

Most powerful people in Asia

The leaders driving growth, investment and operational innovation across Asia's golf industry. **BY TREVOR MASON**

Asian golf's influence continues to expand, driven by leaders who are redefining how the game is played, experienced and invested in across the region.

At the top, Kim Young-Chan remains a dominant global force, with GOLFZON'S rapid international growth and continued innovation in simulator technology reinforcing the company's position at the forefront of modern golf.

This year's list reflects both scale and diversity in leadership. From major operators such as Kotaro Tanaka and Miyoshi Yasuyuki in Japan to emerging markets led by Nguyen Thi Nga in Vietnam, the industry's growth is being shaped by a mix of operational expertise, real estate development and tourism strategy.

At the same time, investment, infrastructure and competition continue to evolve. Leaders such as Cho Minn Thant are expanding the global reach of tournament golf, while executives like Choi Jung-Hun are connecting golf to broader infrastructure and development platforms.

Together, these leaders highlight an industry that is becoming more global, more technology-driven and more integrated with hospitality, real estate and entertainment.

Here's a look at this year's most powerful people in Asian golf:

No. 1 Kim Young-Chan Founder & Chairman / GOLFZON

Kim Young-Chan, founder and Chairman of GOLFZON GROUP, leads a global business operating in more than 60 countries and more than 100 million rounds played in the past year.

GOLFZON's North American expansion



gion gained momentum with GOLFZON Social venues in Scarsdale and Brooklyn, New York, as well as Oak Brook, Chicago. At the 2025 PGA Show, Kim introduced CITYGOLF, an urban concept designed to expand access to immersive golf experiences. The company continued to promote the concept at the 2026 PGA Show while also launching its GDR MAX simulator.

GOLFZON has signed partnerships to bring CITYGOLF to North America, including plans for the GOLFZON Open, a competition hosted within CITYGOLF venues.

Beyond business growth, Kim has emphasized social impact through the GOLFZON Cultural Foundation, which supports underserved communities and cultural initiatives in Korea.

The foundation has supported domestic culture and arts initiatives as well as underprivileged groups in society. Notable programs include the Hope & Happiness Sharing Festival for children from multicultural and single-parent families, the "Draw and Dream" Exhibition in Daejeon for cultural and artistic talent and the Charity Golf Tournament. Through these efforts, the foundation was recognized for its contributions and received the Presidential Citation

in the corporate category at the 2017 Korea Volunteer Awards. His leadership reflects a combination of technology, global expansion and new-format development that continues to influence how golf is played and experienced worldwide.



No. 2 Choi Dung-Kyu Founder & Chairman / Daebo Group

Daebo Group Chairman Choi Dung-Kyu has helped position Seowon Valley Country Club as both a golf destination and cultural venue through the annual Seowon Valley Green Concert. Held each year in Paju, Gyeonggi Province, the event is South Korea's first golf course-based charity concert and has drawn more than 620,000 visitors since 2000, expanding the reach of golf through a broader entertainment audience, including K-pop fans.

Founded in 1981, Daebo Group employs about 4,000 people and operates across construction, distribution, IT and leisure. The company reported ₩2.2 trillion (\$1.5 billion) in revenue in 2025.

Choi also oversees the Choi Dung-Kyu Cup Amateur Golf Championship, held

each August at Seowon Valley and considered one of Korea's premier amateur events.

Seowon Valley Country Club features 45 holes across two courses: the members-only Seowon Valley (18 holes) and the public Seowon Hills (27 holes). The property regularly hosts professional competition, including KLPGA and KPGA events, as well as the LPGA Tour's BMW Ladies Championship, which was played at Seowon Hills in 2023 and 2024.

No. 3 Yoo Shin-il

Founder & Chairman / Hankuk Industry

Chairman Yoo Shin-il, founder of Korea Industrial Co., Ltd., has spent more than three decades building a cross-border golf portfolio spanning the United States and Asia. His early expansion into the U.S. market began in 1998 with acquisitions including Wood Ranch Golf Club and PGA West, helping establish

a presence in one of golf's most competitive markets.

The ownership and operation of PGA West, a joint venture with Century Golf Partners, elevated Yoo's profile in the U.S. industry and set the foundation for continued international growth.

In 2024, the company expanded further with the acquisition of Ishiji Seaside Country Club in Kashiwazaki, Niigata Prefecture, Japan. The 18-hole course, located along the coastline, is positioned to benefit from growing demand for international golf tourism.

Today, Korea Industrial & Marine Co., Ltd. owns 22 golf courses across the U.S. and Japan, reflecting a strategy focused on scale and global reach.

Yoo was recognized for his leadership

with the Human Development Institute Management Award (Global Management Division) in December 2024.

No. 4 Kotaro Tanaka CEO / Pacific Golf Management

Kotaro Tanaka, CEO of Pacific Golf Management (PGM), has overseen the company's growth into one of Japan's leading golf course operators since taking the role in 2014. Founded in 2001 and public since 2005, PGM has expanded through a focus on acquisitions, supported by investments in IT, marketing and sales infrastructure. Today, the company owns and operates 176 courses across Japan.

