

“The Decline of the Liberal Order and its Impact on East Asia”

Summary of an International Conference Co-organized by the University of Tokyo and the Keck Center for International and Strategic Studies at Claremont McKenna College
March 13, 2018, the Faculty of Law, the University of Tokyo

Twelve panelists and fourteen participants, including six graduate students from the University of Tokyo, two Claremont McKenna undergraduates, and CMC President Hiram Chodosh, convened at the University of Tokyo on March 13 to discuss the decline of the liberal western order.¹ Professors from around the globe presented research about the global consequences of the decline and examined the state of democracy and capitalism in Eastern European, Latin American, and Asian nations.

Themes:

- Hegemonic stability
 - the “Kindleberger trap”
 - revival of American leadership
- Impact of technology and social media on the decline of the liberal world order
- Can the U.S. afford not to play by the rules of the game it created?
- Differences between established democracies, emerging democracies, and autocracies in their views of democracy, Chinese power, and American power
- Sticking power of American/Western authority due to existing institutions (inertia) and the role of English
- Does the decline of the liberal order necessarily include a replacement?

¹ Presenters: Hilary Appel, Roderic Camp, Yun-un Chu, Kiichi Fujiwara, Keisuke Iida, David Kang, Kimitaka Matsuzato, Kazuo Ohgushi, Minxin Pei, Shigeto Sonoda, Akio Takahara, Guoguang Wu
Participants: Chiyuki Aoi, Hiram Chodosh, Yee Kuang Heng, Masahiro Kohara, Roberto Orsi. Nobuhiko Tamaki
Students: 6 graduate students from the University of Tokyo, Bryn Miller, Kara Schachter

Speaker Summaries:

Bryn

Minxin Pei

“The Decline of the Liberal Order and the Future of Democracy in East Asia”

Pei presented a framework for understanding the decline of the liberal world order at the global and domestic level and argued that revival of American leadership is critical to maintain the system. He outlined four factors undermining the order. First, the shift in global economic output and manufacturing from industrialized democracies to developing nations has facilitated the transfer of economic power to emerging nations like China and India. Second, America’s security collective is declining, reducing reliance on America and diminishing the nation’s reputation. Third, the moral and ideological authority of liberalism has declined as capitalist democracies have failed to perform well and alternative systems, like China, have surged economically. Especially in the wake of the Cold War, established and emerging democracies could not benefit from a “rally ‘round the flag” effect to reinforce liberal values at home and abroad. Finally, the institutions of democracy have declined in nations around the globe due to the defection of the working class from left-of-center parties; the rise of identity politics spurred, in part, by migration; and the decline of the party system. Social media has exacerbated the effects of these changes, which may prove to be structural and hard to reverse.

Since the mid-twentieth century the United States has supported the liberal world order, acting as a hegemon and exemplar. However, Pei notes that three major events weakened America’s capabilities to lead. The Iraq War drained the budget and was a strategic distraction during China’s rise. In 2008, the financial crisis further weakened U.S. economic power and institutions. In 2016, President Trump’s populism further shook the democratic, liberal institutions within America. In the aftermath of these three events, America did not have the money to defend the liberal order in East Asia. Although established democracies fared well, authoritarian regimes capitalized upon this gap in oversight and became less liberal and less democratic. Although American leadership has fared better than expected in Asia considering the events of the last two decades, revival and re-engagement is crucial to defend the liberal world order in the region and across the globe.

Keisuke Iida

“The Decline of the Liberal International Order from the Economic Perspective”

Iida argued that the decline of the liberal world order can be attributed to the United States’ retreat from the role of hegemon; sustaining the system would require America to reinforce and abide by the rules it laid out for the globe. He presented the current situation as a “Kindleberger trap”: a situation in which the declining power (in this case, the U.S.) is unable to support the system and the rising power (in this case, China) is unwilling to do so. The United States’ inability to lead stems largely from the decline of Western economic power. The G7’s share of global GDP has sharply decline in the past decades, the quality of American economic policy is deteriorating, and China surpassed the United States in GDP at purchasing power parity. In response to this development, America (especially after Trump’s election) has put forth policies that harm the already-crumbling global free trade network. Contrary to the orthodoxy of the American establishment, Trump has pledged to place a 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports and recently implemented a tariff on steel. He speaks disdainfully of multilateral organizations like the WTO and GATT. These factors indicate that a trade war with China may be looming. In this conflict, Iida holds that the United States must listen to the WTO and GATT in adjudications to maintain these institutions’ authority. If America does not abide by and support the trade institutions it set up to contain all nations, the death of the WTO regime could be the death knell of the entire liberal world order.

Chu Yun-han

“Taiwan: Is Democracy Losing Luster?”

