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Western Theories versus East Asian Realities: Political System Preferences among East Asians

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“Strikingly, the belief that democracy is the best (in principle at least) is overwhelming and universal.”

(Diamond 2008a, xi)

“Prodemocracy rhetoric has regularly exceeded reality and has sometimes been used deliberately to obscure a contrary reality.”

(Carothers 1999, 3)

For the past two decades, a large number of regional and multiregional research teams have conducted waves of public opinion surveys to monitor and compare citizen views on democratic politics and democratization taking place across the globe (Heath, Fisher and Smith 2005; Mattes 2007; Norris 2009). These surveys, which include Gallup-International Voice of the People Project,¹ the Pew Global Attitudes Project,² UNDP program on Democracy and Citizenship, and the World Values Survey, have revealed that most people in every region of the world approve of democracy as a system of government and disapprove of its alternatives. These survey findings have recently led a growing number of political scientists to advocate the thesis of universal democratization that democracy is emerging not only as a universal value (Diamond 2008b; Sen 1999), but also as the universally preferred system of government (Diamond 2013; see also Beetham 2009; Klingemann 2012; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Mattes 2010; Welzel 2013). The same findings have also resuscitated the once moribund “end of history” thesis that the liberal democracy of the capitalist Western world will win out over all other forms of government (Fukuyama 2014).

This study seeks to assess these theses of universal and liberal democratization from a contrarian perspective. To this end, I will first review previous studies on citizen support for democracy and highlight their limitations in unraveling the meanings of avowed democratic system support and comparing its levels across different countries and regions of the world. Then I will propose a new typology of citizen preferences for a variety of political systems, including

democracy and autocracy. Unlike all other typologies (Carrion 2008; Chu and Huang 2010; Jamal and Tessler 2010), it will ascertain in sequence the types and subtypes people prefer without using the word “democracy” (“the D-word” hereafter). Finally, I will attempt to evaluate the relevance of the two democratization theses in the context of East Asia, analyzing the 3rd wave of the Asian Barometer Survey conducted in 12 democratic and nondemocratic countries.

At the outset, it should be noted that East Asia occupies a unique place in the study of cultural and institutional democratization. Institutionally, it represents the only region in the whole world that has been “blessed” with socioeconomic development and yet “cursed” with slow democratization (Shin 2008). Unlike Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America, this region became socioeconomically modernized under authoritarian rule. However, its political systems remain mostly autocratic even four decades after the 3rd wave of democratization began to spread from Southern Europe (Diamond 2008a; Shin 2008).³

Culturally East Asia is the region where the Confucian legacies of meritocracy and paternalism have shaped the political mindsets of ordinary people and their political leaders for millennia (Shi 2014; Shi and Lu 2010; Schuman 2015). Unlike their peers in the West, many of them remain attracted to the Confucian principle of virtuous leadership and understand democratic government more in substantive than procedural terms (Lu and Shi 2014). Within the region, moreover, autocracies are known to enjoy greater citizen support than democracies (Chu, Pan and Wu 2015; see also Chu and Huang 2010; Huang 2014; Huang, Chu and Chang 2013; Shi 2014). Such legacies of authoritarian rule and Confucian political culture are likely to influence the way East Asians to react to democracy and other political systems differently from the way people in other regions do.

What types of political systems do people in East Asia favor most and least? Throughout the region, do most people prefer democracy to nondemocratic systems, as advocates of the democratization theses claim? If they do, do they prefer liberal democracy to non-liberal democracy or hybrid systems, as Francis Fukuyama, Ronald Inglehart, and Christian Welzel of the neo-modernization theory claim? If they prefer liberal democracy, do they prefer capitalist liberal democracy to socialist liberal democracy? If they do not favor democracy more than other types of political systems, what type do they favor most? Is it meritocracy or a hybrid system, for which proponents of Confucian democracy or the Asian Values Thesis have recently advocated (Kim 2014; Tan 2004)? By addressing these questions, I will evaluate the relevance of the universal and liberal democratization theses proposed in the West and ascertain whether the process of cultural democratization in East Asia deviates from those of other regions.

Previous Studies on Democratic System Support

Is democracy universally approved as a system of government? Is it also universally preferred to its alternatives? Waves of regional and global surveys have repeatedly shown that ordinary people in both democratic and nondemocratic countries see democracy as valuable and prefer it to autocratic regimes. In the last two waves (the 5th and 6th) of the World Values Survey (WVS), for example, in all regions, including Africa and the Middle East, extremely large majorities of more than 95 percent of their adult populations were in favor of democracy for either themselves or their countries (see Table 1). In a 2013 global survey that the United Nations conducted in 194 countries, democracy was chosen as one of the top three priorities for a future global development agenda (UNDP 2013).

Table 1. Expressing Approval for Democracy among Global Citizenries

Region	Dimensions		Affinity
	Valence	Salience	
Dem. West	93%	94%	98%
Trans. West	86	86	95
Latin America	91	90	97
East Asia	90	95	99
South Asia	94	94	99
Muslim Zone	95	89	99
Africa	93	91	98
(Pooled)	92	91	98

Note: The seven zones listed above are created by collapsing Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) five Western zones into the two zones of the old-democratic West and the former communist West.

Source: 2005-8 World Values Survey.

In all regional barometers conducted in Africa, Islamic Middle East, East Asia, Latin America, and the states of the former Soviet Union, large majorities of their mass publics have affirmed democracy as the best form of government (Amaney and Tessler 2008; Booth and Richard 2014; Bratton, Mattes and Gimah-Boadi 2005; Chu *et al.* 2008b; Klingemann, Fuchs, and Zielonka 2008; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998). According to the 3rd wave of the Asian Barometer Survey introduced above, for example, more than four out of five East Asians (83%) endorsed democracy as “the best form of government.” In Africa, the world’s poorest region, it is preferred to any other kind of government in 30 out of the 34 countries, which the latest 6th round of the Afrobarometer surveyed in 2014 and 2015.

