

Reviews

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
doi:10.1017/S1468109906212416

Daron Acemoglu (Economics, MIT) and James Robinson (Government, Harvard) have written a book that asks one of the biggest questions in political science: why do some countries democratize while others remain authoritarian and still others vacillate unstably between the two? Their answer to this question was adumbrated in articles they have published in recent years in the *American Economic Review* and the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, so the contours of their argument are known to us. But the book is a rich elaboration and extension, and will be widely used in undergraduate and graduate level courses in political economy. This book will be appreciated particularly by economists who are not satisfied with an argument until it reaches its apotheosis as a set of mathematical equations. But the less quantitative have much to glean from this rich book as well, for, as with the best work in the formal modeling tradition, it clarifies what assumptions are required for its arguments to hold, and shows in high relief the contrasts with other standard works on democratization.

The authors first provide a simple, materialist answer: income inequality creates revolutionary potential because the angry poor can potentially mobilize. The elites may either repress the unrest, or defuse it by making concessions to the masses if the costs of repression are too high. Why the elite agrees to democratize rather than make economic concessions, is an interesting question. The problem with economic concessions, Acemoglu and Robinson argue, is that they are easy to revoke and therefore may be insufficient to convince revolutionaries to lay down their arms. Expanding the franchise is a more credible commitment to present and future income redistribution in favor of the masses, because political institutions are hard to change. We might call this Karl Marx meets Anthony Downs. But perhaps Aristotle was there first, when he mused that ‘Owing to constant strife and civil war between the people and the wealthier class, neither side . . . ever sets up a constitution fair and acceptable all around’ (*The Politics* IV, 11). The rest of the book explores a variety of ways to make the simple model more complex and realistic.

If political science can be said to be dominated by three paradigms – materialism, institutionalism, and culture or ideas – this book works primarily to fuse the first two. Most political scientists are eclectic so we are accustomed to mixed and matched paradigms, but combining levels of analysis is not a simple matter for economists like Acemoglu and Robinson who are committed to tightly formulated statements that can be reduced to mathematical equations. An aggressively materialist position like Marxism would be simplest to model: the

distribution of productive resources dominates all other forces, reducing politics to a measure of material wealth. Following this argument, we would expect that either the size of the franchise should follow increasing wealth, or a revolution would grab it. Acemoglu and Robinson in fact do make these predictions. Only when and to the extent that the lower classes are free of economic domination can they gain political influence.

How, then, do institutions matter for Acemoglu and Robinson? They draw inspiration from the most mathematically developed branch of political science, institutionalist political economy, or positive political theory. If institutions are hard to change, they have the capacity to influence political actions and to structure equilibria among strategic players, at least in the short run. Acemoglu and Robinson start with the median voter theorem to conclude that in a democracy, the median voter is poorer than the mean, and will therefore prefer greater tax rates and more redistribution. The greater the income inequality, the greater the redistribution in a democracy. They acknowledge the empirical difficulties of this claim: Sweden is both more equal and more redistributive than the United States, for example. They accept that there may be omitted institutional and cultural variables that are correlated with inequality, such as electoral rules or cultural homogeneity. But they use a simple reduced form model in which the median voter is pivotal.

Acemoglu and Robinson turn to materialist analysis to explain the long run, for institutions themselves are the objects of struggle and pressures to change. For Marxists, institutions are epiphenomenal and purely a reflection of material resources. Why do institutions provide commitment at all? Acemoglu and Robinson provide several reasons for a difference between *de facto* power and the *de jure* power provided by institutional arrangements such as democracy. Parties that form under democratic competition make specific investments in mass mobilization that would be devalued if democracy were to collapse. This shores up democracy because it gives people a greater incentive to fight for it *ex post*. Second, it is easier for the masses to solve collective action problems once they have been mobilized (p. 178). But Acemoglu and Robinson also note that democratic consolidation, or the persistence of democracy is variable rather than inevitable. Income equality makes democracy more likely to emerge in the first place because if the median voter is not poor, the rich worry less about expropriation from an electoral majority. Income equality, or at least the presence of a large middle class, also makes democracy more viable in the longer run because a higher median-voter income reduces the elite's economic loss from redistributive policies. Acemoglu and Robinson hold up Argentina as an example of a regime flip-flopping between democracy and dictatorship because the stark inequality of income gives voters a desire for too much of the elite's money, and the elite has too much to lose from allowing the expropriation to continue.

