

Perspectives of Democracy: Concept, Ideal, and Interpretation

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Abstract

Equality of democracy can be understood from the perspectives of concept, ideal or interpretation. “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. “Equality of Democracy” denotes an underlying concept of “Democracy” with neither contexts nor ideals in multicultural interpretations. This article elaborates the equality of democracy from three perspectives: equality of democracy as a concept or conceptions, equality of democracy as an ideal or realities, and equality of democracy as interpretations or indoctrinations. 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. Western, Eastern, and Mideast conceptions of democracy are equal at the conceptual level. 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.

Keywords: Concept, Ideal, Interpretation

Originated in certain areas and developed in different regions, democracy has become the model of governance recognized worldwide. Ideals and practices of democracy vary, but its abstract concept and basic principles are the same to any countries, so as countries’ right to interpret democratic ideals and implementations. The contributions to the development of democracy by many countries share the same importance, which itself implies the equality of democracy. With a focus on the concept of democracy, we see its equality in essence extracted from variation and diversity of its formalities. “Two conceptions of justice that look different at first sight, might share one underlying concept” (Pierik, 2004). Discussion on democracy here is conducted and distinguished at three levels of concept, ideal, and interpretation to avoid arguments based on different categories.

Introduction

The term of “Democracy” originated from Greek word of “δημοκρατία” meaning “rule of the people” as the antonym of “ἀριστοκρατία” meaning “rule of an elite” or aristocracy. Two implications in this original definition of “democracy” are the scope of “people” and how these people rule. The common definitions of “people” are: 1) any group of human being collectively; and 2) the body of citizens of a state or country (Hyperdictionary). Although in a real democratic

country, the two definitions above mean the same thing when “the body of citizens” includes “any group of human being,” it took two thousands of years for human societies to reach the maximum of the body of citizens that is closest to the concept of “the people.” The broader the range of “the people” in a society is, the more democratic that society.

Democracy in its essence should include universal suffrage in which all adults, without distinction as to race, sex, belief or social status, have a right to vote, and to be able to participate in decision-making. However, it has taken human society thousands of years to go through a process from male citizen suffrage with restrictions on sex, property, and race to manhood suffrage, and finally universal suffrage that is still not a reality across the whole world. In the earliest democracy established in Athens in 510BC, however, “rule of the people” did not imply universal suffrage. The right of vote was only granted to adult male citizens who owned land. The property requirements in Athenian democracy had been carried on for thousands of years. For instance, in Britain only landlords had the right to vote in 1265. The realization of universal male suffrage regardless of class or race did not happen until the 19th century. It took even longer time to remove the restrictions against women having the right of vote. Democracy is a form of government in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives.¹ The standard for the scope of people is its extent towards majority participation. Only with majority participation can the government represent common interests of its people. As mentioned above, the scope of people decides how close the very 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.

While the scope of “people” decides how close the very democracy is to its essence how these people rule presents the formality of democracy. Lakoff (1996) considers autonomy the theme of democracy and democracy the quest for autonomy. According to Lakoff, autonomy is communal, plural, and individual, and “compound autonomy” includes voting and electoral systems, federalism, and other democratic efforts. As mentioned above, how these people rule is reflected in the formality of democracy, which 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 concerning its formality has presented many different ways of decision-making in terms of who made decisions and how decisions were made. Lakoff (1996) traces popular government from Athenian direct democracy, Roman republicanism, and liberal democracy to modern democracy or “compound autonomy.”

Athenians experimented a model of direct democracy with two preconditions: a small community in which all citizens could attend debates and vote on issues; and citizens have enough leisure to engage in politics. However, according to Gascoigne (2001), there are only about 50,000 citizens among 300,000 Athenians. Each citizen has a voice in the assembly, which meets four

¹ <http://www.massdemocracy.org/democracy/> (May 6, 2013)

times a month on a flat-topped hill in Athens. Important issues are decided among as many as 5,000 citizens. Each of 500 members in the council can become one of 50 presidents serving for a month, and the chairman of the council changes every day. “So almost every councilor is effectively head of state for one day of the year” (Gascoigne, 2001).