Using data from the latest two iteration of the Asian Barometer Survey, a comparative survey of democracy and development, Chu outlined the trend of slow “democratic backsliding” in Asia. The survey, which presents data from five South Asian and 14 East Asian nations, provides insight about the level of support for democracy in three distinct categories of nations: autocracies, emerging democracies, and established democracies. People that live in established democracies like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, although they rated their systems low in other categories, agreed that they’d rather live under their governmental system than any other.

However, more autocratic nations like Vietnam received higher levels of regime support than these established and emerging democracies, even when assessing self-censorship. In addition, far fewer people surveyed from emerging democracies than in previous years agreed that democracy is always the preferable form of government. Interestingly enough, perceived regime legitimacy has an inverse relationship with Freedom House scores in this region. This relationship could be attributed in part to indoctrination, but Chu argues that these regimes' abilities to deliver economic and social well-being and establish law and order are larger factors. Since democracy has not yet delivered such benefits in many emerging democracies in Asia, alternative systems may look more attractive. Especially in the era of Trump, when democratic institutions are hollowed out in America and other liberal democracies, these nations do not have a high-performing exemplar to model themselves after.

Shigeto Sonoda

“China Threat’ in the Eyes of East Asian Elite University Students”

Sonoda presented a survey about East Asian university students' attitudes toward China, arguing that many students view China as a rising power yet still gravitate to the United States as the leader of the global community. Assuming that students in these institutions are a good pulse point for the views of the future leaders of these nations, Sonoda and a team of students collected data about views towards China, China's actions, and the United States. He framed this data with information from a 2017 Pew survey, which showed that the majority of nations around the globe view the United States as the most important economic power. His survey results show that students in some nations in the region embrace China's rise, viewing their success as the result of the people's efforts, and believe that China's expansion will offer them opportunities. However, many -- particularly students in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam² -- view China as a threat to the global order and believe that it will not maintain peaceful relations with other Asian nations. Additionally, students across the board recognize the political instability in China and believe that there are numerous social problems caused by rapid economic growth. Despite these negative views, most students believe that China will supersede American influence in the

² Relates well to the classification of three nations discussed in the previous section -- with the easily explained exception of Vietnam, these are the developed democracies.

region. Although they recognize the rising power of China, these students generally have not invested time in studying Chinese the way they study English. This disconnect between perception and action indicates that American authority may have sticking power in the region due to the power of English, the language of the Internet and science. Although the American political system may have, in the words of Chu, “lost its luster,” the cultural and academic aspects of society may help the United States maintain its leadership role.

Rod Camp “Latin America: New Democracies in Distress – the Case of Mexico?”

Although Mexico has presented all the signs of a healthy electoral democracy in recent years, support for democracy there is the lowest in Latin America -- only 37 percent of the populace believe democracy is the preferable system. The opposition party was elected in 2000, re-elected in 2006, and power transferred back to the former incumbent party in 2012. The government enacted the Pact for Mexico, which set the framework for institutions to meet expectations as opposed to individual politicians. Mexico’s confidence in democracy should have gone up after these peaceful power transitions and institutionalization of democratic policies. Camp argues that corruption, drug-related violence, and a lack of trust in the elections have kept confidence low (although people tend to blame the Mexican government for the rise of cartels and criminal activity, he notes that this violence is mainly caused by the high U.S. demand for drugs). Mexicans, like many people in Latin America, would be willing to replace democracy with authoritarian regimes -- signaling the decline of the liberal order -- if that system would better reduce violence.

Kara

***Hilary Appel
“Russia and Eastern Europe: Back to the Future?”***

Professor Appel explored the question of whether political liberalism and populism are a widespread phenomenon in Eastern Europe. In examining Hungary and Poland, the answer seems clear. In both states, the predominant parties have revoked judicial rights, preached anti-immigrant policies, and suppressed domestic media contrary to the government agenda.

Freedom House has noted a significant decline of democracy and rise of autocracy in many eastern European countries, but Appel explained that the patterns of illiberalism in Hungary and Poland are especially worrisome. For example, in the 2017 Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Survey, only 31% of respondents in Poland and 18% of respondents in Hungary are “committed to democratic options.”[1] Following the Euro crisis and Brexit, eastern European countries recognized the extent of dependence on foreign direct investment and criticized both globalization and vulnerability to foreign capital. For the first time since the post-Cold War era, eastern European states began to recognize alternatives to the western model. However, even in states widely accepted as democratic, there has been a rise in populist, anti-democratic ideology. In the most recent national elections, Austria’s voting share of nationalist parties rose 35.1%, Denmark rose 21%, and France rose 14%. However, the European regional trends of nationalism and illiberalism may be combatted by Russia’s rise in the region. Appel argues that although Russia has been historically detested, it is making significant, noteworthy strides in its international relations. Putin has been able to successfully build relationships, fund projects, and ascertain Russia’s hegemonic status. Overall, Professor Appel found the implications of illiberalism troubling not just for eastern Europe, but for the region and the western liberal order.