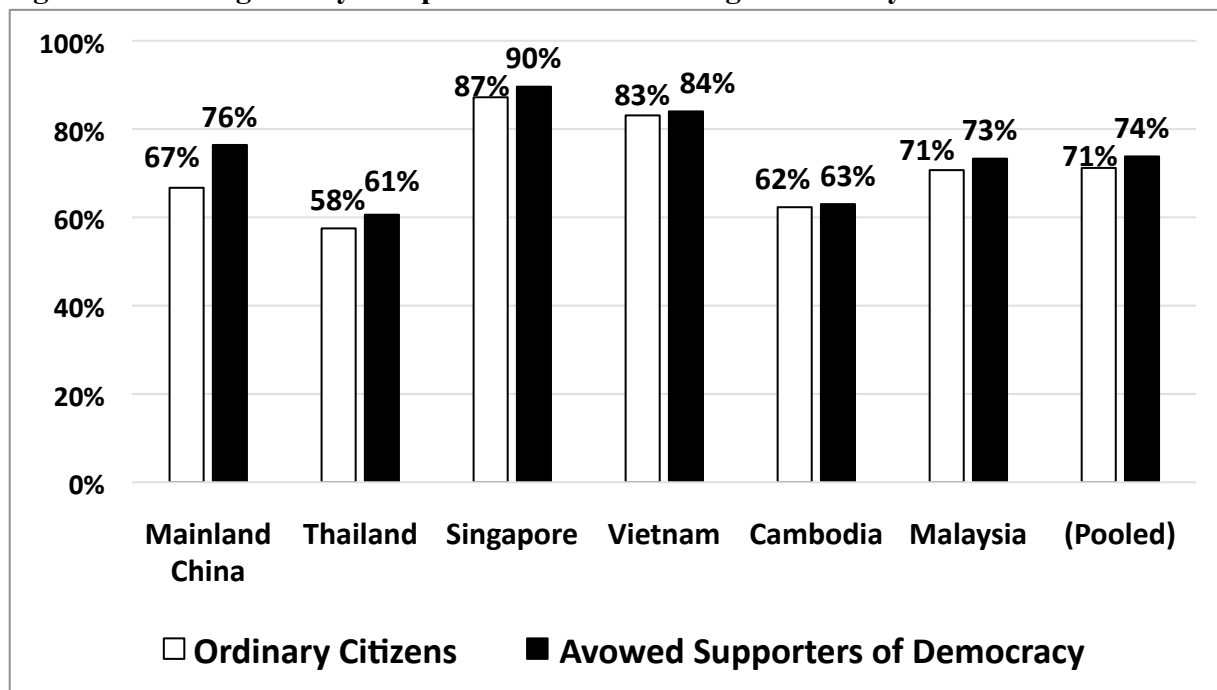
From these findings, it is apparent that democracy as a political ideal has achieved an overwhelming mass approbation throughout the world. It is also apparent that democracy even as a system of government has become “virtually the only political model with a global appeal” (Inglehart 2003, 52; Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 264. See also Welzel 2013). It is “really the only broadly legitimate form of government in the world” (Diamond 2008b, 13). Nonetheless, we need to carefully evaluate the validity of the key assumptions that researchers made in designing survey questions and analyzing responses to those questions before we endorse the claim of universal democratization: “the belief that democracy is the best (in principle at least) is overwhelming and universal” (Diamond 2008a, xi).

One of those assumptions concerns whether ordinary citizens, those especially with little or no democratic political experience, are cognitively capable of understanding what democracy really means. It also concerns whether they agree over what constitutes it. The universal democratization thesis is predicated on the assumptions that contemporary global citizenries are capable of understanding democracy and that they also understand it comparably even across different cultures and regions. These assumptions are grounded in the mistaken belief that

understanding democracy represents a single dimensional concept, which involves nothing more than identifying its properties. Contrary to this belief, it is a multidimensional phenomenon, which involves not only the *identification* of its essential properties but also the *differentiation* of those properties from the ones of its alternatives (Sartori 1987: 183-185; see also McClosky and Brill 1983; McClosky and Zeller 1984).

Contrary to what is assumed in the universal democratization thesis, most citizens, especially of authoritarian countries, are found incapable of *differentiating* democratic regimes from autocratic ones, although they are able to *identify* some of its properties, such as freedom and elections (Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007). In authoritarian East Asia, which consists of China, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia, for example, *the cognitively incapable*, who mistake their own authoritarian system for a democracy, constitute a large majority of 71 percent of its people. As Figure 1 shows, *the cognitively incapable* constitute a larger majority (73%) of those who approve of democracy, agreeing with the statement “Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government.” In Singapore, the world’s richest authoritarian country, they form an overwhelming majority (90%) of avowed democratic system supporters.

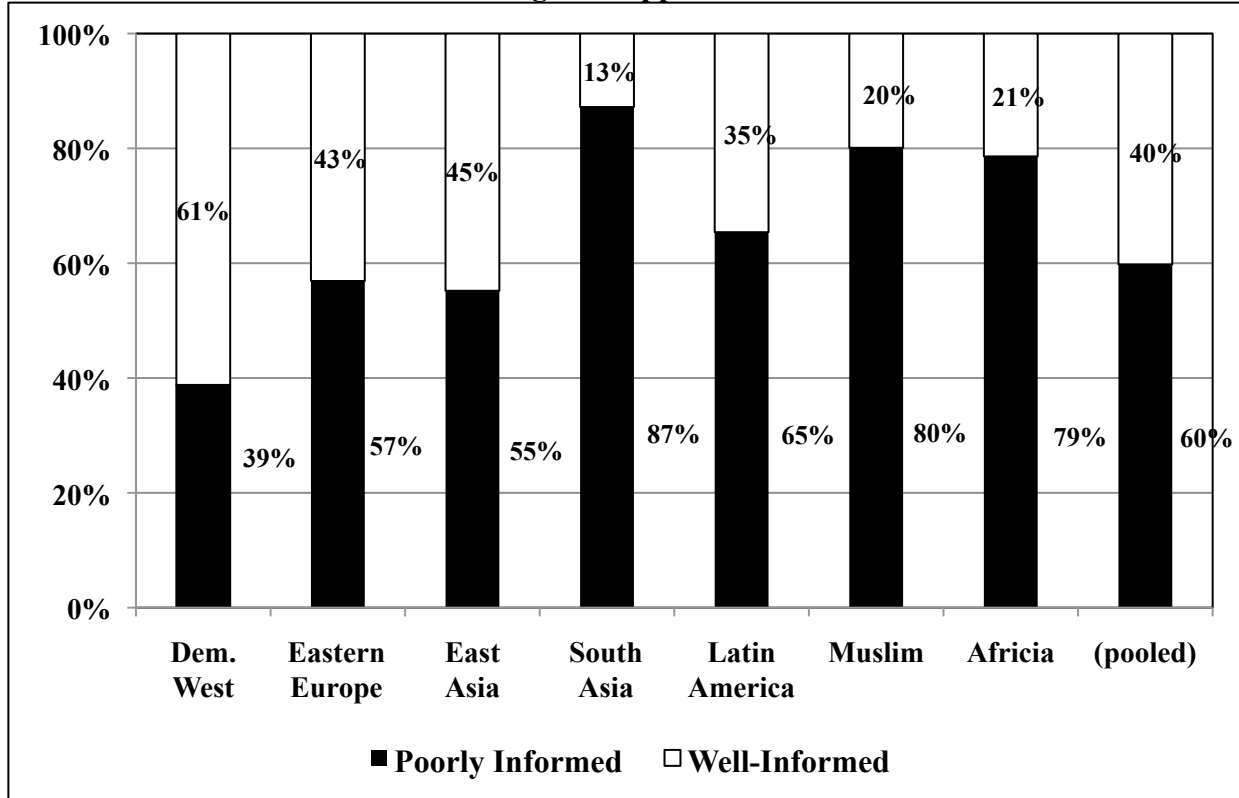
Figure 1. The Cognitively Incapable of Differentiating Democracy from Authoritarianism



Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

Do ordinary people around the world avow support for democracy with an accurate understanding of what it is? To address this question, I analyzed the 5th wave of the World Values Survey, which asks a battery of 10 items that tap into a different conception of democracy. This analysis of two pairs, one on democracy and the other on authoritarianism, reveals that in as many as six of seven cultural zones, excluding the old democratic West, *the poorly informed*⁴ constitute majorities of avowed supporters of democracy ranging from 55 percent in East Asia to 80 percent in the Middle East (Shin 2015b) (see Figure2).