Direct democracy is applicable only within a small community. Even the 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, like the direct democracy in Athens, the early republic democracy in Roman and later on in other regions contained undemocratic factors concerning the range of representatives and the secret ballot. In the Roman republic, “citizens vote orally, giving their answer to a teller. Thereafter they mark a tablet and place it in an urn, constituting a secret ballot” (Gascoigne, 2001). Although this early development of modern representative democracy was interrupted by the Roman Empire, its representativeness with a secret ballot has become an important factor ever since. The establishment of a parliament as a place for speaking and a valid pattern of representation in the 12th century is an important step in the development of representative democracy. However, the early parliaments in Europe between 12th and 16th centuries were equal in formality but not in essence for they consisted of only representatives of nobles, bishops, and wealthy towns. With a democratic constitution adopted in 1788, “the American republic has pioneered a successful working democracy” although it is “based on a restricted franchise, and the leading politicians are all from a small leisured and landed class,” among them, Washington and Jefferson are southern slave owners (Gascoigne, 2001). The American 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” (Gascoigne, 2001).

Why should we focus on the quantity of people in political participation, and what the majority of people really want? The majority participation ensures the decisions made representing the interests of majority people. However, majority participation is the form of democracy whereas the common interests of the most majority of the people are the substance of democracy. Forms are important ways to achieve the goals. Nevertheless, the essence of democracy is whether it represents the common interests of all people and the way of doing it. In terms of the common interests of all people, western democratic movement has been taken the equal political rights as 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 majority people really want. Whether it focuses on universal suffrage or food, clothing and material abundance depends on cultural tradition and the tendency of people’s pursuing.

In conclusion, the basic concepts of democracy should be universal principles that are 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. Majority participation means a high rate of representativeness in decision-making and governing. Common interests are shared among all people in a country regardless of their cultural, ethnical, and sexual identities. Majority participation and common interests are the basic concepts of democracy that are equal to any governmental forms or systems, or the essence of democracy. A country that sticks to principles of majority participation and common interests is a democratic one. Using majority participation and common interests as universal standards to all countries in the world, it leads to the equality in democratization.

Equality of Democracy as a Concept or Conceptions

Pierik (2004) 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 that the participation of all male Athenian civilians is different from the universal suffrage appeared in the late stage of democratic development. The former U. S. president Abraham Lincoln’s “of the people, by the people, and for the people” (1863) can be considered a concept that is applicable to any types of democracy. In Lincoln’s concept of democracy, “people” is a collective concept indicating the overall members or the most majority in a nation. Thus, “of the people” and “by the people” mean that the government is composed of, and run by the “people,” or majority participation. “For the people” implies that the government is for people’s interests. However, it is not for individual interests of certain groups but for the common interests of all people. It protects individuals’ interests as long as individuals’ interests do not hurt the common interests of all people. From Athenian “rule of the people” to Lincoln’s “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” the abstract meaning of democracy as a concept stays the same. In other words, “people” is the core or the essence of democracy. But the conception of people in Athenian democracy is different from what Lincoln means by the word of “people”. The former excludes slaves from people, and later includes slaves in people. Athenian conception of people also excludes women from people whereas whether Lincoln’s “people” includes women is questionable.

