and products ethically.

The establishment of distinct categorizations of vegetarian diets has enabled the development of personalized dietary practices that are aligned with each individual's unique values and preferences. There exists a variety of approaches, ranging from veganism, which involves the exclusion of all animal products, to lacto-vegetarianism (permitting dairy) and ovo-vegetarianism (permitting eggs). More recently, the concepts of pescetarianism (the consumption of seafood, while refraining from other meat) and flexitarianism (a flexible approach to vegetarianism, practiced depending on the circumstances) have also emerged. This shift signifies an expansion in perspective from the question of "what to not eat" to "how to practice better consumption".

According to data from Statistics Korea and the Ministry of Environment, there has been a consistent increase in the domestic population of vegetarians over the last ten years, with an estimated current total of approximately 2.5 million. This phenomenon reflects not only a dietary adjustment for health reasons, but also a growing public awareness of the need for ethical consumption and action on the climate crisis. Vegetarianism has evolved into a symbol that reflects social values and cultural identity, rising above the level of individual choice.

The Positive Impact of Vegetarianism on Health, Environment, and Society

The spread of vegetarianism is not just a matter of personal belief, as its positive effects are also scientifically supported. A vegetarian diet significantly reduces saturated fat and cholesterol intake, thereby lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Plant- based foods are rich in dietary fibre and antioxidants, which suppress inflammatory responses in the body, strengthen immune function and promote weight control and blood sugar stability. Furthermore, numerous studies report that it reduces low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, thus helping to prevent atherosclerosis.

From an environmental perspective, adopting a vegetarian diet can lead to significant benefits. Livestock farming accounts for about 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions, which is equivalent to the total emission from all global transportation. The massive land and water resources required for feeding livestock and cultivating crops lead to deforestation and ecosystem destruction. On the other hand, a diet that focuses on plant-based protein is more sustainable and can cut greenhouse gas emissions by over 60%.

This growing awareness is also transforming industries. As the "food tech" market, including alternative meat, plant-based dairy, and insect protein, grows rapidly, global food companies are expanding their vegetarian options to stay competitive. The domestic food service industry is following this trend by introducing "vegan-certified" menus, and cafeterias in public institutions are offering more vegetarian options.
Vegetarianism is no longer just an effort by a few people; it is becoming a sustainable food culture that considers both health and the environment.

Nutritional Imbalance and Practical Constraints: The Shadow Side of Vegetarianism

However, the increase in vegetarianism does not always have positive results. A strict vegan diet can lead to a lack of key nutrients like vitamin B12, iron, calcium, protein, and omega-3 fatty acids. As vitamin B12 is obtained almost exclusively from animal products, its absence from one's diet can result in anemia and damage to the nervous system. Moreover, the body's absorption of iron from plants is only about half of that from animal sources. This can result in long-term issues like chronic fatigue and a weakened immune system.

The issue of calcium and protein intake cannot be overlooked either. Sufficient calcium, Calcium and protein intake are also crucial for health, and essential amino acids can easily be lacking in a vegetarian-focused diet. Some studies have raised concerns that long-term vegan diets may lead to reduced bone density and decreased muscle mass. Therefore, vegetarians need to manage their diet carefully, either by taking nutritional supplements or eating fortified foods.

Additionally, there are still practical issues to deal with. The lack of sufficient vegetarian-friendly dining options or alternative food choices is still an issue, and sometimes people have to skip meals when dining out because of the lack of vegetarian options. Social awareness is lacking as well. Viewing vegetarianism as an odd eating habit or an excessive concern about nutritional imbalance can create psychological burdens for vegetarians. Ultimately, being a vegetarian is not just a matter of personal choice, but also a matter of society's perception and facilities