How do the arguments in this book hold up against empirical scrutiny? The primary strength of this book lies in its theoretical clarity, for it builds on and streamlines the canonical works of masters such as Barrington Moore and Seymour Lipset. Although the book is replete with interesting comparisons to other scholarly work on democratization, I winced at the unfair dismissal of Carles Boix's book, *Democracy and Redistribution* (Cambridge, 2003), as a restatement of their static model of democratization published earlier in article form (p. 87). Boix's argument about the mobility of assets seems to me quite distinct from the one offered here. I also wondered at the quibble with Przeworski's claim that democracy can be consolidated when all of the relevant players find themselves better off under democracy, since the quarrel was over the

definition of what constitutes ‘relevant’ (p. 229). The book’s greatest value, however, will be to inspire systematic empirical tests of its propositions, which I expect will soon be underway in various corners of the academic community.

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Lam Peng Er, *Japan’s Relations with China – Facing a Rising Power*, Routledge Curzon, 2006.
doi:10.1017/S1468109906222412

Japan’s relationship with China is a tremendously important and complex topic, addressed in great breadth by a dozen distinguished experts in this new volume edited by Lam Peng Er of the National University of Singapore’s East Asian Institute (EAI). Based on papers from a conference held at EAI in 2002, the compilation is up to date in its coverage of the major issues confronting Japan’s China policy in the twenty-first century.

The core of the bilateral relationship is examined by Kokubun Ryosei, a widely respected expert on China and Japan–China ties at Keio University. Kokubun has excellent access to the Foreign Ministry, engaging in regular *benkyokai* (study group) meetings with members of the China School, and it shows in his analysis. Stressing the change in the structure of international politics following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kokubun argues that the recent difficulties in Japan–China relations reflect the incompatibility of the traditional ‘friendship’ framework and the current realities of the regional order. Furthermore, however suitable the friendship paradigm may have been in an era of relatively narrow channels of interchange, the explosive growth of bilateral contact has rendered it entirely inappropriate. In this Kokubun is absolutely correct, and one can only hope that his views are accepted in policy-making circles.

Murata Koji addresses the domestic political milieu, revealing persuasively how the process of establishing a foreign policy toward China has collapsed into turmoil under the pressure of three concurrent changes: disorderly party politics since 1993, anti-Chinese sentiment in the general populace since the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the 1995 nuclear tests, and the decline of the Foreign Ministry and its China School in particular. In regard to this last point, Murata argues that the tendency of any group of bureaucrats to be captured by their clients has reached an extreme in the case of the China School, tainting its credibility. Certainly under Prime Minister Koizumi, Japanese policy toward China has ignored the placating strategy long preferred by diplomats, but is Murata correct that the situation threatens to become as extreme as that in the United States during the Red Scare years of Senator McCarthy? Or is Kokubun’s point about the tremendous breadth of the relationship an important counterbalance to the declining influence of experts?

Kamachi Noriko provides a valuable survey of Japanese writings on postwar Japan–China relations, situating various scholars and opinion leaders according to discipline and ideology and tracing changes over time. Noting the excellent contributions by scholars of international relations, particularly in English, Kamachi suggests that Japanese specialists in China studies should likewise attempt to ‘internationalize’ their work.

He Yinan sees bilateral tensions arising mainly from competing national myths about history, myths that have been reinvented in both Japan and China since the 1970s and therefore violate the mutual understandings reached in the Normalization communiqué and Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Arguing that these myths are put forth to serve partisan political interests, He suggests that bilateral collaboration and the abandonment of myth making in national historiography is vital to achieving better relations. One wonders, however, whether squarely facing historical facts – as welcome as that would be on both sides – would be enough to resolve the strategic rivalry that has blossomed in the past few years.

David Arase reviews Japanese ODA, a topic on which his work is well known, and the changes in ODA policy toward China in particular. Fundamentally, Arase contends that it is too late in China's economic development for Japan to exploit ODA power as a tool to constrain Beijing's policies. There is an interesting tension in Arase's chapter emerging between two subtly different paradigms. The analysis of ODA from the perspective of development assistance leads to recommendations for greater transparency and stakeholder participation, while the analysis of Japan–China ties from an international relations perspective reveals strategic competition. How to resolve this combination of zero-sum and positive-sum games is a deeply intriguing conundrum.

The PRC's most sensitive spot is actually Taiwan. Takagi Seiichiro adeptly explains how the Taiwan issue has been managed (and mismanaged) over the decades, stressing the fundamental change in the nature of the economic and political reality of Taiwan since the 1970s. Advanced technology and democratization have made Taiwan much more important for Japan than in the past, yet Takagi shows that the Japanese government can manage a careful balance and avoid allowing the Taiwan issue itself to inflame relations with Beijing. He expresses fears that if relations do worsen from other causes, however, Tokyo may not be able to resist prodding that most sensitive spot.

