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President Park Geun-hye and the Deconsolidation of Liberal Democracy in South Korea: Exploring its Cultural Roots President Park Geun-hye and the Deconsolidation of Liberal Democracy in South Korea: Exploring its Cultural Roots

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Scholars and policy makers in the West have long touted Korea as a shining example of the third-wave of global democratization. For more than a decade, Freedom House has endorsed the country as a fully consolidated liberal democracy.<sup>1</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit has also rated Korea as one of the three most advanced third-wave democracies (with Spain and Uruguay being the others) for years.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the country is widely recognized as one of a few that “established liberal democracy so quickly” and consolidated it “rapidly”.<sup>3</sup>

Since October 2016, however, this non-Western icon of consolidated liberal democracy has suddenly become a target of ridicule in the global news media, as stories surrounding the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye (박근혜) and her dramatic downfall from president to prisoner continue to unfold. Even before these stories became public news, however, Freedom House began to downgrade on a 0-100 scale the country’s overall level of freedom from 86 in 2013 to 82 in 2017. In the *Democracy Index 2016* released earlier this year, the Economist Intelligence Unit also downgraded Korea from a full democracy to a flawed one. Its seeming steady backsliding from the status of a fully consolidated liberal democracy over the four years of President Park’s tenure, however, challenges what is widely known in the theoretical literature on the evolution of cultural and institutional democratization.

## **The Mysteries of Democratic Deconsolidation**

In her impeachment trial, the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled that President Park “seriously impaired the spirit of representative democracy and the rule of law.”<sup>4</sup> The most notorious of her undemocratic and illegal deeds was to allow Choi Soon-sil (최순실), a personal friend holding no government position, to freely meddle in the formulation and implementation of domestic and foreign policies.<sup>5</sup> The president enabled this friend to enrich herself by forcing 53 companies to donate more than \$69 million to the two foundations under her control. She also had her government agencies blacklist as many as ten thousand political opponents and progressive artists who were critical of her presidency or her government’s policies,<sup>6</sup> and also tax audit news media that published negative stories about her government as well as private businesses which refused to cooperate with it.<sup>7</sup>

Why could these and many other marked practices of the authoritarian past resurge even after nearly three decades of incessant democratic rule? Why did many highly educated citizens and government officials collaborate with the president and her personal friend, violating the fundamental norms of democracy and capitalism? Why did the leaders of many powerful multinational corporations, such as Samsung, become accomplices in those corrupt and illegal practices? Why did opposition parties, civic groups, and the news media fail to serve as countervailing forces against the imperial presidency? Prominent theories of democratization cannot resolve these mysteries of democratic deconsolidation taking place in the world's 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy.

Modernization theory, for example, argues that socioeconomic development is the *sine quo non* of liberal democratization, and that liberal democracies do not backslide or break down after their GNP per capital has reached above \$6,055.<sup>8</sup> Neo-modernization theory holds that socioeconomic modernization brings about fundamental shifts in the priority of human values from authoritarian and deferential values to assertive and liberal values.<sup>9</sup> Institutional learning theory suggests that Koreans should become more detached from authoritarian politics as they gain more practical experience in democratic politics.<sup>10</sup> Social capital theory advocates that Koreans should become more committed to liberal democracy as they become more actively involved in voluntary associations and social networks.<sup>11</sup> None of these theories, however, can unravel the crisis of liberal democracy in the world's most wired nation.

### **Cultural Roots of Democratic Deconsolidation**

What should be faulted for the unexpected outbreak of this crisis? Who should be blamed? These questions have been vigorously debated throughout all walks of Korean life. Kim Jae Dong and other organizers of continuing waves of large protests against President Park target corrupt politicians as the main culprit of their country's malfunctioning liberal democracy, while extolling the political maturity of their fellow citizens who have *peacefully* demanded her resignation and impeachment.<sup>12</sup> Opposition politicians, pundits, and university professors, on the other hand, condemn the institutional provisions of the Korean constitution in the belief that they have promoted the concentration of political power in the hands of the president and created the imperial presidency.<sup>13</sup>

Neither of these two popular claims explains the swift contraction of President Park's supporters to the puniest minority of 4 percent. The crisis, moreover, involves people from various walks of Korean life, many of them more educated and politically mature than ordinary citizens. Participation in peaceful protests demanding her impeachment or resignation alone cannot be equated with unqualified support for liberal democracy either in principle or in practice because dissatisfaction with political leaders does always not indicate a rejection of authoritarian politics *in toto*.<sup>14</sup>

The National Assembly is constitutionally stipulated to be independent of the presidency, yet it failed to prevent or restrain the illegitimate abuse of presidential power.<sup>15</sup> That is, until recently when the Assembly members voted to impeach Park by a lopsided majority of nearly 80 percent (234 versus 56). Therefore, we cannot attribute Korea's democratic crisis that involves people from many different backgrounds merely to either its institutional configurations or the "immaturity" of its political leaders.

As an alternative to what is known in the scholarly literature and the ongoing popular debates in Korea, we choose the cultural legacies of the authoritarian past as a powerful force promoting or continuing authoritarian political practices while impeding the growth of democratic citizenship.<sup>16</sup> Those legacies lurk beneath the façade of free elections and other democratic institutions long after the apparent demise of authoritarian rule. As habits of heart and mind,<sup>17</sup> they often encourage political leaders to resort to various methods of authoritarian governance, which leads to the resurgence of autocratic politics and subsequent deconsolidation of Korea's liberal democracy. At the same time, those habits motivate citizens to welcome a resurgence of those methods, which impedes the growth of democratic citizenship.

We propose that the key to the resurgence of autocratic politics in the country known as a fully consolidated liberal democracy lies in the political and social legacies of Confucian culture that are deeply embedded in the Korean experience.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, its political norms of paternalistic government encourage leaders to play an autocratic or commanding role and their subordinates to play a deferential or submissive role.<sup>19</sup> Often dubbed "a top-down hidebound culture"<sup>20</sup>, the social norms of *datong shehui*, a community of grand unity or harmony, encourage people to become conformists or followers in interacting with others.<sup>21</sup>

These and other Confucian cultural legacies have contributed to the deconsolidation of liberal democracy under President Park in three mutually reinforcing ways. First, the norms of political paternalism misled this democratically elected president to believe that she should rule the country as "the president of a kingdom," not as "the president of a republic."<sup>22</sup> Misperceiving herself as the reigning queen of the Korean kingdom, she refused to obey the rule of law. Second, these political norms encouraged her subordinates to look up to the president as a paternalistic ruler and comply with her antidemocratic and illiberal impulses. Third, the social norms, especially of conformism and anti-pluralism, discouraged dissenters inside and outside her government to challenge those impulses openly especially when they fear retaliations from the government.

### **Paternalistic Autocracy**

Underlying the proposed notion of democratic deconsolidation is the theoretical premise that liberal democracy fails to survive and thrive unless its institutional hardware and cultural software are compatible with each other.<sup>23</sup> What type of political attitudes and beliefs comprises a cultural software compatible with liberal democratic politics? What type of those attitudes and beliefs comprises an incompatible one?

Since the publication of the *Civic Culture* more than six decades ago, numerous studies have addressed these questions. Although there is relatively little agreement on the constituents of the compatible software, there is general agreement on those of the democratically incompatible one.<sup>24</sup> According to the latest volume reassessing the Almond-Verba notion of the civic culture,<sup>25</sup> *allegiant and deferential citizenship* constitutes the most crucial component of the incompatible software, while *assertive and critical citizenship* constitutes a component of the compatible software.

This notion of the incompatible cultural software accords perfectly with the Confucian notion of paternalistic government, which rejects government by the people in favor of government by a guardian or a virtuous leader. For example, Confucius disapproved of government by the ordinary people for the reason that "the common people can be made to

follow; they cannot be made to understand.”<sup>26</sup> Hence, he admonished cognitively incapable masses not to take part in the political process: “Do not concern yourself with the matters of government unless they are the responsibility of your office.”

In Confucianism, moreover, good government must be a paternalistic system in which the ruler and the masses form a relationship analogous to that between parents and children.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, political leaders should play the role of guardians for the masses as parents do for their children while the masses should remain deferential and submissive to their rulers as children are to their parents.<sup>29</sup> In addition, paternalistic government represents a form of autocratic government; it contrasts sharply with democratic government which requires citizens to actively take part in the political process and leaders to respond to their demands.

### **Affinity for Paternalistic Autocracy**

What form of government do contemporary Koreans prefer most? Is it a paternalist autocracy, which Confucius and Mencius advocated? Or is it a liberal democracy, as explicitly stated in the constitution of the Republic of Korea? In Article 1, it prescribes: “The Republic of Korea shall be a democratic republic. The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea shall reside in the people, and all state authority shall emanate from the people.”

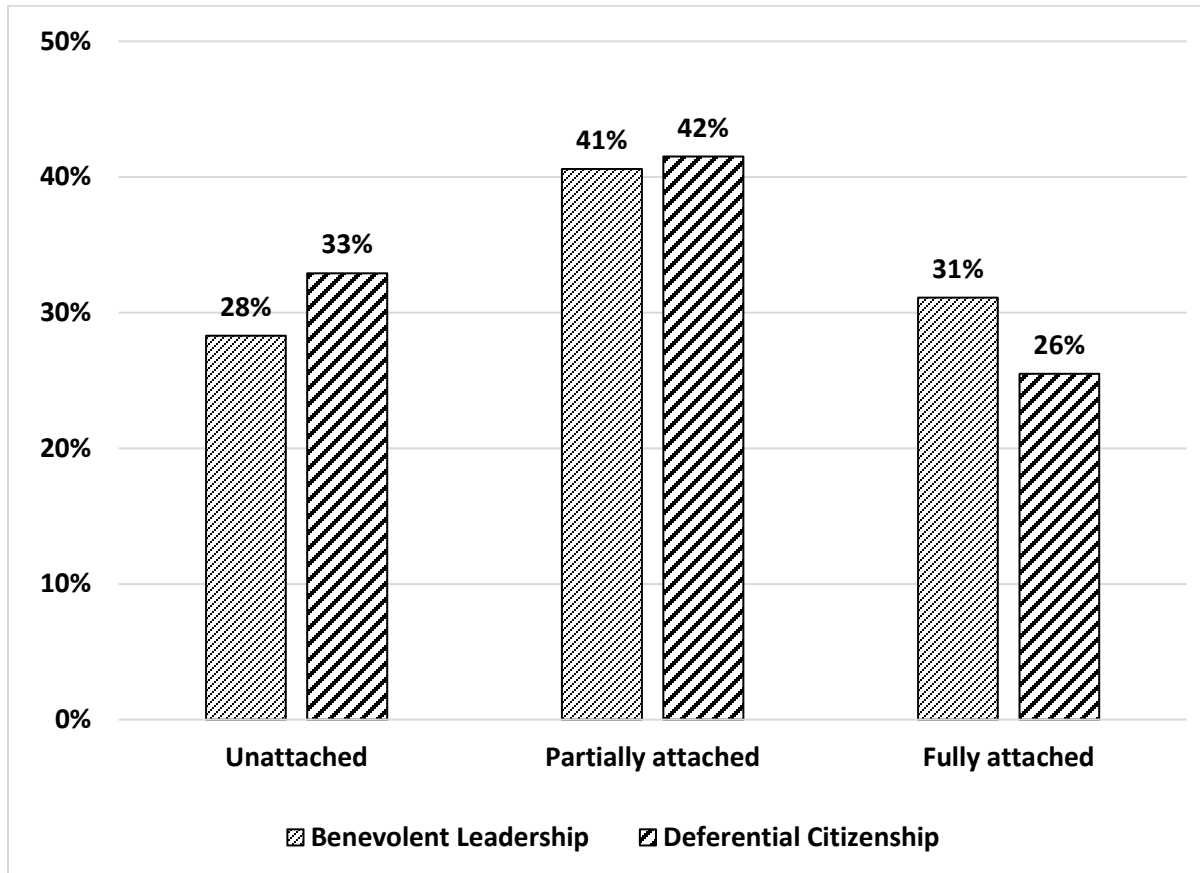
To explore these questions pertaining to the preferred system of government, we culled two pairs of questions from the fourth wave of the Asian Barometer Korean survey conducted between October and December 2015 (for the wording of these questions, see Appendix A). The first pair concerns the preferred role for political leaders and the government to play. To determine whether Koreans prefer their government and its leaders to play the role of a guardian rather than an elected representative, we examined whether respondents to the Korean survey agreed with the statements (Q79 and Q80): “Government leaders do what they think is best for the people” and “The government is like a parent; it should decide what is good for us.”

While more than a half (57%) agreed with the first statement, less than half (47%) agreed with the second statement. Combining affirmative responses of these two statements, a substantive majority of more than two-thirds (72%) expressed preferences for the guardianship role, either fully or partially, by agreeing with either or both of the two statements (see Figure 1). A small minority of less than one third (28%) disagreed with both statements, and preferred the representative role required of democratic government. More notable is that the Koreans who favored such democratic leadership were outnumbered by those fully in favor of autocratic leadership (28% vs. 31%).

The second pair deals with the role ordinary Koreans themselves prefer to play in the political process. To explore citizens’ preference for an allegiant and submissive role, we examined whether they agreed with two statements (Q143 and Q147): “Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.” and “If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything.” A relatively small minority of one third (36%) expressed allegiance to their leaders, agreeing with the first statement. A substantial majority (57%), however, expressed a propensity for inactive citizenship, agreeing with the second statement. When responses affirming the two statements are considered together, as many as two in three Koreans (68%) expressed their desire to remain allegiant to the government authorities or to be inactive in the political process (see Figure 1). The fully allegiant and

inactive, who agreed with both statements, formed a substantial minority of one fourth (26%). The active and critical citizens, who disagreed with both statements, form one third (33%).

**Figure 1. Attachment to the Norms of Paternalistic Autocracy: Benevolent Leadership and Deferential Citizenship**



Finally, we identified three types of political culture by ascertaining the patterns of affirmative responses to the two pairs of questions. Those who answered affirmatively to none or both of the two pairs are considered upholders of *liberal democratic* and *paternalistic autocratic cultures*, respectively. Those who answered paternalistically to one pair and refused to do so to another are viewed as upholders of *hybrid culture*, consisting of preferences for autocratic and democratic politics.

As expected from the percentages presented above, upholders of democratic culture constitute the least numerous in Korea, while those of paternalistic culture constitute the most numerous. More notable is that supporters of liberal democracy comprise a small minority of less than one tenth (9%), while those of paternalistic culture form one half of the Korean adult population (49%). The finding that three decades of democratic rule have produced fewer than one liberal democrat in every ten Koreans disputes the central claim of democratic learning theory that participation in democratic politics transforms supporters of authoritarian politics into adherents of democratic politics.<sup>30</sup>

## The Prevalence of Paternalistic Affinity

Is the paternalistic cultural software prevalent throughout all segments of the Korean population? Or is it confined to the socioeconomically deprived segment, as neo-modernization theory suggests? Is it also confined to those disengaged from civic life, as social capital theory suggests? To address these questions, we first calculated upholders of autocratic and democratic cultures for the population segments defined by the demographic and behavioral characteristics of gender, age, family income, educational attainment, civic engagement, and religious affiliation. Table 1 reports their proportions for each segment. Further we estimated the relative popularity of paternalistic culture over democratic culture in terms of a percentage differential index (PDI), which subtracts the percentage of the latter from that of the former.

**Table 1. The Prevalence of Affinity for Paternalistic Autocracy**

Population Segments	Preferred Systems of Government			Percentages Differential
	Autocracy (A)	Hybrid (B)	Democracy (C)	Index (A-C)
<b>Entire</b>	49%	42%	9%	+ 40
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	51	39	11	+ 40
Female	48	42	11	+ 37
<b>Age</b>				
Young	42	45	13	+ 29
Middle-aged	53	38	9	+ 43
Old	55	37	9	+ 46
<b>Income</b>				
Low	50	40	10	+ 40
Middle	52	38	10	+ 43
High	45	44	12	+ 33
<b>Education</b>				
<high school	55	39	6	+ 48
High school	52	39	9	+ 43
College	44	43	13	+ 31
<b>Employment</b>				
Not working	46	43	11	+ 35
Working	51	39	10	+ 40

<b>Association</b>				
Non-joiner	46	42	12	+ 35
Joiner	53	38	9	+ 44
<b>Religion</b>				
None	48	41	11	+ 37
Catholic	46	48	5	+ 41
Protestant	53	37	10	+ 43
Buddhist	49	39	12	+ 38

*Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.*

A notable feature of Table 1 concerns the prevalence of paternalistic culture and the unpopularity of democratic culture among all Koreans. In all segments, the least popular is democratic culture, while the most popular is paternalistic culture, a finding that holds for all segments except two. Only among those in their 20s and 30s and Catholics, hybrid culture is more popular than paternalistic culture. In all segments, supporters of democracy form small minorities of less than 15 percent, and they are outnumbered by those of autocracy by a large margin of over 3 to 1.

Even among the young who represent the most globalized and internet savvy segment of the Korean population, upholders of paternalistic autocracy outnumber those of liberal democrats by a large margin of 3 to 1 (42% vs. 13%). More surprisingly, even among the college-educated, the former constitute a plurality (44%) and they are over three times as many as the latter (13%). Likewise, those active in civic associations also prefer paternalistic autocracy to liberal democracy, in this case by a large margin of 6 to 1 (53% vs. 9%).

For each population segment, the relative popularity of those preferring paternalistic autocracy to those preferring liberal democracy is summarized in the fourth column of Table 1. The PDI scores presented in this column are all positive and range from a low of 29 to a high of 48. Being both positive and large, these figures confirm that throughout the entire nation, paternalistic culture predominates democratic culture at least by an overwhelming margin of at least 29 percentage points. Indisputably, paternalism represents a widely-shared Korean mindset.

### **The Prevalence of Illiberal Social Norms**

The prevalence of paternalism among even the most modernized segment of the Korean population challenges the neo-modernization theory of human emancipation that claims that socioeconomic resources promote democratization culturally as well as institutionally.<sup>31</sup> That theory posits that these resources will free people in authoritarian societies from the illiberal, oppressive norms of social life. Emancipation from those norms, in turn, will empower citizens to demand liberal democracy which will allow them to steer their lives on their own.

Contrary to what is expected from this thesis of human emancipation, most Koreans refuse to embrace liberal democracy even when they are endowed with the same resources as those in the West. Instead, they remain in favor of a paternalistic autocracy that keeps them



deferential and submissive to political leaders instead of being active and critical of them. Even when they are fully emancipated from the illiberal social norms, moreover, they prefer paternalistic autocracy to liberal democracy by an overwhelming margin of over 3 to 1 (66% vs. 20%).

