Gender, Transnational Migration, and Athletic Career Development: the Case of Korean Players on the LPGA of Japan Tour

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Abstract

Ku Ok-hee became the first ever Korean female golfer to win a tournament on the LPGA of Japan Tour (JLPGA Tour) by her victory in the Kibun Ladies Classic on March 31, 1985. Since then, Korean players as a group have amassed 228 victories on the JLPGA Tour by the end of the 2019 season. Although this has been a truly remarkable accomplishment in the history of international sports, no systematic investigation has been conducted thus far about the factors that contributed to the success of Korean women players on the JLPGA Tour. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the rise and fall of the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour from the perspective of their career life cycles. More specifically, this study will apply the career life cycle model to the career pathways of the players on the tour. Each individual player's career history on the Korean LPGA Tour before the player's transnational migration to the JLPGA Tour will be examined to ascertain whether or not the player's pre-migration record is a reliable predictor of the post-migration performance on the JLPGA Tour. The number of tournament victories of each of the Korean players during the player's entire career on the JLPGA Tour will be reviewed. The all-time history of each individual player's money ranking on the tour will be investigated for both the active and the retired players. A cohort analysis method is used in investigating the tournament wins and money ranking history of the players by comparing the tournament win records and the all-time money rankings on the basis of the entry cohort to the JLPGA Tour.

Keywords Korean women golfers · Transnational migration · LPGA of Japan Tour · Cohort analysis · Role of sports in international relations

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Introduction

The sports industry has undergone a rapid process of commercialization and globalization. The transnational mobility of athletes has emerged as one of the most important phenomena that accompanied the internationalization of sports. The professional athlete tends to move from a smaller and less affluent market to a larger and more affluent market [22, 3]. The individual athlete's performance on the playing field determines where the player pursues his or her professional career. The changes in the athlete's performance level over the player's career life cycle may result in the mobility of the player from one league to another. Previous studies asserted that the athletes' primary motivation for transnational migration is to advance their athletic careers and the athletes tend to develop "psychological openness to further international migration if the opportunity (or need) arises [9, 31, 37]."

Since the monetary compensation package is one of the primary criteria for selecting the destination of player's move, one may decide to play for a league with a lower reputation but offer a more lucrative compensation. The professional athletes of team sports may be subjected to a forced relocation in their careers due to the trade from one team to another. Although the athletes of individual sports have some latitude, they may also have to take into account the changing circumstances of their professional careers and may make decisions to move. In any case, professional athletes experience the transnational migration from their country of origin to another country which may be followed by a secondary migration to a third country. In addition, many globetrotting professional athletes may return to their country of origin in the late stage of their playing careers before retirement.

Over the past 30 years, researchers in the field of sports management, sport psychology, and sport sociology adopted and modified the traditional stage theory and applied to elite sporting careers [2, 17, 42]. The previous studies defined an athletic career as "a succession of stages such as the initiation/sampling stage, development/specialization stage, perfection/mastery/investment stage, final/maintenance stage, and discontinuation stage of competitive sport involvement" [36].

The transnational mobility of professional athletes manifests dynamic interactions with the professional athletes' career life cycle changes. The previous studies on the residential mobility of individuals and households developed the models in which the life cycle transition was designated as one of the primary explanatory variables [20]. In fact, it was reported that life cycle stages account for at least five of the eight or nine moves Americans make in a life time. The residential change at an individual level is correlated with post-secondary school education, marriage, having children, job transfer, retirement, and other life cycle events. In the case of professional athletes, the entire career life cycle length might be short but also the transition from one stage to the next would be swift and unpredictable. It is believed that the life cycle model of geographic mobility is an appropriate approach for the analysis of the transnational migration of professional athletes.

One of the important methods of analysis in the study of migration behavior is to compare the characteristics between stayers and out-migrants at the area of origin as well as between non-migrants and in-migrants at the area of destination. The former is labeled as origin selectivity, while the latter refers to destination differentials [41]. Donato et al. asserted that transnational migration itself is a gendered phenomenon that

influences the selectivity from origin and the differentials at destination [8]. Lutz indicated that gender is one of the important determinants of acculturation of transnational migrants at the area of destination [21]. Previous studies reported that international migrants from less developed country to more developed country are favorably self-selected from the area of origin [4, 5, 6]. However, on average, the socioeconomic statuses of the immigrants tended to be lower than those of the resident population in the country of destination. Many countries have developed highly sophisticated screening systems of applicants for immigration to satisfy the specific national interests including cultural, economic, national security, scientific, and technological development [5, 16].

Most transnational moves of the professional athletes are temporary. However, the athletes' decision to move would be based on elaborate and rational evaluation of the factors at the country of origin, "push factors," as well as the factors at the country of destination, "pull factors" [26]. The potential earnings gap between the countries might be one of the most important reasons for the moves. The international reputations of the sports league in terms of the quality of players, competition level, playing conditions, and policies on work permits for professional athletes are the possible variables that may influence the decision to move. With transnational migration being fairly common in elite development pathway, the need to understand the cultural transition influences on careers has become relevant for the athletic career development. Previous studies identified specific stressors and challenges of migrant athletes, such as cultural, linguistic, and structural barriers of acculturation [1, 15, 25, 31]. Previous studies also noted that such personal factors as the relationships with family members, friends, and mentors influence the adaptation of transnational athletes to the country of destination [19, 27, 28, 30]. Furthermore, the international relations between the origin and destination countries may be considered in selecting the destination from potential pool of destination countries.

The Purpose of the Study

Ku Ok-hee became the first ever Korean female golfer to win a tournament on the LPGA of Japan (JLPGA Tour) by her victory in the Kibun Ladies Classic on March 31, 1985. Since then, the Korean players as a group amassed 228 victories on the JLPGA Tour by the end of the 2019 season. Although this has been a truly remarkable accomplishment in the history of international sports, no systematic investigation has been conducted thus far about the factors that contributed to the success of the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the rise and fall of Korean players on the JLPGA Tour from the perspective of the career life cycles. More specifically, this study will apply the career life cycle model to the career pathways of the players on the tour. Each individual player's career history on the KLPGA Tour before the player's transnational migration to the JLPGA Tour will be examined to ascertain whether or not the player's pre-migration record is a reliable predictor of post-migration performance on the JLPGA Tour. The number of tournament victories of each of the Korean players during the player's entire career on the JLPGA Tour will be reviewed. The all-time history of each individual player's money ranking on the Tour will be investigated for both the active and retired players. A cohort analysis method is used in investigating the tournament wins and money ranking

history of the players by comparing the tournament win records and the all-time money rankings on the basis of the entry cohort to the JLPGA Tour. The focus of the cohort analysis will be on whether there was a significant inter-cohort difference in the tournament victories and money ranking in the careers on the JLPGA Tour. The secondary transnational migration of the Korean players from the LPGA Tour of America to the JLPGA Tour will also be looked at. In addition, the characteristics of the players who make the return migration from the JLPGA Tour to the KLPGA Tour will be inspected.

Data and Methods of Analysis

The data used in this study are obtained from the websites of the LPGA of Japan Tour (lpga.or.jp), KLPGA (klpga.co.kr), and LPGA (lpga.com). The profiles of the players were available for the currently active and retired players. The “STATS” section of the websites offered the data on the tournament winners and money list rankings for each season. The statistical archive section of the websites provided the information on the career total wins, career total prize money earned, and career total events played for each player.

