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I

Democratization: Generalizing the East Asian Experience

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Can a study of democratization in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China hold general lessons? Some analysts even doubt that East Asia has yet democratized. They argue that Japan has been run since World War II by one probusiness party and that there has been no peaceful transfer of power to a genuine challenger. In this view that mythologizes the Western experience, democracy means a clash of opposing interests resulting in the voting of the "ins" out of power. Democracy is defined so that Japan is not democratic. Power in Japan is contained within a conservative consensus. In fact, authoritarian elites in South Korea and Taiwan are trying to copy Japan's supposedly nondemocratic system. In addition, in the standard perspective that takes the West as normal and Asia as anomalous, East Asia's miracle economies are credited to East Asia's singular Confucian culture. How can such political, economic, and cultural uniqueness hold general lessons on democratization?

The analytic consensus treats Japan as an exception, not the rule. In 1990 a wise theorist of the politics of democratization dismissed the East Asian instances because, given corporate politics and economic success, the usual divisions that need attention and healing for a democratic transition "are less salient in the newly industrialized countries of Asia."¹ Also, Japan's "transition, coming after defeat in World War Two" by "imposing democracy on a defeated dictatorship" is "irrelevant," both because it "is unlikely to repeat itself" and because the transition was a result of "international" pressure. "Thus, there is little to learn from the historical examples."²

Another able analyst in 1991 found Japan "a de facto one party state run

by bureaucrats . . . whose sense of values and culture is not shared by the West" since Japan's racial, mystical, hierarchical zealotry finds the liberal individualism of democracy decadent, "cold, divisive and amoral."³ Japan, understood as a dominant-party system with a nonindividualistic culture is portrayed as the opposite of a democratic West where both parties and individuals are supposedly culturally shaped for continuous clashes. In fact, what is assumed about the West's imperatives for democratization is dangerously misleading Western mythology.

The conventional argument holds that democracy requires an independent, individualistic, rational, and tolerant culture as a soil in which to grow. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew argued that China's very different culture was the source of China's spring 1989 tragedy, that "students in China had been watching on Chinese television for several years the almost nightly demonstrations of 'people power' in the Philippines and South Korea and forgot that China was a very different country."⁴ In like manner, numerous writers long contended that a culture of dependence, irrationality, and envy forged a Russian (Asian) psyche unsuited to democracy. Yet Russia and even more "Asian" parts of the former Soviet Union have made democratic breakthroughs.

But facts have had little impact on those who insist that Protestant Britain gives meaning to the essence of democracy. Despite democratization in some thirty Catholic countries in southern Europe and South America, Seymour Martin Lipset in 1990 still contended "that the correlation of democracy with Protestantism and a past British connection point up the importance of cultural factors." He still believed that it was determinative that "Catholic nations . . . are authoritarians in spiritual matters."⁵ Historical developments should long ago have buried theories about cultural preconditions for democracy.

Actually, democratic cultures are the consequences, not the causes, of democratization. Protestantism in the first era of modern democratization tended to be fundamentalist and intolerant. The Church of England was authoritarian and hierarchical, much as the Roman Catholic Church, something that American democratic colonists often criticized. In fact, the insistence that a free nation required "truly free and rational moral agents, autonomous directors of their own lives, independent of the constraints of ossified custom and established authority"⁶ was an argument used to exclude certain communities, such as Catholics, from citizenship. Catholics were deemed unsuited for freedom.

The established mythology mistakes an anti-democratic pretext for a democratic cause. Germans used the argument to brand Jews as immoral and degraded enemies of the people, a premodern germ that had to be removed so Germany could live. To imagine the West as an individualistic culture is to negate an anti-democratic construction invoked to legitimate a war against,

or to gain control over, other communities. That is how even John Stuart Mill defended British imperialism. The natives lacked the essentials.