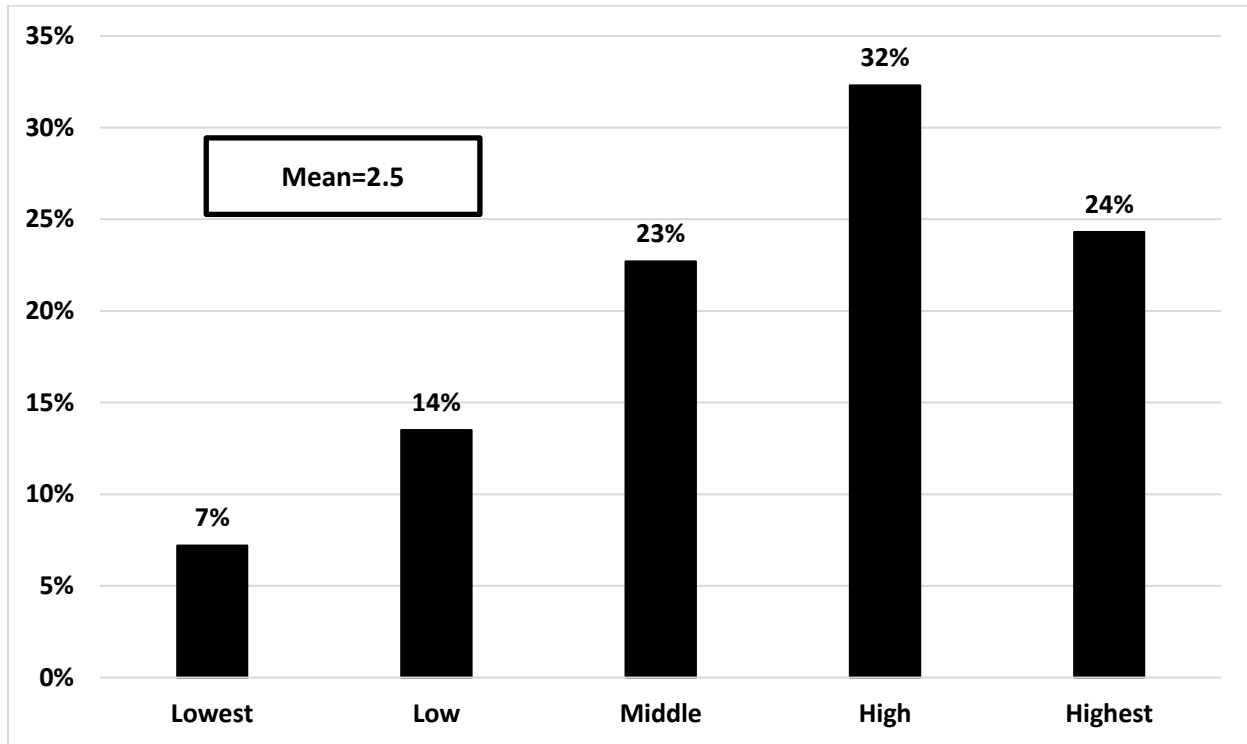
Why does this theory of cultural democratization run counter to the persistence of authoritarian political culture in highly globalized and modernized Korea? Does this persistence have much to do with the circumstances in which the country and its people have become modernized? Unlike their Western peers, one whole generation of Koreans escaped from poverty and illiteracy, and became affluent and well-educated under the leadership of military dictators. What developed was a style of crony or developmental capitalism and a cozy relationship between the state and businesses (정경유착), which may have deprived the people of an opportunity to dissociate themselves from oppressive social norms.<sup>32</sup> A lack of such an opportunity, in turn, could have motivated them to remain attached to the virtues of paternalistic autocracy.

Do Koreans, unlike their Western peers, remain attached to illiberal social norms and refrain from pursuing free and egalitarian social life even after gaining a good deal of wealth and education? We surmise that the answer to this question holds the key to the mystery of Koreans' affinity for paternalistic autocracy and aversion to liberal democracy. To address this question, we choose four categories of such illiberal norms, namely hierarchism, conformism, collectivism, and anti-pluralism (or cultural monism).<sup>33</sup> These norms together do not dispose Koreans to freely interact and disagree with other people, or to compete with others on an egalitarian basis, as required in democratic societies.<sup>34</sup> Instead, these norms encourage them to moderate and restrain their views in dealing with others, especially with their superiors.

To measure attachment to each of these four norms, we first selected a pair of questions from the ABS Korea survey, and determined whether respondents positively answered any of these questions in the pair (for the wording of questions in this and other pairs, see Appendix B). We then accepted a positive response to any of the two questions as an indicator of attachment to it. Finally, we counted the total number of norms respondents affirmed either partially or fully, and constructed a 5-point index measuring the breadth, not depth, of attachment to traditional, illiberal social norms. Scores of 0 and 1 on this index are considered being fully and mostly detached from the norms while 3 and 4 are considered to be mostly and fully attached to them.

Figure 2 shows the proportions of Koreans placed on each of the five index values. Those who score as fully and mostly detached make up minority responses at 7 percent and 14 percent, respectively. Those who are fully and mostly attached, in contrast, make up pluralities of 24 percent and 32 percent, respectively. When these two groups of the attached are considered together, they form a considerable majority of 56 percent, being nearly three times as many as the combined detached (21%). Moreover, in all population segments including the young, the Christian, the college-educated, and the high-income people, the attached outnumber the detached by large margins, ranging from 29 to 46 percentage points. Illiberal social norms, like the norms of political paternalism, are preponderant throughout the entire nation.

