

Hong Ji-yeon, professor at Univ. of Michigan

## ‘Overcoming legacy of authoritarianism is work in progress. If we don’t overcome it, we will regress’

### ‘Like ‘Parasite,’ highlighting Korea’s contradictions and tragedies is country’s true globalization’

“Institutional democratization does not automatically guarantee democratic representation. Without sustained efforts to overcome the legacy of authoritarianism, political regression could occur.”

Hong Ji-yeon (46), a political science professor at the University of Michigan, who visited her home country to attend the International Political Science Association (IPSA) Seoul General Assembly, spoke with Yonhap News on July 14 at a reception for Korean political scientists from around the world, co-hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency and the Korean Political Science Association.

The IPSA General Assembly is often called the “Olympic Games of Political Science,” bringing together some 3,500 political scientists from over 80 countries to discuss recent trends in global politics and future challenges. Hong specializes in the politics and economics of authoritarianism, with a particular focus on East Asia.

### ‘Political parties’ representative nature is biased towards certain elites. Diversity must be embraced’

Professor Hong, who completed her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in political science and international relations at Seoul National University and her doctorate in political science at New York University, served as a professor in the Division of Social Sciences at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology for nine years, starting in 2014. She is currently conducting various research projects at the University of Michigan, including the legacy of authoritarianism, the long-term impact of political violence, and the factors determining elite behavior and government policy under authoritarian regimes. She also serves as a Korea Foundation’s endowed professor of Korean studies.

Hong offered a profound perspective on the “authoritarian legacy” that underlies Korean politics.

“Because our politics began with authoritarianism, it’s difficult to



Hong Ji-yeon, a political science professor at the University of Michigan, emphasized in an interview with Yonhap News, “If we fail to overcome the legacy of authoritarianism, political regression could occur.”



Hong Ji-yeon is interviewed by Yonhap News at a reception for Korean political scientists from around the world, co-hosted by the OKA and the Korean Political Science Association, on July 14.

define what constitutes a ‘legacy,’” she said. “The process of changing institutions, culture and practices since democratization is, in itself, a struggle against and a process of overcoming that legacy.”

She explained this is a process not only experienced by Korea but also by all countries transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy, a process that involves regression, progress, and twists and turns.

#### **‘The roots of Korean politics are still in struggle against authoritarianism’**

“While both Korean political parties have elite-centered party structures, the Democratic Party broadly embraces former student activists and established elites, while the People Power Party tends to be centered around certain bureaucratic elites, such as prosecutors,” she said. “In addition to the ideological representation of political parties, efforts are needed to embrace diverse social groups.”

Regarding the relationship between authoritarianism and economic policy during the industrialization period, she noted: “Unlike the West, Korea is a successful example of a state-led development model. While it transitioned to a private-sector-centered system after the IMF foreign exchange crisis, the West, particularly the United States, has recently strengthened its industrial policy again, embracing the Korean model as a subject of study.”

She added that the recent U.S.-China economic war can also be

viewed as part of the restructuring of a state-led international political and economic system.

Regarding the globalization of Korean studies, she said: “It is clear that Korea is receiving attention as a country that has achieved both economic and democratic success, but the goal of Korean studies should not be mere boasting. As the movie ‘Parasite’ showed, true globalization of Korea is also about highlighting the country’s contradictions and tragedies.”

#### **‘Going beyond K-culture, the globalization of a deeper mode of Korean studies is necessary’**

“Expanding digital archives will further enhance the accessibility of Korean studies research,” she said. “Expanding materials with English explanations is crucial.”

She saw a clear positive impact of the K-culture craze on academic Korean studies. The influence of Korean culture leads to increased interest in Korea, which in turn leads to investment in and interest in Korean studies.

Hong emphasized that the next generation of Korean studies scholars “already possess exceptional linguistic sensitivity, a strong mindset and an interest in a wide range of topics. They are well-equipped to communicate and contribute to the global academic community.”

At the IPSA Seoul General Assembly, she presented on the topics of “The Impact of the Saemaul Movement on Rural Voting Patterns during Korea’s Democratization Process” and “Polarization and the Regression of Democracy.” 장