The essence of democracy implies that the democracy itself combines both the abstraction and the core of democracy. Equality of democracy exists not in the formality of democracy 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. Democracy at the highest degree in its essence is political participation of all people. Democracy is a political process of distributing the equality in political participation to more people until it includes anyone and everyone. Equality of

democracy or the degree of democracy depends on its coverage of political participation. The more people are involved in decision-making, the higher degree of that democracy. It was possible for Athenian city-state to discuss and make its important decision by all its male civilians assembled in a public square. Although this primitive democracy or direct democracy is inapplicable to countries with broad territory and more population, it set up the model of democracy in its pure meaning: rule of the people, thus the essence of democracy. The essence of democracy as conceptions has developed through reforms to expand the political participation, in competitions with monarchy, oligarchy, and autocracy (rule of an elite or rule of a small group of people), 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. For instance, in Athenian direct democracy, the equality of male civilians implied the inequality of female civilians and slaves. However, among male civilians, their individual political power was fairly equal and played the same role in public decision. This equal political power in Athenian democracy is the most essential element it contributed to the development of democracy for it protected the equality of democracy in preventing individuals' private gain through privileges. Equality in democracy implies to not only distribute political standing equally but also distribute equal political standing to all citizens. In practice, it is almost unreachable in any governments so far human society has had. Elected by the people in their communities, representatives may not necessarily speak for the common interests of their communities due to conditions in politics. Democratic governments may impose certain rules or orders without the consent of majority people.

Peter (2007) states that political egalitarianism is at the core of most normative conceptions of democratic legitimacy. It finds its minimal expression in the "one person one vote" formula. The connotation of "one person one vote" has to indicate anybody and everybody with a vote of the same weight without presupposition, privilege, and prestige. The dilemma within the slogan of "one person one vote" is between the equality of the term on its surface and the inequality of the term in its practice, for instance, the lobbying and campaign in the process of election. Peter (2007) points out another dilemma between the procedure and substance existing due to the difference "between the requirement of ensuring equal possibilities to participate in democratic process and the requirement of subjecting substantive judgments to deliberative evaluation."

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 condition of democracy. For instance, the concept of democracy originated from Athenians provides "rule of the people," but its conception of "people" only includes male citizens. In other words, a country that gives vote to male citizens amount only 20% of the population would

be considered least democratic nowadays. Democracy in Japan shows how a conception of modern democracy has developed and modified based on Japanese culture and society while sticking to the concept of democracy. As a result of externally directed political change, the Peace Constitution of Japan provides all the basic principles of a modern democracy. Under this constitution, the first general election in Japan was held on April 10 1946, in which women were permitted to vote. Since much of the drafting was done by two senior American army officers with law degrees: Milo Rowell and Courtney Whitney (Dower, 1999), the Peace Constitution of Japan includes the most important elements of democracy as a concept as well as American conceptions on democracy. First, the preamble of Japanese constitution presents the essence of democracy in the same wording as the original concept of democracy, “government is a sacred trust of the people, the authority for which is derived from the people, the powers of which are exercised by the representatives of the people, and the benefits of which are enjoyed by the people” (1946). Second, Japanese constitution contains important principles of American conceptions on democracy including liberalism and human rights. Thirty-one of its 103 articles from Article 10 to Article 40 are devoted to describe this modern democracy in considerable detail including equality of Japanese people in enjoying all aspects of human rights, universal adult suffrage, and the secret ballot. Third, Japanese constitution adds on new elements according to Japanese society and its development, and forms a Japanese conception on democracy. For instance, under the constitution, the Emperor carries out ceremonial functions as the head of state. The LAP 2012 draft contains many changes for the reason as: “Human rights should have ground on the State’s history, culture and tradition” and “Several of the current constitutional provisions are based on the Western-European theory of natural human rights” (2012). The main changes are as follows: 1) the phrase “public welfare” is replaced with a new phrase “public interest and public order” to enable the State to protect human rights and the order of the society. 2) The word “persons” replaces “individuals” to reflect that “excessive individualism” is an ethically unacceptable thought. 3) A new paragraph on Article 21 concerning freedom of assembly, association, speech and all other forms of expression, which enable the State to prohibit the people from performing expressions for the purpose of interfering public interest and public order. 4) New human rights with four provisions: protection of privacy, accountability of the State, environmental protection, and rights of crime victims. 5) Above the three obligations to work, to pay taxes, and to have their children to be educated, it adds six more obligations. For instance, one obligation for Japanese people is to be conscious of the fact that there are responsibilities and obligations in compensation for freedom and rights. Another new obligation is to comply with the public interest and public order. These changes present the characteristics of Japanese conception of democracy.