[1] Pew Research Center- Global Attitudes Survey 2017

David Kang

“Korea: Bucking the Trend of Illiberalism?”

Professor Kang asserted that South Korea is the exemplar of peaceful democracy, but it is not necessarily one that listens to the demands of global powers, particularly the United States. Kang claimed Korea’s massive progress towards democracy, discussing how in the 1980s, this was not the case, yet now, candlelit, peaceful protests occur as a manifestation of their democratic rights. While corruption in business and top levels of government still do exist, the

pattern of Korea's swing elections and party changes reflect a robust democracy. Korea is a liberal democracy, but not American-centric, leading the media to portray it differently.

However, Kang insisted that South Korea is incredibly democratic. They will not choose sides in the battle for dominance and will act against the United States' global agenda if when it is the better option for South Korea. Kang offered that the South Korean case presents alternatives from the typical western order, but one that nonetheless champions the principals of democracy.

Kiichi Fujiwara

"Illiberal Democracies and the Fate of Liberal Internationalism"

Professor Fujiwara attributed the decline of the liberal order to three key breakdowns: the decline of the west, the decline of liberal democracies, and the decline of international institutions. He noted that western powers have shifted towards illiberal democracies through the expanding executive powers, restricting competition, employing populist rhetoric, retreating from international institutions, and mobilizing political support. Fujiwara acknowledged the role that the United States plays in the western decline, but noted that from a geopolitical perspective, the Trump administration is not necessarily the key actor. Fujiwara, like several other scholars at the conference, stressed globalization and internationalism's role in the western order's decline. Economic, political, and institutional organs must function democratically to uphold the pillars of liberal internationalism, yet all three have been threatened through globalism's rise. Fujiwara argued that even social democrats are not truly for liberal principals such as completely free global markets. Instead, leaders are opting towards protecting domestic markets, defending national borders, and questioning the legitimacy of international organizations and institutions. However, Fujiwara offered potential ways in which the rise of illiberalism could be challenged: through the restoration of political pluralism, defense of the international system and institutions, and public, demonstrated support of liberal internationalism.

Guogang Wu

“China: Hard Authoritarian Rule Gets a Boost”

Professor Wu reiterated the theme of China’s power shift threatening the western liberal order.

He examined China’s reversed transition to a new model of neo-totalitarianism through Friedrich and Brezezinski’s criteria for totalitarianism: an elaborate ideology focusing on all aspects of human society, single leadership, a terror system, monopolized communication, control of arms and weapons, and economic control. Wu found that Xi Jinping’s regime has fulfilled all criterion through the CCP’s hardened stance towards adherence to Party ideology, which has been successful through efforts such as “Xi Jinping Thought” and referring to the ideology as the “final truth of the universe.” China’s response to the exponential growth of globalization was in reaffirming its control over all aspects of Chinese life, both material and spiritual. While China has economically benefitted from globalization and marketization, Jinping’s response has been to regain all control over the freedoms brought with them. As such, China’s policies have demonstrated a strong desire to dominate the global order and establish spheres of influence in its politics and affairs. Since many countries, especially those in east Asia, do believe in the efficacy of the Chinese model, Wu believes that the “reversed transition inevitably yields significant and tremendous consequences in China’s relations with the rest of the world, China’s role in global affairs, and the global order.”

Akio Takahara

“The ‘Principal Contradiction’ in China: Does the CCP Have a Solution?”

Professor Takahara discussed the modern paradox China faces; Xi Jinping has acknowledged that, “people’s demands for democracy, rule of law, fairness, justice, security, and better

environment are growing,” yet under his leadership, China has undergone a major absolutist and restrictive phase. Even if the sentiment for democracy is more apparent than in the Mao era, societal actions reflect otherwise. Takahara drew parallels to the Mao Zedong era, discussing “Xi Jinping Thought” (similar to Mao’s Little Red Book), dressing to the core, and targeted schooling. This reverse transition is without the masses and brute force of the Mao era, but has been successful through Xi’s consolidation of power. While decision-making at the executive level may be slower, this consolidation of power has made it easier for the Xi regime to overcome the obstacle faced in collective leadership. In his discussion, Takahara recognized that while the capabilities of Xi’s government officials may be limited, they still have the resources and communication channels necessary to influence the minds of China’s youth. Takahara confirmed sentiments echoed throughout the conference, affirming a strong belief in the China model and the desire to export the China model beyond its current reach.

Presentations Not Summarized

Kimataka Matsuzato “The Donbass War and Politics in Cities on the Front: Mariupol and Kramatorsk”

Kazuo Ohgushi “Transitional Justice in Latin America: Victim’s Needs and Perspectives”