If one takes off narrowly self-serving, anti-democratic, cultural blinders, the actual politics of East Asian democratization comes into clear focus. Political scientist T. J. Pempel noted that "in Italy and Japan one sees fragmentation on the left and relative unity on the right." Japan's advantage was a political organization of "soft hegemony," leaving Japan's conservatives "far more able to respond tactically to its opponents and to changing political opportunities."⁷ Japan's democratization is explicable in ordinary and generalizable political terms. Instead, even the wisest of theorists have dismissed East Asian "accomplishments" as "exceedingly rare."⁸ This misses lessons for democratization in general that concern the centrality of broad consensus to the consolidation of democratic breakthroughs. The chapters in this volume contribute to what is usually missed.

Some observers confuse Japan's quite typical form of democratic consolidation, conservative democracy, with reactionary dictatorship.⁹ In fact, post-World War II Japan democratized. That is, institutions had been entrenched that provided fair rules and space for people to express their purposes and to peacefully challenge, contest, and eventually to compromise on major policy issues without fear of loss of liberty, property, or life. The military and security police did not kidnap, torture, or murder peaceful challengers. In contrast to Japan, for decades after World War II, elsewhere in East Asia, elite intransigents in Taiwan and South Korea in control of politicized security forces relied on coercion to repress or terrorize challengers. Subsequent democratizations in Korea and Taiwan have been as different from each other as each has been from Japan. Contrary to the conventional Western misperception, East Asia's paths to democracy are as diverse as is any other region's. Yet democratic consolidation, in Europe or Asia, is bound by a similar general political logic.

Democratization presupposes a taming and neutralization of the elite's anti-democratic military and security forces.¹⁰ Entering the last decade of the twentieth century, arms of coercion in China were still props of elite intransigents whose values and interests precluded risking an ascension to power by challengers through a popular vote. Conservative elites in South Korea or Taiwan who cannot control their violent intransigents can reverse their democratic breakthrough and prevent democratic consolidation. As the culture of the German Protestant Reformation and a middle-class economy did not guarantee that the Weimar Republic would succeed, so recent gains in wealth in South Korea and Taiwan do not guarantee a democratic consolidation. In the political experience of Japan and the rest of East Asia are general lessons for democratic consolidation that are missed by theories focusing solely on individualistic cultural values and a middle-class economy.

Democracy is a process that institutionalizes fair, general rules that risk a

loss of power. If a government, after an initial democratic breakthrough, resorts to force or fraud and does not play by the new democratic rules of the game, then, at the popular level, the power holders will seem illegitimate and a violent anti-democratic opposition can seem legitimate. Democracy then will have a difficult time. If the late-twentieth-century democratizing regime in Korea or Taiwan changes the rules during the game, it will make people cynical and foster chaos, civil strife, and an end to democratization. In the struggle to consolidate democracy, concessions to both intransigent elites and challengers are required in order to build a broad democratic consensus. Consolidating democracy involves avoiding the persistence of significant populations of polarized, violent intransigents. Legitimate clashes of groups, interests, and individuals are a subsequent development.

In Japan, the Cold War seemed to initiate a course away from full democratization. Efforts to build popular union strength, to weaken elite financial cliques, and to outlaw war criminals ended. Worried about radical unions, not reactionary elites, ruling conservatives made what was proclaimed to be democracy appear to be in continuity with the despotic past in which rulers legitimated repression as expunging communism.

The flaw that could subvert democracy was not electoral victory by the "ins" but an experience of cheating by the "ins." A grand conservative coalition that won elections could not be legitimated by a marred process. Political processes are crucial. If conservative predominance had, in fact, come from continually changing the rules while the game was in progress, Japanese democracy would not have been consolidated. But, over time, it became ever clearer in Japan that the victors played by established rules that involved key concessions to challengers. Eleanor Roosevelt noted on a 1952 visit to Japan that "there is a contradiction in this whole political situation here because the reactionaries are actually in power but they accepted and uphold the very liberal constitution which we forced upon them. They really do not believe in most of the measures . . . but the people do believe in them and they do not dare repudiate them."¹¹

Still, had Japan's conservative Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida conceded to Washington's 1950s pressure for cold war military activities against foreign communists, or if Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda had not, in the 1960s, shared the wealth in an income-expanding equity pact, then the late 1940s reverse course could have discredited Japan's democratization and crippled the fledgling democracy. Instead, a broad political consensus was created and democracy was institutionalized. Processes of political accountability seemed to be working.