It is controversial whether the People’s Republic of China is a democratic country. According to 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 when Chinese government restricts so-called democrats’ freedom. However, China defines its government as democracy, and views democracy as its ideal with a long process ahead to be finally realized. The words claiming a democratic government in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of

China (2004) fall into a few categories. 1) “All power belongs to the people” (Article 2 = A2); the representatives of the People’s Congress are elected democratically, accountable to the people, and subject to the supervision of the people (A3). 2) All people who have a Chinese nationality are citizens of PRC (A33); Citizens enjoy the equality before the law (A33); Respect and protect citizens’ rights of private property (A13), human rights (A33), freedom of religion (A36), personal freedom (A37), right to education (A46), equality between women and men (A48), and equality among ethnic groups (A4). 3) Prohibiting any organizations or individuals that disrupt or destroy the socialist system (A1), national unity (A4), the unity and dignity of the socialist legal system (A5), natural resource (A9), public property (A12), social security (A14), and social and economic order (A15). 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 western democracies have. The phrases expressed in these articles can also be considered a democratic ideal for Chinese although many problems occur in reality.

In Chinese conception of democracy, “people’s living” is one of the key elements. China claims that people’s living is the most important human rights. First, food and clothing are still the main concern of majority Chinese. Second, unity and stability are the main concerns of Chinese government (Zhu, 2012). In last 30 years, Chinese government has accomplished greatly in fighting with poverty, especially in rural areas. Absolute poverty population in rural areas had been reduced from 0.25 billions in 1978 to 14.8 millions in 2007; Rate of poverty population had been reduced from 30.7% to 1.56% . Low-income population had been reduced from around 62 millions in 2000 to 28 millions in 2007; the percentages of low-income population within the whole population in rural areas had been reduced from 6.7% to 3% (Zhang, 2009). According to the statistics from the World Bank, the whole world had reduced 0.207 billion of poverty population between 1990 and 2002. China contributed 90% of this progress that reduced 0.195 billion of its poverty population. Similar policies aiming at improving the other aspects of people’s living have been carried out, especially in business, education, and housing (Zhang, 2009).

In conclusion, the 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. However, the conceptual development of democracy has experienced from “of and by all male citizens” to “of and by all people including women and slaves,” and from “for” certain groups of people to “for” all people. Equality of democracy at conceptual level means that any democracy has to include all her people. While a concept implies an ideal matching to 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

Prescriptive assertion of democracy is universally applicable since there should have no objections to the essence of democracy. While prescriptive assertions are identical or universal descriptive assertions are diverse for they are the descriptions of democratization processes and experiences of various countries. Therefore, the prescriptive assertion of democracy is of a universal ideal of democracy, and descriptive assertions of democracy are of its realities in practice. The equality of democracy exists in democracy as an ideal and in the integration of democratic ideal and its realities towards that ideal. Democracy is an ideal for many countries. Equality of democracy in ideal implies an equal right for every country to pursue democracy. Although democracy is always in an ongoing and never completed process of pursuing and realization, democratic practices in various countries are the ideal of democracy in practice towards the same destiny. Countries have different formalities or realities of democracy due to the fact that the breeding grounds they were born are dissimilar, but their contributions to the development of democracy share an equal importance. Athenian democracy only took the male citizens as the members of “the people.” However, it has been considered the model of democratic governments. Two justifications for this acknowledgement are: first, it was the most democratic formality of a government based on human’s knowledge and experience from a historic view; and second, it was the starting point towards an ideal society of human being or the preliminary stage of democratic ideal. “Rule of the people” as the core of democracy is an ideal to all countries advocating democratic principles. But the understanding and implementing of this ideal won’t be the same. Realities consist of both environments and conditions for reaching an ideal. Through realities, we see the process to an ideal democracy taking different steps at different stages embracing a variety of characteristics.

