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Ken'ichi Ikeda and Sean Richey. *Social networks and Japanese democracy: The beneficial impact of interpersonal communication in East Asia*. New York: Routledge. 2012.

Ken'ichi Ikeda, a professor in the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Tokyo, and Sean Richey, Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Department of Political Science at Georgia State University, have written a concise book describing the empirical research undertaken to investigate the role of social networks in Japanese politics and democracy. Most of the studies on social networks that show the role of both informal and formal networks on democracy and political life are focused on Western democracies. As such, the role of social networks in East Asia and the ways in which such networks influence East Asian democracies are not often considered. Thus, the authors of this work raise the question of democracy in East Asian countries, specifically, and the influence that East Asian culture and social networks may have on democracy.

The book is organized into eight short chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. It examines East Asian values, with a specific focus on Japan; describes social networks, including the measures and determinants[1] of participation in such networks; follows with an analysis of the influence of several aspects of social networks on politics and democracy; and finally, shows how some programs in Japan benefit democracy. In their research, Ikeda and Richey used the Japanese Elections Study (JES) III, which is the largest academic political survey ever conducted in Japan (p. 7). The JES III consisted of a panel survey conducted by mostly face-to-face interviews between 2001 and 2005 and analyzed several topics that are of great interest in Japanese society, such as the influence of social hierarchy and group heterogeneity on social networks. Obedience to hierarchy and the maintenance of group harmony so that disagreement is avoided are two fundamental Japanese cultural practices, and the JES III sought to analyze the extent to which such practices are observed within the realm of social network interactions.

Among the questions that the authors of this book sought to answer was whether Japan can be considered to have a more East Asian or more Western culture. The statistical results of the research presented indicate that Asian societies, specifically Japan, have well-functioning, liberal democratic societies that share both East Asian and Western characteristics. For example, the authors find that while many Japanese citizens perceive the existence of social hierarchy and the pursuit of group harmony to be important forces in their lives, political disagreement is indeed common in Japan. Another important finding is that social networks have a powerful influence on Japanese political behavior; this is a particularly interesting finding since it is a result that differs from prior research on the subject.

Ikeda and Richey examine the Asian values that are based on the Confucian cultural tradition and the extent to which these values have been accepted in Japan. While Confucian elements are a part of Japanese culture, Confucianism never became the dominant state ideology in Japan as it did in China and Korea; Japanese society also incorporates some values from the Buddhist tradition as well. The authors make a distinction between public aspects and private aspects of Confucianism in Japanese society behavior. (In this case, public aspects are related to government behavior and not to the behavior of Japanese people in public situations.) For the purpose of analyzing whether Confucian values are present in twenty-first-century Japan, the authors used the East Asian Barometer (EAB) Survey. This

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[1] What were some of these determinants? Some measures of social networks are: activeness, hierarchy, and harmony in informal and formal networks. The authors describe the variables that have been found to be significant causes of each of these three measures, such as age, male, education or income.

survey compares how Confucian values are distributed in eight East and South East Asian countries and finds that the Japanese keep the vertical hierarchy and harmony values in both public and private interactions but do not maintain other Confucian values related to public aspects.

After examining the foundation of Japanese interactions in the public and private spheres, Ikeda and Richey move on to study social networks, specifically. In order to do so, they measure three important aspects to social interaction in Japan: (1) activeness, which is considered the basic deliberative democratic norm, (2) hierarchy, and (3) heterogeneity (or "non-harmony") and discuss the influence of these three aspects of social interaction on both formal and informal social networks in Japan. The authors find that Japanese networks are stable over time and that membership in social networks in Japan is determined largely by the same factors that have been found to be determinants of social network participation in the US and Europe.

Ikeda and Richey test the effects of social networks on the essential elements of democracy in Japan, and to that end, they measure the influence of social networks on (1) political participation and voter preference, (2) the sources of political knowledge, (3) policy preference, and (4) tolerance (p. 83). The authors explain the measures used to test how social networks influence on each of these items. For example, political participation is measured as the number of political activities in which an individual participates, weighted for frequency (p. 62), and the results show that social networks increase political participation in Japan. The authors also found that while hierarchy in social networks does not alter political participation, it does affect voter preference, increasing the similarity of voting outcomes among socially networked voters (p. 67). Concerning political knowledge, the results show that political discussion itself does not necessarily increase Japanese knowledge of politics; however, speaking with opinion leaders did increase it (p. 76). Thus, social networks did allow for the spread and increase of political knowledge among social network users in modern Japan.

A significant body of literature stresses the non-rational nature of decision-making, yet rational policy preferences require learning about specific details in a competitive political environment. This research finds that political discussions in social networks serve as a means of helping Japanese citizens to form an opinion on public policies (p. 89). Lastly, studying tolerance in Japan is particularly important since Japanese society has strict beliefs about which behaviors are acceptable (and a generally negative attitude is taken toward any deviation from such behaviors). Despite this, Ikeda and Richey find that not only do Japanese individuals have political disagreements but also that social networks with a highly diverse membership have significantly greater levels of political tolerance than would otherwise be expected (p. 100). However, the authors note that the level of political tolerance may not be influenced by the trust in the democratic system. In other words, in their research, political tolerance refers only to a "tolerance for diverse political opinions" and not to an understanding among citizens that political institutions will necessarily protect them (p. 95)

After showing the positive influence of heterogeneous non-hierarchical social networks on Japanese democracy, the authors examine how the government might intentionally generate this type of network through programs called community currencies, created to increase trust in local government. These programs in Japan create new social networks by giving individuals incentives to participate in these networks and cooperate with unknown people, which has been shown to increase political trust and benefit democracy, generally.

I agree with Ikeda and Richey's approach of incorporating questions in the survey measuring aspects related to East Asian values that have not been previously asked in Western surveys to test the validity of model in countries like Japan. Nevertheless, since the

research is focused on Japan, it is not appropriate to extend the results to other East Asian countries, such as China, Korea, or Taiwan. Like the authors, I also believe that the need for group harmony in East Asian societies limits open disagreement. Perhaps, however, it is not suitable to investigate harmony within social networks in terms of "homogeneity" (p.38) since it is not clear that group heterogeneity necessarily implies disharmony within a group in Japan. In addition, I think that diversity within networks does not necessarily involve cooperation with unknown people (p. 117).

In sum, however, this is an interesting book that deals with the essential topic of the generalizability of democracy in countries with East Asian cultural values and, specifically, Confucian values in Japan. But this book is not easy to read. It seems that some parts are more than a little confusing, perhaps because it includes quite a wide range of research information that has been sharply condensed to fit into this brief book. Nonetheless, the text will be of clear benefit to scholars of politics and democracy in Japan as well as those interested in Japan studies, in general.

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