From the information included in the profile of each player, it was possible to determine when the player began her career on the KLPGA Tour and moved to the JLPGA Tour. For those players who were on the LPGA Tour and subsequently joined the JLPGA Tour, the time of their move was ascertained from the player’s profile and tournament records. Likewise, the return migration of the players from the JLPGA Tour to the KLPGA Tour was identified on the basis of the information available in the websites of the tours.

In order to track down the entire career history of the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour, both the active and retired players are included in this study. A total of 42 players are considered in the study. The players were categorized into five entry cohorts on the basis of the year when the player joined the JLPGA Tour: 1984–1989, 1990–1999, 2000–2004, 2005–2009, and 2010–2014. In addition, the players were divided into three groups depending upon their background characteristics before joining the JLPGA Tour: started the JLPGA Tour without any prior experience of playing on the KLPGA Tour, joined the JLPGA Tour after playing on the KLPGA Tour, and moved to the JLPGA Tour after playing first on the KLPGA Tour and then playing on the LPGA Tour. The grouping of the players on the basis of the pre-JLPGA Tour playing experience makes it possible to examine the effects of the career life cycle stages on the performance outcomes of the players on the tour.

A History of KLPGA¹

In 1978, the Korea Professional Golf Association (KPGA) created a women’s professional division. In the same year a “pro test,” a test to qualify to be a professional golfer, was conducted, and 8 players passed the test. The first Korea Women’s Professional

¹ lpga.co.kr, “KLPGA History”

Golf Tournament was held on September 20–23, 1978. Han Myung-hyun became the first Korean player who passed the “pro test” of the JLPGA in 1983, and Koo Ok-hee passed the qualifying test in 1984, and she had her first tournament victory on the JLPGA Tour in 1985. The KLPGA was founded on February 22, 1988. Koo Ok-hee won the Standard Register Turquoise Classic of the LPGA Tour on March 27, 1988, and she became the first Korean player to win on the LPGA Tour. In 1995, the Samsung World Championship, an official event of the LPGA Tour, was held in Korea.

In 1998, Pak Se-ri won three tournaments in her rookie year including two majors on the LPGA Tour, US Women’s Open and McDonald’s LPGA Championship. Pak won the Rolex Rookie of the Year award for 1998. Pak’s remarkable success on the LPGA Tour boosted the morale of the Korean people who were suffering from a serious financial meltdown at that point in time. Moreover, Pak Se-ri’s success story inspired many young girls in Korea to become professional golfers. In fact, a cohort of young Korean girls who were influenced by Pak had emerged as successful professional golfers on the LPGA Tour in their own right; subsequently this cohort of Korean players has been dubbed the “Se-ri Kids.” Those players who are regarded as “Se-ri Kids” would include Park Inbee, Shin Jiyai, Choi Na-yeon, Ji Eun-hee, Kim In-kyung, Ryu So-yeon, and others. With the rising popularity of women’s golf among golf fans, the KLPGA had entered a live broadcast coverage of its events with the Seoul Broadcasting System, one of the major television networks in Korea in 2000.

By 2004, a team of the players on the KLPGA Tour won the annual team matches between KLPGA and JLPGA for three consecutive years, thus showing that the quality of the competition of the KLPGA Tour was at least comparable to that of the JLPGA which had a much longer history and depth of players’ pool. The KLPGA expanded the structure of the tour system by having not only the KLPGA regular tour, but it organized a second tier, third tier, and senior tour under its organizational umbrella. As of June, 2020, the KLPGA has 1368 regular members, 988 associate members, 283 teaching professional members, and 9 special members.

In 2018, the KLPGA Tour had 28 tournaments, while the Dream Tour, Jump Tour, and Champions Tour had 21, 20, and 15 tournaments, respectively. For the 2019 season, the KLPGA Tour had 29 official events, and a total purse of \$19 million was the largest ever in the history of the KLPGA. In fact, the KLPGA had a greater number of tournaments and total purse than the KPGA had in recent years. The Korean media depicted the situation as “men low, women high” phenomenon, and it reflected the difference in the popularity between the two tours among golf fans. The KLPGA has been able to attract the major corporations as the tournament sponsors, while the KPGA has been losing the corporate sponsors which led to the shrinking number of official events and amount of total purse. The fans might be lured into watching the physically attractive female players on the television live broadcast. Such fan preference may be embedded in the sports market as the sports industry has increasingly become commercialized and entertainment oriented to attract the consumers. Nevertheless, it would be essential to guard against any exploitation of the sexual attractiveness to promote the sports in the market place.

Findings

Durability and Consistency of the Korean Players

As indicated in the previous section, Han Myung-hyun was the first Korean player admitted as a member of the JLPGA Tour by passing the qualifying test in 1983. Ku Ok-hee passed the qualifying test in 1984, and she had her first victory on the JLPGA Tour in 1985. Table 1 shows that Korean players as a group have accumulated 229 tournament wins during the period between 1985 and 2019. Before the year of 2000, only a handful of Korean players were on the JLPGA Tour. The Korean platoon was led by the three pioneering players, Ku Ok-hee, Ko Woo-soon, and Lee Young-mee, during the early period. In particular, Ku Ok-hee is a legend in the history of transnational migration of the Korean players. Ku became a regular member of the JLPGA Tour by winning the qualifying tournament in 1984. She played in 528 JLPGA Tour events between 1984 and 2012. She had 23 tournament victories including 3 majors on the JLPGA Tour. Her last tournament victory on the JLPGA Tour was at the APiTa Circle K Sunkus Ladies on June 19, 2005, when she was 48 years old. Although she was on the JLPGA Tour on a fulltime basis, she also had one victory on the LPGA Tour at the Standard Register Turquoise Classic in 1988. Ku Ok-hee was a pioneer of the women's golf in Korea in a true sense in light of the fact that she was not only one of the first cohort of players on the KJLPGA Tour in 1978 but also she opened the doors for Korean players to both the JLPGA Tour and LPGA Tour.

As shown in Fig. 1, the number of tournament wins recorded by the Korean players increased sharply over the past 15 years since 2005. Since 1983 the number of the Korean players who were qualified for the JLPGA Tour increased. The drastic rise in the number of tournament victories was partially due to the expansion of the pool of Korean players on the JLPGA Tour. More importantly, the continued influx of elite players with an outstanding record of accomplishment on the KJLPGA Tour and the LPGA Tour was responsible for the success of the Korean players as a group on the JLPGA Tour in recent years. More specifically, the early entry cohort of Ku Ok-hee and Ko Woo-soon was strengthened by the inflow of the middle cohort of Lee Ji-hee and Jeon Mi-jeong, and then the constituent was augmented by the addition of the recent cohort of Ahn Sun-ju, Shin Jiyai, Lee Bo-mee, and Kim Ha-neul. A salient ingredient of the success of the Korean constituent on the LPGA Tour is the fact that, while the earlier cohort had continued to produce tournament victories, the subsequent cohorts manifested a level of performance immediately after their arrival on the tour that was comparable or even superior to that of their preceding cohorts. The secret of the success was the combination of the durability and consistency of the existing pool of players and accession of the new cohort who amended the record of accomplishments of their predecessors.