In January 2025, Heiwa, PGM's parent company, acquired Accordia Golf, Japan's largest golf course operator, for 510 billion yen. The deal brings together two of the country's largest operators under one umbrella, while allowing both brands to continue operating independently.

The acquisition is expected to strengthen PGM's market position and expand its access to higher-end courses, reinforcing its strategy of scale, operational efficiency and portfolio growth.

No. 5 Miyoshi Yasuyuki CEO / Accordia Golf

Miyoshi Yasuyuki leads Accordia Golf, Japan's largest golf course operator, with a portfolio of 198 courses and 26 driving ranges. He serves as chairman, president, CEO and representative director, roles he also holds at Next Golf Management.



Accordia was acquired in 2021 by SoftBank's Fortress Investment Group for \$3.5 billion, a move that helped diversify Fortress' hospitality portfolio while driving new traffic to Accordia's courses.

Today, the company accounts for roughly 12% of Japan's golf market.

No. 6 Nguyen Thi Nga Chairwoman / BRG Group

Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Nga continues to shape Vietnam's golf industry through BRG Group's focus on tourism-driven development. She was recognized at the 2025 Vietnam Tourism Awards for the company's role in introducing high-end services and setting new standards across the country's tourism infrastructure.

Since founding BRG Group more than 30 years ago, Nguyen has positioned golf as a driver of international tourism and economic growth, developing a network of courses designed to attract global visitors and generate foreign revenue.

Today, BRG's portfolio includes nine courses totaling 163 holes across six complexes, with designs by Nicklaus Design and Greg Norman.

Nguyen has emphasized that golf courses serve not only as sports venues, but as cultural destinations that connect communities and enhance the broader visitor experience.



No. 7
Cho Minn Thant

Commissioner & CEO / Asian Tour

Cho Minn Thant has used LIV Golf's \$300 million investment to rebuild the Asian Tour and launch the International Series, significantly elevating the tour's global profile. He is now leading a five-year expansion plan to grow the schedule from 23 to 30 events, with average purses of \$2.5 million.



A key focus is reducing reliance on Saudi funding by securing independent title sponsors and expanding commercial partnerships across venues and regions.

"We do have the International Series going for another eight years, but we don't want to be reliant on that as our sole source of revenue," Cho said. "Our plan is to use that as a backup and to populate those tournaments with their own title sponsors so they would still survive if we didn't have the funds from LIV Golf."

The strategy is already gaining traction. The Asian Tour has attracted LIV players to its marquee events, driving record purses, while the International Series has expanded into the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe, including events in England and Scotland.

No. 8
Choi Jung-Hun

Founder & CEO / YIDO

Choi Jung-Hun, founder and CEO of YIDO Co., Ltd., is expanding golf within a broader infrastructure and real estate platform. The South Korea-based company operates across cleantech, AI infrastructure, transportation and real estate, with golf integrated into its CLUBD brand.

Under CLUBD, YIDO owns and oper-



ates 72 holes across three courses, alongside CLUBD Oasis, a resort-style leisure facility in Busan that combines golf, wellness and entertainment. The approach reflects a strategy of positioning golf as part of a larger lifestyle and destination experience.

YIDO has also invested in growing the game through its "CLUBD Dream Team" junior development program, which has produced more than 550 participants, including national-level players. Golf legends Park Se-ri and Park In-bee have contributed to the program through mentorship and training.

Beyond operations, YIDO continues to expand its investment platform, including a 2025 agreement with AMCHAM Korea, NH Investment & Securities and Han River Asset Management to support U.S. infrastructure initiatives. The company has also supported the Ddimdol Foundation, which focuses on developing junior golfers and expanding access to the sport.

Choi's leadership reflects a model that connects golf with infrastructure, development and long-term talent growth, positioning the game within a broader economic and lifestyle framework.

No. 9
Vicente Santos

Chairman / Sta. Lucia Group

Vicente Santos is leveraging golf as a key component of Sta. Lucia Group's broader



real estate and tourism strategy. The Sta. Lucia Golf Tour marked its 20th year in April 2026 with an event in Da Nang, Vietnam, re-

flecting the company's continued investment in regional golf promotion.

Sta. Lucia Group is one of the Philippines' largest real estate developers, with more than 24,000 acres across more than 200 projects nationwide. The company also owns 11 golf courses, positioning golf as both an amenity and a driver of destination development.



No. 10
Chanya Swangchitr

Owner / Phoenix Gold Golf & Country Club

As a female owner within the Thai golf industry, Chanya Swangchitr has pursued a model that combines course renovation and real estate development, which is rare. Her investment reflects her vision to elevate Phoenix Gold to the host of international competitions in Pattaya and expand it into a list-based golf and leisure complex development in the future.

After acquiring Phoenix Gold in 2013, the company invested in a complete renovation of the course and clubhouse, and in particular, the "Lakes" course among the 27 holes was redesigned in collaboration with Thai designer Pirapon Namatra.

Under her management, Phoenix Gold has modernized courses and auxiliary facilities in three areas: mountain, ocean and lakes, as well as renovated clubhouses, restaurants and locker rooms. It has also announced plans to list its real estate business by developing a nearby 160-hectare site.