A conversation about the election race would be incomplete without mentioning what topics the contenders involved are locking horns with each other about. The Korea Times points out that while in previous elections the issues related to North Korea's nuclear program, and improving inter-Korean relations, were important elements in the debate, neither side is focusing on those at all in the current one.

Apparently, the point is that since the administration under Moon Jae-in did not show any real progress, interest in North Korea on the part of the public in South Korea has declined.

Lee Jae-myung raised the North Korean issue using just one sentence: “Establishing a peaceful economy on the Korean Peninsula, and revitalizing the North’s economy, will be a big boost for new growth.” This is in stark contrast to 2017, when he presented the idea of independent diplomacy focused on national interests during his sparring with Moon in the primaries.

A similar situation has developed with the other contenders. Lee Nak-yon and Chung Sye-kyun just briefly mentioned that they would continue the diplomacy espoused by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, but did not specify what kind of policy they would pursue to improve inter-Korean relations.

The same thing goes for the conservatives: Yoon Seok-youl said that “South Korea must show that it is founded on the common values held by civilized countries, so that it can provide predictability for its enemies, friends, competitors, and partners,” but did not elaborate further. Later on, Yoon was also vague: “North Korea is our main enemy, but we must cooperate on some aspects that can help bring lasting peace to the Korean Peninsula.”

Hwang Kyo-ahn criticized Moon's government policy toward North Korea, and promised to build a "sustainable
world", but did not go into any details either.

As for an economic agenda, political commentator Choi Young-il notes that, although economic indicators such as the volume of exports show relatively high growth when compared to other countries, people do not feel any benefit from this in their daily lives. The people are more concerned about the failure to stabilize the real estate market, and job creation strategies that only exacerbate social stratification.

At the same time, strong opposition candidates such as Yoon or Choi have worked in the legal industry for almost 30 years, and therefore have not yet presented a clear vision of their economic policies. Those who are experts in the field of economics, such as Yoo Seong-min and former minister of economy and finance Kim Dong-yeon, do not receive the same support as Yoon and Choi.

Perhaps the key theme in this presidential race will be justice. Riding on that wave, the Moon administration gained power after the candle revolution, but by now it has become clearly evident that the dragon conqueror has become a dragon, with no fewer teeth, especially after the scandals surrounding former minister of justice Cho Kuk.

On top of that, it is important for whom young people vote: economic polarization works in conjunction with generational conflict because older generations have houses, savings, and pensions that they should also receive, while the so-called MZ generation (Millennials and Generation Z) does not have any of this.

A number of commentators have drawn attention to the fact that “young people are not an ideological generation. They are said to have been liberal (in the 2017 presidential election), but became conservative in the by-elections (by selecting candidates from the PPP). They will vote for a candidate who can solve their problems, regardless of whether the candidate is a conservative or a liberal.

This is why Lee Jae-myung is so proactive about proposing a basic income for young people, although political observers and some opposition candidates have questioned the feasibility and sustainability of these kinds of transfer payment plans from a national budget perspective. As political science professor Shin Yul at Myongji University notes, “Governor Lee must first make it clear whether he plans to introduce a basic income system while maintaining existing welfare programs in the country. If he plans to do both, I doubt it will be a sustainable plan.” Lee has been rebuked that such a policy would quickly drain the government’s coffers, and lead the country to a financial meltdown.

Pie in the sky projects that are fantastical to varying degrees are combined with criticism of the opposite camp that, generally speaking, has the nature of ad hominem arguments: within the framework of both the Confucian and Protestant paradigms, the adversary must look like an unrighteous person. This means that there will be a lot of digging around for dirty laundry, but who will be knocked off the track - and who will reach the finish line and take the throne - will become clear in the next episodes in our chronicle.

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