

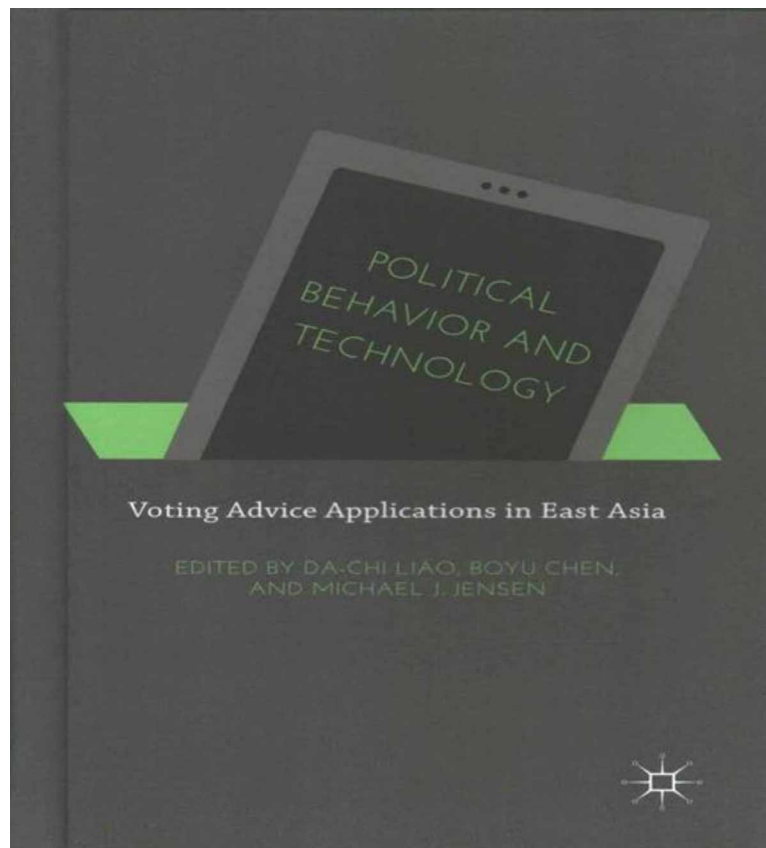
## Book Review

**Da-Chi Liao, Boyu Chen, and Michael J. Jensen (Eds.). *Political Behavior and Technology: Voting Advice Applications in East Asia*. (2016). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. 188 pages.**

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Voting advice applications (VAAs) are designed to help voters identify which candidates and/or political parties match their own opinions on a variety of issues. While political parties and candidates have always been able to share their views, and other organizations (e.g., newspapers) have sometimes condensed this information into comparative tables and other easily understood information, VAAs are a relatively new take on this idea. They employ technology to help voters make informed choices. After asking a user to answer a series of questions about their views on the most salient issues in an upcoming election, a VAA will say how closely his/her views match certain candidates' or parties' views.

The goals of VAA creators include improving voter engagement and helping voters become more informed about what candidates/parties believe and thereby make a more "correct" choice, i.e., to vote for someone who believes what they believe. VAAs originated in Europe and until now there has been little scholarly work on them in Asia. They are relatively new here. They were first introduced in Japan in 2007, South Korea in 2004, and Taiwan in 2012.

The editors chose the three countries as the case studies for this book because they are "the only fully consolidated liberal democracies in East Asia" according to Freedom House (p. 11). These three countries share many cultural similarities, which also make them good candidates for comparison. At the same time, each of these countries has many unique characteristics. The layout of this book makes it easy for the reader to appreciate the similarities between these three countries while getting a taste for each distinct political system, local issues, and how their respective VAAs were created and utilized during recent elections.

There are 8 chapters in this book. The first and last chapters serve as an introduction and conclusion, tying the book together and comparing the three cases. Chapters 2-4 introduce the VAAs of each of these countries. The authors of these chapters were involved in the creation of a VAA in their country. Chapters 5-7 look at the impact of

the VAAs in each of these countries.

The kind of information we find on each country varies. Some chapters are based firmly in data, although sometimes the significance of that data is overstated. Others are more descriptive. In addition, in countries where multiple VAAs were used, there is a definite focus on the one that the authors are most familiar with. Some readers may find it hard to understand all the nuances of the local issues described in some chapters, and sometimes the authors' personal biases about a situation may creep in. Nevertheless, these chapters provide a good overview and give readers a taste of the local flavor. Readers who become curious to know more about the political situation in each of these countries can undoubtedly continue reading about them elsewhere.

More importantly, as I read, I found myself wondering about the premise behind the VAA. For the VAAs described in this book to be an effective tool, we have to assume many things: first, we are assuming people should vote based on the issues. We are assuming that politicians will state their views on these issues clearly and that they will be consistent and honest about these views. We assume that potential voters have a well-thought out view of these issues without necessarily understanding the position of these candidates and that unbiased VAA creators will accurately depict these views. Many of these fundamental questions are discussed, particularly in Chapter 6. While not every question is answered fully, posing these questions is a good first step.

Some of these issues have already been dealt with to some extent in other countries, and so there are comparisons to VAAs in other countries throughout the book. