

Equality of Democracy

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Abstract. *Equality* in this article is not a concept affiliated with human rights but a term with a meaning of identity at an abstract or conceptual level. In presenting an abstraction of *Democracy* from the historic development in governance and relativity of democracy including various political systems with democratic ingredients, philosophical annotation, and ideological explanation, this article advocates an equality of democracy by focusing on the essence of, and the process towards, democracy, and the equal right of interpreting democracy. Democratic Constitutional System, Constitutional Monarchy, and Party-guided Constitutional Government in realities share the same importance in pursuing the ideal of democracy. Democracy cannot be spread through indoctrinations. Countries at different stages of democratization have an equal right in interpreting their practices towards democratic ideals in conceptions extracted from the realities of their democratic course.

Introduction

Democracy as a term originated from Greek word of *δημοκρατία* meaning *rule of the people* as the antonym of *ἀριστοκρατία* meaning *rule of an elite* or aristocracy. Two points in this original definition of *democracy* are the scope of *people* and how these people rule. The broader the range of *the people* in a society is, the more democratic that society. The standard for the scope of people is its extent towards majority participation. Only with majority participation can a government represents common interests of its people. The scope of people decides how close this democracy is to its essence or to what extent it is democratic. The broadest scope of people in a country includes every citizen regardless of sex, race, and social status. The quantity of people participating in decision-making parallels the quality of democracy, thus its essence. But how these people rule or the formality of democracy depends on many factors including the size of a country, the political literacy of ordinary people, etc. Theoretically, democracy provides every adult an access to group decisions. In reality, there has never had a formality of democracy matching its concept.

The history of democracy has presented many different formalities of decision-making in terms of who made decisions and how decisions were made. Lakoff [1] traces popular government from Athenian direct democracy, Roman republicanism, and liberal democracy to modern democracy. Direct democracy is applicable only within a small community. Even ancient Athens could not really implement a literally direct democracy for it excluded slaves and women, and only about 10% of its male citizens could directly participate in decision-making. Thus, democracy has to be run in a representative format in which most citizens cannot directly discuss important issues but through their representatives. However, the early republic democracy in Roman and later on in other regions contained undemocratic factors concerning the range of representatives. For instance, the representatives of those early parliaments in Europe between 12th and 16th centuries only consisted of nobles, bishops, and wealthy towns. Even the American democratic constitution only states that the right to vote shall not be denied “on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude.” It is not until 1920 the equality of democracy has its meaning to women when the constitution finally states the right to vote shall not be denied “on account of sex” [2].

The essence of democracy is whether it represents the common interests of all people and how. In terms of the common interests of all people, western democratic movement has considered the equal political rights its priority including the rights of voting, political participation, freedom of expression, and property. But in other countries, especially those with a large population and at low living standards, a stable society and basic materials for living are what the majority of people really want.

Whether it focuses on universal suffrage or food, clothing and material abundance depends on cultural tradition and tendency of people's pursuing.

In conclusion, concepts of democracy are universal principles applicable to any governments with a quality of, or a tendency towards, democracy. The basic elements of democracy without limitation in contexts are majority participation and common interests. They are the core values of democracy with the same meaning to any governmental forms and with the same importance to the essence of any democratic systems, which is what *Equality of Democracy* implies.

Equality of Democracy as a Concept or Conceptions

Pierik [3] states that concepts are phrased in such a high level of abstraction that possible disagreements about their interpretation and implementation are concealed. At a lower level of abstraction, conceptions are particular interpretations of that concept. *Rule of the people* as the concept of democracy has not changed since Ancient Greece. But conceptions of *people* vary in different countries in different historic periods, so as the conceptions of *rule of the people*. When Greeks interpreted democracy as *rule of the people*, their concept of *people* is different from a modern concept of *all the people*, so as the participation of all male Athenian civilians is different from the universal suffrage appeared in the late stage of democratic development.

The essence of democracy means both the abstraction and the core of democracy. Equality of democracy exists not in the formality, but in the essence of democracy. Majority participation as the essence of democracy has had a course towards its completion of a majority including anyone and everyone. Equality of democracy or the degree of democracy depends on its coverage of political participation. The more people who involved in decision-making, the higher degree that democracy. The essence of democracy has developed through reforms in expanding the political participation, and in searching of applicable formalities. Republic and representative democracies are various formalities of democracy based on nations' history and tradition. As political experiments of human society in its process towards an ideal and functional democracy, different formalities of democracy share the essence of democracy at different degrees.

