The Challenges of Democratic Experiments in South Korean Politics

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After two decades of democratic experiments in South Korea, a rough road lies ahead for Korean politics. South Koreans have had four democratically elected presidents since 1988 when democracy was established. From the perspective of democratic consolidation, it is quite an achievement for all of the former presidents to have completed their terms, but none of them received a recognition or respect from the general public for their presidency. The current president, Myung-bak Lee, seems likely to face the same fate. It is fair to say that many of the general public are disillusioned with Korean political system and elites, in particular with their selected presidents, which is quite a challenge for democratic politics in South Korea to flourish. In order to enhance an understanding of the challenges that Korean politics faces in democratic experiments, this lecture discusses the ideological tension within a society in South Korea arising from the division between North and South Korea, as well as an authoritarian legacy. This lecture will also address the current generational divisions and tensions in South Korean society as well as male-female divisions regarding jobs, unemployment, and housing.

Dr. Hwang Juhong is a graduate of Yonsei University and received his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri. The author of several books on politics, he served in several important posts in the National Congress for New Politics and the Millennium Democratic Party. He served three terms as mayor of the southwestern city of Gangjin beginning in 2004 and, in 2012, was elected to the National Assembly as a member of the Democratic United Party.