Figure 2. The Distribution of the Poorly and Well-Informed among Avowed Democratic Regime Supporters



Source: 2005-8 World Values Survey.

Another equally dubious assumption concerns how ordinary people understand democracy and whether their democratic understandings can be compared meaningfully across different cultures and regions. In the universal democratization thesis, democracy is regarded as an uncontested concept whose meanings are widely shared throughout the world. Since its meaning differ little in kind, therefore, “support for democracy can be interpreted similarly in different contexts (Moncagatta 2015, 5). This assumption that all supporters of democracy understand it in the same way has led advocates of the thesis to compare affirmative responses to the questions containing the “D-word” across regions of the world, and to proclaim its universal appeal. Regardless of how differently they understand democracy, all those who respond positively to any of the survey questions containing the “D-word” are regarded as democratic system supporters.

In the real world of politics, however, democracy is a highly contested concept, which often means a variety of different things in different contexts. Its meanings, therefore, vary a great deal in quality and quantity across space and time (Arliely 2015; Arliely and Davidov 2011; de Regt 2013; Moncagatta 2015). When asked to define the term “democracy,” some name only one property while others identify many, including even those of authoritarian political systems (Canache 2012; Chu *et al.* 2008; Welzel 2013). In Southern Africa, for example, people revealed as many as 10 different categories of positive, negative, and neutral meanings when asked to define democracy in their own words (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005). Even within Europe, people who have lived all their lives in a democracy are also found to understand it in six different patterns, including electoral, liberal, social, direct, inclusive, and representative

(Ferrin and Kriesie 2014). Undoubtedly, such qualitative and quantitative differences in popular conceptions of democracy make it highly superficial to determine its universal appeal by counting and comparing sheer numbers of those who reply positively to the questions containing the “D-word”, regardless of how they understand it.

Further, the proclaimed universal prevalence of democracy over autocracy is based on the assumption that the former is the only viable alternative to the latter and that the latter is also a transient phenomenon. Therefore, those who favor democracy more than authoritarianism while not rejecting the latter are all regarded as supporters of democracy, even though many of them favor some features of authoritarian rule together with those of democracy. In the real world of citizen politics, however, those who favor both democracy and authoritarianism simultaneously are neither democrats nor authoritarians. They are supporters of a hybrid system, which mixes some components of both systems (Shin 2015a). . Oversimplifying a variety of political systems people favor into just two broad types, previous studies have often obscured the diversity of individuals’ system preferences, which, in turn, has led to an overestimation of democratic system preferences.

Finally, when citizens approve of democracy as the best system of government, they are assumed to accept a democratic political system in its entirety instead of upon embracing it incrementally in sequence over a long period of time. Once they accept it as a political ideal, therefore, they are often assumed to support its policymaking institutions and the procedures to run those institutions. In the real world of politics, however, democracy is structured into multiple levels; it evolves in different sequences and matures in different phases (Dahl 1971; Tilly 200). At each of these levels, people need to evaluate whether democracy works better than its alternatives before they endorse it.

It is, therefore, highly unrealistic to assume that they embrace a democratic political system *in its entirety* and *at once*, as implied in the universal thesis that likens an approval of democracy in principle to its full support in practice. More realistic is to assume that they remain supportive of it at some levels while rejecting it at other levels for a period of time, because all those levels may not be able to perform democratically in unison. Normatively, moreover, it is desirable to assume that “in order to give meaningful support for democracy, people must learn what democracy means in practice.” (Rose 2007, 111).

The above reviews of previous studies make it clear that the claims of universal democratization result from either highly optimistic assumptions made about democratic citizenship and/or overly simplistic assumptions about democratic political order. Assuming that ordinary people in all regions of the world do approve of democracy in its entirety with an accurate and comparable understanding of what it is, studies have overestimated individuals’ support for democracy as a viable system of government. At the same time, the same studies have underestimated support for hybrid and other nondemocratic systems of government, assuming that people’s political preferences are not only dichotomous in kind but also invariant across the varying levels of political system.

Conceptualization

What should be done to ascertain all the systems of government people in East Asia favor? What should be done to assess the thesis of universal democratization, which suggests that democracy has emerged as the most preferred system throughout the region? To address these questions in a

way that is more meaningful than methods in previous studies, we need to overcome the limitations discussed above. To this end, we should first note that contemporary global citizenries usually equate the term “democracy” with a political ideal such as freedom (Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; Rose 2007). Throughout the world, therefore, people even without any knowledge or experience of democratic politics avow their support for it by replying positively to the questions containing this word in the belief that it is socially desirable to do so. To minimize such a positive bias resulting from the “D-word”, therefore, responses to any of those questions should no longer be employed as a valid indicator of democratic system support (Bratton 2010; Chu and Huang 2010).

Further, we need to conceptualize democracy as a political system that exists in the real world in which we live, not as an ideal or perfect system of government. As a political system in actual existence, it represents a phenomenon with a multitude of properties, and it is also multi-tiered phenomenon whose properties are hierarchically structured into different layers or levels (Easton 1965, 1975). As a multi-tiered phenomenon, its properties operate neither independently nor simultaneously. Instead, they operate interactively or sequentially from one level of its structure to another. In this study, therefore, the development of a democratic political system is viewed to evolve sequentially in stages over a long period of time (Huntington 1991; Tilly 2000).

Analytically, a democratic political system-in-practice can be disaggregated into three levels of its structural makeup.⁵ The most fundamental level consists of the core tenets of democratic politics, which are always embodied in the state constitution. As its ideological foundation, these tenets identify and distinguish it from all other non-democratic types of political systems. They also define the relationships between citizens and their leaders and the specific roles they should play in the political process. The second level involves the structure of a regime and its political institutions, such as elections and political parties, which are established on the basis of those core tenets of democratic politics. The third and least fundamental level consists of the methods or processes of governing those institutions and putting into action their policy goals on a daily basis. Liberal and non-liberal democracies, for example, differ in the process of ensuring freedoms and rights. Capitalist and socialist democracies, on the other hand, differ in formulating and implementing the goals of welfare policy political institutions should pursue.

Theoretically, therefore, this study makes three assumptions about the dynamics of institutional democratization. The first concerns the slow and uneven development of a democratic political system over a long period of time. The second concerns its hierarchical structure that is divided into multiple levels or tiers. And the third relates to the varying priority of these structural levels and their properties. These assumptions, considered together, suggest a sequential approach that allows for analyzing the development of a democratic political system by breaking it into various subunits and sequencing interactions among those subunits. It should be noted that these three assumptions contrast sharply with those of the previous studies—simultaneity and parity—that employed the techniques of factor analysis and summative indexing.