**Figure 2. Levels of Attachment to Illiberal Social Norms**

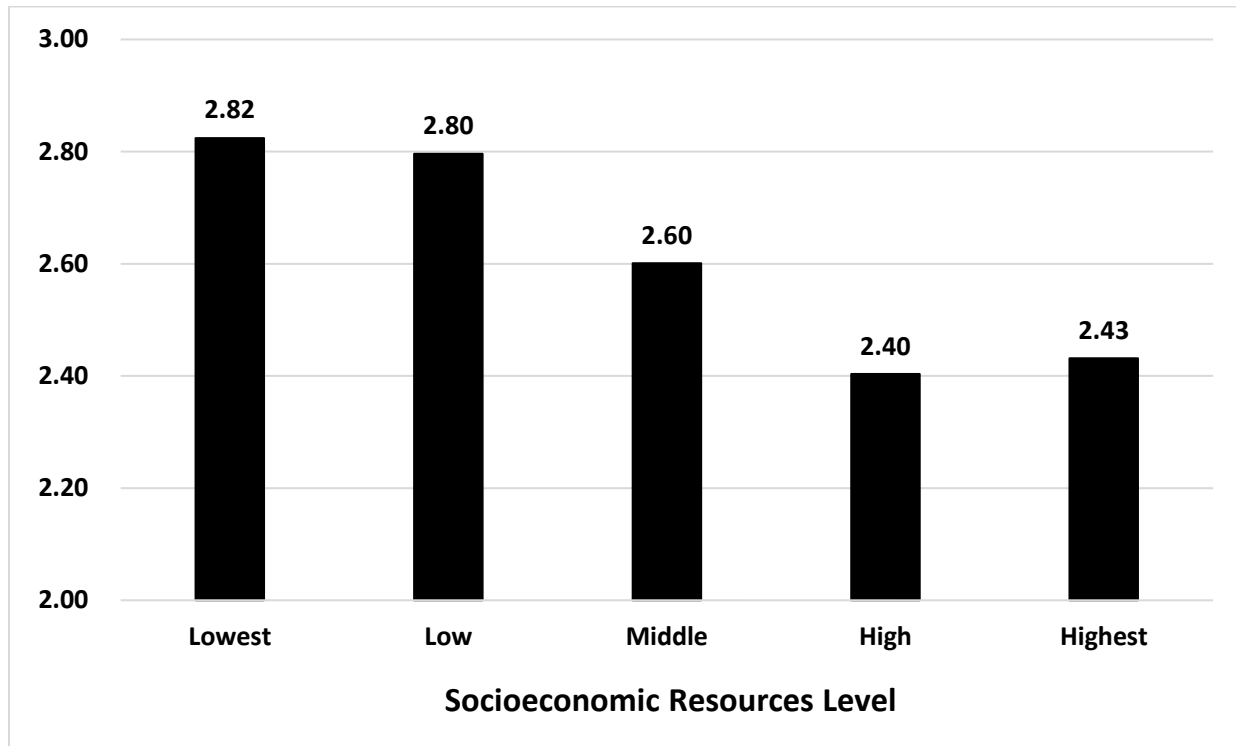


*Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.*

Does the preponderance of such illiberal norms confirm that in Korea, socioeconomic modernization has failed to emancipate the people from illiberal norms? If it has, has that failure occasioned them to remain attracted to the idea of paternalistic autocracy? To address the first question, we constructed a 5-point index of socioeconomic resources by combining three equivalent levels of family income (low, middle, and high) with three levels of educational attainment (less than high school, high school, and college education) and examined the relationship of this index with the one measuring attachment to those norms.

In Figure 3, we examine whether socioeconomic modernization weakens an attachment to illiberal norms, as the theory of human emancipation suggests. The figure, indeed, shows that the extent to which Koreans are attached to those norms decreases almost steadily from 2.8 at the lowest level to 2.4 at the highest level of the socioeconomic resources index. The more socioeconomic resources Koreans command, that is, the less they are attached to the norms. This finding appears to accord with the theory that socioeconomic modernization leads to human emancipation from oppressive social life. Yet it should be noted that all five socioeconomic resource levels register scores significantly higher than the midpoint (2.0) of the 5-point index, tapping attachment to these norms. This indicates that regardless of the extent to which they have become socioeconomically modernized, Koreans remain attached to oppressive social norms.

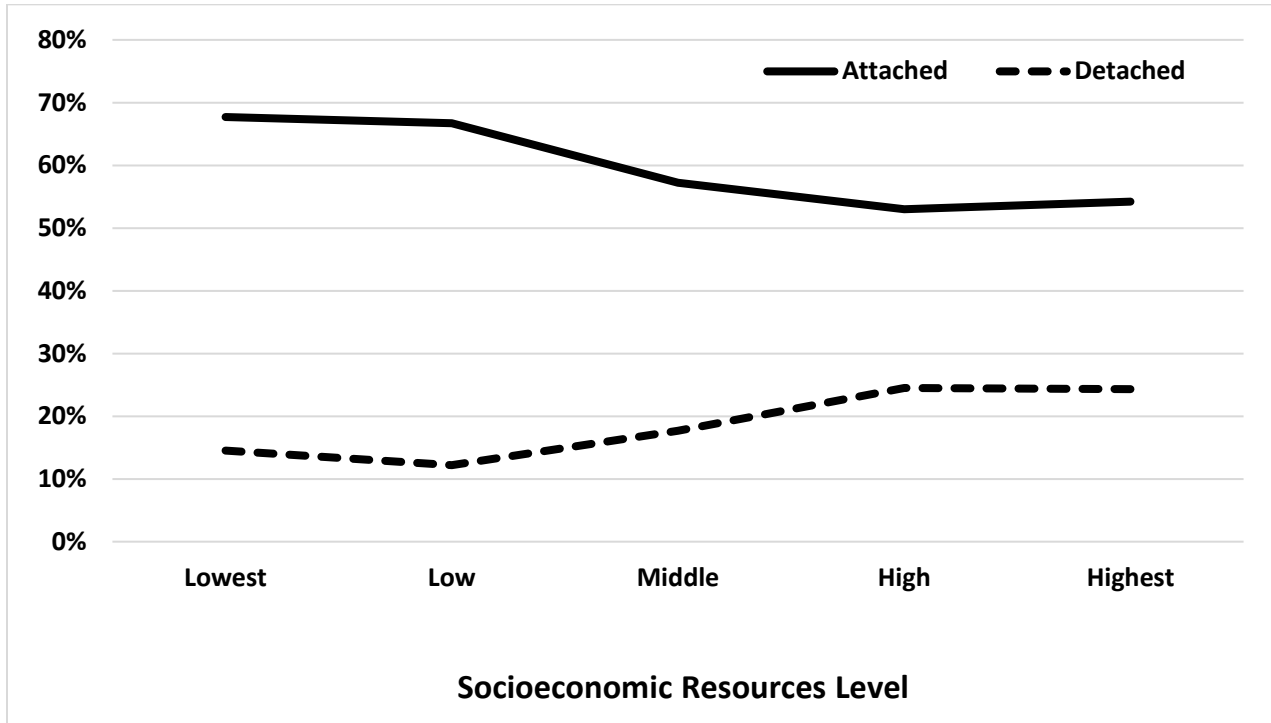
**Figure 3. Socioeconomic Resources and Attachment to Illiberal Social Norms**



*Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.*

In Figure 4, we further examine how influential socioeconomic modernization have been in freeing Koreans from oppressive social life by examining the proportions of people detached and those attached to the norms. As levels of modernization rise from the lowest to the highest, the percentage of the attached decreases steadily from 68 to 54 percent, while that of the detached increases from 15 to 24 percent. A comparison of these percentages suggests that even full-scale modernization from the lowest to the highest level enlarges the detached by only 9 percentage points and reduces the attached by just 14 percentage points. Even among the college-educated with a high income, a majority (52%) remains attached to oppressive social norms, while a small minority of one quarter (25%) is detached from those. Even when Koreans become fully modernized and have both high incomes and a college education, they are twice as likely to remain attached to the norms than detached from them (54% vs. 24%). Undoubtedly, in Korea, socioeconomic modernization under decades of autocratic and democratic rules has done little to emancipate people from illiberal norms and become autonomous social beings.<sup>35</sup>

**Figure 4. The Attached to Illiberal Social Norms and the Detached from Those Norms by Levels of Socioeconomic Resources**



Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.