Cream of the Crop

The website of the JLPGA offered the historical data on tournament winners on the JLPGA Tour going back to the 2007 season.² The information about the tournament

² “The Past Tournament” section of lpga.or.jp

Table 1 The tournament victories by Korean players on the LPGA of Japan Tour, 1985–2019

Period	Number of tournament wins	Number of wins of majors	Tournament winners
1985–1989	5	0	Ku Ok-hee (4), Kim Man-soo (1)
1990–1994	14	2	Ku Ok-hee (5), Lee Young-me (3), Ko Woo-soon (3), Won Jae-sook (3)
1995–1999	21	1	Ku Ok-hee (7), Lee Young-me (5), Ko Woo-soon (3), Won Jae-sook (2), Han Hee-Won (2), Kim Ae-sook (1), Shin Sora (1)
2000–2004	16	1	Ku Ok-hee (6), Lee Ji-hee (5), Ko Woo-soon (3), Won Jae-sook (1), Shin Sora (1)
2005–2009	38	4	Jeon Mi-jeong (13), Lee Ji-hee (7), Shin Hyun-ju (4), Shin Jiyai (3), Song Bo-bae (3), Lim Eun-a (2), Ku Ok-hee (1), Jang Jeong (1), Kim So-hee (1), Bae Jae-hee (1), Koo Yun-hee (1), Hwang Ah-reum (1)
2010–2014	65	5	Ahn Sun-ju (18), Jeon Mi-jeong (9), Lee Bo-mee (8), Shin Jiyai (6), Lee Ji-hee (5), Park Inbee (4), Shin Hyun-ju (2), Kim Na-ri (2), Lee Na-ri (2), Lim Eun-a (1), Kim Hyo-ju (a)(1), Kim So-hee (1), Na Da-ye (1), Ester Lee (1), Jeong Yeon-ju (1), Kim Young (1), Kang Soo-yun (1), Lee Mi-hyang (1)
2015–2019	70	11	Shin Jiyai (14), Lee Bo-mee (13), Ahn Sun-ju (10), Lee Ji-Hee (6), Kim Ha-neul (6), Lee Min-young (5), Hwang Ah-reum (4), Jeon Mi-jeong (3), Chun In-gee (2), Bae-Seon-woo (2), Kang Soo-yun (2), Kim Hae-rym (1), Bae Hee-kyung (1)
Total	229	24	

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_players%27_victories_on_LPGA_of_Japan_Tour

name, tournament site, winner's name, and winner's amount of prize money was also available. The corresponding data for the years before 2007 were not available in that archive. From the data set, it was possible to count the total number of tournaments that

Fig. 1 Number of tournament victories of the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour by period

were held on the JLPGA Tour for each season since 2007.³ A total of 469 tournaments took place between 2007 and 2019. The Korean players as a group cumulated 162 victories out of the 469 tournaments, winning a whopping 34.5% of the total JLPGA Tour events during the period. Five elite players, Ahn Sun-ju, Jeon Mi-jeong, Lee Ji-hee, Shin Jiyai, and Lee Bo-mee, compiled 107 wins of the 162 total victories by the Korean players as a group between 2007 and 2019.⁴ It means that the five players shared about 66% of the total tournament wins by the Korean players as a group during the period. Twenty-one other Korean players contributed about one-third of the 162 total wins.

The data in Table 2 show that 24 of the 38 players who had at least one tournament victory on the JLPGA Tour between 1985 and 2019 had one or more tournament wins on the KLPGA Tour prior to joining the JLPGA Tour. Nearly one-half of the 38 players had multiple victories on the tour in Korea. Ku Ok-hee had 20 wins on the KLPGA Tour, while Shin Jiyai secured 21 victories on the KLPGA Tour. In particular, Shin Jiyai has had an amazingly successful career on three different women's professional golf tours, LPGA, JLPGA, and KLPGA. Shin compiled 21 wins on the KLPGA Tour prior to her move to the LPGA Tour in 2009 where she had 11 victories. She became a member of the JLPGA Tour in 2008, and she has won 22 tournaments on the tour thus far. She won the Rookie of the Year award on the KLPGA in 2005, and she was the Player of the Year as well as the winner of the Money List Leader award of the KLPGA for both 2007 and 2008. Shin also won the Rookie of the Year award and the Money List Leader award on the LPGA in 2009. She was ranked number one on the Women's World Golf Ranking in the portions of 2010 and 2011 season. In 2018, Shin won the Player of the Year award of the JLPGA Tour. It is puzzling why she moved from the midst of such a successful career on the LPGA Tour to the JLPGA Tour. In an interview with the media in 2014, Shin Jiyai explained the reasons why she decided to leave the LPGA Tour and join the JLPGA Tour: "I was losing my passion. I felt like I needed a new goal. I wanted to find my passion again. The combination of injuries, as well as the travel and grind of my international schedule was breaking down more than my body. I feel more comfortable playing the Japan LPGA Tour to be nearer to my family in South Korea" [24].

Unlike the other Korean players who moved from the LPGA Tour to the JLPGA Tour near the end of their playing careers, Shin Jiyai had made a somewhat risky decision by leaving the LPGA Tour at the peak of her successful career on the tour. Retrospectively, however, her move turned out not only to be a career saving decision but also it offered her an ideal playing environment to establish another round of success as a player in Japan. It appears that Shin Jiyai made the right move at right time for her career.

The Rookie of the Year awards in professional sports are coveted and considered to be a solid predictor of future success in their careers. Unlike the balloting system used in Major League Baseball, National Basketball Association, and National Football League in selecting the winner of the rookie of the year, the KLPGA Tour, JLPGA Tour, and LPGA Tour use the point system that reflects the rookie player's performance in each and every

³ The number of tournaments on the JLPGA Tour had fluctuated from one season to the next. The smallest number of tournaments was 33 in 2010, 2011, and 2012, while the largest was 39 in 2019.

⁴ The tournament victories by Lee Ji-hee and Jeon Mi-jeong which were recorded before the 2007 season were not included.

Table 2 The total number of tournament victories in the player's career on the LPGA of Japan Tour, KLPGA Tour, and LPGA Tour at the end of the 2019 season

Player's name	First year on JLPGA Tour	Number of victories on J LPGA Tour	Number of victories on KLPGA Tour	Number of victories on LPGA Tour
Ah Sun-ju	2010	28	7	0
Jeon Mi-jeong	2005	25	3	0
Ku Ok-hee	1985	23	20	1
Lee Ji-hee	2000	23	0	0
Shin Jiyai	2008	22	21	11
Lee Bo-mee	2011	21	3	0
Ko Woo-soon	1993	8	17	2
Lee Young--me	1987	8	3	0
Won Jae-sook	1994	6	1	0
Shin Hyun-ju	2005	6	1	0
Kim Ha-neul	2015	6	8	0
Hwang Ah-reum	2008	5	0	0
Lee Min-young	2017	5	4	0
Park Inbee	2010	4	1	20
Lim Eun-a	2008	3	1	0
Kang Soo-Yun	2011	3	8	1
Song Bo-Bae	2007	3	6	1
Shin So-ra	1992	2	0	0
Han Hee-won	1999	2	1	6
Kim So-hee	2007	2	0	0
Lee Na-ri	2010	2	0	0
Kim Na-ri	2010	2	0	0
Bae Seon-woo	2019	2	4	0
Chun In-gee*	2015	2	9	3
Kim Ae-sook	1985	1	0	0
Kim Man-soo	1985	1	0	0
Koo Yun-hee	2005	1	0	0
Jang Jeong*	2006	1	0	2
Bae Jae-hee	2007	1	0	0
Na Da-ye	2011	1	1	0
Kim Hyo-joo*	2012	1	10	3
Kim Young	2014	1	5	1
Lee J.H.	2014	1	0	0
Jung Yeon-ju	2014	1	1	0
Lee Esther	2014	1	0	0
Lee Mi-hyang*	2014	1	0	2
Kim Hae-rym	2017	1	3	0
Bae Hee-kyung	2018	1	2	0