In parallel to the process of institutional democratization, this study makes similar assumptions about cultural democratization taking place in the minds of individual citizens. As the democratization of a political system evolves sequentially in stages, people do not embrace all the practices of democratic politics *in toto at once*; instead, they embrace those incrementally over a long period of time.⁶ Having lived most or all of their lives in nondemocratic rule, moreover, many people in authoritarian and post-authoritarian countries do not think that a

democratic system is fully capable of solving all the pressing problems facing their countries. This motivates them to remain incoherent by rejecting democracy as a method of daily governance while accepting it as regime structure. Assuming that people react differently and slowly to the structures and processes of democratic and other political systems as they become more familiar with them, the present study seeks to unravel the dynamics of political system preferences from the perspective of disaggregating them into developmental sequences.

Measurement

What core principles undergird the most fundamental level of all democratic political systems in practice? From numerous principles of democratic politics, I chose the most widely-known three principles of popular rule, which President Abraham Lincoln coined and popularized:⁷ (1) government by the people (popular elections of government leaders), (2) government of the people (demanding citizenship), and (3) government for the people (responsive leadership). Of these three principles, I consider government by the people prior to the two others because the implementation of the latter requires the existence of the popularly elected government. Without such a government, citizens are not able to meaningfully participate in the political process and demand governmental actions without retaliation, nor can they hold their leaders accountable to them and responsive to their demands. Therefore, those who refuse to uphold this pivotal principle of electing political leaders are called supporters of a nondemocratic political system regardless of whether they endorse the two other principles of popular rule. Upholders of this principle, on the other hand, are considered supporters of a democratic political system only when they endorse the two other principles of government of the people and for the people. If they refuse to do so, they are considered supporters of a hybrid system.

In its 3rd wave, the ABS designed and asked a new battery of six questions to ascertain democratic and other regime preferences without using the “D-word”. Three of these questions deal with the aforementioned core principles of democracy, while the three others concern its institutions and processes of daily governance (for the wording of these questions, see the Appendix). To ascertain a variety of political systems East Asians prefer, I consider responses to these six questions in sequence according to the importance or priority of the democratic system property each question probed.

To determine whether East Asians endorse the democratic principle of forming the government by the people, the ABS asked respondents to choose one of the two statements: “Political leaders are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections.” and “Political leaders are chosen on the basis of their virtue and capability even without election.” To further determine whether such elections are *truly competitive*, they were asked to choose one of the two statements: “Multiple parties compete to represent political interests” and “One party represents the interests of all people”. Those who prefer the method of selecting political leaders to that of electing them are classified as supporters of *meritocracy*. Those who favor their elections but prefer a single-party system to a multiparty system are called supporters of *one-party state* or *electoral autocracy*.

Those who prefer a multiparty system are classified as either supporters of democratic or hybrid system, depending on whether they endorse the two other principles of popular rule, that is, government of the people and government for the people. For the former principle, the ABS asked respondents to choose one of the two statements: “Government is our employee, the

people should tell government what needs to be done.” and “The government is like parents, it should decide what is good for us.” For the latter principle, it gave them a choice of the two statements: “Government leaders implement what voters want.” and “Government leaders do what they think best for the people.” Those who chose the first statement in each pair are classified as *democratic system* supporters. Those who refused to do so by choosing the second statement on either or both of the two pairs are classified as *hybrid system* supporters, who combine the democratic practices of truly competitive multi-party elections with the nondemocratic principles of paternalistic rule.⁸

Democratic system supporters are divided into two groups, liberal and non-liberal, depending upon whether they approve of the censorship of the news media. Those who want the government “to prevent the media from publishing things that might be politically destabilizing” are supporters of *non-liberal democracy*. Those who believe that “the media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control” are supporters of *liberal democracy*.

Finally, liberal democratic system supporters are further divided into two subgroups: supporters of capitalist and of socialist democracy. These two subgroups hold different views on the role of the government in seeking to ensure citizens’ wellbeing. In this regard, the ABS asked respondents who should be mainly responsible for their wellbeing. Supporters of *capitalist liberal democracy* believe that “People should look after themselves and be primarily responsible for their own success in life.” Those of *socialist liberal democracy*, in contrast, believe that “The government should bear the main responsibility for taking care of the wellbeing of the people.”

To summarize, the proposed typology of system preferences identifies supporters of three types—autocracy, hybridity, and democracy—of political systems. It further divides supporters of authoritarian systems, all of which lack truly competitive elections, into two subtypes, meritocracy and one-party state. It also divides democratic system supporters into two subtypes, supporters of liberal and illiberal democratic systems. Finally, liberal democratic system supporters are further divided into those of capitalist and socialist liberal democratic systems. All in all, the typology consists of as many as six different types and subtypes of political systems East Asians prefer.

The extant literature is concerned primarily with identifying and comparing supporters of two regime types: democratic and authoritarian. As a result, it provides little or no information about the popularity of other systems like hybrid and meritocratic systems, which are rooted in political legacies of Confucianism. By offering information about these two additional types besides democratic and authoritarian systems, the proposed typology portrays a more comprehensive account of regime preferences. In addition, the typology offers more precise account by differentiating democratic and authoritarian system supporters into various subtypes. Unlike all previous studies, it further considers and compares the popularity of capitalist and socialist liberal democracy in the context of East Asia.

All in all, the proposed six-fold typology serves to construct a more accurate, comprehensive, and precise account of East Asians’ regime preferences than what is known from current literature. It is not based on citizen responses to any question containing the socially desirable term “democracy,” nor is it based on those to question containing the socially undesirable terms such as “dictatorship.” As a result, it minimizes an overestimation of democratic regime preferences and an underestimation of nondemocratic regime preferences.

Analyses and Findings

Support for Democracy in Principle

Do East Asians approve of democracy overwhelmingly as a system of government “in principle at least,” as Larry Diamond and other proponents of universal democratization often claim? Do they do so uniformly throughout the entire region of East Asia? Since these questions focus on the magnitude and distribution of democratic regime support *in principle*, I first chose the questions the ABS asked to probe whether East Asians endorse the three core principles of democratic politics. As discussed above, each of the three questions deals with a different dimension of popular rule. None of the questions contained the “D-word” that encourages respondents to overstate their approval of democracy.

For the 12 East Asian countries the ABS surveyed as a whole, Table 2 reports the proportions endorsing each of three democratic principles. *For government by the people*, about three quarters of East Asians (73%) endorsed it by choosing the popular elections of political leaders over their selections on the basis of virtues and capability. *For government of the people*, less than half (47%) affirmed it by rejecting the passive role of citizens and accepting their active participation in the political process. *For government for the people*, a much smaller minority of about two-fifths (39%) approved of it by choosing government leaders who follow what voters want over those leaders who follow their own views. All these three figures are much smaller than what is generally known as an overwhelming majority of 90 percent or more. Obviously, in East Asia, none of the three democratic principles wins an overwhelming approval.

