Book Reviews

***Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence*. By Sheena Chestnut Greitens. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781316505311**

This book examines the use of coercive institutions by authoritarian regimes, focusing on two key questions related to the application of coercion within an autocratic regime. Those two key questions are: What determines the design of autocratic coercive institutions, and why do different autocrats design the institutions differently? Also, what effect does the institutional design have on the patterns of repression and the use of violence against civilians? There seemed to be nothing new about these questions, as literature on the relations between authoritarian regimes and the use of violence is numerous. Nonetheless, this book presents novel findings using an unconventional independent variable: a coercive dilemma. According to the author, a coercive dilemma is a tradeoff between political control and coercive power, where autocrats must empower security forces enough to enforce order and defense while controlling the power not used against them.

Coercive institutions are a dictator's final defense in pursuit of political survival and his chief obstacle. This book argues that autocrats face a coercive dilemma: whether to organize their internal security apparatus to protect against a coup or to deal with the threat of popular unrest. Because coup-proofing calls for (1) fragmented and socially exclusive organizations while (2) protecting against popular unrest demands unitary and inclusive ones, autocrats cannot simultaneously maximize their defenses against both threats. Coercive institutions creation and management are the regime's urgent priorities as they fundamentally shape patterns of repression and state violence.

As a result, this dilemma has consequences for citizens, creating a fragmented and socially exclusive coercive organization, which is best suited to avoid a coup, versus a unitary and inclusive organization, which is best suited to prevent widespread unrest. The author argues that these two consequences could not happen simultaneously. This use of the coercive dilemma is refreshing in explaining the drive behind autocrats' design of coercive institutions. More interestingly, the consequences of this dilemma are exclusive from one another. Although exclusive, the author does not mention whether the consequences can follow one another. The central hypothesis of this book is that fragmentation and exclusivity are increasing the levels of state violence through two pathways: the incentives for violence and the intelligence capacity. Regimes whose coercive institutions are internally fragmented and socially exclusive are more likely to engage in violence.

Originally written as the author's doctoral dissertation, this book straightforwardly presents its content. Divided into four parts, this book presents a comparative study of various regimes in East Asia, using them as case studies. The first part is the theoretical framework. The author argues that autocratic regimes are primarily concerned with the risk of a coup, which can create a fragmented and exclusive organization. At the same time, widespread unrest creates a unitary and inclusive

organization. The second part describes variations of the coercive institutions. A more fragmented and socially exclusive organization is likely to be more violent because fragmentation and exclusivity damage the institution's capacity to collect and effectively analyze intelligence and create professional and social incentives to engage in a higher level of violence. By contrast, regimes that are concerned about widespread threats use less violence because of their intelligence capacity and incentives that favor limiting violence rather than increasing it.

The third part is the case studies. Both the second part and the third part are organized as comparative studies of Taiwan, the Philippines, and South Korea. The case of Taiwan concerns the regimes of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo. In this case, both regimes transitioned from fragmented to unified and inclusive repression in the early 1950s, leading to a marked decline in violence. For the case of the Philippines, under the Ferdinand Marcos regime, it can be seen that there are forces that deliberately fragment coercive institutions to make them exclusive, fueling intensified repression throughout the martial law period of 1972 to 1986. In the last case of South Korea under the Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan regimes, it can be seen that Park's institutions are elite-centered and fragmented, thus creating regional and inter-agency violence. During Chun's era, institutions were more integrated, thereby reducing indiscriminate repression.

Lastly, the fourth part is the conclusion, where the author attempts to apply the same argument to other autocratic regimes. In Chile, a deal struck by the junta in the mid-1970s reduced Pinochet's elite threat, leading to the consolidation of the coercive apparatus and a decline in state violence. In East Germany, the unexpected outbreak of mass unrest in 1953 made that the dominant perceived threat, spurring remarkable growth in the power and reach of the Stasi, the quintessential unitary and inclusive organization, and reducing state violence against East Germans in favor of the surveillance-based style of repression for which the Stasi has become infamous. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein's paranoia about a coup led him to create fragmented and competitive security agencies staffed exclusively by family members, which were collectively responsible for extraordinarily high levels of state violence during his rule.

With its deep analysis, the overall theme of this book is considered a significant contribution to the study of authoritarian regimes and their use of coercive institutions. This book provides a powerful institutional lens for understanding when and why autocratic leaders employ brutal repression as a means of controlling their population. While additional factors, such as legitimacy, elites, and external forces, are portrayed as complex variables added to the intricacy of the deployment of coercive institutions, the coercive institution itself remains foundational in linking institutional structure to violence.

Maria Indira Aryani
International Doctoral Program of Asia Pacific Studies, National Chengchi University, Taiwan
Email: indira.aryani@gmail.com