In the Cold War era, Japan's socialists had a popular base because of their priority of preventing Japan from returning to fascist militarism.¹² That priority meant limiting the military budget, weakening security ties to the United States, and preventing Japan from military action on the side of U.S.

Cold War policies. The socialists won on this agenda because, among conservative elites, the ruling Yoshida faction and bureaucrats of the powerful Ministry of Finance were willing to forego a global politico-military role for Japan. A broad democratic consensus was forged that included most conservatives and most progressives. It forced the resignation of the promilitary Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi. Democracy was consolidated because a broad array of political interests could identify with the policy consensus, not because the Japanese were by nature harmonious, as the culturalists wrongly assert.

But with the United States giving anticommunism priority over democracy in Asia, as was the case in Japan's militarist era, East Asia's geopolitical context strengthened Japanese ultraconservative factions that championed the emperor and nationalistic education as part of an antiliberal anticommunism. In that political context, no human rights regime developed in East Asia. Human rights efforts would be embarrassing to anti-Communist dictatorships in Korea and Taiwan that were aligned with conservative rulers in Japan. The anti-democratic danger in this unrepentant reactionary force worried the Japanese people and kept Japan's socialists popular for preserving democracy and opposing full-scale rearmament. The broad political consensus continued as central to democratization. The socialists became the protector "of democracy against fascism and militarism."¹³ Japan's governing elites therefore could rule legitimately only by separating themselves from their most reactionary supporters and making concessions to left-wing challengers. Political compromises helped consolidate democracy.

The old elites crafted electoral rules that strengthened their political prospects. They joined their factions in a conservative party that developed multicandidate districts so that members of different conservative factions could all get elected. The result was conservative dominance over a splintered Left, a challenger whose antimilitarist electoral appeal was still strong enough to force conservative elites to compromise against rearmament and for social equity to maintain power. As occurred in nineteenth-century crises of political mobilization in democratic Europe and in the United States, T. J. Pempel has noted that "important historical blocs allied or divided in ways that gave each a unique confluence of interests and set the country's policies on a consistent trajectory for decades. . . . A party that forges a historical compromise among important socio-economic sectors in the crucible of crisis enjoys a halo effect for some period thereafter."¹⁴ In sum, Japan's consolidation of democracy, rather than being anomalous, is explicable in categories that reveal a general political pattern for the consolidation of democracy as such.

The democratization of East Asia is best understood as part of a global process. A spark for late 1989 democratization in Eastern Europe lay in the televising of China's great spring 1989 democracy movement. "[The 1989

movement in China] awakened the world, especially East Europe. Everywhere in East Europe people were talking about it. Everybody told me: 'without the Chinese [who started the movement], we could not have done anything.'¹⁵ East Europeans report that watching the Beijing massacre persuaded East German rulers not to follow China's bloody road when confronted with democratic demonstrators.¹⁶ The East Asian experience, in practice as well as in theory, in China as in Japan, is central to the global moment.

Then why in 1989, even Chinese ask, could East Europeans democratize although China could not? Answers, from the perspective of this volume, lie in the realm of ordinary politics. In Beijing, the charismatic revolutionary generation that toppled the old order in 1949 still held on to dictatorial power. Where similar Leninist first-generation patriotic groups held power, that is, in Pyongyang, Hanoi, and Havana, democrats did not win. In fact, in these other capitals, the democratic surge was far, far less than in Beijing. This could suggest that, comparatively speaking, the democratic potential in China may be relatively large.

The 1989 suppression of democratic forces in China may, in addition, have no deeper cause than the particular political choice of senior, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. In contrast, ruling Leninist elites in Ulan Bator and Tirana chose to embrace much weaker democratic challenges. No one contends that Mongol or Albanian culture was individualistic or democratic. This suggests that had Deng Xiaoping embraced the Chinese democratic challenge, there would have been no deep cultural structures blocking China's peaceful transition to democracy.