A careful scrutiny of the data reported in Table 2 reveals that of the three democratic principles, *government by the people* is the only one that wins the approval of majorities in all 12 countries. These majorities range from a low of 63 percent in China to a high of 81 percent in Korea. Being much smaller than the 90 percent level, none of these percentages can be regarded as an overwhelming majority. As for the principle of *government of the people*, its supporters constitute majorities only in four countries, including Japan (65%), Mongolia (67%), Taiwan (63%), and Thailand (54%). In three other democracies, Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines, even a bare majority is not willing to support it. More surprisingly, in all 12 countries, majorities refuse to endorse the principle of *government for the people*. In five countries, which include three democratic countries, Japan (37%), the Philippines (34%), and Taiwan (35%), they do not form even substantial minorities of more than two-fifths.

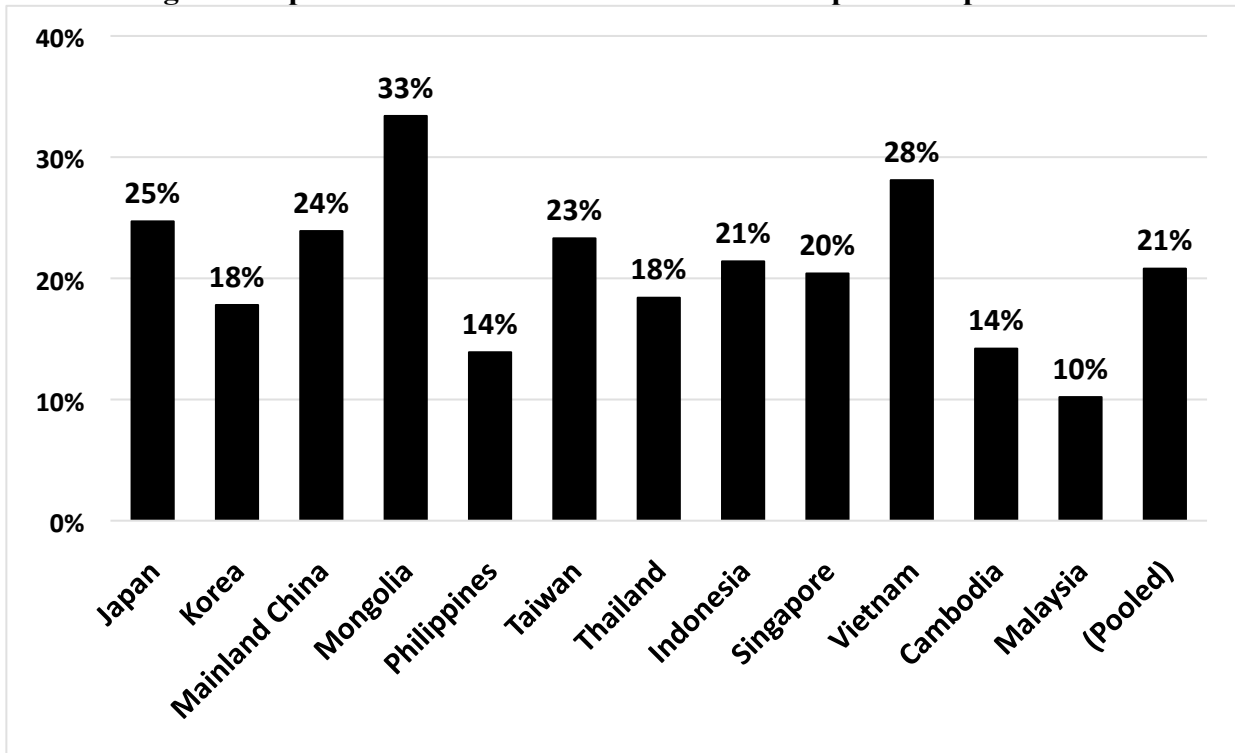
To estimate the overall level of support for democratic politics in principle, I calculated the mean of the three principles East Asians endorse. According to this statistic, the average person in the region supports less than two (1.7) principles. In the region as a whole, those who support all three principles form a small minority of about one-fifth (21%). In none of the countries do those full supporters of democracy in principle constitute even a bare majority (see Figure 3). Even in the three so-called liberal democracies of Japan (25%), Korea (17%), and Taiwan (23%), they constitute a small minority of one-quarter or less.

Table 2. Upholders of the Democratic Principles of Popular Rule

Countries	Democratic Principles		
	Government by the people	Government of the people	Government for the people
Japan	80%	68%	38%
Korea	85%	42%	52%
Mainland China	73%	53%	52%
Mongolia	76%	68%	51%
Philippines	68%	45%	34%
Taiwan	84%	70%	37%
Thailand	79%	64%	32%
Indonesia	86%	46%	56%
Singapore	82%	37%	47%
Vietnam	84%	55%	57%
Cambodia	76%	29%	32%
Malaysia	72%	35%	25%
(Pooled)	79%	51%	42%

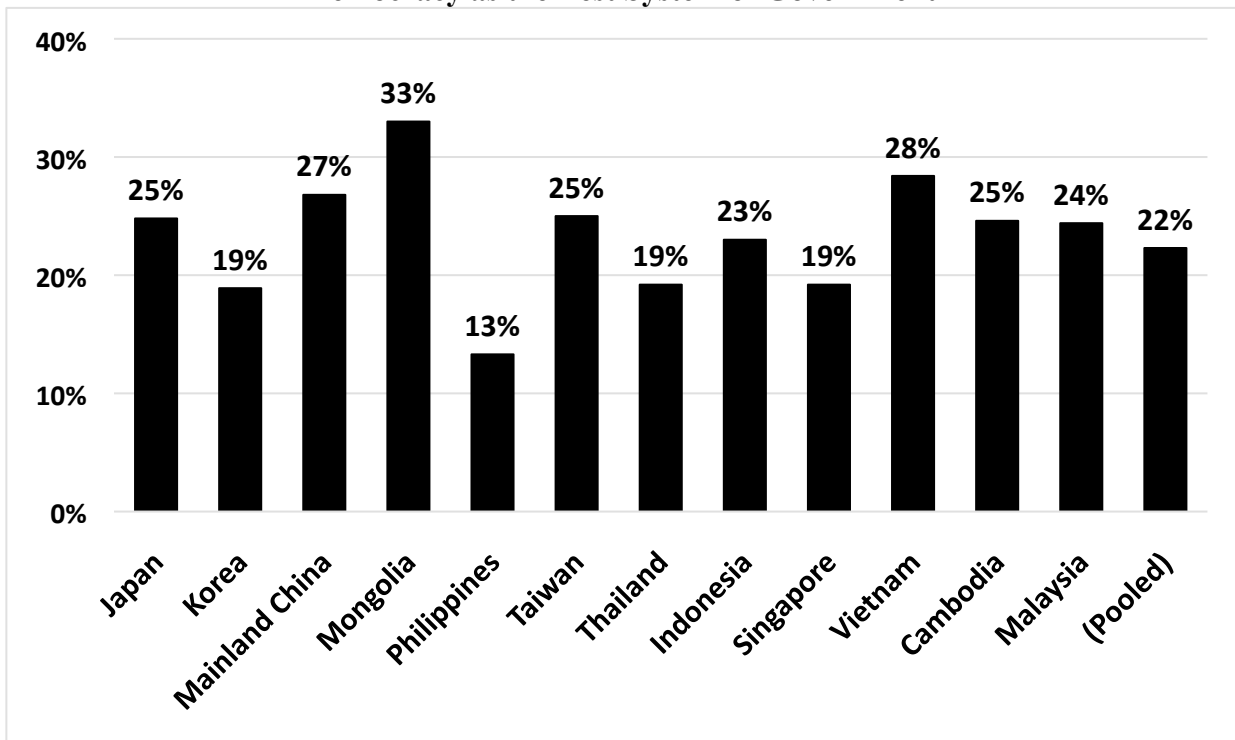
Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

