

Strengths, Weaknesses and Trends of Authoritarianism in East Asia

Feixuan Li

Cheltenham Ladies' College, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3EP, England

Keywords: East Asian authoritarianism; strengths; weaknesses; development trends

Abstract: The strengths of authoritarianism in East Asia refer to some of the advantages that authoritarian regimes may have over other political institutions in specific situations, such as contributing to social stability and efficient decision-making, and promoting the economic development of the country to a certain extent. However, it needs to be made clear that these advantages are also subject to certain prejudices and limitations. Although some economic and social development policies were implemented to some extent by authoritarian regimes in East Asia, its drawbacks and negative impacts cannot be ignored. Authoritarian regimes have posed challenges to civil liberties, human rights protection, political repression, corruption and social inequalities, and have negative impact on social stability and sustainable development. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the advantages and disadvantages of East Asian authoritarianism dialectically, analyze comprehensively, and explore its development trends on this basis. This paper completely analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, and development trends of East Asian authoritarianism through a dialectical approach, in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the system developed by a variety of factors.

1. Introduction

East Asian authoritarianism is a political system that exists in East Asia with its central feature of the centralization of government power and the restriction of civil liberties, emphasizing national security, social stability and economic development. Its strengths are mainly reflected in efficient decision-making, maintenance of stability and economic development. First, one of the advantages of authoritarianism in politics is that it can make decisions and implement them quickly, avoiding multi-party consultations and delays in the decision-making process. Second, authoritarian governments usually have stronger control to effectively maintain social order and political stability, especially in developing countries or during periods of social unrest. Finally, authoritarian governments can concentrate their resources on economic development, and achieve their development goals by controlling markets and capital to promote economic growth rapidly. While the weaknesses are mainly associated with human rights violations, lack of supervision and accountability, as well as constraints on innovation. First of all, authoritarian governments tend to restrict citizens' freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and personal freedoms, and there are shortcomings in the protection of human rights. Secondly, authoritarian governments may lack effective supervision and balancing mechanisms, leading to abuse of power, corruption and the

formation of beneficiary groups. Finally, the intensity of authoritarian government control may have a negative impact on innovation and free thinking, limiting social progress and technological development.[1]

The formation and persistence of authoritarianism in East Asia is related to the geopolitical factor that the East Asian countries and regions are in the special middle ground of the Cold War between the East and the West after the Second Great War. One of the key reasons for the long-term existence of such a regime is that it reinforces the centralizing requirements of the authoritative regime in order to resist the "northern threat" and all sectors of society are forced to submit to the obligation of the authoritative regime. This is also the "legitimacy" of the new authoritarian regimes that emerged in East Asia after the Second World War (mainly in Korea and Taiwan, also in Singapore). The strengths, weaknesses and trends of authoritarianism in East Asia is a complex and broad topic, on which I will briefly introduce some of the main points below. But please note that these are only general discussions and are not country-specific.

2. East Asian Authoritarianism

East Asian authoritarianism refers to a political system that emerged in East Asia. Authoritarianism is a political concept that emphasizes the centralization of power and the restriction of civil liberties.[2] In East Asia, some countries have implemented authoritarian regimes to a certain extent. These countries usually adopt highly centralized political systems, with a strong central government or leadership holding most of the power. The government tend to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of media and the development of civil society through administrative means to ensure the stability of the regime and social order. In this process, national security, social stability and economic development are often regarded as the most important goals. In addition, authoritarian countries in East Asia are also characterized by strict control and intervention in economic activities from government, as well as the suppression of social groups and political dissent, and one-party or limited multi-party systems are also common forms of political systems in these countries. It is important to be highlighted, however, that there are differences in the degree and implementation of authoritarianism among different East Asian countries. In some countries, authoritarianism may be stricter and more tyrannical, while in others it may be relatively more moderate. Furthermore, the political environments and historical backgrounds of East Asian countries also have an impact on the characteristics of authoritarianism.

