

ironic instance of national propaganda that new emotional communities would wield against their maker as power dynamics increasingly tilted.

In moments of comparative insight, Chen draws upon more contemporary parallels such as the post-9/11 visual frames of the US-led wars on terror. He could have gone further and cited ongoing extraterritorial drone strikes (with their collateral consequences), which certainly bear an uncanny resemblance to the Sino-Western conflicts of the covered time period in their rationalizations depending on the sovereign lens used, geographic backdrop, and divisiveness. Moreover, Chen warns of “the continued tendency to reduce the Sino-Western historical relationship to one of fundamental incommensurability and inevitable clash” (p. 250) despite the interdependent constellation that is today’s international economic order. Beijing’s modern reluctance to simply relent to the wants of neoliberal governments and their free market dictates, e.g. with respect to its national system of corporate governance and competition laws, becomes more understandable in light of its intense security concerns (with their historical origins).

Chen’s overly frequent references to the book’s and any given chapter’s objectives can detract, at times, from the flow of his work, but this is a minor quibble for a remarkable and important volume. His balanced eye and command of both Western and Chinese sources, a number of them mined and juxtaposed for the first time, render the work free of unnecessary dogma. Although China’s economic rise in recent decades via its own variety of capitalism and legal infrastructure may seem novel to lay observers, adversarial international reactions to it have triggered flashbacks and *déjà vu* among the historically conscious Chinese population. Chen has done much to illustrate the true extent of the subversive forces that helped shape this centuries-old anxiety.

Failed Democratization in Prewar Japan: Breakdown of a Hybrid Regime. By HARUKATA TAKENAKA. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. 256 pp. \$55 (cloth).

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In *Failed Democratization in Prewar Japan*, Harukata Takenaka has two major goals: to better understand semi-democratic regimes and to explain why Japan descended from semi-democracy to military authoritarianism in the early 1930s. Takenaka spends the first portion of the book laying out his conception of a hybrid semi-democratic regime. He suggests that semi-democratic regimes have three major characteristics. First, while elections are held regularly and for important posts, they are not completely free or fair because of restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Second, not all major political offices are held accountable to the voters: there are important posts that are not subject to elections. Third, only a small portion of the population has the right to vote. Takenaka argues that Japan’s political regime from 1918 to 1932 met all three characteristics, and can therefore be considered a semi-democratic regime.

Takenaka argues that semi-democratic regimes are understudied in the literature. He suggests that too much scholarly work on regimes and transitions focuses on the shift from authoritarianism to democracy. Takenaka argues that transitions in other directions, such as Japan’s experience of going from semi-democracy to military authoritarianism, should receive scholarly attention as well. In addition, Takenaka submits that too many academics seem to believe that a transition from semi-democracy to democracy is swift and inevitable, but Japan’s experience demonstrates that transitions toward democracy are far from preordained.

Semi-democratic regimes, according to Takenaka, tend to break down when the balance of power between democratic and nondemocratic forces within the regime begins to change. When

the balance of power shifts too far in the nondemocratic direction, the regime is likely to fail. The relationship between democratic and nondemocratic forces within semi-democratic regimes is governed by three major factors: political institutions, legitimacy, and semi-loyalty. Political institutions are important because they determine the legal basis of the regime and help govern the actions that internal forces, democratic and nondemocratic, are likely to take. The regime's legitimacy is also crucial because it impacts the level of power democratic forces can project against their challengers. Finally, semi-loyalty is important: when democratic actors become only partially loyal to the regime, they empower nondemocratic forces while diminishing the power of their democratic allies.

The author's measurement of legitimacy is problematic: Takenaka gauges the regime's legitimacy based on newspaper columns, opinions of intellectuals, turnout rates, labor strikes, and conflicts between peasants and their landlords. Most of these elements of legitimacy are extremely hard to measure, and Takenaka could have benefited from taking a more direct approach to measuring legitimacy. His introduction of the concept of semi-loyalty, however, is an interesting innovation.

In the second portion of his book, Takenaka turns to exploring three periods of Japan's history: the competitive oligarchical era from 1889 to 1918, the semi-democratic era from 1918 to 1932, and the military authoritarian era from 1936 to 1945. The competitive oligarchical era began with the adoption of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. Takenaka argues that the oligarchical period in Japan's history paved the way for the emergence of a semi-democratic regime in 1918. It did so by expanding suffrage, encouraging some political competition, and giving the electorate control over some political offices. In addition, during this period the elected Lower House had some moral suasion over the actions of the nondemocratic government.