Figure 3. Upholders of all Three Democratic Principles of Popular Rule



Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

Figure 4. Upholders of Three Principles of Popular Rule among Avowed Supporters of Democracy as the Best System of Government



Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

In none of the East Asian countries today does an overwhelming majority endorse any of the three core principles of democratic politics. In none of the countries, moreover, is even a bare majority fully supportive of the basic intellectual foundation of democratic politics by endorsing all the three principles of popular support. More notably, the full supporters of democracy in principle constitute less than one-quarter (22%) of those who avowed support for it as “the best system”. In none of the countries do they form even a substantial minority of more than one-third of avowed democratic system supporters (see Figure 4). These findings contradict the claim that popular support for democracy “in principle at least” is “overwhelming and universal.” They also suggests that in East Asia, democracy is far from emerging as the most favored system of government, as widely claimed in the literature.

A Variety of System Preferences

If a large majority of East Asians refuses to fully support democracy even in principle, do they favor any other types of political systems more than a democratic system? If they do, what other systems do they favor most and least? In Table 3, I sought to address these questions by analyzing responses to the ABS battery of six questions according to the proposed sequential model of democratization taking place in the minds of ordinary citizens. As discussed in detail above, its developmental sequence identifies six types and subtypes of system preferences, starting with the principle and practice of establishing popular government, proceeding through truly competitive multiparty elections and free communications and expressions of information and ending with the goal of welfare policy.

A notable feature of Table 3 is that none of these four main types—meritocracy, one-party state, hybridity, and democracy— represents even a substantial minority, not to mention a majority. With no exception, each and every one of them comprises a small minority that accounts for about one-quarter or less. More precisely, those who fall into these four types, one democratic and three nondemocratic, range from a low of 15 percent to a high of 27 percent. Obviously, East Asians do not favor any type of political system overwhelmingly. Instead, they are highly divided into the four types, none of which is powerful enough to overwhelm the rest. The lack of a general agreement on the preferred type of political system is a modal characteristic of political cultures in East Asia.

As expected from the aforementioned analysis of the three principles of popular rule, democracy is not the system East Asians favor most. Instead, it is the least favored of the four main types, including meritocracy, one-party state, and a hybrid system. While supporters of all non-democratic systems form minorities ranging from a low of 20 percent to a high of 27 percent, those of democracy account for a much smaller minority of 13 percent. In contemporary East Asia, non-democratic system supporters, when considered together, overwhelm democratic system supporters by a large margin of over 4 to 1 (69% vs. 15%). It is not the other way around, as the thesis of universal democratization suggests.

A careful scrutiny of the data in Table 3 reveals that all eleven countries are alike in that democracy is not the most favored system.⁹ Yet the relative ranking of its affinity varies considerably across the types of political systems in which East Asians currently live. In four democratic countries—Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan, democracy is one of the two most favored systems. In seven other countries, which include the two democracies of the Philippines and Indonesia, in striking contrast, it is one of the two least favored systems. Obviously, citizens

Table 3. A Variety of Political System preferences

Country	The Preferred Types of Political Systems					
	Meritocracy	One-Party State	Hybrid System	Illiberal Democracy	Capitalist Liberal Democracy	Socialist Liberal Democracy
Japan	19%	12%	42%	4%	14%	3%
Korea	14%	10%	39%	2%	8%	6%
Mainland China	23%	42%	8%	2%	4%	2%
Mongolia	23%	12%	33%	6%	21%	2%
Philippines	31%	27%	29%	2%	7%	1%
Taiwan	15%	9%	41%	8%	8%	5%
Thailand	19%	13%	35%	2%	7%	5%
Indonesia	12%	24%	29%	6%	1%	6%
Singapore	18%	20%	40%	4%	11%	2%
Cambodia	24%	59%	12%	2%	2%	2%
Malaysia	27%	47%	15%	2%	3%	1%
(Pooled)	20%	23%	27%	3%	7%	3%

Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

of democratic states are more in favor of democracy than their peers of nondemocratic states. This finding renders support for the theory of institutional learning that greater experience with democratic politics leads to greater support for it (Rose 2007; Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998; Shin and McDonough 1999). Nonetheless, it should be noted that even in these democracies, more than two-thirds are not in favor of democratic rule.

Among a minority of democratic system supporters, liberal democracy is far more popular than non-liberal democracy (11% vs. 3%).¹⁰ This pattern prevails throughout the entire region. In all of the 11 countries, however, liberal democrats represent a small minority of less than one-quarter. In five countries, including China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Malaysia, they form a very small minority of less than 10 percent. Even in Japan where a liberal democratic system has governed consecutively for over six decades, less than one-fifth (17%) embraces it as the most favored system. More notably, its supporters account for much less than

one-half of those who favor a hybrid system (42%). From this finding alone, it appears that liberal democrats are not likely to celebrate “the end of history” in East Asia.

The most notable feature of Table 3 concerns the types of political system East Asians prefer most. The table shows that each of three non-democratic systems is favored most at least in one of the countries, although the number of countries that favor it most varies across these three types of non-democracies. For example, a hybrid system is most popular in 7 countries. It is followed by one-party system most popular in three countries and a meritocracy most popular in one country. What is most favored throughout the entire region of East Asia today is a hybrid system of combining competitive elections with the practices of paternalistic rule.

The countries where a hybrid system is favored most include Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore. This group includes all democracies in the region with the exception of the Philippines where a meritocracy is favored most. In China, Cambodia, and Malaysia, where the ruling party dominates the political process, one-party system is favored most. In the region, citizens of democracies are most supportive of a hybrid system, while those of one-party states are most supportive of the one-system in which they currently live. Do the former do so because they see their current system as a hybrid system, not a democracy? This is an important question to be addressed in future research.