Towards Sustainable Vegetarianism with Scientific Balance and Social Support

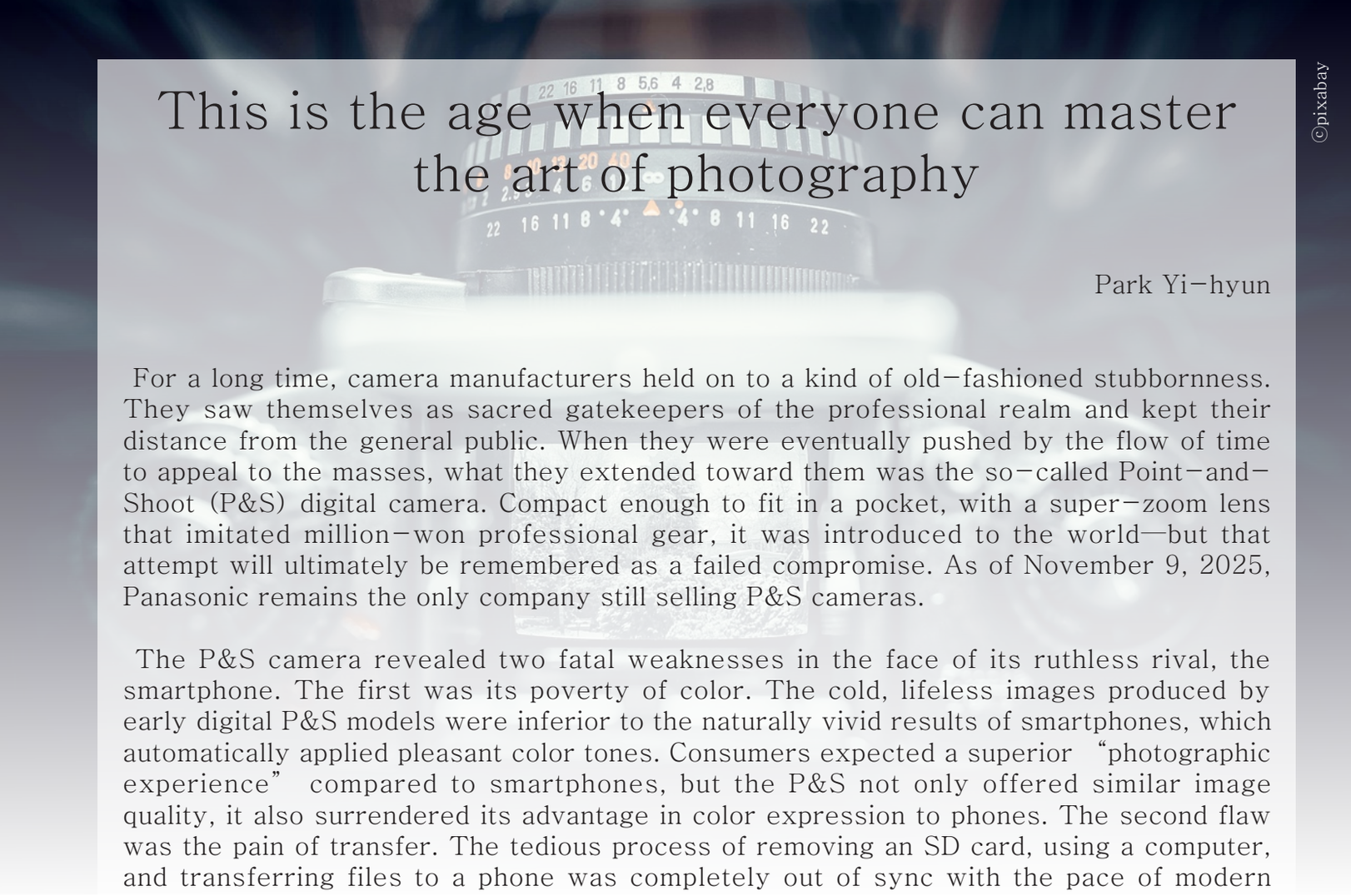
Vegetarianism is undoubtedly a meaningful choice when considered from the perspectives of ethical values, health, and environmental protection. Nevertheless, for this selection to be truly sustainable, diet management grounded in scientific evidence and social support must be integrated. People need to educate themselves about food ingredients and nutrients and come up with practical alternatives to supplement nutrients that are easily lacking.

Furthermore, society also plays a crucial role in this. Schools, companies, and public institutions need to ensure the availability of vegetarian options and provide accurate nutritional information and education on diverse diets. The food industry must also strengthen the introduction of a "vegan certification system" and improve the affordability of vegetarian foods.

Vegetarianism is not just a trend; it's a cultural turning point in solving the environmental and resource issues humanity faces. The important question is no longer "whether one is vegetarian," but "how can one sustain a vegetarian diet in a healthy and balanced way." When individuals make carefully considered choices and society provides inclusive support, vegetarianism will establish itself as a truly ethical food culture, not just a simple eating habit.







This is the age when everyone can master the art of photography

Park Yi-hyun

For a long time, camera manufacturers held on to a kind of old-fashioned stubbornness. They saw themselves as sacred gatekeepers of the professional realm and kept their distance from the general public. When they were eventually pushed by the flow of time to appeal to the masses, what they extended toward them was the so-called Point-and-Shoot (P&S) digital camera. Compact enough to fit in a pocket, with a super-zoom lens that imitated million-won professional gear, it was introduced to the world—but that attempt will ultimately be remembered as a failed compromise. As of November 9, 2025, Panasonic remains the only company still selling P&S cameras.