There is a distance between democracy as an ideal and democracy as a reality in any countries including the ancient Athens and modern democratic countries so as it is in China. The differences of this distance among countries vary greatly due to many factors especially their political tradition and democratic heritage. The Wuxu Reform in 1898 in China aimed at a reform as the Meiji Restoration in Japan. However, after a thorough investigation and serious consideration, the leader of the Wuxu Reform in 1898, Kang Youwei, although paid much attention to the parliament, believed that China was not ready for opening a parliament, and suggested “a power sweeping by the emperor” who could leader the reform (Wang, 2005). There are many Chinese visions of democratic ideal raised from the reality of Chinese society. Zhou (2011) 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. These five types of democracy are all Chinese ideals of democracy that fall into two categories. Liberal democracy and direct democracy belong to the same category whose practices and arguments are extracted from past and present realities of western societies with the former based on modern western democracy and the later the Athenian democracy. Alternative democracy, China’s road to democracy, and incremental democracy belong to another category whose practices and arguments

are extracted from the Chinese reality. The common characteristics of these democracies are: 1) considering democracy an ideal whose realization needs to go through a progressive process; 2) emphasizing on the rule of law; and 3) expanding individuals' rights gradually.

In recent years, criticizing China of violating human rights and democracy from western media mainly picks up two types of issues: one issue concerning minority areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang; and the other issue concerning those who criticize Chinese government and praise western systems. The representatives of the former are Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer, and the representatives of the later are Liu Xiaobo and some others. Many westerners think that Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer are fighting for democracy and autonomy for Tibet and Xinjiang, and that Liu Xiaobo and some others are fighting for democracy in China. But how does China justify its criticizing or arresting these people who were considered democrats by westerners? Chinese government and many Chinese people think what Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer have done was to control or to claim the independence of Tibet and Xinjiang, thus to disrupt the national unity of China, and what Liu Xiaobo and some others have done was trying to overthrow the socialist system of China. These behaviors fall into the categories that PRC Constitution prohibits for destroying or disturbing the social and economic order of China. As the presidents of World Uighur Congress, Rebiya is an influential person behind the terrorist attack on July 5, 2009 that killed 156 and injured 1080 people, burned 261 cars, and destroyed 203 stores (Liu, 2009). Chinese government takes zero tolerance on terrorism, and the independence of either Tibet or Xinjiang touches the core interests of the country. While according to western conceptions of democracy, the autonomy of Tibet and Xinjiang should be decided by their people, and the behaviors of Dalai and Rebiya should be protected by democracy and are within the limits of freedom of speech, Chinese government holds an opposite view. Similarly, Liu's offensive words in his "Charter 08" are beyond the limits of freedom of speech within the Chinese conception of democracy. The famous professor of criminal law, Gao (2010) discusses the boundaries between incitement to subversion of State power and freedom of speech. According to Gao, there are two characteristics or standards for an incitement to subversion of State power: 1) spreading rumors, slanders or other means; and 2) with serious harm to society. Liu wrote and published incendiary articles on the Internet and collected signatures of others, which is not the problem of speech, but the implementation of "acts" the Penal Code prohibits. Professor Gao (2010) also refers to some cases in western countries and the identifying standards regarding restrictions on freedom of speech of U. S. courts: First, freedom of speech is a right being measured and restricted according to its harmful consequences; Second, the standards regarding restrictions and negations on freedom of speech are according to the nature and extent of the danger to societal order posed by speeches in certain circumstances (Gao, 2010).

The above-mentioned opposite views on Chinese reality come from different conceptions of democracy and different interpretations of Chinese reality. 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? Is the political consultative system between the Communist

Party and other parties a democratic one? Does the National People's Congress of China meet the democratic principles of majority participation and common interests? Ke (2015) points out that the party-guided constitutional government is the reality of China. Different from a monarch in a constitutional monarchy or a president in a democratic constitutional system, Chinese-style constitutional government 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. There are many rules that are not standardized yet in the party-guided constitutional system. Ke (2015) suggests that the fifth constitution of China² 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. As a professor at the University of Politics and Law of China and Director of Legal Studies Institute, Ke's opinion maybe considered an advocacy of the Communist Party. However, a Chinese scholar's interpretation on Chinese system has its unique value that western critics lack.

