

4-1-2016

**Fung, Edmund S.K. & Steven Drakeley, (Eds.). Democracy in Eastern Asia: Issues, problems, and challenges in a region of diversity. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.**

Sharon R. Wesocky Ph.D.  
*Allegheny College*, [swesoky@allegheny.edu](mailto:swesoky@allegheny.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Wesocky, Sharon R. Ph.D. (2016) "Fung, Edmund S.K. & Steven Drakeley, (Eds.). Democracy in Eastern Asia: Issues, problems, and challenges in a region of diversity. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7: No. 2, Article 13.  
DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1303  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss2/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**Fung, Edmund S.K. & Steven Drakeley, (Eds.). *Democracy in Eastern Asia: Issues, problems, and challenges in a region of diversity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.**

This important book takes on the task of examining paths toward democratic consolidation in East and Southeast Asia, featuring case studies of 12 countries by expert scholars often based in the countries about which they write. The volume is especially timely given new global opportunities and challenges for democratization, with the Arab Spring and the particular role played by Eastern Asia in the globalization of democratic forms of governance.

The editors' introductory chapter examines ways that the "Asian Century" connects to notions of both cultural particularity as well as political universalisms. The introduction is primarily a brief review of each of the cases presented in the research chapters, and perhaps could have benefited from a fuller contextualization of wider discussions regarding democratization outside of the Western context. It also could perhaps have set out a few core conceptual categories (e.g., civil society, electoral processes, economic development) that would allow for threads to be drawn between all the chapters in terms of comparing their various stages on the path to democratization.

Purnendra Jain, in "Democracy in Japan: National, subnational, and grassroots perspectives," provides an overview of the state of Japan's "fully functioning mature democracy," examining not only its past shortcomings such as the Liberal Democratic Party's long dominance but also how the party's dominance has changed through both internal LDP reforms as well as increased electoral competition from other parties. Jain finds Japan's democracy to be increasingly robust in terms of the role of subnational government responsiveness as well as that of civil society, highlighted by citizen activism after the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Some of this chapter's data seemed quite anecdotal with respect to its emphasis on subnational government.

"South Korea's disaffected democracy," by Chong-Min Park, focuses on the ways that the relatively new democracy in South Korea is well-consolidated despite still facing challenges. Park finds that Korean citizens now reject authoritarian rule—though they also periodically demonstrate reduced support for democracy as well. Park links Korean disillusionment with democracy to the centrality of economic expectations for how South Koreans evaluate their government. To this reader at least, a deeper analysis of how South Korean dissatisfaction with democracy has emerged and changed over time would be useful.

"From regime transition to liberal democracy: The case of Taiwan," by Chung-li Wu and Shih-chan Dai, focuses on the role of the Kuomintang (KMT) as Taiwan's first authoritarian governing party and then as the agent of the state's democratization in the 1980s. Wu and Dai examine how changes in aspects of the party's ideology and its "Taiwanization" led to the emergence of a generally consolidated democracy in Taiwan. This chapter provides a fascinating look at the role of the KMT in Taiwanese democracy but perhaps could have used more attention to the role played by opposition parties such as the Democratic Progressive Party as well as the more general emergence of a "Taiwanese" identity.

In "Indonesia's low-quality democracy consolidated: the dangers of drift and corrosion," Steven Drakeley examines some of the sources of the "flawed" aspects of Indonesia's post-1998 democratic transition. Problems stemming from its authoritarian past, such as continued military influence, extremist Islamic forces, and "endemic" corruption, co-exist with the possibility of future economic crisis to make Indonesia's democratic future as yet uncertain. Drakeley also examines some of the strengths of Indonesian democracy, such as high electoral turnover and

support for liberal values, lending the chapter an appropriate tone of ambiguity regarding the future of democracy in Indonesia.

Pavin Chachavalpongpun, in “Thai democracy at a dangerous crossroads,” looks at the “democratic recession” Thailand experienced in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ending after the 2011 electoral success of the populist Pheu Thai Party under Yingluck Shinawatra. The chapter examines the struggle between elitist forces of military, bureaucracy, and monarchy on the one hand and populist democracy supporters on the other, looking at how the former has politicized the country’s *lèse-majesté* laws to maintain power. While the chapter has some optimism regarding the future due to popular support for electoral processes, it also examines risks and, thus, at the time of publication, somewhat anticipated the 2014 military coup that subsequently removed Yingluck from power. The chapter is mostly an excellent introduction to more contemporary events, though it could use a bit more in-depth analysis of historical and structural supports and impediments to Thai democracy.