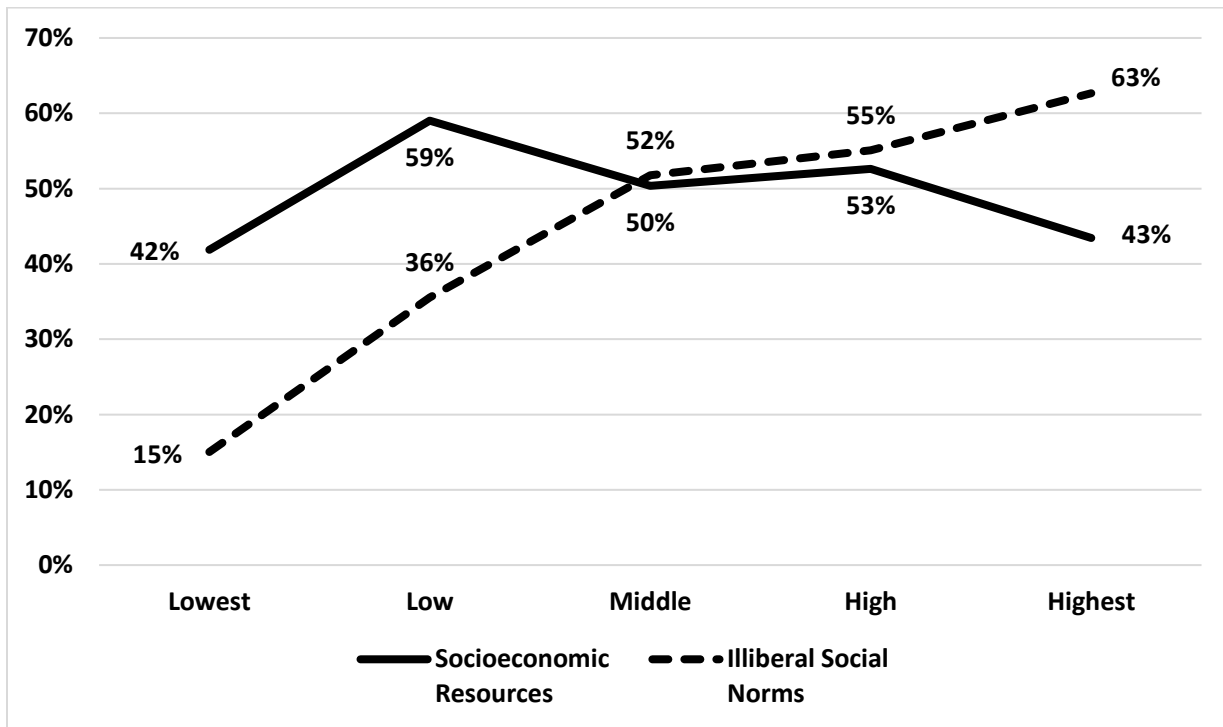
### **Illiberal Social Norms as an Influence on Paternalistic Autocracy**

Why did people from a variety of backgrounds collaborate with President Park Geun-hye in enforcing unconstitutional schemes to rule the country with a few unelected officials and in suppressing political freedom and opposition? Why did they also join in the illegal schemes to empower and enrich her friend, who held no government position? Why didn't a great deal of family wealth and education at the country's best university make them embrace liberal democracy and refuse to join in all these antidemocratic schemes, as neo-modernization theory suggests?<sup>36</sup> Did they do so because of having internalized illiberal and oppressive social norms in their earlier lives, as the proposed cultural theory of democratic deconsolidation suggests? To explore these possibilities, we estimated the independent impact of those norms on affinity for paternalistic autocracy, and compared it with the influence of socioeconomic modernization.

For this analysis, we performed on the ABS Korea survey the multiple classification analysis (MCA), known as equivalent to a multiple regression analysis using dummies.<sup>37</sup> As other multivariate analyses do, this analysis generates the *beta* statistic for each predictor, which estimates the extent to which the predictor affects the dependent variable independent of all other predictors. In addition, the MCA generates the *unadjusted* and *adjusted values* of the dependent variable for each category of a predictor measured on a nominal or ordinal scale. These are the values calculated before and after the effects of all other predictors in the equation on the dependent variables are statistically removed.

For five different levels of illiberal social norms and socioeconomic resources, Figure 5 reports *adjusted* proportions of upholders of paternalist autocracy. Even after controlling for socioeconomic resources and seven other known influences on political preferences (gender, age, civic activism, interpersonal trust, internet usage, exposure to global news, and experience of democracy) (See Appendix C-G for the wording of the questions asked to measure these variables), there is a significantly positive and highly monotonic relationship between illiberal social norms and paternalistic autocracy. Thus, the results show that those who are fully attached to the norms favor nondemocratic system of government over four times more than do those who are fully detached (15% vs. 63%). In striking contrast, the independent effect of socioeconomic resources on support for paternalistic autocracy is neither significantly negative nor highly monotonic, contrary to what is expected from the human emancipation thesis. More surprisingly, there is virtually little difference between the two extreme levels of those resources in autocratic support (42% vs. 44%).

**Figure 5. How Illiberal Social Norms and Socioeconomic Resources Affect Affinity for Paternalistic Autocracy Independently (MCA adjusted percentages)**



*Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.*

For all nine predictors, including illiberal social norms and socioeconomic modernization, Table 2 reports the values of their *beta* coefficients. Being equivalent to standardized regression coefficients, these coefficients allow us to determine the relative importance of each independent variable as an influence on affinity for paternalistic autocracy. All predictors except social norms have no significant independent effect on affinity for paternalistic autocracy. Contrary to what is expected from the theories of neo-modernization, civic activism, and democratic learning, these predictors fail to discourage the Korean people

from cherishing the virtues of paternalistic autocracy. None of them, therefore, can be held responsible for the resurgence of autocratic politics in the President Park Geun-hye's government.

**Table 2. The Prediction of Affinity for Paternalistic Autocracy by Confucian Illiberal Norms, Socioeconomic Resources, and Seven Other Characteristics**

Predictors	<i>Eta</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Gender	0.048	0.047
Age	0.128	0.059
Internet Usage	0.054	0.035
Associational membership	0.036	0.034
Interpersonal Trust	0.015	0.021
Socioeconomic resources	0.115	0.091
Illiberal social norms	0.273	0.262*
Access to global news	0.027	0.045
Democratic Experience	0.029	0.046
<b>(Explained Variance)</b>		(9.6%)

\*Significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: 2015 Asian Barometer Korean survey.

Unlike those demographic and behavioral characteristics, the internalization of norms promoting hierarchism, collectivism, conformism, and monism in social life constitute the only significant promoter of affinity for paternalistic autocracy. Moreover, their internalization registers the highest *beta* coefficient of 0.26. This coefficient is nearly three times higher than the ones for other predictors, including socioeconomic modernization (0.09). Based on this finding, therefore, we attribute the deconsolidation of liberal democracy under President Park Geun-hye to the prevalence of these illiberal social norms throughout the entire Korean nation. We also conclude that in Confucian East Asia, prevailing culture, not socioeconomic modernization, shapes the contours and dynamics of liberal democratization.

