

Foreword

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It is a pleasure to welcome Roland Rich's timely study of the principal emerging democracies of Pacific Asia. Two decades have now passed since the popular movements that brought transitions to democracy in the Philippines and South Korea. As this book goes to press, South Korea is preparing to elect its fifth democratic president since the 1987 transition, while Taiwan is completing the two-term maximum tenure of its second democratically elected president. Each country has suffered from political scandals and ongoing political polarization, but each is a vigorous, liberal democracy. The Philippines is struggling quite a bit more with the travails of elite-driven money politics, but twenty years later, democracy endures. In Indonesia democratic institutions are beginning to settle in, to a degree that many observers might have found hard to imagine a decade earlier when the East Asian financial crisis brought down Suharto's "New Order" authoritarian regime after three decades in power. Meanwhile, during the period under study, Thailand has twice gone full circle, from a military-dominated semi-democracy to an electoral democracy, to a military coup displacing that turbulent democracy, followed by the restoration of democracy, historic constitutional reform, the apparent progress of democratic institutions, and then their reversal once again—culminating in another military coup in September 2006.

For anyone wanting to understand the political future of Asia, and for anyone wanting to understand the future of democracy globally, this is an important set of cases to chart and comprehend. Among the many reasons for doing so (including the fascinating mix of diversity and commonality among these five cases, which Rich exposes so well), I wish to underscore two. One obvious reason for importance is sheer demographics. Asia contains two-fifths of the world's population, including the biggest and most powerful dictatorship, China, which Rich rightly calls the "core state" of Pacific Asia. Which way China goes politically will have an enormous impact on the future of democracy in the world, and that in turn will be shaped to some extent by the success or failure of democracy on China's periphery, in the cases that Rich examines in this book. This is perhaps particularly true for Taiwan, with which mainland China shares so much in language, culture, and political history, and which most Chinese continue to see as a part of China. But it is true for the other democracies of the region

as well, which share with Taiwan the capacity to disprove the argument that Asian values are so distinct from those of the liberal West—for example, in supposedly privileging the community over the individual and order over freedom—that democracy cannot work in this part of the world. The communist leaderships of China and Vietnam would like their peoples to accept that thesis, and the surrender of freedom that it encourages. But in this fine comparative study, Rich gives us cautious but well-reasoned grounds to believe that Pacific Asia is headed in a different, more democratic direction.

A second reason for the importance of these cases—and this book—is that the Pacific Asia region has been, and remains, the most economically dynamic part of the developing world. It may therefore be reasonable to expect that democracy should be functioning better here than in much of the rest of the world touched by the third wave of democratization. In particular, to the extent that democracy is facilitated by economic development, we would expect to find it working quite well in Taiwan and South Korea, which have been two of the most remarkable economic-development success stories of the post–World War II era. That this is not entirely the case—and that the presumably stable democracy in Thailand should have collapsed altogether—cries out for attention and explanation. Rich highlights some of the problems that have retarded democratic development in the region.

Combining as he does scholarship on the region with the practice of diplomacy and democracy promotion in the region, Roland Rich is well placed to write this comparative study (which from time to time extends beyond the above five democracies to Japan, India, and even Papua New Guinea). As an Australian diplomat in Burma, the Philippines, and Laos (the latter, as Australia's ambassador), and then as the first director of Australia's flagship democracy-promotion organization, the Centre for Democratic Institutions, Rich observed firsthand the challenges of political development and democracy building in Asia across several decades. Thus, he brings to this study a feel for the politics of Pacific Asia that is not only scholarly but also personal, intuitive, and nuanced. His experience helps him to transcend the rigid confines of ideologies and academic theories and to see Pacific Asia's democracies as they are—a not always flattering picture. But he also sees them as they are becoming, or struggling to become, higher-quality democracies, and thus gives us a hopeful analysis of democracy in the Pacific Asia region.

There is a certain institutional pride, as well, in welcoming this work, which began during the period Rich spent in Washington in 2005 as a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). I know that Marc Plattner, my codirector of NED's International Forum for Democratic Studies, which hosts the Reagan-Fascell fellows, joins me in congratulating Roland and thanking him for making such excellent use of his time with us at NED.