In a word, the survival of authoritative regimes in East Asia, the socio-economic development of these countries, the stability of the political environment, and their special close tie with the United States are related to the constant so-called "pressure" from the North. In turn, the transition from authoritarian to democracy in East Asia is associated with the pressure from the Western (America). It is the simultaneous existence of both Northern and Western pressures that has led East Asian countries and regions to develop this more centralized authoritarian system of government in the process of adapting to the challenges of such external pressures.

3. The Strengths of East Asian Authoritarianism

3.1 Social Stability

Authoritarian regimes in East Asia usually emphasize social stability and the maintenance of order, achieved by centralizing power and restricting civil liberties. This political system can effectively prevent social unrest and political chaos, thus maintaining the stability of the country.[3] At the same time, authoritarian governments may take strong measures to maintain social order and security, with a quicker and more effective response to criminal behavior and social unrest. This kind of stability

provides people with a sense of security and promotes social development and prosperity. In addition, authoritarianism can contribute to social stability by construction of social discipline and morality. Authoritarian regimes usually encourage the construction of social discipline and individual morality through a variety of means, which helps to improve social order, reduce crime and bad behavior, and enhance national cohesion.

3.2 Rapid Decision-making and Implementation

Authoritarian regimes tend to be able to make decisions in a short period of time and implement them quickly because power is highly concentrated in the hands of a few. Such efficient processes of decision-making and implementation can contribute to national development agendas such as economic development, infrastructure development, etc. The rapid decision-making of authoritarianism is also represented in political stability and social unity. Authoritarian governments may enhance political stability and social unity by centralizing power and improving the efficiency of decision-making, which could reduce social conflicts and divisions to a certain extent and maintain the overall stability of the country. Finally, speedy infrastructure construction is also one of the manifestations of strong execution of authoritarian decision-making. Authoritarian governments can move infrastructure more quickly due to the feature of centralized decision-making, such as expressways, railroads, airports, etc., in order to support economic development and enhance the country's competitiveness.

3.3 Economic Development and Modernization

Some East Asian countries have conducted a series of economic development policies and reform and opening-up measures in parallel with authoritarian regimes. These policies have enabled these countries to realize faster economic growth and modernization. Moreover, authoritarianism in East Asia is also advantageous in stability in economic development, and governments are liable to be more efficient in decision-making and more executive in implementation of economic policies to boost economic development more rapidly, which possibly leads to faster economic growth and industrialization.[4]

4. Weaknesses of East Asian Authoritarianism

East Asian authoritarianism certainly has the advantages of social stability and stable economic development, nevertheless, there are two sides to every regime. Despite developing advantages, weaknesses and shortcomings also existed. Therefore, it should be noted that some East Asian countries have achieved some economic and social progress while practicing authoritarian regimes, which have some obvious shortcomings and negative impacts yet, including the challenges to restrictions on civil rights, political repression, corruption, and democracy and human rights, etc. In consequence, in assessing the strengths of East Asian authoritarianism, both of positive and negative impacts need to be thoroughly considered.

4.1 Limitations on Human Rights and Individual Freedoms

Under authoritarian regimes, the fundamental rights of citizens, such as freedom of expression, assembly, association and the press, are often severely restricted. Control of ideas, speech and the media from government seriously undermines the ability of citizens to express themselves freely and participate in politics. This approach with more restrictive control over democratic values, such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly for citizens, can cause

limitations on human rights and constraints on individual freedoms. Moreover, authoritarian regimes often consolidate their power by suppressing dissenting voices, repressing political opponents and imprisoning dissidents, and such political repression leads to human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, unfair trials, torture and cruel treatment, etc. Simultaneously, authoritarian government's control over society and the economy may limit the space for innovation and personal development.[5] The lack of an open environment under the democratic system may hinder the full realization of individual talents and the emergence of social innovations.