Purnendra Jain and Glenn Hook have each contributed fascinating chapters on bilateral contacts outside the traditional framework of the central governments. Jain discusses how governments at the prefectural and, especially, municipal levels have established a new domain for policymaking through such means as 'sister city' or 'sister province' relations, as well as trade promotion offices. Hook explores the case of efforts by Kyushu to build (metaphorical) bridges to mainland Asia within the framework of the Pan-Yellow Sea Zone. Kyushu, Hook says, is rejecting its postwar marginalization to the periphery of Japan's economic miracle centered on the Tokyo–Nagoya–Osaka axis, and is instead centering itself in a microregion encompassing eastern China and South Korea. Both chapters serve as a corrective to the dominant, negative image of bilateral ties that emerges from a focus on what is said and done in Tokyo and Beijing.

The ability of sub-national governments to expand their space for exchange and cooperation activities, despite tensions at the national government level, reveals that not only has the sheer volume of bilateral contact exploded (as Kokubun noted), but also that the very nature of the agents of Japan–China relations has changed. Takahara Akio's chapter on Japanese NGOs in China builds on this notion, showing how NGOs in general, and a small Japanese NGO Green Earth Network in particular, can make a positive impact on real problems on the ground. By doing so, they can also contribute to reshaping ideas of what 'China' and 'Japan' mean to human beings.

The final three chapters, by Brad Glosserman, Lee Poh Ping, and Gilbert Rozman, expertly reflect the Japan–China relationship as seen from the perspectives of the United States, Malaysia,

and Russia, respectively. Each of these men is recognized as an outstanding specialist, and each chapter stands on its own merits. Each exposes how a degree of Japan–China competition is welcome in Washington, Kuala Lumpur, and Moscow, while all three hope for stability in the region.

The only significant weakness of the volume overall is that the whole is perhaps less than the sum of its parts – for example the last three chapters take such different approaches that one struggles to assemble a coherent picture of Japan–China relations in a regional context. Perhaps a chapter on Korea’s role between them could have helped, but the challenge of conference volumes is to go beyond a stack of papers, however individually excellent, to creating some unified whole. Lam makes a valiant effort to tie together the chapters around the theme of ‘China rising, Japan stagnating’, but when so many of the authors rely mainly on their own past work in their footnotes it is clear that most of the work of synthesizing their disparate perspectives is left to the reader. Perhaps, as Lam argues, this is a necessary process that reflects the truth of Japan–China relations today: multifaceted and diverse, unable to be summed up in a simple phrase or slogan. All the more reason to follow Kokubun’s recommendation and transcend static notions of ‘friendship’.

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Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006

doi:10.1017/S1468109906232419

In her ambitious first book, American political scientist Kathleen Collins argues that clans – defined as informal subethnic networks of individuals linked through kinship and personal ties – are central for understanding regime transitions in post-Soviet Central Asia. This is because Central Asian societies are clan-based and ‘in clan-based societies, formal [political] institutions and elite decisions have limited power’ (p. 23). Therefore, focusing on formal institutions, as most studies of transition do, means missing the most important part of the picture. Collins further argues that clans are central for understanding the variation and stability of Central Asia’s regimes. Her comparison of the political trajectories of three Central Asian states shows that in the early 1990s clan competition and cooperation led to tentative democratization in Kyrgyzstan, a new autocracy in Uzbekistan, and civil war in Tajikistan. However, in the late 1990s clans’ pursuit of their own political and economic interests drove these initially divergent regimes toward a common model of weak and potentially failing authoritarianism. Hence, clan politics does not produce durable regimes, either democratic or autocratic. By examining the political role of clans, Collins seeks to make a contribution to general theory of regime transitions for, as she points out, clan-based societies are not uncommon in other parts of the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East.

Informal types of social organization are more difficult to study, measure, and quantify than formal ones. According to Collins, clans present a particular challenge because they ‘became a taboo subject during the Soviet era, and continue to be taboo today’ (p. 357) and there is limited scholarship on the topic. For these reasons, the author adopts a qualitative and

comparative historical approach. The book, which grew out of Collins's award-winning doctoral dissertation, draws on primary data gathered over three years of fieldwork and follow-up trips to Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan taking place in 1994–2004. The author interviewed over 200 representatives of political elites, broadly defined, and more than 300 rural respondents. She also consulted published sources and archival documents. Russian was her primary language of research.

