

[ Media Talk Show 2016 ]

# Concerns and Outlooks of the Younger Generation

## JoongAng Ilbo

**Moderator** CHUNG Kang-hyun Reporter, JoongAng Ilbo  
**Discussant** WON Heeryong Governor, Jeju Special Self-Governing Province  
**Performance** LEE Jung Singer  
**Rapporteur** RYOO Young-sun Global Affairs Team, JoongAng Ilbo

The Media Talk Show, launched last year in celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of JoongAng Ilbo, features a so-called "New Type of Concert," a combination of debates on current issues and performances by the younger generation in their 20s and 30s. This year's concert, on the theme of "Concerns and Outlooks of the Younger Generation," was held on Jeju Island for the first time to commemorate the 11<sup>th</sup> Jeju Forum.

- **Chung** It is said that the results of this year's general election, which reduced the ruling party to a minority, reflects the outrage of the younger generation.
- **Won** It not only reflected the opinion of young adults who have few job opportunities, but also the sentiment of those in their 50s, who feel increasingly anxious about retirement as well as for the future of their children. Those issues are what politics and politicians are expected to address. At least, they should give the hope that things will get better in the future. But they seem only interested in lining their own pockets, and it is only too natural that voters feel enraged.
- **Chung** As a politician yourself, what do you think you should do for the younger generation?
- **Won** The current social malaise in South Korea

stems largely from structural factors. At the heart of the problems of those in their 20s lies job opportunities, while the older generation is concerned about housing. The two issues are closely connected. The older generation has spent their whole life securing a house, and a drop in housing prices would put their assets and life after retirement at risk. On the other hand, an increase in housing prices puts a heavier burden on the younger generation. We must find a fine balance between the two. Preaching words like the "youth is supposed to suffer" sounds so irresponsible in the face of these structural problems. Offering an umbrella to the young in the rain would be the best solution, but if that is not possible, we should at least get rained on together and seek a solution together.

- **Chung** The younger generation, too, should do something about this.
- **Won** Across all ages and places, the young generation always suffered and felt lost. They should have courage and the mindset to accept the suffering as their privilege. I sometimes feel heavy when some young people talk about the so-called "gold spoon theory" and simply give up trying. I do not mean to moralize that they need to make

more effort. While the younger generation exerts passion, politicians have to set the stage for them to prove their worth.

- **Chung** You were top in exam after exam, from the SAT to the bar exam, and it seems that this makes you have a hard time sympathizing with ordinary young people.
- **Won** I had ups and downs until I passed the bar exam. I engaged in student activism for about 10 years, and it was a hard time for me. When I was being chased by the police for staging anti-government protests, rumors were going around that I was drowned in Baengnokdam Lake on Halla Mountain. But the experience served as a basis for my growth. I feel grateful to my parents for trusting and waiting for me to rise up again.
- **Chung** Sometimes, we make unlikely choices at the crossroads. You also chose to become a prosecutor instead of a judge even though you graduated from the Judicial Training Institute with honors.
- **Won** I thought sitting all day as a judge looking into documents was not enough to consume my youthful passion. At the time, an anti-corruption campaign was in full swing under the Kim Young-sam government, and prosecutors spearheading a series of investigations seemed gorgeous to me. I found it exciting to find something out of nothing.
- **Chung** You made another unlikely choice when you entered politics as a Grand National Party member, instead of the opposition Democratic Party, even though you have a dissident background.
- **Won** My experience as a prosecutor and an attorney as well as the financial crisis changed my mind a lot. I used to be preoccupied with democratization in my 20s, but I started to think about state affairs and national policies, including economic growth. Besides, I found that Korean society can make progress not only through the struggles of the progressive line but also by reforming the conservative camp.
- **Chung** You ran for the presidential candidacy in the 2007 primary, despite a lot of hardship.
- **Won** I believe that the conservative party should not stand in the way of innovation, only to pro-



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WON Heeryong

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tect the vested rights of chaebol. By joining the primary race till the end, I wanted to make people aware that there are voices for the common people within the conservative party.

- **Chung** What are your plans after your term as a governor?
- **Won** Jeju Island is a kind of test bed for me. I used to be outspoken as a politician but I still have to prove myself as an able administrator. After that, I want to play a role of contributing to statecraft, possibly as President of the Republic of Korea if popular support gives me the chance to do so.

## Policy Implications

- A politician's job is to create hope for the future and make it come true. Therefore, they should keep challenging the status quo to accomplish their tasks.
- All public policies should be oriented toward job creation. In addition, it requires concerted efforts by society to establish long-term plans to create new job opportunities.
- Indiscriminate development of Halla Mountain by Chinese capital has been put on hold. The natural beauty of Jeju Island could be irrevocable, if destroyed by or handed over to Chinese capital.
- Developing a creative, culturally high-end tourism program will dispel the shoddy image of Jeju tourism. It will also help increase the capital of local residents.