4.2 Existence of Problems in Authoritarian Rule and Corruption

Authoritarian governments may have problems of power abuse, corruption and lack of impartiality, which gets a rise to social inequity and discontent. Power in authoritarian regimes is usually highly centralized in the hands of a few, likely to result in corruption and abuse of power. Additionally, the lack of transparency and supervision mechanism makes the abuse of authority and corruption more commonplace, damaging social equity and justice. Therefore, authoritarian regimes may lead to increased polarization and inequality in society. Furthermore, a privileged few often have access to more resources and opportunities, while the ordinary people face economic and social constraints, which increases the risk of social inequity and instability.[6]

4.3 Lack of Legitimacy and Representation in Governance

Authoritarian regimes usually lack genuine democracy and legitimacy, insufficient competition and pluralism in the electoral system, which causes a lack of broad public participation and representation in the process of power exertion and policymaking by the government, and vulnerable to social discontent and political instability. Overall, the impact of authoritarianism is complex, depending on the historical, cultural and political environment of the country. The strengths and weaknesses of authoritarian regimes need to be comprehensively assessed and compared with other political systems to better understand their implications.

5. Trends in Authoritarianism in East Asia

5.1 Strengthening the Establishment of Core Values

In some countries, the development of authoritarianism may be combined with nationalism and conservatism. The country may emphasize local cultures and values and take measures to limit the spread of foreign cultures and influences. At the same time, some East Asian countries may intensify their control over the education system in order to shape it to fit national interests and ideologies. Some other countries may put forward authoritarian political models that place greater emphasis on core values in order to strengthen control over national interests and ideology.

5.2 Digital Surveillance & Information Control

Due to the popularity of the internet and social media, the country may adopt stricter internet regulations to maintain control of information, probably involving reviewing and filtering specific types of content. Meanwhile, with progress in technology, authoritarian governments in East Asia are likely to adopt more advanced means of digital surveillance and information control to strengthen social management and control over their citizens.

5.3 Balance between Economic Reform and Political Stability

Some authoritarian countries may seek a balance between economic reform and political stability in order to maintain social development and security. Influenced by domestic economic developments and some national leaders, some countries in the East Asian region may be inclined to strengthen authoritarian controls, potentially including stricter social management and surveillance to ensure social stability and national security. Control of the media might also be added to ensure consistent coverage of national interests, which could bring about restrictions on press freedom and a rise of government interference in the media. Finally, there will also be a focus on international relations and transparency, as authoritarian countries in East Asia could be under international pressure, requiring greater openness and transparency to attract foreign investment and maintain international image.

6. Conclusion

Trends in authoritarianism in East Asia include increased social management and surveillance, a combination of nationalism and conservatism, strengthening control over the Internet and the media, and guiding the education system. Of course, these trends are not fixed and are affected by a variety of factors, including changes in political and economic environment at home and abroad. It should be noted that the advantages and disadvantages of authoritarianism will vary in different countries and situations. In addition, the development of the political system is a complex and lengthy process determined by a number of factors, including the national history, culture, economic conditions and the people's expectations, etc.

References

- [1] Xu Yuanyuan. *An Analysis of the Causes of Authoritarianism in East Asia* [J]. *Da Guan Weekly*, 2012:86,73.
- [2] Liu Chenguang. *Discourse Analysis of Western "Authoritarian"* [J]. *Scientific Socialism*, 2020:7.
- [3] Xu Siyu. *A Typology of East Asian Authoritarianism-- Taking Singapore and Korea as Examples* [D]. *Journal of Shanghai University*, 2019.
- [4] Marco Boffo, Alfredo Saad-Filho, Ben Fine, Wang Jiateng. *Neoliberal capitalism: Toward Authoritarianism* [J]. *Marxism & Reality*, 2019: 144-153.
- [5] Mitzen J. *Ontological security in world politics: State identity and the security dilemma*[J]. *European journal of international relations*, 2006, 12(3): 341-370.
- [6] Hang D. *Political parties and policy transfer in authoritarianism* [J]. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 2023, 45(1).