The procedure of election in China is also different from western democracies, in which the head of the winning party becomes the leader of the country, and choose the top officials for the government. The independents have no impact on government, and their voices are hardly heard. In China, the transition from matching election to competitive election is really slow. Ren (2015) describes matching election as "one radish one hole" and competitive election as "ten radishes eight holes." The first election law written in 1953 provides that every citizen of 18 years old and above has the right to elect the representatives of congresses at different levels. However, matching election ensures the candidates to be elected one hundred percent. In 1957, the President of China, Liu Shaoqi suggested to implement a system of competitive election, but he failed. Since 1979, the election in China has gone through "competitive election in pre-selection, and matching election in formal election" to competitive election at the city level. It is probably very difficult to operate competitive election in a national election, especially in such a big country like China. 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. For instance, there are near 3,000 representatives from all over the country participated the congress in March 2015. The congress received 522 motions³ covering all areas concerning people's 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 the people to control their leaders and to oust them without the need for revolution (Jarvie, & Milford, 2006). 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,

² The 1st Chinese Constitution was written in 1954; the 2nd one in 1975; the 3rd one in 1978, and the 4th on in 1982. Ke predicts the 5th one will come soon.

³ China.com.cn. March 11, 2015.

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 undergoes 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. Among them, there are mainly western/Christian, eastern/Buddhist, and Mideast/Islamic conceptions of 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” (Sartori, 1987). It is not surprising to see democratic realities in other countries or regions taking different routes in different patterns.

Equality of Democracy as Interpretations or Indoctrinations

Democracy is an important governmental system in world civilizations established by human together, so as the power of interpreting democracy 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. In order to understand and concretize the essence or the concept of democracy, an equal power of interpretation is necessary. Thus, the equality of democracy implies both an understanding of the essence, and an equal power of interpretation, of democracy.

Equality in democracy means that democracy is a political ideal without fixed model or formality, linear procedure, and presuppositions or stereotyped values. Equality of democracy is rather prescriptive than descriptive, and a concept in social and political philosophy rather than a sociological and economic analysis. However, various descriptive interpretations of democracy are equal in the right of interpreting. The premise of equal power of interpreting democracy is that the truth on democracy belongs to all nations in the world. Democracy is an ideal of all nations for better governance. In pursuing a democratic government, countries may establish democratic governments in different formalities as long as not deviating from the essence. 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 at different democratic stages. For instance, western traditions that originated from ancient Greece and Rome have been focusing on right of voting, and political participation. Among eastern countries, some have adopted western systems including Japan, India, and South Korea, and others have explored their own forms of governance according to their cultural tradition, political heritage, and national circumstances. As mentioned above, although the Peace Constitution of Japan was set under a strong influence from the U. S., 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. Many Chinese interpretations of democracy do not accept western indoctrination but combine Chinese thoughts and democratic practices in Chinese reality. These interpretations are different from western ones. They summarize the Chinese experience towards their own model of democracy in their own ways and steps. For instance, the main elements in the interpretation named China's road to democracy are both description of Chinese reality and conceptions of democracy as well as the democratic ideal of Chinese society. The main points of this Chinese interpretation are: 1) trinity of Leadership of the Communist Party, the people being the masters, and governing the country according to law; 2) Four systems of the People's Congress, multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party, minority regional autonomy, and the grass-roots self-government; and 3) Three steps of sovereignty to the people, economic equality, and expanding personal rights and freedom of the people (Zhou, 2011). While western democracy focuses on human rights Chinese democracy emphasizes the interests of the people and the stability of society. Although the Chinese system is not considered a democratic one, including the interpretations of democratic experiences from China and other countries is part of the task for the equality of democracy. In the case of Singapore, the late President said, "What our priorities are, first a welfare, the survival of the people; then the democratic norms and processes which from time to time we have to suspend" (Lee, 1986). Practically, a direct democracy is suitable to a small-sized country like Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew, 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.

