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Political Participation in Asia (PPA) is an edited volume that examines the use of political space by actors in non-democratic regimes in Asia. The volume is divided into three parts: The first section provides a literature review of broader theoretical concepts; the second section examines competition in political space; and the last section considers the oversight and policing of political space by different governing authorities. Editors Meredith L. Weiss and Eva Hansson co-author the introductory and concluding chapters of *PPA* and argue that examining political space and participation provides an understanding of the functions of civil society and other political actors in non-democracies. *PPA* challenges the traditional regime paradigm of Robert Dahl, which argues non-democracies lack high levels of political participation and political contestation. The work provides evidence that challenges Dahl's theory¹ and demonstrates significant levels of participation and contestation in several non-democratic countries. *PPA* considers complex political dynamics and provides a thorough analysis of civil society, the state, and business's use of political space.

The first section of *PPA* is a primer of the book's major theories and concepts. The first chapter, by the editors, and the next chapter, by Kevin Hewison, provide a substantial literature review. Both chapters present ideas on political space, civil society and discuss the idea of "post-democracy." Post-democracy refers to a state in which elites drive the primary functions of the political system. Post-democracies limit direct influence and participation from the masses, and elites try to confine or limit civil society's capacity to influence the policy agenda. Hewison argues, quite pessimistically, that post-democracies are modern political entities that tightly align with business and business interests. The author briefly considers the expansion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) after the Cold War, arguing that the democratization process in Asia did not expand civil society as a result of the explosion of NGOs. He argues that NGO practices are eerily similar to those of business and that this "businessification" of the state and civil society is attributable to the pervasion of capitalism and poses an existential threat to civil society. While Hewison is adamant in his theoretical argument, the evidence in the chapter is thin and underdeveloped. The final chapter in this section, by Jamie Doucette, expands on the ideas of post-democracy and NGOs by providing a substantive case study of South Korea's elite-driven democratic transition in the 1980s and 1990s. Doucette documents various political protests and the handling of citizen mobilization by Korean state officials, noting that elites repeatedly used coercive measures to mute the demands from civil society as it democratized. Doucette concludes that elites pushed neoliberal ideas over more egalitarian policies in the state's restructuring and that this led to turbulence in the transition process. The first three chapters of *PPA* are the most theoretically dense in the work, but it is the second section that provides the empirical support to the theories in section one and that is arguably the better developed section.

Part II covers highly salient topics from five detailed case studies, beginning with Johan Lagerkvist's chapter on China. This chapter examines the consolidation of power by Xi Jinping, which appears to have had a stabilizing effect for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The author argues that the one-party authoritarian regime manages to occupy, or at least control, most of the political space and fill it with ideas of neoliberal marketization and Confucius thought in order to provide a "moral" direction for its citizens. This chapter provides great detail to the marketization process of China and the rise of Xi Jinping. The next chapter, by Kwang-Yeong Shin, expands on Doucette's more theoretical chapter and documents the mobilization of Korean

citizens in the same time period. While Shin's chapter covers very similar subject material to Doucette's, it emphasizes elements of civil society mobilization from the bottom-up, whereas Doucette's chapter is presented from the vantage point of elites trying to manage mobilization from the top-down. These chapters are very similar in nature and probably should have been grouped in the same section, or if possible, merged into one chapter through author collaboration.

One of the exemplary chapters in *PPA* is by Bui Hai Thiem. Thiem examines internet usage by the citizens of Vietnam, and this chapter marks a distinct shift in tone for *PPA*. Contrary to its predecessors, this chapter possesses a rather optimistic outlook regarding the survival of civil society over elite suppression. Thiem's analysis discusses the measures Vietnam's communist party have taken to limit elements of civil society. Despite such measures, the expansion of internet usage spurred a surge in online activism and protest within the country. In the forms of anonymous blogging and social media, citizens have been able to remove corrupt officials, shift party values and norms, and change local policies. Despite efforts to control this form of communication, Thiem demonstrates that social media is becoming a wildly powerful political instrument for citizens and that it is being used to relay information and express discontent with the state or party policies. This chapter segues to the final chapter in the section by Hew Wai Weng, which is the only comparative analysis in the volume. Weng examines consumer habits in Malaysia and Indonesia and argues that citizen consumption patterns are significantly influenced by marketing "pious Islamic lifestyles" in urban areas. Weng documents the ways in which demand is generated by suppliers and how suppliers have used religion to market products to citizens. Consuming such products provides a means for citizens in either state to express their opposition to secularism, and Weng provides extensive evidence from interviews and field work to this effect, creating a powerful narrative of the lifestyles of urban citizens in each state. The chapters by Thiem and Weng stand out in *PPA*, with each providing strong qualitative cases on the use of political space by citizens.