### Summary and Conclusion

In East Asia, Confucius, Mencius, and their disciples have long advocated virtues of paternalistic autocracy to achieve political order by maintaining a proper relationship between ordinary people and government officials. To build a community of grand unity called *datong shehui*

(大同社会), early Confucians have also advocated virtues of harmony (和), including equilibrium, self-restraint and propriety.<sup>38</sup> As the paternalistic system of government requires political inaction and submissiveness among ordinary citizens, its norms are not compatible with those of liberal democracy, which demands their participation and competition in the political process. The social norms of harmony, on the other hand, require moderation and fitting, which “reinforce vertical relations of dominion and personal dependency”.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, these social norms are not compatible with those of autonomous and mutually cooperative civic life, which has been labeled “an engine of democracy”.<sup>40</sup>

In Korea today, most people remain attached partially or fully to the norms and practices of paternalistic autocracy even after three decades of what has appeared to be incessant democratic rule. Many remain committed to the hierarchical and illiberal norms of social life even after they have amassed a good deal of wealth and education. The persistence and prevalence of such legacies of paternalistic politics and uncivic social life have served to countervail the practices of liberal democratic politics, especially under the leadership of a president with an authoritarian bent.

More so than any of her predecessors, President Park Geun-hye likened herself to a virtuous and wise ruler of ancient Confucian Korea, and placed herself above the law. Envisioning herself as a reigning queen, she refused to open the policymaking process especially to those with opposing views, while demanding allegiance from the government officials who worked closely with her. Those officials and many others inside and outside her government remained merely her allegiant subordinates. The end results were the resurgence of autocratic politics and the deconsolidation of liberal democracy in Korea.

What are the implications of these findings for the newly emerging literature on democratic deconsolidation? Empirically, liberal democracy remains the least favored system of government even after seven rounds of free and competitive presidential elections in Korea today. The paucity of support for this regime type does not accord with the claims of global democratization that democracy is becoming the most favored system in the world, or liberal democracy is “the end of history.” Nor does lack of such support accord with the theory of institutional learning that ordinary citizens come to prefer democracy to its alternatives after personally experiencing its virtues.

Further, it should be noted that fully consolidated liberal democracy did break down in Korea, a country that has been highly globalized and modernized for decades. It should also be noted that the forces of socioeconomic and digital modernization have failed to emancipate most of its citizens from the norms of unfree and unequal social life. Regardless of their wealth and education, moreover, Koreans prefer paternalistic autocracy to liberal democracy. These findings challenge the prominent theories of modernization and neo-modernization, which treat economic development as the ultimate root of cultural and institutional democratization.

In Korea and other countries in Confucian East Asia where in principle and in practice, paternalistic autocracy has played a leading role in educating and enriching the people,<sup>41</sup> it is evident that socioeconomic modernization does not determine the contours and dynamics of democratization as it did in the West. As Barrington Moore Jr. argued in his seminal analysis of divergent paths to modernization and democratization,<sup>42</sup> both the ruling class and the masses in countries where the state colluded with big businesses to promote economic development failed to cultivate “the bourgeois impulse” to become an autonomous being.<sup>43</sup> As a result, the legacies of political paternalism and social harmony have persisted as the habits of their hearts and minds. Theoretically, therefore, the persistence of these habits that reject liberal democracy accords with

the thesis of “No bourgeois, no democracy”.<sup>44</sup> Their persistence also accords with the orthodox Asian Values Thesis that Confucianism is inherently incompatible with liberal democracy.<sup>45</sup> Empirically, on the other hand, it reinforces the contrarian view that “liberal democracy has a long way to go before it can consolidate its position in Asia.”<sup>46</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World: Korea,” available at [freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/south-korea](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/south-korea).

<sup>2</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, “Democracy Index 2016,” available online at [http://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2016](http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=DemocracyIndex2016)

<sup>3</sup> Larry Diamond and Gi-Wook Shin, (eds.), *New Challenges for Maturing Democracies in Korea and Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014): 2. See also Hahm Chaibong, “South Korea’s Miraculous Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 19 (3): 128-142.

<sup>4</sup> For the Constitutional Court’s rulings on President Park Geun-hye’s impeachment, see <http://blog.naver.com/memo/MemologPostView.nhn?blogId=2kimoon&logNo=220959374811&currentPage=1>

<sup>5</sup> For further information, see “The Ultimate Choi Soon-sil-gate Explainer (Part 2),” available at <http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2016/12/the-ultimate-choi-soon-sil-gate.html>. See also “2016 South Korean Political Scandal” at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_South\\_Korean\\_political\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_South_Korean_political_scandal)

<sup>6</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, “South Korea Blacklist Adds to Outrage over Presidential Scandal,” *New York Times* (January 12, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Choe Sang-hun, “The Korean President’s Leadership Style is Seen as Factor in Scandal,” *New York Times* (November 11, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christian Welzel, *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rose, “Learning to Support New Regimes in Europe,” *Journal of Democracy*, 18(3) (2007): 111-125; William Mishler and Richard Rose, “Generation, Age, and Time: The Dynamics of Political Learning During Russia’s Transformation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (4) (2007): 822-834.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994).



<sup>12</sup> Kim Jae Dong, “50 million citizens who Led the Republic of Korea, Proud! (제동 "대한민국 이끈 5천만 국민, 자랑스럽다)," *Yonhap News* (January 21, 2017). Similarly, other political observers have attributed the current crisis of Korean democracy to “conflicting views held by the citizens living in the 21st century and a political class stuck in a 20th-century style of ruling,” as reported in Anna Fifield, “South Korea’s Political Crisis could become a Trigger for Bigger Change,” *Washington Post* (December 7, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Jaung Hoon, “Korean Democracy Standing before 1 million Candles (백만 개 촛불 앞에 선 한국 민주주의),” *Joongang Daily* (2016.11.17).

<sup>14</sup> Doh Chull Shin, “Popular Understanding of Democracy,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Online publication), January 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Park Jung Hoon of *Chosun Ilbo* points out that the National Assembly should be held equally responsible for the worsening crisis of democracy in Korea. For further details, see his column “Why Performing a Surgery only on the Imperial President, Leaving the Parliament (帝王 대통령'만 수술? '바보 국회'는 놔두고)?” available at [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2017/02/16/2017021603404.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/02/16/2017021603404.html).

<sup>16</sup> Uk Heo and Sung Deuk Hahm, “Political Culture and Democratic Consolidation in South Korea,” *Asian Survey*, 54 (5) (2014): 918-940; Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (1) (2003): 6-17.