Affinity for Liberal Democracy

What sort of East Asians adheres to the system of liberal democracy, the system favored least in their region? What differentiates adherents of liberal democracy from those of a hybrid system, the system most favored in the region? Following the lead of neo-modernization theory (Inglehart and Welzel 2010; Welzel 2013), I compared supporters of these two political systems in terms of the socioeconomic resources they command and the values they cherish for themselves and their community. The theory holds that people come to prefer liberal democracy to other political systems when socioeconomic, intellectual, and psychological resources enable them to steer their own destinies under it.

To measure the levels of economic and intellectual resources supporters of the two different systems command, this study employed respondents’ family income and their own educational attainment as indicators of those resources. The values of these two variables were first divided into three levels each of which contains a similar number of respondents. Their three levels are combined into a summary index, which assigns them to one of five different levels of socioeconomic resources.

On this index, those placed on the bottom rung represent the poorest and most uneducated or undereducated segment of the population, while those on the top rung represent its most affluent and college-educated segment. According to the theory of neo-modernization, greater access to those resources motivates people to embrace democracy and reject its alternatives (Inglehart and Welzel 2010; Welzel 2013). Those on a higher rung of the resources index, therefore, are more likely to embrace it than those on its lower rung. Among those on the top rung, supporters of liberal democracy are also likely to outnumber those of a hybrid system. Among those on the bottom, in contrast, the former are outnumbered by the latter.

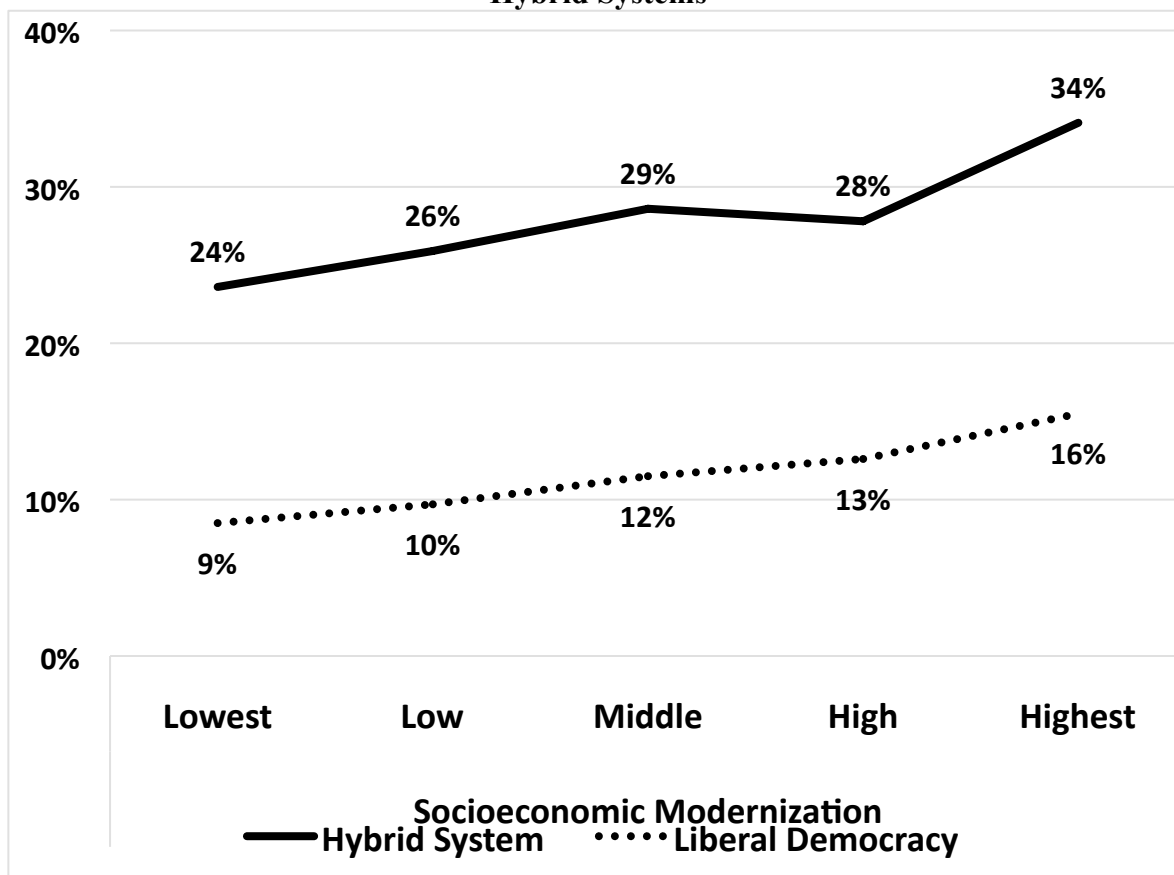
To measure their value orientations, I chose from the ABS instrument the four items tapping the extent to which East Asians feel emancipated from the traditional norms and authorities that would proscribe the freedom of personal and social life. As the attached

Appendix B shows, two of the four chosen norms deal with respecting the authority of parents (Q55) and mothers-in-law (Q56). The other two (Q59 and Q60) deal with withholding dissenting views in a group setting for the sake of its harmony (for the wording of these questions, see Appendix B). Responses expressing the unwillingness to abide by these four norms are combined and recoded into a summary index that scales personal emancipation into five levels.

On this index, the lowest of these levels indicates being fully adherent to the norms, while the highest level indicates being fully detached or emancipated from those norms. Those placed at a higher level on this emancipation index are more likely to favor democracy than those at a lower level. Conversely, the former are less likely to favor a hybrid system than the latter. Among the former, democracy is expected to be more popular than a hybrid system. Among the latter, in contrast, a hybrid system is expected to be more popular than democracy.

For each of five socioeconomic resources levels, Figure 5 shows the proportions supporting a democracy and a hybrid system. As the theory of neo-modernization holds, supporters of democracy increase steadily from 9 percent at the bottom level to 16 percent at the top level. Contrary to what is expected from the theory, however, hybrid system supporters also increase almost steadily from a low of 24 percent to a high of 34 percent. When the percentage points of their increments are compared, it is evident that socioeconomic resources engender greater support for a hybrid system than for a liberal democracy (10% vs. 7%).

Figure 5. Socioeconomic Modernization and Support for Liberal Democratic and Hybrid Systems



Source: 2010-2011 Asian Barometer Survey.

In addition, the table shows that at every resources level, supporters of a hybrid system outnumber those of liberal democracy by a large margin of more than 15 percentage points. Even among high-income people with college educations, for example, the former are over twice more numerous than the latter (34% vs. 16%). Such greater affinity for a hybrid system among the most modernized population segment of East Asia suggests that, in this region, socioeconomic modernization is more conducive to the hybridization of mass political culture than its democratization.

Do East Asians also express greater affinity for democracy when they enjoy a greater amount of freedom to disagree with other people and disobey those in authority? Figure 6 shows that at each higher level of such freedom, its supporters increase steadily by 9 percentage points from 7 percent to 16 percent. As a result, they are over two times more numerous at the highest level than at the lowest level of the emancipation index tapping such freedom. Yet even among those at the highest level who feel completely emancipated from the oppressive social norms and practices, fewer than one in six (16%) favors democracy while twice as many favor a hybrid system (33%).