The book is organized into ten chapters. In the first two, Collins introduces her argument that informal clan networks played the most important role in shaping Central Asia's political systems during the transition period and presents a series of propositions regarding the persistence and short- and long-term effects of clan politics. Clans predate Central Asia's absorption into the Soviet Union and the next two historical chapters trace the evolving relationship between the Soviet state and clans. The Bolsheviks, who deemed clans anti-modern and therefore anti-Soviet, sought to eradicate them. However, their own policies of nation-building and promoting local cadres ensured clans' survival. Later on, the economy of shortage and Brezhnev's 'colonial-like, indirect style of rule in Central Asia . . . fostered the growth of clan patronage networks and clan politics' (p. 131). Hence, Central Asian republics were set on a path toward the informalization of politics, which intensified during Gorbachev's perestroika and after the Soviet Union's collapse. In Chapters 5 and 6, Collins provides a detailed discussion of political developments in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in 1990–95, that is, during the years immediately before and after the onset of independence. Her argument here is that the short-term regime transition was stable, even if divergent, in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan because in each country clans reached a pact brokered by a legitimate leader; by contrast, the absence of such a pact in Tajikistan led to regime breakdown and civil war. Chapters 7 and 8 cover the period from 1995 to 2004 and address the long-term stability of each country's political regime. In each case, clans further penetrated formal institutions and strengthened their control of the state's economic and political resources. As a result, the three countries' initially distinct trajectories converged, so that each is an authoritarian but unconsolidated regime, whose leaders and state institutions are increasingly shaped and constrained by informal clan politics. Chapter 9 discusses the political role of clans in other former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, the Caucasus) as well as in Africa (colonial and post-colonial Somalia) and Western Europe (medieval to contemporary Italy). These comparisons lead Collins to conclude that historically clans declined in Western European societies which were early adopters of the state, nation, and capitalism; conversely, the late development of the state, nation, and market serves as precondition for the persistence of clans. Chapter 10 revisits the study's central questions and summarizes its findings.

The author is to be commended for seeking to reorient comparative politics toward the study of informal relations and politics and for her attention to Central Asia's pre-transition history. The book marshals an impressive array of scholarship on regime transition, state formation, comparative political science, and history of Soviet nation-building. It is therefore surprising that Collins does not offer a sustained discussion of the studies analyzing the primitivization and informalization of economic and political life that accompanied the first decade of Russia's post-Soviet transition (by Michael Burawoy, Simon Clarke, Eugene Huskey, Stephen Kotkin, Vladimir Shlapentokh, to name a few.) While the scholarship on clan politics may indeed be limited, this body of literature has generated conceptual insights on the reinvigoration of particularistic norms and practices inherited from the Soviet era under the conditions of transition that are

directly relevant for Collins's examination of Central Asian clans as networks of particularistic trust. One of Collins's claims is that clan politics is an attribute of Central Asia's status as a Soviet periphery and of the lasting impact of that peripheral status. However, reading her book alongside this body of literature suggests that processes impelling the intensification of informal types of social organization have been operant throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet realm leading to the question: Is it clans – that is, inter-personal networks defined by real and imagined kinship – or is it a more general variety of local and class-based informal networks of patronage and trust?

This question lingers because Collins's discussion of clans remain somewhat abstract. Despite the author's prodigious research, the book does not analyze what a typical Central Asian clan might look like, what a typical clan size is (apart from one unsourced estimate made by 'Central Asian journalists . . . that Central Asian clans range from 2,000 to 20,000 individuals' (p. 18)), how a clan is organized and governed (by way of illustration, Collins tells us that Central Asian presidents, government officials, and village elders appoint friends and relatives to desirable positions, but this phenomenon is not unique to clan-based societies and does not tell us much about governance), clan variation (by ethnicity, region, across rural-urban lines), what gender relations inside a clan are. One of the clan's defining features is that the bonds of kinship transcend class; otherwise it is not a clan but an elite patronage network or a poor folks' self-help association. Therefore, perhaps the most serious omission is that Collins does not offer a template of the relationship between elite and non-elite members of the same clan. For instance, while it is clear that those clan members who belong to Central Asia's ruling elites reap enormous benefits from their privileged access to the state's resources, we do not learn much about the benefits clan membership delivers to their poor brethren. As a matter of fact, in Chapter 7 the author herself suggests that few of the spoils trickle down. Are we then to assume that the bonds of clan kinship remain meaningful across class boundaries, even in the absence of tangible benefits coming from the top down? Although one appreciates the difficulty of teasing out the necessary evidence for this kind of analysis of informal relations, it is called for by Collins's claim that clans continue to pervade the social fabric of Central Asian societies.

All in all, the book is a stimulating, if at times heavy-going, reading. I recommend it to scholars and graduate students interested in contemporary Central Asia and in the politics and economics of informal networks.

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