Human rights are important elements in modern democracy. Equality of democracy considers human rights a common standard for all people in all nations. Human rights cover many aspects including civil and political, economic, social, and cultural equality for all people. The essence of majority participation in democracy is partially embodied in civil, political, and social aspects of human rights whereas the essence of common interests in democracy is embodied in social and cultural aspects of human rights. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are important connotations of human rights within the context of democracy. The equality in freedom of speech and freedom of religion is attached to the equality of democracy. The equality in freedom of speech

premises the freedom of speech of any people and any nations without hurting others' freedom of speech. The equality in freedom of religion premises the freedom of religion of any people and any nations without hurting others' freedom of religion. It is also the watershed between interpretation and indoctrination.

Freedom of speech is not equal to freedom of saying anything. The equality in freedom of speech implies the right not to slur or attack others while publishing own opinions or interpretations. The same rule is applicable to freedom of press. However, individuals are responsible for whether his/her speech violates the rule and the social impact of the speech, whereas newspapers or magazines are often considered social media and culture of mainstream, and even government's policies. Due to the function of press as media guidance, the equality in freedom of press implies the right not to advocate the extremism or disrupt the society but to build an atmosphere for a tolerant, inclusive, and harmonious society. In terms of freedom of religion, it is a more integrated, sensitive, and complicated issue due to the disparities in values, ideologies, and sermons within various cultural contexts at different civilizational levels. The common sense of a religion could be a taboo of another religion. In dealing with religious related issues, the equality in freedom of religion implies the right not to only accept the similarities or judge by own sermon but to recognize and tolerate the differences of other religions while carefully exercising the rights of freedom of speech and press.

The terrorist attack by masked gunmen on the newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on Jan. 7, 2015 was a "savagery of vulnerable civilization," (Ma, 2015) whose fuse was a caricature. To western civilization, it is an action reflecting, and within the allowed range of, freedom of speech and press. It is nothing wrong to be sharp and acerbic in comic strip. It might be acceptable in Christian civilization to caricature Jesus Christ. However, it is a humiliation to Muslims to see their Allah to be caricatured as the terrorists justifying their cruel behavior so that French comic artists have to pay the price for having insulted the Prophet. The incident relates to freedom of religion other than freedom of speech and press. Actions in freedom of speech and press concerning religion have to abide by the rules in freedom of religion. In other words, in order to keep a balance among equalities in freedom of speech, press, and religion, any individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations have to abide by the basic rules of three freedoms. They are, as mentioned above, neither to slur or attack others, nor to advocate the extremism or disrupt the society, but to recognize and tolerate the differences of other religions. To French comic artists, expressing their views through caricatures is part of their rights in freedom of speech and press, and taunting without mercy is one of the artistic standards for caricatures. However, freedom of religion indicates the equality among various religions in three aspects: to express religious belief piously, to spread religious teachings, and to tolerate and respect other religions. A speech on criticizing or humiliating another religion violates that religion's believers' freedom of religion. According to the famous Japanese cartoonist, Miyazaki, it is wrong to satirize what other religion worships. Caricatures "should first be used towards national politicians, pointing at politicians of other countries will only make people feel suspicious" (Miyazaki, 2015). The discussion above presents a case study of equality of democracy in terms of interpretations or indoctrinations.

Implementing freedom of speech, press, and religion as well as other democratic conceptions through interpretations rather than indoctrinations is the key to ensure the equality in all related areas.