* Non-member of the LPGA of Japan Tour; source: lpga.or.jp

official event throughout the season. Table 3 shows the Korean players who won the Rookie of the Year award on the JLPGA Tour by year when the player won the honor. Three winners, Ahn Sun-ju, Jeon Mi-jeong, and Lee Ji-hee, have 28, 25, and 23 victories on the JLPGA Tour thus far, respectively. Ko Woo-soon who won the award in 1994 recorded 8 tournament wins on the tour. Song Bo-bae, the 2009 winner of the award, had 3 victories on the tour, while Han hee-won who was the winner of the 1999 Rookie of the Year award had 2 wins on the JLPGA Tour. Han moved on to play on the LPGA Tour and cumulated 6 victories on the tour in the USA. Song also played on the LPGA Tour after leaving the JLPGA Tour and won one tournament on the LPGA Tour. Winning of the Rookie of the Year award turned out to be a reliable predictor of the future success on the JLPGA Tour. It should be noted that these players had an extensive experience of playing on the KLPGA Tour and winning multiple tournaments before their move to the JLPGA. Hence, the outstanding performance record of the players on the KLPGA Tour prior to their move to the JLPGA Tour led to the winning of the Rookie of the Year award as well as the subsequent success on the tour.

The Origin Selectivity

There is a hierarchy in women's professional golf organizations in terms of the prestige. The organizational prestige is based on the number of official tournaments held, the total amount of the purse offered, and the caliber of the players competing on the tour. In this context, the LPGA Tour would be regarded as a core, followed by the JLPGA Tour, the KLPGA, and the Ladies European Tour (LET) in the semi-periphery and periphery. The transnational migration of professional women golfers would be expected from the semi-periphery and periphery to the core tour. The LPGA Tour has long been regarded a dream destination to many Korean women golfers if such an opportunity were available. Thus, many elite Korean players made the transnational migration from the KLPGA Tour to the LPGA Tour over the years. On the other hand, the JLPGA Tour has been considered a second choice of possible destinations when moving to the LPGA Tour was deemed unattainable due to various reasons.

One of the major barriers for the transnational migration to the LPGA Tour of the USA is successfully passing the Qualifying Tournament. The “Q-School” stages “multiple day tournaments, which are supreme tests of physical and mental endurance under intense pressure [32].” The participants at the Q-School not only include those aspiring golfers from all over the world but also the veteran players who have been on the LPGA Tour for some years but failed to make the money list in immediately preceding season. In any case, numerous Korean players passed the Q-School successfully and became eligible to play on the LPGA Tour. At the same time, many Korean players failed to pass Q-School, and they had to take the route of the Symetra Tour to qualify for the LPGA Tour. Many others who failed to pass the Q-school multiple times may give up and continue to play on the KLPGA Tour. In this regard, Ahn Sun-ju is an exceptional case in that she passed the LPGA Q-School in 2009 as the top qualifier among the applicants, but she gave up the seeded status to play on the LPGA Tour and decided to move to the JLPGA Tour.

Some Korean players who have been playing on the JLPGA Tour reported several important advantages of playing on the JLPGA Tour. First of all, the traveling from one

tournament site to the next is much easier, less expensive, and less time-consuming than traveling on the tour in the USA. Secondly, the course layout, length, type of fairway grass, and speed of the greens of the tournament courses of the JLPGA Tour are very similar to those of the KLPGA Tour courses, and the Korean players would not have any serious problems in adapting to the JLPGA Tour courses. Thirdly, the cultural similarities between Korea and Japan including the food and life styles tend to help the players adapt well to the tour life in Japan. Fourthly, the players would be able to contact family members in Korea and visit each other if it is necessary without great difficulty. Fifthly, the Japanese language is much easier to learn than English for an average Korean, and thus the Korean players become functional in a couple of years to communicate in Japanese. On the whole, it is possible that some of the elite Korean players may value these advantages of playing on the JLPGA Tour to a greater extent in the future than before. If that happens, the JLPGA Tour may become a more viable destination for potential transnational migrant Korean players compared to the LPGA Tour as a potential destination.

In the past, the top class of the Korean players on the KLPGA Tour tended to move to the LPGA Tour, and the players on the next tier went to the JLPGA Tour [34]. Although such an origin selectivity of transnational migrant players may persist even in the future, preferences of individual players may increasingly become an important factor that would influence in selecting the destination of their transnational moves. As the Korean players make their transnational moves at younger ages than before, the player's record of performance on the KLPGA Tour seems to be too short to be a reliable predictor for the career development at the destination.

One interesting recent case is the return migration of Jang Ha-na from the LPGA Tour to the KLPGA Tour. Jang joined the LPGA Tour in 2015 after establishing herself as one of the elite players on the KLPGA Tour by winning 8 titles. She had four victories on the LPGA Tour between 2015 and 2017. In May, 2017, she decided to leave the LPGA Tour and return to the KLPGA. The primary reason for her return to Korea was to be with her family: "I thought being world No.1 was the only goal in my life and that was where my happiness comes from. But I realized there are many more important things than that. Even though I won four times, I still felt empty inside. I made the decision because being with my family is more important to me than being world's top golfer" [18]. Jang Ha-na's return migration turned out to be a successful shift in that she has had four victories including one of the KLPGA majors and the BMW Ladies Championship in 2019 which is co-sponsored with the LPGA Tour. By winning an official event of the LPGA Tour, she became eligible again to return to the LPGA Tour. It appears, however, that Jang will stay on the KLPGA Tour for the foreseeable future. Jang Ha-na's case seems to demonstrate that the transnational mobility of the Korean players is becoming increasingly complex in terms of both the origin selectivity and destination differentials.

Migration Streams

According to the all-time money list of the JLPGA website, 61 names which appeared to be Korean names were listed.⁵ However, for some of the players on the list, any more

⁵ All-time money ranking of the JLPGA Tour tournaments that are counted in the money ranking: lpga.or.jp

information including the player's profile was not available. Thus, with the information on the background characteristics of the players, it was not possible to determine the transnational mobility status of some of Korean players who had ever played on the JLPGA Tour. In any case, at any given point in time, the Korean players' group on JLPGA Tour are consisted of the four different categories in terms of the background characteristics: (1) players who did not have any experience of playing on the KLPGA Tour; (2) players who played on the KLPGA Tour but did not record any win on the tour; (3) players with one or more victories on the KLPGA Tour; and (4) players who had one or more wins on both the KLPGA Tour and the LPGA Tour and moved from the LPGA Tour to the JLPGA Tour. Insofar as the available information on the player's profile is concerned, no Korean player ever moved directly to the JLPGA Tour without going through the playing experience on the KLPGA Tour.

As shown in Table 2, 14 of the 38 players who recorded at least one victory on the JLPGA Tour did not have any tournament win on the KLPGA Tour prior to their move to the JLPGA Tour. Lee Ji-hee who has cumulated 23 victories on the JLPGA Tour since 2000 did not record a win on the KLPGA Tour prior to her move to Japan. She had played for only two seasons on the KLPGA Tour before her move to the JLPGA Tour at age 21. Another player who had multiple victories (6 wins) on the LPGA Tour but no win on the KLPGA Tour was Hwang Ah-reum. She joined the JLPGA Tour in 2007 at age 20. Thus, having the experience of winning a tournament before joining the JLPGA might not be a necessary condition for a successful career on the JLPGA, provided that the player made the transnational move at a relatively young age.