The last section of *PPA* focuses on the policing of political space and begins with a chapter by Teresa Wright. Wright discusses internet control by the Chinese state, and her analysis discusses how the citizens of China use online space—which is, to some degree, permitted by the party—as a means for citizens to participate in the political discourse. The internet has been used to remove corrupt officials, improve government responsiveness to local affairs, bridge the communication gap between party officials and local officials, and as a means for citizens to voice their displeasure. This chapter parallels Thiem's chapter on Vietnam, but China is much more sophisticated in managing cyberspace. It created the "Great Firewall" and employs methods of online misdirection by paying Chinese citizens to comment in online political spaces to influence political discourse (as opposed to Vietnam's practice of suppression). Wright convincingly concludes that despite negative perception in the West regarding China's information control, Chinese citizens do have a means of online expression without necessarily directly participating in the voting or selection process of CCP members.

The chapter by Bencharat Sae Chua provides a very detailed historical and cultural review of Thailand. Chua covers the history of military coups in Thailand and the influence of the military over its electoral system. He argues that it is the culture and nation of Thailand that is the primary variable that contributes to the country's cyclic military intervention. He notes that the average Thai citizen views politicians as corrupt and the military as the voice of the people that restores peace and order. This chapter is an excellent historical overview of post-WWII Thailand and discusses the evolution of legitimacy for Thailand, arguing that military

“suppression is only possible because of the existing politics of morality in Thai political culture” (Chua, 2018, p. 157). The author concludes with an optimistic outlook, arguing that political participation and public resistance is on the rise in Thailand. The last chapter before the conclusion is Marco Bunte’s case of Myanmar, which is an analysis that covers the very odd and sudden democratic transition of Myanmar from a largely military state. This case is engaging due to the suddenness of the regime transition, which appears to have come from the top-down. The gradual democratic transition of Myanmar incrementally opened up political space for its citizens. Bunte’s case is similar to Chua’s chapter in that it provides insight to the internal transitionary process of military regimes.

The outlier in *PPA* is the chapter by Elisabeth Olivius. Olivius examines refugee agency, but the chapter seems thematically out of place in *PPA*. Refugees in foreign lands is a salient issue, but the examination of their use of political space in a host country contrasts too much with the domestic scope of *PPA*. The research does have merit and is thorough, but the conclusion is unsurprising: refugees simply do not have much autonomy and agency within their host country and very little agency with IGOs. This chapter would be better suited to a different edited volume regarding refugee rights or international law rather than a volume dedicated towards domestic political space of citizens.

PPA is a title that covers salient topics, examines a non-democratic region, and explores the concepts of political space and its use by different political actors. *PPA* begins with a highly critical tone, discussing the neoliberal marketization and elite control over political space. However, despite the forbidding prospect of elite’s controlling the entirety of political space, the subsequent chapters provide a positive and optimistic outlook of the use of political space in non-democracies by ordinary citizens to overcome elite control. *PPA* is an excellent addition for scholars studying elite theory and those that desire a greater understanding of domestic politics in Asia.

Notes

¹ Dahl argues that non-democracies possess very low levels of political participation and contestation. In extreme cases of dictatorships, participation and contestation are virtually non-existent among different political actors and society as a whole. According to Dahl’s pluralist theory, as participation and contestation within the state rises its form of governance shifts to resembling a democracy. He labels these regimes with higher levels participation and contestation as a “polyarchies”, in which multiple groups compete and participate in the governance of the state.

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