



"Kick City," a concept put forth by the President and Vice-Chancellor of Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, Lam Khin Yong, raises the question: What if we brought the world's leading researchers to Korea to forge a 'Korean Silicon Valley' where companies, universities, and research institutes coalesce?

In a recent joint interview at the Seoul Economic Daily headquarters, President Ho Taek-hwa and Vice-President Lam Khin Yong of Nanyang Technological University (NTU) highlighted concerns over Korea's dwindling population, fading rural areas, and tepid growth potential. Yet, they posit, "Local universities can galvanize an innovation ecosystem by converging with Korean entities and top overseas talent."

Their objective is clear: entice premier global minds to Korea, promoting the amalgamation of science and technology while catalyzing job creation and the birth of innovative ventures and startups. This initiative, dubbed 'KICK-City', represents a quantum leap in altering the competitive landscape. KICK stands for 'Korea Industry Convergence Knowledge'.

Post-interview, they joined our correspondent to visit R&D facilities in next-gen semiconductor and advanced bio sectors, delineating their strategic vision for Kick City.

The plan envisages Korea's advanced manufacturing prowess and innovative R&D meshing with global academic minds. Through entities like MIT and the Technical University of Munich, NTU is positioned as a nexus for inviting stellar global resources. Engaging with the Minister of Education, they aim to propel this initiative forward next year, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties establishment.

Korea, they suggest, should capitalize on its collaborative experiences with China and Indonesia to architect a 'win-win model'.

Nanyang Technological University is likened to a magnet, attracting not only eminent scholars but also burgeoning talents. The Nanyang Distinguished Professor Program offers young, leading researchers initial grants of up to \$1.5 million and pivotal roles in interdisciplinary research. Singapore's use of English, low taxes, and its status as a base for numerous Asian regional headquarters provide fertile ground for worldwide collaboration.

In the pursuit of a Korean 'Silicon Valley', NTU's model of industry-academia partnership stands as a testament to its success. Vice-President Lam credits a well-established tripartite model of cooperation among universities, government, and businesses in Singapore. When a company commits to funding a research center at a university, parallel support is garnered from the university and the government. NTU

currently boasts about 350 partner companies and has established research centers with around 20 global corporations.

Exploring collaborations in high-tech areas like electric vehicle production with Hyundai Motors and smart mobility with Continental, NTU is a forerunner in fusing academia and industry for tangible innovations. They posit that universities are the proving grounds for nascent industries, a notion underscored by the extensive internship opportunities available due to their location in a high-tech manufacturing hub.

President Ho underscores Korea's strength in advanced manufacturing and R&D, advocating for the harnessing of top-tier global researchers to create a ripple effect of synergy. NTU's aim is to serve as a mediator and connective hub for the world's leading universities. Their active collaborations with prestigious institutions underscore their ambition to elevate Korea's innovative landscape.

Vice-President Lam suggests 'Pro Mix City' as a moniker for the Korean rendition of Silicon Valley, leveraging Korea's industrial might to attract and amalgamate outstanding foreign expertise. This backdrop to Kick City is underscored by Korea's scientific prowess and global appeal, further enhanced by the Hallyu wave. It's a country gaining worldwide appeal, according to Lam, who also expresses his personal admiration for Korea.

Ho and Lam envision Kick City as a platform for attracting cutting-edge global R&D centers and fostering an environment conducive for international scientists to establish their presence in Korea. Addressing issues like population decline and stagnating growth through this collaborative hub is seen as imperative.

During discussions with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Lee Joo-ho, and First Vice Minister of Trade, Industry, and Energy Kang Kyung-seong, President Ho affirmed the potential of Korea to become a bastion of R&D, spawning businesses and employment opportunities. A five-year strategy is anticipated within the next year, with proactive implementation to follow.

The 50th anniversary of Korea-Singapore diplomatic relations serves as an opportune moment for both nations to jointly pursue intellectual property generation through industry convergence, creating a win-win scenario and facilitating Kick City as a crucible for global talents post-K-pop, drama, movies, beauty, and food.

Vice-President Lam emphasizes the importance of knowledge, basic and applied research, and the convergence of industry and academia as catalysts for innovation. The goal is to metamorphose Kick City into a hub of international stature.

Nanyang Technological University's past initiatives in Indonesia and China lay a foundation for similar endeavors in Korea. With Guangzhou's China-Singapore 'Guangzhou Knowledge City' and Indonesia's 'Singapore Sustainable Innovation Research' project as blueprints, NTU aims to cultivate new food sources and reinvigorate old industries in Korea, alongside propelling basic and applied research.

The proposal to create a unique Korean Silicon Valley carries the promise of benefits for both countries, envisioning a shared future in smart city R&D and renewable energy. This bilateral cooperation could bring Silicon Valley's innovation spirit to Korea, inspiring future generations.

Nanyang Technological University's efforts to address societal issues and foster an innovative and educational ecosystem highlight its commitment to societal growth. Collaborations with Cambridge University and the Technical University of Munich exemplify NTU's international aspirations, further cemented by its partnerships with Korean universities and corporations.

In closing, the leadership at NTU holds a vision of creating a fertile ground for innovation, a nexus of academic and industrial prowess that beckons a bright future for Korea's technological landscape.