The third category of the Korean players are those who had established an extremely successful career on the KLPGA Tour by winning a multiple number of tournaments on the KLPGA Tour before their move to the JLPGA Tour. Ahn Sun-ju, Ku Ok-hee, Shin Jiyai, Lee Bo-mee, Ko Woo-soon, Lee Young-mee, and Kim Ha-neul are in this category. Historically, these players became the core group that contributed a large portion of the total victories by the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour. Jeon Mi-jeong had only two victories on the KLPGA Tour, while she has rolled up 25 wins since her move to the JLPGA Tour in 2005 at age 22. Therefore, once again in some cases, the player's record on the JLPGA Tour was not completely consistent with the player's accomplishment in Korea prior to their transnational move to Japan.

The data in Table 2 show that 12 of the 38 players on the list had one or more victories on the LPGA Tour. The group was led by Park Inbee with 20 wins, followed

Table 3 Korean players who won the Rookie of the Year award of the LPGA of Japan Tour

Year	The player who won the Rookie of the Year award
1994	Ko Woo-soon
1998	Han Hee-won
2001	Lee Ji-hee
2006	Jeon Mi-jeong
2009	Song Bo-bae
2010	Ahn Sun-ju

Source: lpga.or.jp

by Shin Jiyai with 11 wins, and Han Hee-won with 6 wins on the LPGA Tour. Chun In-gee, Jang Jeong, Kim Hyo-joo, and Lee Mi-hyang had won on the JLPGA Tour as an invited international player. Especially, Jang Jeong won the Japan Women's Open Golf Championship in 2006, one of the majors on the JLPGA Tour, while Chun In-gee won two majors on the JLPGA, the Japan Women's Golf Championship in 2015 and World Ladies Championship Salonpas Cup in 2015. Kim Hyo-joo won the Suntory Ladies Open on the JLPGA Tour as an amateur at age 16. Both Chun and Kim have had a successful career on the LPGA Tour thus far. Ku Ok-hee, Han Hee-won, Chun In-gee, and Kim Hyo-joo recorded their victories on the JLPGA Tour prior to their win on the LPGA Tour in the USA. On the other hand, the two wins on the LPGA Tour by Ko Woo-soon came from her victories at Toray Japan Queens Cup in 1994 and 1995 which were held in Japan but recognized as an official event on both the JLPGA and the LPGA. The winning on the JLPGA Tour at an early stage of their professional career might have been a valuable international experience for Chun In-gee and Kim Hyo-joo for their subsequent career on the LPGA Tour in the USA.

Two players, Kang Soo-yun and Kim Young, had 8 and 5 victories on the KLPGA Tour, respectively, before they qualified for the LPGA Tour. Both Kang and Kim recorded one win on the LPGA Tour. Kang moved to the LPGA Tour in 2003 and won a tournament in 2005. After playing on the LPGA Tour for 8 years she moved to the JLPGA Tour in 2011 at age 35. Kang had 3 victories on the JLPGA Tour between 2011 and 2017. She moved back to Korea and played her last tournament on the KLPGA Tour on October 7, 2018, at age 42. Kim Young played on the KLPGA Tour between 1998 and 2001 and had 5 victories. She moved to the USA and played on the Futures Tour for 2 years and qualified to play for the LPGA Tour in 2003 and played on the tour until 2009 and had one victory on the LPGA Tour. In 2010 she moved to the JLPGA Tour and had one victory before her retirement in 2016 at age 36. It is interesting to note that both Kang and Kim decided to move from the LPGA Tour to the JLPGA Tour instead of moving back to the KLPGA Tour, not long before their retirement. The fact that the JLPGA offers more tournaments and larger amount of prize money than the KLPGA Tour might have lured them to move to Japan. In the case of the Korean athletes who played Major League Baseball in the USA and the Premier League in the UK made return migration to the Korean leagues in the past. In light of the fact that quite a few Korean players on the LPGA Tour in the USA are in their thirties, some of them may also decide to move to the JLPGA Tour before their retirement.

All-Time Money Ranking

In previous sections, the player's wins of the official tournaments were examined. The player's career record of tournament wins may be one of the most reliable indicators of the player's performance on the tour. However, counting only the number of tournament wins would not be sufficiently inclusive to take into account for the player's career pathways in its entirety. Some of the professional sport tours have been using the total amount of prize money won by a player as a yardstick of the player's performance. The "money ranking" is likely to reflect the "score card" in each and every event where the player competed. Hence, analysis of the money ranking data may complement the investigations of the data of tournament wins.

Both the PGA Tour and LPGA Tour have a long history of using a player's ranking in the previous year's season ending money list in determining the priority list for the following season. The ranking in the career money list is also considered in the priority list. In the case of the LPGA Tour, the top 80 and ties on the previous year's season ending money list make up the priority list for the current season. In addition, the members in the top 20 on the all-time money list as of the last official tournament of the previous year would also be on the priority list of the following tour season. For the JLPGA Tour, the top 50 on the previous year's money list will be qualified to play on the tour in the following year's season. The JLPGA Tour offers a lifetime eligibility to those players who recorded 30 or more victories on the JLPGA Tour.⁶ Unlike the policies of the LPGA Tour, the LPGA of Japan Tour does not offer a seeding on the qualifier list for the members in the top 20 on the all-time money list.

Becoming the winner of the official money title of a tour season is considered to be a major accomplishment for tour players on the professional golf tours. To win the money title, a player must demonstrate an outstanding performance in all tournaments consistently in which the player may compete throughout the entire season. Among the Korean Players who have ever played on the JLPGA Tour, three players have won the money titles. Ahn Sun-ju has won the most money titles with four. She won her first money title on the JLPGA Tour in 2010 which was her rookie season, and she won the money title again in 2011, 2014, and 2018. Lee Bo-mee has won the money titles twice, 2105 and 2016, while Jeon Mi-jeong won the money title in 2012.⁷ Although Ku Ok-hee had 23 victories on the JLPGA Tour, but she did not win the money title in her career. Also, Lee Ji-hee who accumulated 23 victories on the JLPGA Tour has not won the money title in her career thus far. Shin Jiyai who won the money titles on both the KJPGA Tour and the LPGA Tour has yet to win the money title on the JLPGA Tour thus far.

Table 4 shows the all-time money leaders on the JLPGA Tour. Of the top 15 all-time money leaders, six were the Korean players. Lee Ji-hee was ranked 2nd, followed by Jeon Mi-jeong being ranked 3rd, Ahn Sun-ju 4th, Shin Jiyai 6th, Lee Bo-mee 9th, and Ku Ok-hee 14th. It is truly remarkable that five of the top 10 all-time money leaders of the JLPGA Tour are the Korean players who are still active members of the tour. As shown in Table 4, Shin Jiyai and Ahn Sun-ju would be ranked 1st and 2nd in terms of the average amount of prize money earned per tournament. The number of tournaments and total purse of the JLPGA Tour must have increased over the years. The recent entry cohorts to the JLPGA might benefit from such trends of expansion of the tour more so than the earlier cohorts. Even when the all-time money rankings were compared among the players who joined the JLPGA Tour around the same time when the Korean players did, between 2000 and 2011, the superior position of the Korean players in the all-time money rankings did not change. The elite Korean player group which is consisted of Lee Ji-hee, Jeon Mi-jeong, Ahn Sun-ju, Shin Jiyai, and Lee Bo-mee simply outperformed their competition on the JLPGA Tour.

Table 5 shows the highest money ranking the Korean players have ever reached in their careers on the JLPGA Tour as of the end of the 2019 season. Of the total 42

⁶ "The 2020 JLPGA Tour priority list," lpga.or.jp. As of the 2020 season, six players have the lifetime eligibility status for the JLPGA Tour: Hisak Higuchi, Ai-Yu Tu, Yuri Fudoh, Tatsuko Ohsako, Ayako Okamoto, and Yuko Moriguchi.