The fragile democracy in the Philippines tends to fluctuate between predatory and clientelist forms, according to Nathan Gilbert Quimpo in “The limits of post-plunder reform in the Philippines’ oligarchic democracy.” Quimpo in this chapter well-uses these forms to examine the history of Filipino “oligarchic democracy,” as well as the reformist, anti-corruption, and anti-poverty policies of current President Benigno Aquino III. However, Quimpo finds that the inadequacies of Aquino’s antipoverty measures, the persistence of patronage, and the lack of agrarian reform do not fully resolve the problems of Filipino democracy. This chapter provides both good historical background and useful contemporary analysis.

In “Developments in Cambodian democracy,” Melissa Curley briefly surveys the post-civil war transition to democracy in Cambodia, focusing primarily on the increasing political dominance of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). Despite a diverse civil society and a judiciary focused on a post-Khmer Rouge truth and reconciliation process, there is political interference in both of these spheres, making Cambodia a “competitive authoritarian” regime. The chapter ably surveys political, civil society, and judiciary spheres, though more analysis of the “weak opposition” would be useful for a full comprehension of the challenges facing Cambodian democracy.

The Malaysian case is an important one of transformation caused by its very own hybrid forms, writes William Case in “Democracy and change in Malaysia: When do authoritarian controls backfire?” While previously an “electoral authoritarian” regime, more recent elections have challenged the long dominance of the ethnic Malay-dominated political party, UMNO. Case not only traces the historical and structural forces that contributed to UMNO’s long grip on power but also how aspects of the party’s post-Mahathir leadership led to the rise of more robust electoral challenges. This chapter nicely combines historical and political analysis with grounding in theoretical concepts.

Singapore is also experiencing increasing opposition challenges to the “hegemonic party regime” of the People’s Action Party (PAP), writes Netina Tan in “Democratization and embracing uncertainty in post-2011 Singapore.” In a case more of liberalization than democratization, Singapore’s electoral authoritarian hybrid regime under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in the early years of the 2000s did promote some opening political reforms. This led to the opposition getting a record 40 percent of the vote in 2011; however, as Tan notes, periodic control of online speech and party-state fusion lead to the continued overall dominance of the ruling party.

With particular attention to the post-2010 inclusion of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the previously imprisoned Daw Aung San Suu Kyi into politics, Helen James examines the democratic transition in Myanmar in her chapter, “The democratic transition in Myanmar: Will the reforms be sustained?” While threats continue to the democratic transition in Myanmar, including socioeconomic problems and the violence against the Muslim Rohingya population, James maintains a reasonable confidence about the future of the transition, a confidence that was affirmed by elections in late 2015 granting the NLD a clear victory. This result supports James’s assertion that Myanmar is a case that shows compatibility between a strong military role and continued democratic consolidation, although the chapter could use more background analysis of the causes of this rather stunning transition.

Joseph Y.S. Cheng, in “Democratization in Hong Kong: A theoretical exception,” seeks to explain why Hong Kong contradicts modernization theory’s claim that an expanded middle class leads to pro-democracy pressures. Cheng especially examines various aspects of a “cost-benefit analysis” to explain the “political apathy” of many Hong Kong residents. While Hong Kong has greater basic freedoms and rule of law than China, it also has increasing inequality, leading some voters to favor new political approaches. Despite Hong Kong’s purported autonomy Beijing maintains its influence in the electoral process.

In the final chapter, Chongyi Feng writes about “the quest for constitutional democracy in contemporary China,” examining the emergence of China’s “post-totalitarian” system and emphasizing the emergence of a broadly-defined “rights defense movement.” At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party’s emphasis on “stability preservation” contributes to continued human rights violations. Feng finds that institutional and ruling elite barriers to democratization persist, though he was “hopeful” about the new leadership under Xi Jinping that had just come to power at the time of writing. Unfortunately, since publication, Xi Jinping has become increasingly repressive toward the “rights defense movement” and other aspects of China’s fragile civil society.

The book’s short conclusion locates some common themes among cases, including (1) the need for institutionalization, (2) economic growth in itself not producing democratization, and (3) the importance of internal demands for democratic change. These themes draw together some of the book’s disparate chapters, and the editors end on a note of “cautious optimism” regarding the future of democracy in Eastern Asia, also helping to orient the reader by offering a few generalizations about this diverse region.

Sharon R. Wesoky PhD  
Allegheny College  
[swesoky@allegheny.edu](mailto:swesoky@allegheny.edu)