



Korean Studies in Social Sciences Series III:

Prof. Markus Pohlmann (Universität Heidelberg, Germany)
The Fight Against Corruption in Korea

May 16, 2018 (Wednesday), 6-8pm, Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30

Abstract:

Early April 2018, the former president Park Geun Hye, South Korea's first female president, was found guilty of corruption and was convicted of being part of an elaborate cash-for-favors scheme with long-time friend and informal adviser, Choi Soon-sil, in which Choi sought donations from major Korean companies—including Samsung—for foundations she set up. The whole drama has not only taken the very active civil society movements in South Korea to the street, led to a vote of mistrust and the resignation of the president, but also to the arrest of all parties involved as well as to early elections, which took place on May 9, 2017.

South Korea is a relatively young democracy with a significant culture of giving and taking, personal trust and a strongly defining socialization in school classes and educational institutions. However, many cultural rules of giving and taking are today subject to modern corporate and regulatory compliance rules as well as strict anti-corruption laws. The only thing one can see is that all the presidents—with the exception of Park Chung-hee (1962-1979), who was assassinated in 1979—were under investigation for corruption and fraud during or after their terms of office. Likewise, the presidents of South Korea's big corporate groups often end up in jail as a result of bribery and fraud. What is the pattern behind all this? In my talk, I will highlight three key factors to explain the South Korean pattern of corruption and of the challenges of the fight against it.

Prof. Markus Pohlmann is a full professor of Sociology at Heidelberg University. His major fields of research are: Sociology of Organization, Sociology of Management, Corporate Crime Studies, especially East Asia, Brazil, USA, and Germany. Pohlmann received his diploma in Sociology at the University of Bielefeld and worked as a lecturer at the University of Lüneburg. After his Ph.D., he went to the University of Jena in the Eastern Part of Germany as an assistant and associate professor. He is recently in charge of a big research project on "The Fight against Corruption," funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.