(Figure 6)

Similarly greater freedom in interpersonal life also leads to greater affinity for a hybrid system, increasing it steadily from 24 percent to 35 percent. While it enhances support for a hybrid system by 11 percentage points, it also supports liberal democracy by 9 percentage points. As socioeconomic resources do, this freedom enhances support for a hybrid system to a greater extent than that for liberal democracy. Even with further advances in socioeconomic modernization and emancipation from oppressive social life, therefore, East Asia is not likely to be transformed into a region of truly liberal democratic system supporters, as the “end of history” thesis predicts. Instead, it is likely to remain a region of hybrid system supporters.

Summary and Conclusions

In East Asia, as in other regions of the world, the belief that “democracy is the best form of government” is widely shared among its mass publics. Yet, most of those who uphold this belief do not even endorse the key democratic tenets of popular rule. Although they favor the elections of their political leaders, they endorse those of guardianship or paternalistic rule. Among those avowed believers in democracy as the best form of government, a large majority of more than two-thirds (68%) refuses to support all the three principles of popular rule, which are known as *government by the people, government of the people, and government for the people*.

In East Asia today, the fully committed to democracy *in principle* constitute a small minority (22%), a figure that is much smaller than an overwhelming majority. Even among this minority, nearly one-half (48%) refuses to endorse its essential practices of multiparty competition and press freedom. As a result, only one in eight (12%) avowed democratic believers embraces democracy both in principle and in practice. The finding that nearly seven out of eight (88%) avowed supporters are not fully committed to its principles and practices raises a serious question about the widely popular practice of measuring its universal approbation in terms of the avowed endorsement of the democratic belief. It also raises a serious question about the validity of the universal democratization theses of Western origin.

In the region as a whole, those fully committed to democratic politics constitute the smallest minority among supporters of four main political systems. In every country, they also

form a small minority of less than one-third. In every country, moreover, they are outnumbered by supporters of one of nondemocratic political systems by a large margin. When three non-democratic systems are considered together, supporters of these non-democratic systems form a substantial majority of more than three-quarters (77%), while those of democratic systems make up a small minority of one-seventh (15%). When these two figures are compared, it is evident that among East Asians, preferences for nondemocratic systems overwhelm those for democratic systems. This finding directly challenges what the theses of universal democratization suggest to the region.

More notable is the finding that among East Asians, neither socioeconomic modernization nor cultural liberalization transforms the prevalent pattern of their system preferences from the nondemocratic to the democratic. In the West, people are known to prefer liberal democracy to its nondemocratic alternatives as they become modernized with greater access to socioeconomic and intellectual resources and as they become liberalized from oppressive authorities and norms (Welzel 2013). In East Asia, however, in striking contrast, people continue to prefer a hybrid political system to democracy even when they become highly modernized and fully liberalized from those authorities and norms.

Among the socioeconomically most modernized segment of the East Asian population, for example, supporters of a hybrid system are over two times as many as those of liberal democracy. Among the culturally most liberalized segment as well, the former are over two times more numerous than the latter. Such patterns of non-democratic system preferences, even among the most modernized and liberalized, testify that the Western theory of neo-modernization does not hold true in East Asia. As the forces of socioeconomic and cultural change contribute more to the hybridization of political cultures than to their democratization, moreover, the region is highly unlikely to be teeming with liberal democrats even when history reaches its ultimate end (Stanley and Lee 2014).

In a nutshell, political scientists in the West have recently put forward numerous claims for the universalization of democracy.¹¹ In East Asia, however, all these claims run directly counter to the contrasting reality of non-democratic system preferences among a large majority of its citizenries. The claims, therefore, no longer play the role of theoretical propositions, which advance accurate knowledge about political system change taking place in the minds of ordinary citizens in the non-Western world (Rueschemeyer 2009; Lebow and Lichbach 2007). Instead, they serve merely as “prodemocracy rhetoric,” which Thomas Carothers (1999, 3) once found “used deliberately to obscure a contrary reality.”

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Appendix

A. System Preferences

Let's talk for a moment about the kind of government you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements do you agree with most? Choose the first or the second statement.

- Q74. Statement 1. Government leaders implement what voters want.
Statement 2. Government leaders do what they think is best for the people.
- Q75. Statement 1. Government is our employee. The people should tell government what needs to be done.
Statement 2. The government is like parent, it should decide what is good for us.
- Q76. Statement 1. The media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control.
Statement 2. The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that might be politically destabilizing.
- Q77. Statement 1. People should look after themselves and be primarily responsible for their own success in life.
Statement 2. The government should bear the main responsibility for taking care of the wellbeing of the people.
- Q78. Statement 1. Political are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections.
Statement 2. Political leaders are chosen on the basis of their virtue and capability even without election.
- Q79. Statement 1. Multiple parties compete to represent political interests.
Statement 2. One party represents the interests of all the people.

B. Emancipation from Traditional Authorities and Norms

Please tell me how you feel about the following statements. Would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?

- Q55. Even if parents demands are unreasonable, children still should what they ask.
- Q56. When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law come into conflict, even if the mother-in-law is in the wrong, the husband should still persuade his wife to obey his mother.
- Q59. Even if there is some disagreement with others, one should avoid the conflict.
- Q60. A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him.

Endnotes

¹ According to Gallup International 2015 global End of Year survey conducted in 63 countries, a substantial majority of 76 percent believes that “democracy may have problems, but it is still the best system of government.”

² A global survey conducted in 2015 reports that majorities in nearly all 38 nations polled say it is at least somewhat important to live in a country with free speech, a free press and freedom on the internet (Wike and Simmons 2015).

³ Of 16 independent countries in the region, only 6 countries (37%) are currently rated as electoral or liberal democracies.

⁴ The poorly informed are those who assess at least one of two democratic system characteristics—popular elections and protecting liberty—as unessential to democracy and/or those who assess at least one of two authoritarian system characteristics—religious interpretation of laws and military takeover as essential to it.

⁵ For the shortcomings of measuring support for democracy by disaggregating it into its components, see Bratton (2010).

⁶ In post-authoritarian and authoritarian countries, ordinary people tend to embrace democracy first as a political ideal, followed by its principles and regime structure, institutions, and processes in this order.

⁷ There are five known copies of President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in his handwriting, each with a slightly different text, and named for the people who first received them: Nicolay, Hay, Everett, Bancroft and Bliss. These copies are retrievable from

<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

⁸ This type of hybrid system is often called a distinct form of Asian democracy in East Asia (Thompson 2015). In Latin America, it is called delegative democracy (O’Donnell 1994).

⁹ Vietnam was not included in this analysis because the country did not ask the entire set of 6 questions tapping into system preferences.

¹⁰ The ABS asked a total of 10 questions tapping into authoritarian procedural orientations. Previous analyses of these items reveal that in East Asia, non-liberal democrats are far more numerous than their liberal peers.

¹¹ For a critical assessment of democratic universalism as a historical phenomenon, see Rosanvallon (2009).