As Japan shifted into its semi-democratic era, political competition intensified. Both major parties had nationwide organizations and formal policy prescriptions. In addition, parliamentary government was effectively established, as the President of the largest party in the Diet was appointed Prime Minister. However, Takenaka argues that this period cannot be considered fully democratic for three reasons. First, the government intervened in the electoral process and excluded certain groups from participation altogether. Second, the franchise was limited to 20 percent of the population. Third, four of Japan's major political institutions, including the military, were still not under popular control. Party government during this period was also burdened by a lack of cohesiveness, fragmented political power, and the relative autonomy of the military.

Takenaka suggests that, despite its precarious position, party government was fairly successful in constraining the military's influence between 1918 and 1926, mostly because of its high level of legitimacy. Nonetheless, party government failed to capitalize on that legitimacy to bring more offices under the electorate's control. After eight years of relative inaction, the semi-democratic regime began to break down. According to Takenaka, between 1926 and 1932 party government's legitimacy was eroded by scandals, a rise in semi-loyalty, economic crises, and unpopular secret deals between political parties. As a result, the balance of power between party government and the military began to shift in the military's direction. As party government's credibility diminished, its ability to restrain the military also declined. After several political crises, in 1932 the military stepped in to help remove the semi-democratic regime.

As Japan transitioned from semi-democracy to military authoritarianism, a new ruling class emerged, composed of members of the army, navy, bureaucracy, some politicians, and a handful of aristocrats. Free speech in the Diet was severely limited and its power was curtailed. Moreover, the new regime that emerged in the 1930s, under pressure from the military, began to intervene in elections for the Diet. The military became extremely influential, with sway over the composition of the Cabinet and government policies.

Takenaka concludes that the most important factor in encouraging the failure of Japan's semi-democratic regime was its inability to bring all of the nation's important political offices, including the military, under the electorate's control. Overall, Takenaka does a good job in contrasting the

political realities of the three periods of Japanese history explored in the book, although he spends surprisingly little time looking at the role of the Emperor. Takenaka also offers a thorough overview of his conception of semi-democratic regimes and the problems that can cause their downfall. Some cursory understanding of modern Japanese political history would be desirable before reading Takenaka's work, as at times his historical descriptions can be overly detailed and technical. However, Takenaka does make several adept comparisons with other semi-democratic regimes to make the book more accessible.

Higher Education, Meritocracy and Inequality in China. By YE LIU. Singapore: Springer, 2016. 221 pp. \$99.99 (cloth).

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Discussions of meritocracy, whether in its political or economic variant, often start or end with China—a country with a millennium-long Confucian tradition that continues to inform its approach to education as well as to governance. Specifically, it is the Middle Kingdom's past system of civil service examinations, the *Keju*, that opens a unique window on understanding not only Chinese historical dynamics and its present system of political and academic selection, but also the problematics of meritocracy in general. This is also the starting point of Ye Liu's timely new book, *Higher Education, Meritocracy and Inequality in China*, which sets out to understand the rationale for and the effects of the expansion of Chinese higher education, and to study the implications of its (un) meritocratic nature.

Liu's study is guided by two main research questions, "What is the role of the state in the expansion of higher education, in the particular context of a market economy under the communist regime?" and "To what extent has access to higher education in contemporary China been based on meritocratic criteria?" (p. 6), each with a set of related sub-questions.

To answer these questions, the study takes an interdisciplinary, mixed-method, and multilevel approach. The first part of the book establishes a conceptual and theoretical foundation used in the rest of the study. It thus begins with a historical analysis of the principles and practices of Chinese meritocracy, and conducts a critical comparative analysis of existing theories of meritocracy. The author follows with a multi-level, contrast-oriented analysis—a systematic study of meritocratic approaches to higher education across five advanced economies—as she develops a typology of meritocracy based around different selection practices, the roles of private educational opportunities, and financial responsibilities.

Liu then turns to the exploration of the explanations for the expansion of higher education in China, and observes that the re-introduction of meritocracy was integral to the government's Development and Stability strategy rolled out following the turbulent departure from ideological communism. Having established a theoretical groundwork, Liu moves to the empirical part of the study to address the second research goal: to explore the meritocratic qualities of the selection schemes for entry to the institutions of higher learning. The focus is primarily on the connection between students' social, economic, and demographic factors and their performance on the *Gaokao* entrance examination, allowing for assessment of its meritocratic effectiveness. The study investigates family education levels, cultural capital, gender, and geography, and their impact on higher education choices and performance. Specifically, the goal of the analysis is to test the educational meritocracy hypothesis asserting that "students' destination in types of universities should be determined by their *Gaokao* scores regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds" (p. 116).