Crisis in the Women’s Movement in South Korea?

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This paper explores feminist practice in South Korea in changing political contexts on the basis of in-depth interviews with 5 young feminist activists (in their 20s and 30s) and analysis of secondary sources. Feminism has been regarded as 'Western culture' in most Asian countries. Feminists in Asian countries have been criticised for the introduction of feminism to their countries and for the careless application of 'Western thought' to their local contexts. However, some Asian countries like Korea have developed their own feminist practice rooted in their specific socio-political and cultural context. Korean women’s movement has both been vigorous in pursuing relationships with the state. There is little doubt that these strategies have produced significant advances in gender equality and have seen a partial institutionalisation of feminist perspectives within state policy-making processes. However, a triumphalist view of the gains of liberal feminism does not tell the whole story. Korean women’s movements have experienced risks and disadvantages. The consciousness of crisis in the movement was has been heightened in particular, among young feminist activists and some academics. One significant challenge has been the ability to adapt to changing political contexts in particular after the Conservative Lee Myung Bak government took office in 2008. This paper explores the ways in which the women's movement have changed and adapted to new environments.