

Toward a New Critical Survey of the “Quality” of Democracy

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Since the 1980s, many Asian countries have gone through a political transition toward democracy. With distorted legacies of colonialism, the Cold War and dictatorship piled up, civil and grassroots movements have focused on overcoming dictatorship and securing and proliferating democracy and human rights. However, democratization and human rights improvement have shown fluctuations in light of new circumstances: the impact of neoliberal globalization, the growth of capital and market in each country, and the negative consequences of the war on terrorism after 9/11, among others.

The “third wave of democratization” has swept countries of the Third World and moved forward and backward alternately since the 1980s, transforming dictatorships into postdictatorial democracies. According to the traditional theories of “Transitology” (theory of democratic transition) and “Consolidology” (theory of democratic consolidation), there are several known “Valleys of Tears.” The first is a restoration of free elections, which feature uncertainty, indeterminacy and contingency. As Juan J. Linz pointed out, the process of democratization has a bottleneck wherein the “democratic game” becomes the “only game in town.” The transition of power takes place at the second bottleneck known as “elections.” When free elections and democratic institutions take root, leading to the transition of power, we can say the society enters the phase of democratic consolidation. A lot of scholars believe that the conduct of free elections a second time can be translated as consolidation of democracy or an election system being settled and stabilized in the form of competition among various sociopolitical groups. For such scholars, the transition of power within the framework of electoral democracy can thus be understood as democratic consolidation.

With democratization of many postdictatorships in the Third World on track, the theories of democratic transition and democratic consolidation have become a high-profile research field in the United States. As a result, diverse research achievements have been made and accumulated so far in that

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field. Some scholars are trying to conduct research about countries that are in the process of democratic transition, undergoing the “postconsolidation” process, or are riding the “fourth wave of democratization.”

However, such research activities have been sluggish since the theory of democratic consolidation. I personally attribute some critical activities to the fact that “consolidology” looks at the post-transition process from the viewpoint of consolidation. “Democratic consolidation” discussed in consolidology refers to the settlement and stabilization of democratic institutions that have been introduced through democratic transition. That is, democratic consolidation means stabilization, routinization, institutionalization, and legitimation of politically related activities. This, of course, includes conventional dimensions as well as institutional ones. In reality, however, many forms of democracy after the transition from dictatorship have encountered conflict situations where they cannot be recognized as a “stabilized democracy.” There should have been research on the “post-consolidation” process as a follow-up to the study of consolidation. However, such research cannot move forward since the democratization process goes through continuous instability and seems to be stabilized, and then turns around again, sometimes showing a reversion to dictatorship. That is, an “unconsolidated” reality itself remains a significant challenge to the theory of democratic consolidation, preventing further research.

We can say that our study on the quality of democracy should start with a critique of existing studies of democratic transition and consolidation. One of the main goals of democratization is said to be the realization of the fair rule of majority, because a former dictatorship has been regarded as a regime wherein minor authoritarian figures, groups, and forces have ruled the majority against their will. In this sense, democratization meant to the ordinary people the realization of “fair majority rule” in accordance with their preferences and opinions via a free election

However, the kind of democracy realized in this way is not an ideal one. On the contrary, real democracy works in such a way as to exclude the majority in the social and economic sense, while it argues to work in accordance with the majority will. In reality, the former power elites keep their monopolistic position under a so-called democratic regime while the majority and diverse minorities are excluded from the new democratic regime. In a sense, the new democracy becomes a “problem,” as remnants of the former dictatorship continue to be “problems.”

Having said that, a critical version of a survey of the quality of democracy should try to capture the new problems of a new democracy, including the continuation of the monopoly of the former powers under a “formally

democratic” regime and the substantial exclusion of voices and interests of subalterns and diverse minorities.

In this regard, our research is aimed at analyzing and describing new problems and limitation of the new democracies in Asia, while accepting it in comparison to the former dictatorships.

This volume is the inaugural issue of *Asian Democracy Review*. We envision that the succeeding issues will include new critical studies trying to go over the horizon of the existing literature.

The main content of this volume includes the research output of the members of the research network called the Consortium for the Asian Democracy Index (CADI) that conducted a pilot test of the Asian Democracy Index (ADI) survey in 2011, which includes the Democracy and Social Movements Institute of Sungkonghoe University in South Korea, the Indonesian Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (DEMOS) and the Centre for Political Studies (PUSKAPOL) of the Department of Political Science, Universitas Indonesia, and the University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center. We could not compare the national indices fully in this volume. However, the quantitative and qualitative data in this volume is still quite valuable, reflecting the state of the three countries in terms of autonomy and competition as a part of democratic liberalization processes and pluralization and solidarity as a part of democratic equalization.

This volume also contains a theoretical paper related to the index framework and an edited version of the ADI Guidebook. Also included are commentaries on the 2011 country reports, the preliminary results of the 2012 survey (the reports of which are still being completed; a team from the University of Malaysia Sarawak also conducted a survey this year along with the aforementioned members of CADI), and the ADI project in general. These commentaries were delivered in the 2012 Asian Democracy Index Conference, which was held on August 30-31, 2012, at the University of the Philippines-Diliman.

As mentioned, we plan to include other research outputs done outside of our network in future issues. We hope that critical scholars who have a similar orientation to ours, i.e., scholars who anticipate the progressive development of democracy in Asia for more minorities to enjoy more freedom and socioeconomic equality, will contribute to this journal. Future issues will also include the results of other national surveys and comparisons of national survey outputs.

We are very happy to share our research results with many scholars concerned in the progressive development of democracies in Asia and expect comments and attention from them.