Hungarians suggest that when the first democratic movement against a Leninist tyranny is crushed and the representatives of the old Leninist system try to combine economic reforms to woo the citizenry with the despotic political status quo to cow the citizenry, as with 1956 and after in Budapest, then it is only a matter of time, at most a generation, before the whole Leninist system is discredited and crumbles—as occurred in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Most China specialists surveyed on the issue forecast a Chinese democratic transition in ten to twenty years. If China in 1989 is equated with Hungary in 1956, might China's subsequent transition to democracy then come faster than in Europe? If so, that would further discredit theories of cultural or socioeconomic class prerequisites of democratization.

According to his known words, China's paramount leader chose against democracy for two reasons. First, if he welcomed democracy, his head would roll and his name would be muddied; that is, Deng Xiaoping would have been seen by the historians of the victors as a villain. Second, all that he and his generation had created of anti-imperialist socialism would have been lost. By this he seems to mean that Chinese democrats would have cut the

bloated military budget, and their market-oriented policies would have ended the social safety net. China would have ceased to be a military power to be reckoned with and would have lost a socioeconomic system that supposedly avoids the economic polarization that brings poverty and misery in pure market economies, the purported fate of the powerless in developing "capitalist" nations.

These claims by Deng Xiaoping are strange. Given how Jiang Jingsuo is lionized in Taiwan for facilitating Taiwan's democratic opening, surely it is not unreasonable to suggest that, in fact, had Deng Xiaoping welcomed democracy, then his name and fame would resound happily to Chinese ears for centuries to come. And everyone knows that Maoism in fact brought death to many tens of millions and facilitated economic polarization and mass starvation. The surface rationales of Deng Xiaoping's regime are so superficial that anyone in China can see through them. The tyranny therefore seems merely to be serving a selfish group that refuses to surrender the privileges and perquisites of power. The citizenry has neither been co-opted nor cowed. Consequently, contrary to theorists who focus on China's authoritarian culture, the authors of the last two chapters in this volume, which are both on China, foresee China's democratization.

This book's authors counter the contention that democratization in Japan or the rest of East Asia is an anomaly. Stephen Manning's analysis of Chinese attempts to democratize shows the weakness of both cultural and socioeconomic explanations.¹⁷ Likewise, Tun-jen Cheng and Eun Mee Kim generalize from the Korean vicissitudes in establishing the centrality of a broad moderate coalition with a strong leader in consolidating democracy.¹⁸ Thus East Asian developments are shown to be generally relevant for both the once Leninist world and for the struggling democracies of the developing world.

In fact, the general rules for democratization explored herein hold even for purported prototypes of democratization in Europe. This volume's case studies of democratization in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China show that purported Western cultural idiosyncracies such as individualism do not explain democratization. Instead, the Japanese experience of crafting a national consensus and forging a grand conservative coalition tells more about democratic consolidation than do the West's myths of the origins of democracies in uniquely liberal cultures. To understand democratization, it is useful to abandon a misleading opposition of consensual Asia versus individualistic Europe and to rethink Western experience in terms of generalizable lessons of consensus building.

At one with the views of the authors in this volume, Giuseppe Di Palma explained democratization in terms of the centrality of crafting a national consensus and a grand conservative coalition. He even noted, albeit in passing, that in East Asia, rulers in South Korea tried to resolve the crisis of

transition by having "a president who came from the ranks of the old regime . . . come to terms with the parliamentary opposition" while "removing hard-liners from the government,"¹⁹ and that, in like manner, Japan, in transitioning to democracy, made "reformed sectors of the old regime" central to the new political system,²⁰ building a broad, centrist, conservative coalition, a new basis for political cooperation with moderates among the opposition. Supposedly idiosyncratic East Asia actually is paradigmatic for an understanding of democratization.