According to Sartori (1987), democracy is government by discussion. “As democracies develop, more and more people discuss more and more.” Along with this tendency of more participation within a democracy, it is expected that more countries interpret more about democracy without an indoctrination of western conceptions. Making comments on the systems of other countries has to be accompanied with an open mind and goodwill. Criticizing other formalities along with their conceptions and interpretations of democracy is a behavior of indoctrination. For instance, many westerners criticize China of violating human rights, but do not study for the whole picture of all facts and the deep reasons behind the formality. Naisbitts (2010) 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 (2010) 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.” “Regardless of any interpretation, ‘The People’ are in the center of China’s political system.” Zhou (2011) discusses democracy from various perspectives: democracy as values or tools, strengths and weaknesses of democracy, direct and indirect democracy, difference between competitive democracy and deliberative democracy, political democracy and economic democracy. 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: left extremists or right extremists. Kashani (2009) criticizes Iranian Leftist for inventing the word of “Eastern Democracy” and put it in opposition to “Western Democracy.” According to Iranian Leftist, Eastern Democracy best suits their culture and traditions, and there is no need to follow the “corrupt” Western Democracy model. But Kashani claims that there is only one form of Democracy, and that’s “Democracy”. No such things as “Eastern” or “Western” Democracy. Human rights, freedom of speech and social freedoms and political freedom...are all “universal” (2009). This article agrees that there is no difference between Eastern and Western democracies from perspectives of concept, ideal, and the right of interpretation. However, the conceptions of democracy, realities of democratic process and their interpretations vary. 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.

Different interpretations result from not only the experiences in different cultures and traditions, but also the important democratic principle concerning the freedom of speech. 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. For instance, in a competitive model of democracy, two parties spend much money and energy attacking the opposite party while competing each other. It has a function of “Check and Balance”, but only within the two parties. Not every citizen is a party member. A non-party member is almost impossible to be the head of the country. In Japan, the representative of the winning party is automatically the Premier of the government. In the U. S., the leader of the winning party is the President. In many democratic countries, the percentage of the people who vote is less than two thirds of all citizens of the country, which can be considered the undemocratic factor in a democracy. However, it is unavoidable on its route to the democratic ideal. In a deliberative democracy, the influence of the major party on election and decision-making is often considered being undemocratic such as the Communist Party in China. But its People’s Congress and People’s Political Consultative Conference can also interpreted as democratic elements towards its democratic ideal. 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 (1987) 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 have been spreaded 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. With the equality of democracy, the democratic course of the world is towards the same ideal from different routes. 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.

Conclusion

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. Different conceptions, realities in practice, and interpretations with the same importance are equal in human course pursuing democracy. As the best form of governance, democracy involves the most majority of the people in a country and represents their common interests. The equality of democracy among countries exists in both its concept and conceptions. There is no essential difference between the ancient and modern concepts of democracy. Athenian concept of democracy as “rule

of the people” and modern concept of democracy in Lincoln’s “of the people, by the people, and for the people” share the keyword of “the people.” Starting from the core or the abstract concept of democracy, the routes countries take 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. As a universal value, democracy is advocated in many countries in the world. However, there is not a perfect model yet that deals with every thing democratically. Thus, 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, and they share the equality of finding and realizing democracy as their ideal.

Democracy as a concept or an ideal has its universal standards of majority participation and common interests; and democracy as conceptions or realities is diverse and multicultural. Using a conception of democracy based on one reality to judge different conceptions of democracy extracted from other realities is a behavior of authoritarianism and indoctrination. Democracy is not a western patent but the common wealth of human beings. Its essence cannot be changed, but its formalities including measures and steps are flexible to suit the realities, so as the interpretations of these formalities. Due to the exclusion of political participation to certain groups and unequal exertions of political power, none of the democratic formalities or governments has reached the height of democracy at its whole essence. And only at the ideal and conceptual level does democracy imply the essential equality. However, as a digression on the equality of democracy, this discussion has a significant meaning in mitigating the confrontation between religions, resolving the contradictions between the East and West, and removing the obstacles in establishing new type of relations among powers in the age of globalization with different political traditions.

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