The history of democracy shows that equality in democracy has been compatible with inequalities including political and socioeconomic advantages of male civilians and majorities. In practice, it is almost unreachable to any governments so far. Elected representatives may not necessarily speak for the common interests of their people due to conditions in politics. Democratic governments may impose certain rules or orders without the consent of majority people. A pure democracy only exists in its concept. The reification of conceptual democracy adds concrete and historic contents that are conditional and deviant. Even the conception on the origin of democracy or the Athenian democracy contains deviations from its concept, which can be viewed as unequal conditions of democracy.

According to the western conceptions, China is not a democratic country with serious problems in areas including freedom of speech, press, and religion, and human rights. Countries, especially the United States, through western media often criticize China being violating human rights. However, China defines its government as democracy, and views democracy as its ideal with a long process ahead to be finally realized. The statements claiming a democratic government in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China [4] include *All power belongs to the people, Respect and protect citizens' rights of private property, human rights, freedom of religion, personal freedom, equality between women and men, and equality among ethnic groups*. Literally, there are no ambiguities between the articles in PRC Constitution and the essence of democracy in terms of majority participation and common interests. In other words, the Chinese conception of democracy contains all the important elements the western democracies have. The phrases expressed in these articles can also be considered a democratic ideal for Chinese although problems occur in reality.

In conclusion, theorizing of democracy based on formalities of individual democracies has not only ignored the original concept of democracy but also resulted in conflicted conceptions of democracy. Agreed on the concept of democracy, every country has an equal right to discuss and

present conceptions of their democracies. Concept is the reminder of democratic essence, and conceptions are carriers of democratic experiences. Equality of democracy exists not in its conceptions but in its concept. While a concept implies an ideal matching the essence of the very concept, a conception reflects the reality of implementing the conceptual principles towards that ideal. Thus, equality of democracy at the level of conception accepts any conceptions on how to reach a democratic ideal of respective countries.

Equality of Democracy as Ideal or Reality

The prescriptive assertion of democracy is of a universal ideal of democracy, descriptive assertions of democracy are of its realities of democratization processes and experiences of various countries. The equality of democracy exists in democratic ideal as well as in the integration of democratic ideal and its realities towards that ideal. Democracy is an ideal for many countries. Equality of democracy as an ideal implies an equal right for every country to pursue democracy. Countries have different formalities or realities of democracy due to the breeding grounds they were born are dissimilar, but their contributions to the development of democracy share an equal importance. Through realities, the process to an ideal democracy takes different steps at different stages embracing a variety of characteristics.

There are many Chinese visions of democratic ideal raised from the reality of Chinese society. Zhou [5] discusses various possible route maps for a Chinese ideal of democracy: alternative democracy focusing on the rule of law, liberal democracy consistent with representative democracy, direct democracy or full democracy, China's road to democracy focusing on current Chinese system, and incremental democracy. There are three characteristics in Chinese reality that are different from other democratic realities: a large population with low democratic awareness, a tradition of people's livelihood over civil rights, and a system of multi-party cooperation under the leadership of the Communist Party. Does democratic system have to come out of two-party competition? Does the National People's Congress of China meet the democratic principles of majority participation and common interests? Ke [6] points out that the party-guided constitutional government is the reality of China. It is a dual constitutional system: binary of the national constitution and the party constitution; and binary of the leadership of Communist Party and the sovereignty of Chinese people. Ke suggests that the Chinese constitution includes the party constitution as an attachment, clearly defines the dual system of national constitution and party constitution, and unifies people's sovereignty and party's leadership.

The procedure of election in China is also different from western democracies, and matching election ensures the candidates to be elected one hundred percent. Since 1979, the election in China has gone through "competitive election in pre-selection, and matching election in formal election" to competitive election at city level. As long as the representatives actively participate in the congress, and speak for the people of their communities, they are implementing the principles of democracy: majority participation and common interests. Contemporary democratic governments in Europe, North America, and Asia have mixed democratic, oligarchic, and monarchic elements in forms of congress/parliament, senate, ministers/cabinet, the prime minister/the president, and the queen/the emperor. However, they share the opportunities for people to control their leaders and to oust them without the need for revolution [7]. The ideal of *the people to control their leaders* takes different measures in realities, such as impeachment, complaint reports, investigation, and discipline inspection. In recent years, China, through its Committee of Discipline Inspection, has ousted many governmental and military officials at high positions as important actions of anti-corruption. These actions are welcomed and supported by the majority of Chinese people. It can be considered either part of Chinese reality towards its democratic ideal or part of politics at the top of Chinese government as long as it is an interpretation based on Chinese reality rather than a western indoctrination on democracy.

In conclusion, as an ideal, democracy is always in a process of step-by-step forward moving towards perfection. As realities, democracy is always a limited practice containing biases and undemocratic elements and undergoing through improvement and reforming. Conceptions are interpretations of a concept that add some specific contents on the abstract concept including philosophical, religious, cultural, and ideological elements. Originated in the West, democracy is an ideal form of government that nations in the world are pursuing. The different conceptions of democracy are the explanations to various experiences of democracy that share an equal right of interpreting democracy. In terms of past and present realities of democracy, “there have been discontinuous democracies in Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. New African states have been democracies for a short spring only—if at all” [8]. It is not surprising to see democratic realities in other countries or regions take different routes in different patterns.

