

## Disgraced cloning expert convicted in South Korea (Update)

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South Korean disgraced scientist Hwang Woo-suk arrives for his trial at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul, South Korea, Monday, Oct. 26, 2009. The court prepared to deliver a verdict Monday in the trial of Hwang whose fraudulent claims of breakthroughs in stem cell research shook the international scientific community. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

(AP) -- A South Korean stem cell scientist once hailed as a hero for bringing hope to people with incurable diseases and creating the world's first cloned dog was convicted Monday on criminal charges related to faked research, but avoided jail.

The Seoul Central District Court sentenced [Hwang Woo-suk](#) to two years in prison for embezzling research funds and illegally buying human eggs. However, it suspended the penalty, allowing him to stay free if he

breaks no laws for three years.

Prosecutors had asked for four years in prison, but Judge Bae Ki-yeol said the 56-year-old scientist had shown remorse and had notable achievements in dog cloning.

Hwang, who appeared confident as he walked into the courthouse, made no comment as he left. His lawyer, Yoo Chul-min, suggested in an interview with the YTN television network that he would not appeal, saying Hwang had been unable to concentrate on his research because of the "time-consuming" trial.

Prosecutors were not immediately available for comment late Monday.

The verdict was the culmination of a long fall from grace for a man once hailed as a pioneer in stem cell research.

Hwang gained worldwide fame in 2004 when he and his former colleagues at Seoul National University claimed in a paper published in the journal *Science* that they had created the world's first cloned human embryos - and had extracted stem cells from them.

A year later, Hwang's team also claimed in the journal that they had created human [embryonic stem cells](#) genetically matched to specific patients, a purported breakthrough that promised a way to withstand rejection by a patient's immune system.

Stem cell research is highly controversial, and Hwang had been the only South Korean scientist allowed to carry out studies on the master cells that scientists say could lead to revolutionary cures for hard-to-treat diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

The South Korean government showered him with lavish perks,

designating him the country's first "top scientist," giving him generous research funds and assigning personal bodyguards and a diplomat to assist him with international contacts. Korean Air gave Hwang and his wife free first-class flights for a decade, calling the scientist a "national treasure."

But Hwang's reputation quickly eroded after questions about his claims led to an investigation by a university committee. It concluded that the 2005 paper was based on faked data, and also cast doubt on the previous findings. The journal, *Science*, retracted both papers.

The South Korean government stripped him of the right to conduct stem cell research and other privileges in 2006.

He was charged later that year with fraud for allegedly accepting some 2 billion won (about \$2 million) in private donations under false pretenses. He also was accused of embezzling 800 million won (about \$800,000) and buying human eggs for research in violation of South Korea's bioethics laws.

Hwang eventually admitted the data was faked but claimed he had been deceived by a fellow researcher.

The trial, which heard testimony from more than 60 witnesses, lasted more than three years. During an August hearing, Hwang pleaded for leniency, saying he was ready to "pour the last of my passion" into his research.

On Monday, Judge Bae dismissed the main fraud charge against him, saying it was difficult to believe Hwang intended to deceive donors to get funding.

Hwang, who with his Seoul National University team of scientists

created the first known cloned dog, Snuppy, in 2005, has focused on cloning canines since being fired by the university and stripped of the right to conduct stem cell research.

Hwang still has a loyal following, with dozens of supporters rallying outside the court Monday and chanting "We trust Dr. Hwang."

"This is a dire matter for us," said Choi Bu-am, a polio victim who is a vice president of the Korea Culture Association for the Disabled. "We want the government to allow Hwang to resume his stem cell research."

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