⁷ "Stats: The prize money earned by year," lpga.or.jp

players considered, 14 players attained top 5 in the money ranking at least once in their career on the JLPGA Tour. On the other hand, 25 of the 42 players did not make top 10 in the money ranking in the career on the tour. In fact, 16 of the 42 players had failed to reach top 30 in money ranking in their career on the JLPGA Tour. Thus, there seems to be two tales of the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour as one group.

The Sponsors for the Korean Players on the JLPGA Tour

The professional athletes are celebrities, and they tend to build a sizable fan base. Many corporations recruit the elite athletes to represent the company's desired image and help to promote their products or services. The corporations would sponsor the athletes who are expected to influence the fans and audiences about the sponsor's brands endorsed by the athletes. From the perspective of the players, one of the important benefits of being sponsored is that the sponsorship becomes an additional source of income. The sponsorship confers the athletes' privilege to concentrate on their performance on the playing field without worrying about paying the expenses for the athletes' playing on the tour.

Previous studies developed the models on the relationship between the corporations as sponsors and the athletes as endorsers. The attractiveness model stipulates that the sponsors consider the physical attractiveness and likability of the athletes as the key criteria for selection of the athletes to sponsor [39]. On the other hand, the match-up model suggests that the images of the athletes as endorsers and the products or services offered by the sponsors must be compatible for the advertisement to be effective [39]. However, the findings of the previous studies which tested these models turned out to be inconsistent. Some previous studies reported a positive effect of the endorser's physical attractiveness on the endorsed products and services, while other studies indicated that physical attractiveness of the endorser had no significant effects on the products or services [11, 14]. With regard to the match-up model, the previous studies observed a greater effectiveness of the endorsements when the compatibility between the images of the endorser and the product or service is high. However, it was also found that there was no difference in the effectiveness between low compatibility endorsement and no endorsement at all [12].

The corporate sponsorship played a critical role in facilitating the emergence of the Korean players as one of the most successful groups in the history of the LPGA Tour. The corporate sponsorship also contributed to the rapid growth of the KLPGA Tour as an organization over the years. Sirak noted that "the support South Korean golfers get from both fans and corporations at home is something that needs to be emulated worldwide. Corporations have realized the enormous popularity the players have. They've jumped in there in terms of sponsorship money, endorsement money and really are supporting women's golf over there in a very, very big way."⁸ Many LPGA players who played in the events in Korea that were co-sponsored by the KLPGA and LPGA Tour noticed "how the galleries, TV exposure and all the adulation affect the

⁸ "LPGA Commish Wants To Improve Players' Endorsement Opportunities," <https://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Daily/Issues/2018/10/15/Marketing-and-Sponsorship/LPGA-Sponsorship.aspx>; [Golfchannel.com](https://www.golfchannel.com), October 12, 2018.

sponsorship support top Korean players receive.”⁹ Azhara Munoz, one of the players on the LPGA Tour, stated that the KLPGA Tour players “look like NASCAR drivers, with logos everywhere.”¹⁰

Samsung’s sponsorship of Pak Se-ri for her Hall of Fame career on the LPGA Tour became a benchmark of the corporation’s investment in the Korean players’ transnational migration to the LPGA Tour as well as the growth of the players on the KLPGA Tour. Kim asserted that “Korean women golfers’ transnational mobility was initiated, promoted, and strengthened by Korean multi-national corporations... Samsung invested 27 billion Won in Pak, and in return collected 2100 billion Won (estimated value of the publicity, public relations, and increased sales)” [13]. Kim pointed out that Samsung’s global sport marketing through golf started in 1995, when Samsung became the title sponsor of the LPGA tournament, World Championship of Women’s Golf [13]. Subsequently, the title of the tournament was changed to the Samsung World Championship. After Pak Se-ri’s win of the US Women’s Open in 1998, she signed a 10-year sponsorship contract with Samsung.

Ever since Samsung’s sponsorship of Pak Se-ri, many other major Korean conglomerates followed Samsung’s footsteps and became sponsors of players on both the LPGA Tour and the KLPGA Tour. In fact, as of June, 2020, there were 39 corporations that sponsor players on the KLPGA Tour. The size and line of business of the sponsor organizations varied widely, ranging from the major banking, financial services, construction, and insurance companies to the fried chicken restaurant franchise, kitchen ware and furniture, and substitute driver service companies. One striking fact is that the Korea Real Estate and Investment Corporation started its “women’s golf corps” which is consisted of six players on the KLPGA Tour on May 12, 2020, in the midst of the complete shutdown of all sporting events due to the pandemic of COVID-19.¹¹

From the perspective of the corporations, sponsoring the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour may have substantially different implications to compare with sponsoring players on the KLPGA Tour and the LPGA Tour. The sponsoring corporations would target the Korean fans and consumers by sponsoring players on the KLPGA Tour. By sponsoring players on the LPGA Tour, the corporate images and products may be enhanced in the international market through the exposure to the audience and consumers in North America and elsewhere via the media and television coverage of the tour events. However, the JLPGA Tour does not offer its players any meaningful exposure to the international audience above and beyond the domestic fans in Japan. Japan is the 5th largest export market in the world for Korea, and the Korean firms may want to be represented by Korean players on the JLPGA Tour to tap into the Japanese market.

The website of the JLPGA Tour provides the profile of the individual player on the tour. The information on the name of the company with which the player is affiliated is available.¹² Table 6 shows the information on the corporate sponsors for the selected Korean players on the JLPGA Tour as of June, 2020. Of the 14 players considered, 8 players had Japanese firms as their sponsors, while two players’ sponsors were Korean

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Edaily.co.kr, Even the coronavirus could not stop the popularity of women’s golf: A surge of women’s golf corps’ created by corporations, May 12, 2020.

¹² In the player’s profile, those players who do not have any corporate sponsors were categorized “free.”

Table 4 The all-time money leaders, money ranking, money amount, number of tournaments played, and average prize money earned per tournament on the JLPGA Tour as of the end of the 2019 season

Ranking	Player's name	Career total amount (yen)	Number of tournaments	Average prize money earned per event (yen)
1	Yuri Fudoh	1,364,023,382	452	3,017,751
2	Ji-hee Lee	1,199,733,359	508	2,361,679
3	Mi-jeong Jeon	1,151,606,804	445	2,587,880
4	Su-ju Ahn	1,100,114,790	253	4,348,280
5	Sakura Yokomine	1,044,111,888	342	3,052,959
6	Ji-yai Shin	982,790,526	204	4,817,601
7	Shiho Oyama	928,973,033	421	2,206,587
8	Akiko Fukushima	909,087,761	447	2,033,753
9	Bo-mee Lee	842,622,290	293	2,875,844
10	Momoko Ueda	819,364,476	322	2,544,610
11	Teresa Lu	747,797,478	263	2,843,336
12	Ai-yu Tu	740,239,934	733	1,009,877
13	Kaori Higo	720,505,537	556	1,295,873
14	Ok-hee Ku	710,981,852	528	1,346,556
15	Michiko Hattori	698,522,884	512	1,364,302

Source: lpga.or.jp

corporations, and four players did not have any corporate sponsors. None of the 8 Japanese firms that are sponsoring Korean players on the JLPGA Tour appear to be major corporations in Japan. Kim Ha-neul is sponsored by Hite Jinro, one of the major beer and soju manufacturers in Korea. Lee Min-young is sponsored by Hanwha Q cells which also sponsors several other players on the LPGA Tour. It is interesting to note that Shin Jiyai had a lucrative sponsor contract with one of the major investment