The P&S camera revealed two fatal weaknesses in the face of its ruthless rival, the smartphone. The first was its poverty of color. The cold, lifeless images produced by early digital P&S models were inferior to the naturally vivid results of smartphones, which automatically applied pleasant color tones. Consumers expected a superior "photographic experience" compared to smartphones, but the P&S not only offered similar image quality, it also surrendered its advantage in color expression to phones. The second flaw was the pain of transfer. The tedious process of removing an SD card, using a computer, and transferring files to a phone was completely out of sync with the pace of modern life, where instant sharing is a virtue. The price tag of 500,000 - 700,000 KRW—too expensive to be a toy and too modest to be a professional tool—became the final reason for consumers to turn away. Today, without the nostalgic coat of "retro," the P&S has become a relic. Its epitaph is clear: what consumers truly wanted from a camera were rich color and freedom from the inconvenience of file transfer.

Fujifilm was the first and most successful brand to solve the problem of color in the camera market. Living up to its reputation as the "king of film," Fujifilm transplanted its long-standing film manufacturing expertise into digital photography through the revolutionary "Film Simulation" feature. Thanks to this, users could obtain deep, film-like color and mood directly at the moment of shooting—without entering the professional realm of post-processing. What once required a professional's fine-tuned exposure and hours of editing could now be achieved by an ordinary user in Auto mode with a single click.

This strategy achieved dramatic success. From 2015 to 2020, Fujifilm Korea recorded five consecutive years of sales growth, and from 2020 onward, buyers in their twenties and thirties far outnumbered those in their forties and fifties, establishing Fujifilm as a favorite among the MZ generation. In 2023, its camera division saw a 14.5% increase in revenue and a 39.9% increase in operating profit year-over-year. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, people confined to their homes sought analog nostalgia through the "film look," and that aesthetic trend swept the camera market. It showed that once a certain level of technical performance is met, consumers value emotion—especially the film-like aesthetic—more than specifications.

However, this explosive demand produced an unusual market phenomenon. Popular Fujifilm models such as the X100 series and parts of the X-T series became completely sold out despite price increases of over 20% compared to 2020. According to analyses by Digital Camera World and other publications, it became nearly impossible to buy

a Fujifilm camera at retail price, and even secondhand models were being sold for more than the official list price, despite having similar specifications to competitors costing nearly half as much. This proved that consumers were willing to pay significant time and financial premiums for instant, film-like color and hip, nostalgic aesthetics. Fujifilm strengthened this loyalty through communities like "Fujifilm Weekly," which share and distribute film recipes for free, building a devoted user ecosystem. As a result, the camera evolved from a performance tool into an emotional luxury item that represents personal identity.



Recently, a true game changer has emerged—Panasonic. It has simultaneously solved the two long-standing pain points of camera users: the inconvenience of file transfer and the need for instant professional color. With the release of its new LUMIX S9 camera and the accompanying smartphone app "LUMIX LAB," Panasonic has introduced a new standard for photographic life. The core of LUMIX LAB is its LUT (Look-Up Table)-based sharing ecosystem. Through the app, users can freely download professional-grade color grading templates such as Kodak Film Look, Fujifilm Look, or Cinematic Look, and send them directly to the camera. When the user takes a photo, the chosen LUT is instantly applied, meaning that even casual shots look as though they were crafted by professionals.

Captured images are automatically saved to the smartphone through LUMIX LAB, allowing users to change LUTs, make further high-quality edits, and share instantly on social media platforms like Instagram. Panasonic calls LUMIX LAB a "game changer" that transforms the traditional photography workflow of "shoot → edit → share" into "shoot → share." The company also announced plans to make all future cameras compatible with LUMIX LAB. Soon after, Panasonic expanded this feature to video devices, allowing even amateurs to apply cinematic color grading—a process once considered too complex for non-professionals. This has been hailed as a remarkable innovation.

Powered by these breakthroughs, Panasonic has shown remarkable early market performance and strong growth since the release of the S9. (Exact figures are expected in upcoming quarterly reports, but clear upward trends in sales and market share are already visible.) Nikon soon followed, launching the "Nikon Imaging Cloud" app, which offers nearly identical LUT-based color services and promises to include this feature in all future Nikon cameras.

At present, Sony—the second-largest player in the mirrorless market—is the only major manufacturer lagging behind this LUT and instant-sharing movement. This indicates that the future camera market will focus even more on color expression and ease of sharing, and that trends are moving toward allowing ordinary users to achieve professional-quality results effortlessly. Consumers would do well to pay attention to this new wave and perhaps find the camera that best fits their aesthetic and lifestyle.

The Gangneung-Wonju

Herald

to 2025