Although a universalistic discourse is needed to cover events, particularistic explanations predominate. The 1989–1990 global surge of democratization, from Muslim Albania to Buddhist Mongolia, dramatically negates the Eurocentric hypothesis that democratization rests on uniquely Western foundations of rational secularism, modernized middle classes, and radical individualism. Yet, self-serving, ethnocentric myths infuse theoretical understandings.

Winners everywhere claim that their victories are intrinsically deserved. It is no more unnatural for westerners to insist that they are democratic because they are Western than it is for Japanese in the last quarter of the twentieth century to claim that they are economically successful because they are Japanese. When Central European countries democratized in 1989, though Soviet Russia did not, proud Central Europeans contrasted their essential Europeaness to inherent Russian Asianness. Such self-congratulatory logic is a happy rationalization, not a useful hypothesis, as "Asian" Russia's 1991 democratization reveals. Social science can explain the normality of the self-congratulatory rationalization; the rationalization is not social science.

The conventional European comprehension is that only its value-based history facilitates democratization.

The fundamental fact about the American Revolution surely is that it occurred in a Protestant country with an Anglo-Saxon tradition of limited self-government. . . . No Protestant population could ever have been beaten down to the French (or Spanish or Latin American) level. Even the serfs of Prussia were not reduced to quite the existence of the peasant helotry of neighboring Catholic Poland. . . . in present-day [1964] Europe the two largest Communist parties are those of France and Italy. . . . Hitlerism arose in Catholic Austria and Bavaria, not in Lutheran Prussia. . . . The modern age . . . begins with the Reformation. . . . the Dutch Rebellion and the English Civil War set the stage for the American Revolution. . . . Holland . . . is the cradle of the modern world.²¹

Those who see early Protestantism in terms of the burning of witches and dogmatic religious wars over doctrinal truth are suspicious of this romance of militant, if not fundamentalist, religious culture that led some Protestants to see other Protestants as satanic or papist or successful because of ties to

nativistic nationalisms. Far from experiencing themselves as heirs of Protestant England, having fled from British religious intolerance, New England Protestant clergy at the end of the 1790s saw Britain "siding with the Pope."²² The pretty picture of self-restrained, tolerant Protestant Americans ignores the evil of slavery, the most unrestrained domination, and the Protestant bigotry of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1855 Abraham Lincoln worried,

As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read, "all men are created equal except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they made no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken . . . without the base alloy of hypocrisy.²³

For those who believe that slavery had to end before America could be a free republic, the Civil War is the American revolution.²⁴ As freedom's birthday is disputed, so the notion of Catholics as essentially anti-democratic is contested.

George Wiegell showed how rightist Vatican political interests tipped the balance of forces in the church after the French Revolution movement for anticlerical, liberal secularism. But political factors can change rapidly and drastically. By the second half of the twentieth century, "the Church . . . [was] clearly aligned on the side of democracy in Latin America. . . . in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, the Church is at the forefront of the democratic churning. . . . in East Asia, the Church was the chief democratic institutional support for the democratic insurgency that toppled Ferdinand Marcos . . . , and Church leaders and laity played important roles in the transition to democracy in South Korea."²⁵ However much Wiegell has exaggerated the church's role in the struggle for democracy, the decisive point is that essentialist explanations of culture miss the contingent character of politics in which the purported immutable culture, including, quite centrally, religion, is in fact a conflictual and changing human creation.

All cultures are rich in conflicting political potentialities. Had China democratized before Europe, historians could have found that China's cultural heritage was uniquely democratic. The ancient *Book of History* proclaimed that nature sees and hears as the people see and hear; the mainstream Mencian tradition of Confucianism was premised on popular support as the basis of legitimate rulership. Confucianism stressed that all could be educated; Daoism focused on freedom; the Legalist school of political philosophy was making all, including the rulers, equal before the law; and Mohism was premised on egalitarianism and the yin-yang school on compromise and dialogue. With its emphases on selection for government administration by civil service exams, on a duty of protesting unjust policies, on approving