Table 5 The highest money ranking achieved in the careers of the Korean players on the LPGA of Japan Tour

The highest money ranking achieved on the LPGA of Japan Tour in player's career	Number of players
1st	3
2nd	4
3rd	2
4th	3
5th	2
6th–10th	3
11th–20th	9
21st–30th	4
31st–40th	4
41st +	8
Total	42

Source: lpga.or.jp

banking company in Korea, Mirae Asset, for the period of 2009–2013, but the Mirae Asset decided not to renew the sponsor contract in 2014 when Shin became a full-time player on the JLPGA Tour. Shin has had 22 victories and ranked 6th on the all-time money list on the LPGA Tour. Despite such an outstanding record, the Mirae Asset did not see the possible return that may correspond to its investment to Shin for her career on the JLPGA Tour. This may demonstrate that the potential return from the investment is the primary factor that drives the corporate sponsorship decision, not necessarily the player's record of accomplishments on the tour. Jeon Mi-jeong is another interesting case. Jeon has had 25 victories and ranked 3rd in the all-time money list on the JLPGA Tour. She had a sponsor contract with Jinro Japan, a Korean multinational corporation based in Japan. Jeon does not have any corporate sponsor, and Hite Jinro is now sponsoring a younger Korean player on the JLPGA Tour, Kim Ha-neul who is known for her physical attractiveness in addition to her solid record with six wins on the JLPGA Tour since 2015. In terms of the corporate sponsorship, the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour may be caught in the middle between the KLPGA Tour and the LPGA Tour.

The Career Life Cycle Stages of the Korean Players on the JLPGA Tour

On the website of the JLPGA Tour, the annual money ranking data are available for each player's entire career on the tour. Using the information, it is possible to trace each player's career life cycles on the tour. The money ranking data on 42 Korean players were obtained, and 25 of them were retired as of the beginning of the 2019 season, and 17 were active on the JLPGA Tour.

Figure 2 presents the player's ranking on official money list by player's career point of the 42 selected Korean players on the JLPGA Tour. The number of years on the tour ranged from 2 to 29 years, while the money ranking varied from 1st to 180th in the careers of the players.

As shown in Fig. 2, the player's money rankings by the player's career point tend to manifest an upside-down U shape curve. The money rankings at the point of first and second year on the tour varied widely from the top to 160th. Afterwards, the money rankings became clustered around above 50th between 3rd and 9th year on the tour. The money rankings turned out to be increasingly dispersed starting around 10th year. By 14th year on the tour, the players were evenly split into two groups, above and below 60th. The players who had stayed on the tour 20th year and beyond tended to be scattered below 60th. The data on the player's money rankings for her entire career on the tour indicated that no player left the tour while they were still ranked 50th or above, thus being eligible to stay on the tour.

A Cohort Analysis of the Money Rankings

The player group consisted of individual players with a substantial variation in terms of the year when the player started the tour, any year between 1984 and 2019. Each of the JLPGA entry cohorts might have been exposed to quite different conditions of the tour in terms of the structure of the qualifying tournament, number of official tournaments,

total amount of the purse for the season, tournament sites, rules of play, guidelines on equipment, competition level of the tour, opportunities for product endorsement contract and corporate sponsorship, availability of transportation to and from the tournament sites, and other factors [33]. More importantly, any changes in the state of the JLPGA Tour with regard to its financial strength, size of fan base, and television coverage of the tournaments would have a different level of impact on the welfare for the different cohorts of the players depending upon the timing of such changes. Hence, it is important to apply the method of cohort analysis to the investigation of the career life cycles of the players on the JLPGA Tour.

The 42 selected players were categorized into 5 cohorts on the basis of the year of player's entry to the JLPGA Tour: cohort of 1984–1989, cohort of 1990–1999, cohort of 2000–2004, cohort of 2005–2009, cohort of 2010–2014, and cohort of 2015–2019. The cohort size varied from 4 of the 2000–2004 cohort to 12 of the 2005–2009 cohort. For each of the cohorts, the overall shape of the curve of the money ranking by career point turned out to be similar, an upside-down U shape. The variation in money ranking at a given career point between individual players within a cohort is easily detectable from the cohort data. In older cohorts, who had retired from the JLPGA Tour sometime before 2019, the extent of variation in the money rankings tended to be greater at both extremes of the career life cycle stages, the beginning and the ending stages. The players were bunched up around 40th or higher rankings at the midpoint of the players' career life cycles for the 1984–1989 and 1990–1999 cohorts. For the post-2000 entry cohorts, the variations in the money ranking at early stages of the players' career life cycles were evident. However, unlike the pre-2000 cohorts, the post-2000 cohorts did not display any noticeable variations in the later stages of the players' career life cycles. This may be primarily due to the fact that many players of the post-2000 cohorts are still active on the tour, and some of them may be at the apex of their careers. In particular, the two most recent cohorts, the 2010–2014 and the 2015–2019 cohort, seem to manifest a greater concentration in the upper echelon of the money ranking hierarchy to compare with the older cohorts. This may reflect the increasing origin selectivity of the Korean players in recent years who have been making the transnational move to the JLPGA Tour. However, it may be premature to project how the entire careers of the recent entry cohorts may shape up since these players have been on the JLPGA Tour only 5 years or less.

Discussion

According to the priority list of players who qualified to play on the JLPGA Tour for the 2020 season, there were 11 Korean players. These 11 players received seeded status by making top 50 in the money ranking for the 2019 season or being a title holder of one of the majors on the JLPGA Tour within the past 3 years. In addition, six other Korean players were eligible to play on the JLPGA Tour for the 2020 season on the basis of their rankings in the Qualifying Tournament (QT). The rankings of three of the six players were higher than 35th, and thus they would be able to play in most of the tournaments on the tour for the 2020 season. However, the other three players whose rankings at the QT were below 35th would have a limited opportunity to play on the JLPGA Tour, and they would be assigned to play on the Stepup Tour, a second tier tour

of the JLPGA. The point here is that the JLPGA Tour is very competitive, and even those players who had solid records of accomplishment on the KLPGA Tour prior to their move to the JLPGA Tour may not secure top 50 in money ranking in a given season on the JLPGA Tour. The case in point is Kim Ha-neul who had 8 victories on the KLPGA Tour, and she had 6 wins on the JLPGA Tour since her move in 2015. However, her money ranking for the 2019 season was 56th, and thus she had to make the priority list on the strength of her win of the World Ladies Championship Salonpas Cup in 2017, one of the four majors of the JLPGA Tour. Had it not been for her win of a major, she would have to go through the QT route to qualify to play on the JLPGA Tour for the 2020 season. Kim Ha-neul's possible predicament should be treated as an unequivocal alert to any Korean players who plan to join the JLPGA Tour in the future.

