Introduction: The Growing Scope of the Asian Democracy Index

THE CONSORTIUM FOR THE ASIAN DEMOCRACY INDEX

The first issue of Asian Democracy Review (ADR) contained, among other pieces, the country reports of the first three teams—from South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines—to conduct an Asian Democracy Index (ADI) survey in their country. These pioneering studies were hardly uniform in form and content, though they collectively showed several possible country-specific variations in the ADI methodology and what one can reasonably derive from the ADI survey data.

The second issue of ADR contained four country reports; in addition to the papers discussing the conduct of ADI surveys in the aforementioned countries was a paper on pilot survey in Malaysia. In that issues, while the South Korean, Indonesian, and Philippine country reports attempted to compare survey results across (a brief expanse of) time, the Malaysian study focused on examining the applicability of the survey in the Malaysian context. While, as the other teams have, the Malaysian team raised several reservations about the ADI's methodology, it did find that the survey's value lies in how it is "able to put forward a completely different and more analytical perspective of democracy from that of the usual legal and normative definitions" (Aeria and Tan 2013, 91). Indeed, for whatever methodological misgivings that the ADI project might currently have, its advocacy of "democratization as de-monopolization" (after Cho 2012) makes it a unique counterpoint to preexisting means of evaluating or "measuring" democracy, which all too often prop up Western liberal democracy as an ideal.

The Consortium for the Asian Democracy Index (CADI) is a network of research institutes and independent researchers working on the development of a new Asian Democracy Index. Since its formation in 2011, CADI members have been conducting annual perception surveys of various local experts on politics, economics, and civil society to examine the state of democratization in the said experts' countries.

The novelty/promise of the CADI formulation of democracy may very well be one reason why the number of country teams conducting ADI surveys continues to grow. In this issue, in addition to the country reports on the four countries previously mentioned, we can see the results of the first ADI surveys conducted in Thailand and India. Thus, the ADI project now spans East Asian states that underwent "developmental authoritarianism" prior to (re)transitioning to democracy, post-colonial democracies from South to Southeast Asia, countries that have (or are currently experiencing) extended periods under some form of martial rule, ethnically (super)diverse states—in short, the project now contemplates a wider scope of that contentiously defined region called Asia.

If only because it further demonstrates the limitations and potentialities of the ADI project, one should be disabused of the thought that this issue of ADR is "leaner" in terms of scholarly contribution because it only contains country reports. Perusing the studies herein, one sees how the results of each survey offer more than a snapshot of how democratization is proceeding in a particular country. While many of the survey results discussed here generally agree with the findings of other observers of democratization in Asia, there are, at times, results that defy expectations, such as the thus-far truly common situation wherein informants from supposedly diametrically opposed ideological positions agree on certain country-specific conditions in the political, economic, and civil society fields.

A brief walkthrough of the country reports is appropriate here. In South Korea, according to Dongchoon Kim, Heeyeon Cho, Junghoon Kim, Hyungchul Kim, Yooseok Oh, Hyunyun Cho, and Kwangkun Lee, democracy has been "downsized," as the results of the 2013 survey hardly differ from those of previous surveys (e.g., certain civil liberties remain restricted); one clear trend they highlight is the plunging score of the variable called economic equalization, which suggests that economic inequality is worsening in South Korea. Similarly, Sri Budi Eko Wardani, Dirga Ardiansa, Muhammad Ridha, Julia Ikasarana, Anton Pradjasto, and Inggrid Silitonga focus on how their survey results confirm that oligarchic control over politics, the economy, and civil society in Indonesia remains an everyday reality, even with the existence of anti-corruption courts, increasing voluntarism, and the like. Clarinda Lusterio Berja, Miguel Paolo Reyes, and Joshua Hans Baquiran relay how in the Philippines, as in South Korea and Indonesia, democratization appears to have by and large stagnated, with an allegedly reform-oriented administration, headed by the son of a "democracy icon," failing to significantly weaken the grasp of monopolizers of power. Lastly, Andrew Aeria

and Tan Seng Keat, after conducting the first "benchmark" survey in Malaysia, find that theirs was a country that is, in their eyes and those of their respondents, "deeply authoritarian" (p.62).

Is the situation any less dismal in Thailand and India? Naruemon Thabchumpon, Jakkrit Sangkhamanee, Carl Middleton, and Weera Wongsatjachock consider Thailand of late to be deeply polarized, with certain "well-established political and economic groupings" (p. 66) managing to hold on to power no matter the regime. Naveen Chander and Bonojit Hussain use their ADI survey data to illustrate how the "robust democracy" in India is inextricably tied with elite interests that are sustained through "traditional" marginalization.

Collectively, all of the papers here warn against complacency: whatever the current gains toward "democratization as de-monopolization" in these countries, by ADI standards, these countries have a long way to go before being considered democratic. It should also be noted that all of the papers here display the emerging "autocritical tradition" of CADI. Both of the "newcomers" in particular elaborate on how CADI's methodological framework and theoretical underpinnings must be modified in the future so that the ADI can better reflect the realities in Thailand and India.

The ADI can certainly be refined further to become a more reliable and accurate means of assessing the march (or slog) toward democracy in particular contexts. Pending that refinement, the ADI survey results remain an excellent means of emphasizing that, in the words of Heeyeon Cho, there can be no "democratic consolidation" without de-monopolization (2012, 30)—democratic institutions are all for naught if they fail to address society's myriad inequalities.

References

Aeria, Andrew and Tan Seng Keat. 2013. "The Asian Democracy Index for Malaysia 2012: Authoritarian and Ineffectual Government despite Formal Democratic Institutions." *Asian Democracy Review* 2, 81-122.

Cho, Heeyeon. 2012. "Democratization as De-monopolization and Its Different Trajectories: No Democratic Consolidation without De-monopolization." *Asian Democracy Review* 1, 4-35.