<sup>17</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1835-1840] 2002); Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Hearts: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Philip J. Ivanhoe and Sungmoon Kim, (eds.), *Confucianism, a Habit of the Heart* (Albany: State University of New York, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Sungmoon Kim, *Confucian Democracy in East Asia: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Tianjian Shi, *The Cultural Logic of Politics in China and Taiwan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Doh Chull Shin, *Confucianism and Democratization in East Asia* (New York: Cambridge University, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Daniel A. Bell and Chenyang Li, (eds.), *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Choe Sang-Hun and Paul Mozurjan, “Samsung Galaxy Note 7 Crisis Signals Problems at Korea Inc,” (January 23, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Among the five constant virtues of Confucianism are the two social norms of *li* (propriety) and righteousness (*yi*). The former demands conformity to customs and deference to others, while the latter demands self-restraint.

<sup>22</sup> Jaung Hoon, “The Two Tales of the Korean Presidency,” in Jongryn Mo and David W. Brady, (eds.), *The Rule of Law in South Korea* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2010), 61-77; Lee Yong Ma, “Imperial President and Power Agencies (제왕적대통령과 권력기관),” *Monthly Participation Society* (월간 참여사회) (September 2016). Available from <http://www.peoplepower21.org/Magazine/1446082>

- <sup>23</sup> Harry Eckstein, "Congruence Theory Explained" (July 15, 1997). *Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California/Irvine*. Paper 97-07. Available at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/97-07>; Russell Dalton and Doh Chull Shin, (eds.), *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets around the Pacific Rim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- <sup>24</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1963); Putnam, *op. cit.*; Aaron Wildavsky, "Democracy as a Coalition of Cultures," *Society* 31 (1963): 80-3.
- <sup>25</sup> Russell Dalton and Christian Welzel, (eds.). *The Civic Culture Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- <sup>26</sup> D. C. Lau, (trans.) *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 8:9.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 8:14; 13:26
- <sup>28</sup> Bell and Li, *op. cit.*, David Hall and Rogers Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York: 1987).
- <sup>29</sup> Shi, *op. cit.*, 48. See also Joseph Chan, "Democracy and Meritocracy: Toward a Confucian Perspective," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34 (2):179–193 (2007); Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
- <sup>30</sup> Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (3) (1999): 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Inglehart and Welzel, *op. cit.*; Viktoria Spaiser and David J.T. Sumpter, "Revising the Human Development Sequence Theory Using an Agent-Based Approach and Data," *Journal of Artificial Societies and Simulation*, 19(3) 1, 2016.
- <sup>32</sup> Sook Jong Lee, "Scandal and Corruption Plaguing South Korea President's Abuse of Power Must Cease," *EAI Column* (December 2, 2016).
- <sup>33</sup> Shi, *op. cit.*, chap. 2; Andrew Nathan and Tse-shin Chen, "Traditional Social Values, Democratic Values, and Political Participation," Asian Barometer Working Paper Series No. 23 (2004).
- <sup>34</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).
- <sup>35</sup> In China and Taiwan also, most people are found to have remained attached to the traditional norms of allocentric and hierarchical social relations despite rapid and dramatic social and political change. See Shi, *op. cit.*, chap. 3.
- <sup>36</sup> Among the government officials who worked most closely with President Park are Kim Ki-choon (김기춘), Cho Yoon-sun (조윤선), and Woo Byung-woo (우병우), all of whom graduated from Seoul National University.
- <sup>37</sup> F. Andrews, J. Morgan, J. Sonquist, and L. Klem, *Multiple Classification Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Institute of Social Research, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Chenyang Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Sharon Kilarski, "Harmony: One of the Most Precious Elements in Chinese Traditional Culture," <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1528988-harmony-chinese-culture/>.

<sup>39</sup> Putnam, *op. cit.*, 145.

<sup>40</sup> Tocqueville, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> The Confucian prioritization of material welfare is considered the genesis of developmental capitalism in East Asia, as discussed in Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 9 and Leonard Shilien Hsu, *The Political Philosophy of Confucianism* (London: Cuzon Press, 1932), chap. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Barring Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

<sup>43</sup> According to Andrew Nathan's insightful analysis of the Chinese middle class, most members of this class support their authoritarian regime even when they embrace liberal values, as their Korean peers do. For further details, see his "The Puzzle of the Chinese Middle Class," *Journal of Democracy* 27 (2) (2016): 5-19.

<sup>44</sup> Moore Jr., *op. cit.* 418.

<sup>45</sup> Critics of this thesis argue that Confucianism can be made compatible or convergent with democracy because it contains pro-democratic elements. See Bell, *op. cit.*, chap. 6; Baogang He, "Confucianism and Democracy: Testing Four Analytical Models in an Empirical World," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 12 (2) (2016): 27-52; Shin, *Confucianism and democratization in East Asia*: chap. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Shi, *op. cit.*, 228.

## Appendix Survey Questions

### A. Preferred Systems of Government

#### 1) Leadership (choose a statement)

Q79. Statement 1. Government leaders implement what voters want.

Statement 2. Government leaders do what they think is best for the people.

Q80. 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.

#### 2) Citizenship

Q142. Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.

Q147. If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything.

### B. Illiberal Social Norms (for each statement, would you say you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?)

#### 1) Collectivism

Q56. In a group, we should sacrifice our individual interest for the sake of the group's collective interest.

Q57. For the sake of national interest, individual interest could be sacrificed.

#### 2) Hierarchism

Q60. Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children still should do what they Ask.

Q61. 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.

#### 3) Conformism

Q63. In a group, we should avoid open quarrel to preserve the harmony of the group

Q65. A person should not insist on his own opinion if his co-workers disagree with him.

#### 4) Monism (anti-pluralism)

Q144. Harmony of the community will be disrupted if people organize lots of groups.

Q148. If people have too many different ways of thinking, society will be chaotic.

**C. Interpersonal Trust**

Q23. Generally speaking, would you say that “Most people can be trusted” or “you must be very careful in dealing with people?”

**D. Internet Usage**

Q51 How often do you use the internet including social media networks to find information about politics and government? Everyday, several times a week, once or twice a week, a few times a month, a few times a year, or practically never?

**E. Associational Membership**

Q20 On the following card, we have listed various types of organizations that many people belong to. Could you identify the three most important organizations or formal groups you belong to?

**F. Access to Global News**

Q150. How closely do you follow major events in foreign countries? Very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, very little, or not at all?

**G. Experience of Democratic Politics**

Q93 In your opinion, how much of a democracy is in your country? A full democracy, a democracy but with minor problems, a democracy with major democracy, or not a democracy?