The Korean media, especially the television networks that specialize in broadcasting the golf events, contributed to the rise of golf's popularity in Korea. Between the two television networks, the SBS Golf and JTBC Golf, not only the Korean men's and ladies' tours are covered but also the PGA Tour, LPGA Tour, European Tour, JGTO, and JLPGA Tour tournaments are broadcasted on live or tape delayed basis. The two golf channels tend to allocate a majority of their air time in covering the KPGA, KLPGA, PGA, and LPGA events. The coverage of the JLPGA Tour tournaments by the Korean television networks has been extremely limited. The major daily newspapers in Korea seldom report any news about the Korean players on the JLPGA Tour. Thus, despite the fact that the Korean players have been extremely successful on the JLPGA Tour, they have been nearly forgotten to many golf fans in Korea primarily due to the lack of media coverage of their performance on the tour. It is hoped that the

Table 6 The sponsors of the Korean players on the LPGA of Japan Tour

Player's name	Player's sponsor
Lee Ji-hee	IZAK, industrial waste collection, transportation, and recycling business
Jeon Mi-jeong	No sponsor
Ahn Sun-ju	Mos Burger, Japanese style hamburger restaurant chain with 1714 stores
Shin Jiyai	ThreeBond, industrial adhesive and chemical manufacturing company
Lee Bo-mee	Nobuta Group, a company which owns Pachinko parlor chains
Hwang Au-reum	No Sponsor
Lee Na-ri	Alpen Group/Golf 5, sporting goods manufacturing, managing ski resorts. Golf courses, fitness centers
Kim Ha-neul	Hite Jinro, a Korean distiller producing soju, beer, and whiskey
Lee J.H.	No Sponsor
Lee Min-young	Hanwha Q Cells, a Korean producer of solar cells and modules with markets in Germany, UK, Japan, and Korea
Bae Seon-woo	Daiwa Land Group, real estate management, resort development company
Yoon Chae-young	No sponsor
Chung Jae-eun	Kyudenko Corporation, a Fukuoka-based electrical facility construction company
Ahn Shin-ae	Swanicoco, a Korean cosmetics manufacturing company
Lee Solar	Pro Target Company, management of professional golfers, Golf Academy

Source: lpga.or.jp

Fig. 2 Player's money ranking of the Korean players by career point on the LPGA of Japan Tour

Korean media will report more about how Korean players are doing on the JLPGA Tour.

The Korean players on the JLPGA Tour may play an important role in improving the relationship between South Korea and Japan. The South Korea-Japan relationship has deteriorated rapidly in recent years, and there is no indication thus far that the two governments will try to mend their fences. On December 28, 2015, South Korea, President Park Geun-hye was still in power, and Japan agreed to irreversibly settle the issue of “comfort women” who were forced to work in Japanese brothels during WWII.¹³ Japan made an apology and paid 1 billion yen (\$8.3 million) to fund victims. However, on November 21, 2018, the President Moon Jae-in government of South Korea discarded the 2015 agreement on the grounds that the Park administration did not consult with the victims about the contents of the agreement [10]. In addition, on October 13, 2018, the Supreme Court of South Korea handed down a ruling that Japanese companies should pay restitution for forced laborers during World War II [38]. The Japanese government retaliated by imposing a restriction on exports of three chemicals to South Korea which are essential for manufacturing semiconductors and display screens. The Japanese government also removed South Korea from the “white list” of “trusted trade partners.” President Moon Jae-in responded by announcing on August 22, 2019, that South Korea decided not to renew “the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) that allowed South Korean and Japanese governments to share sensitive intelligence, including information related to North Korea’s nuclear and missile activities” [35]. However, on November 22, 2019, the

¹³ “Japan and South Korea settle dispute over wartime ‘comfort women’”, *New York Times*, December 29, 2015.

South Korean government reversed its decision on terminating the GSOMIA hours before its expiration and indicated that the termination of GSMIA will be temporarily suspended [43]. It was speculated that Washington persuaded Seoul not to terminate the military intelligence sharing agreement with Japan [43]. As a fallout from the conflicts between South Korea and Japan, there have been heavy economic losses for both countries. The exports from Japan to South Korea declined by 16.5%, while the exports from South Korea to Japan dropped by 11.2% between August and November, 2019 [40]. The number of Korean tourists visiting Japan declined from 2.9 million between August and November 2018 to 1.2 million during the same period in 2019. The number of Japanese visiting South Korea was down by 14% [40]. In addition, South Korean consumers boycotted Japanese products including clothes, automobiles, and beer [23].

In light of the persistent tensions between South Korea and Japan, one may contemplate what can be done to cool the tensions, and whether sports may play a role in bringing the two countries to a rapprochement. Rowe asserted that “sport is held by many state actors to possess the capacity to function in the service of public diplomacy, breaking through the formal barriers that divide people as national subjects by asserting a common, informal attachment to competitive games and be able to advance relations of ‘soft power’” [29]. Historically, sport has raised mutual understanding and has promoted peace in international relations. On April 10, 1971, 15 American table tennis players and team officials visited China for 10 days on the invitation of the Chinese leader Chairman Mao Zedong [7]. They were the first group of Americans to be invited to China since the Communist takeover in 1949 [7]. In February 1972, President Nixon visited China, and a breakthrough in the USA-China relationship followed [7]. Commenting on the historical significance of the visit of the American table tennis team, Chinese Premier Chou En-lai stated that “Never before in history has a sport been used so effectively as a tool of international diplomacy” [7].

Moving forward to February 9, 2018, at the opening ceremony of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, there were encouraging signs of movement toward a possible peace and harmony between two Koreas as well as the international relations at large. The North and South Korean teams marched under a common flag. Two Koreas fielded a unified team for women’s ice hockey. The leaders of the nations that they were having a perennial conflict in their international relations, President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Kim Yo-jong, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s sister, Vice President Mike Pence of the USA, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, were present. Retrospectively, the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics precipitated the Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un inter-Korean summit meeting in Pyongyang and the historic meeting between President Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un in Singapore on June 12, 2018. Although inter-Korean relations and USA-North Korean dialogues have turned into a standstill, subsequently the international community was hopeful that some tangible resolutions would come out of the summit meetings when the political leaders were still engaged in the processes of negotiations. In this context, the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics which was scheduled to begin on July 24, 2020, might have facilitated an opportunity for the world leaders to meet and deliberate on the major international issues. It is extremely unfortunate that the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics had to be postponed for 1 year due to the coronavirus pandemic, and thus the possible dialogs between the world leaders in Tokyo are not going to happen as expected at this point in time.

From the perspective of both JLPGA and KLPGA, the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics must be a major disappointment although it was an inevitable decision considering the pandemic situation. Women's golf is included as an official medal event in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and both Korea and Japan are in position to field a group of players who would be bona fide contenders for Olympic medals. Most of the major sports organizations had canceled or rescheduled their events due to the pandemic. However, the KLPGA Tour had decided to resume the 2020 season on May 14, 2020, and five tournaments have been held thus far, including the KIA 34th Korea Women's Open Championship on June 18–21, 2020. The KLPGA Tour did not allow any spectators to these tournaments thus far.

The JLPGA Tour also started its 2020 season with the Earth Mondahmin Cup on June 25–28, 2020, without spectators. Only two Korean players participated in the event, and perhaps the other Korean players were still in Korea and the coronavirus caused travel restrictions interfered with the player's return to the JLPGA Tour. In view of the positive role of sports for facilitating a political reconciliation between countries, it would be desirable to formulate a proposal for an international cooperation between the KLPGA Tour and the JLPGA Tour. One possible international event would be a modified version of the Solheim Cup, the biennial team competition between the top women professional golfers from the USA and Europe. The proposed event, tentatively titled as the East-West Women's Goodwill Cup, would be a biennial team competition between two teams, the USA/Europe and the Korea/Japan teams.¹⁴ The event may be held in the year when the Solheim Cup is not held and rotating four sites, Korea, USA, Japan, and Europe. One possible stipulation in team matches of four-ball and foursome formats is that each team should have two partners from two different countries. A team of a Korean and a Japanese player would compete against a team of American and a European player. It will be truly refreshing to observe both Korean and Japanese fans cheering the Korea-Japan team!

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¹⁴ The players from China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and other countries in Asia may be included in the Team East.

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