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The difficulty of democracy in economic development




The ongoing trends in East Asia

Mie Oba, Ph.D
Professor of International Relations, Tokyo University of Science

The prominence of liberal democracy

-  The reality of democracy in each country was so diverse.
-  Liberal democracy as the “legitimate” political regime since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR.
-  Human rights as the core of liberal democracy




The “retreat of liberal democracy” as an issue of extensive global interest

-  The main theme of *Freedom in the World 2019*, the annual report of the Freedom House, is “Democracy in Retreat”.
-  Edward Luce, *The retreat of Liberal Democracy* 2017
-  Ian Zoulanka, *Counter-Revolution*, 2018

The retreat of democracy in developed countries

- 🌐 The examples: The Brexit, the commencement of Trump administration (the emergence of populism leader in the US), the surge of xenophobic nationalism in some European countries...
- 🌐 Point 1. The downslide of the middle classes with widening huge economic and social gaps is causing the retreat of liberal democracy.
- 🌐 Point 2. Such huge gaps have been fostered by globalization.

The “retreat of liberal democracy” in Asia

-  The situations in East Asia do not follow the argument about the retreat of democracy in developed countries.
-  The retreat of liberal democracy in emerging and developing countries in East Asia is rather occurring in the rapid development of the middle classes with economic growth of these countries.
-  The globalization has fostered economic growth and development of middle classes, but liberal democracy has been in recession in East Asia, and autocracy or authoritarian regimes are gaining prominence.

China factor?

- The influence of the “China model” or “Beijing consensus” for economic development?
 - The notion that economic development can be achieved by strong, capable, and effective initiative of government without the promotion of liberal democracy.
 - The attractiveness of the BRI and AIIB for emerging and developing countries
- To emphasize the one-way influence from China to other countries too much may make our understanding follow a kind of conspiracy theory.
- The importance of the domestic context of each country

Case 1. China

- 🌐 *The rise of autocracy and the violation of human rights.*
- 🌐 The suppression of ethnic minorities.
- 🌐 The tightening control on the inflow of information.
- 🌐 The oppression of democratization movements, activists, the NGOs.
- 🌐 The amendment of the Constitution
 - 🌐 To formally remove the two-term limitation of presidency.
 - 🌐 Xi will remain in his office beyond 2023, (and forever?)
- 🌐 The priority of Chinese government
 - 🌐 to keep the domestic political and social order, while holding serious contradiction between economic development with capitalism and keeping one-party system





Case 2. Thailand

- *The autocracy supported by urban elites and residents*
- The political instability since the the *coup d'état* against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006 and his subsequent exile.
 - The confrontation between pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin factions
- The military junta since 2014 with the support from upper-income urban elites, intellectuals, and the Royal family
- The result of the general election in March of 2019
 - Before the election, the junta suppressed and weakened the opposition parties.

Case 3. The Philippines

- The promotion of a relentless anti-drug campaign promoted by the strong will of President Duterte.
- The number of victims: over 12000 (*The World Report 2018*)
- The high approval rate of Duterte administration
 - Around 80 % even in its fourth year

Case 4. Indonesia

-  *The surge of identity politics and intolerance against diversity.*
-  Democratic system since the collapse of Suharto regime, the emphasis on the respect of religions and ethnic diversity in the Constitution
-  The rising voice of conservative Islamic groups causing intolerance toward religious and ethnic minorities, such as Hindus, Christians, and Chinese
-  The influence of wave of Islamic conservatism on the domestic politics



Case 5. Cambodia

- 🌐 *Elections without democracy and the gradual rise of autocracy*
- 🌐 The electoral democracy and the good economic performance
- 🌐 The “victory” of PM Hun Sen and the ruling party at the election in 2018.
 - 🌐 The dissolution of the prominent opposition party.
 - 🌐 The shutdown of English-news paper “the Cambodia Daily”.
 - 🌐 The strong control of freedom of speech

Case 6. Myanmar

- *The incompatibility of civil control and the protection of human rights*
- Public discrimination against the Rohingya peoples after the transition to civilian control in 2011
 - The majority of Myanmar nationals: Buddhists: 87.9%
 - Rohingya people: a Muslim minority
 - Even Aung San Suu Kyi could not address this issue.
- “Area clearance operations” by the Myanmar army in Northern Rakhine State in 2017
 - killing of ten thousand Rohingya people
 - 740 thousand refugees

Obserations

-  As demonstrated in explanation of these cases, while the economies of East Asia are growing with the rise of the middle classes, democracy in these countries is, conversely, declining, and the human rights issues in some countries are becoming severe than before .
-  The priorities of leaders, elites, and middle classes in these countries differ from the expectations of supporters of liberal democracy. Rather, their priorities seem to place greater importance on political stability sustained by eligible government, which is indispensable for economic development in the context of ongoing globalization.

Questions for the future

- The importance of Political stability for any nation in the world
- The critical questions
 - Could autocratic and authoritarian regimes be a stable alternative?
 - If a government or a leader fails in an autocratic or authoritarian country, what should and could ordinary people, including the middle classes, do in order to revive their country without democracy?
- The fact that people in the modern era are already familiar with the experiences of democratic society, where individual civil rights are regarded as an indispensable component of society.
- Liberal democracy needs to be sustained while we simultaneously address its defects, which have been accelerated by rapid globalization.

Thank you so much for your attention.