Equality of Democracy as Interpretations or Indoctrinations

Democracy is an important element of world civilizations created by human together, so as the power of interpretation belongs to all mankind. Philosophers and politicians presented various views and theories of democracy based on their experiences and understanding of democracy at different stages in certain countries or regions with an equal right of interpretation. However, a strong power of interpretation distinguishes prescriptive and descriptive clarifications of democracy, and focuses on the prescriptive principles while allowing the variations of descriptive formalities. A prescriptive assertion of democracy focuses on the norm or the essence of democracy whereas descriptive assertions of democracy present spatiotemporal formalities of democracy. Equality in democracy means that democracy is a political ideal without fixed model or formality, linear procedure, and presuppositions or stereotyped values. Although all countries have the same equal power of interpreting democracy, their interpretations have to focus not on formality but on essence.

The different views and interpretations of democracy are due to the different emphases in respective democracies in realities of different democratic stages. For instance, Japanese government has revised some important terms and added new content according to the tradition and reality of Japanese society, which become more of Japanese interpretation than American indoctrination [9,10]. While western democracy focuses on human rights Chinese democracy emphasizes on the interests of the people and stability of the society. Practically, a direct democracy is suitable to a small-sized country like Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew [11], however, did not follow the western model of Athenian democracy but a centralized country under an elite leadership and a strict legal system. Singapore’s success adds a new model of governance that takes good care of common interests of its people, and that is as good as some of the advanced democratic countries in the west. Naisbitts [12] believes that freedom means different things to different people. They point out, “Social order and harmony were central to the teaching of Confucius, who believed that only order could provide true freedom,” and “conflict and disharmony, especially in such serious matters as governance, do not fit the Chinese mentality.” Based on this understanding, Naisbitts name the Chinese system a vertical democracy in which “politics is run not by rival parties or politicians but by consensus in a top-down, bottom-up process.” The discussion enriches the connotation and denotation of democracy. The more inclusive the interpretations are, the better they concentrate the essence of democracy.

There are indoctrinations from two extremes: from left extremists or from right extremists. Refusing to follow the basic principles and rules of democracy originated in the West is an indoctrination with a tendency of left extremism whereas denying the Eastern form of democracy is an indoctrination with a tendency of right extremism. Democracy is still in the process toward its improvement and perfection. Indoctrination of democracy hinders its development and reformation, whereas interpretations of democracy encourage its evolution in multicultural contexts and age of globalization. Originated from the simple concept of *rule of the people*, democracy has grown its conceptual tree including liberty and human rights. However, it is an open system that is to be continuously expanded and enriched to include various democratic practices. In terms of different

aspects of democracy, the focus of western democracies is leaning more on political features such as the right to vote and freedom of speech due to the western tradition in civil rights movement and the subsistence level of their citizens. But in some countries, economic democracy is the first priority for both citizens and government for it is the key to the security and stability of the country. In addition, due to being lack of political tradition in democracy, it is only one step away between a mass involvement low in political quality and societal chaos due to being lack of mechanism for people's participation nationwide. As Sartori [8] commented, "democracies are not viable unless their citizens understand them."

In conclusion, we should let countries choose the suitable and effective ways to eventually reach the highest level of democracy. The democratic elements are spreading in time and space from ancient Athens to modern European countries and from North America to Asia, which will continue spreading to more areas and last forever. The equality of democracy implies countries' right of interpreting their democratic realities. Variety of interpretations is a necessary phenomenon resulted from variety of democratic practices and out of the equality of democracy. The equality of democracy only exists among conceptions and interpretations of different democratic realities. Indoctrination of western democracy on other countries violates the equality of democracy.

Summary

Equality of democracy exists in its concept, ideal, and interpretation. The concept of democracy implies the essence of democracy while the ideal of democracy is still in the process along with various interpretations. Different conceptions, realities in practice, and interpretations are equally important in human course pursuing democracy. As the best form of governance, democracy involves the most majority of people in a country and represents their common interests. Starting from the core or the essence of democracy, the routes countries took to implement democracy are not exactly the same due to the different cultures and political heritage, thus various conceptions occur. However, as long as these conceptions are not deviated from the concept of democracy, they share the equality of democracy. Democracy is an ideal to all countries that are on the process towards that direction. Countries take different steps with various paces, and are at different stages in democratization. However, the realities of countries in their democratization are only different on how they reach the ideal of democracy, they share the equality of finding democracy as their ideal.

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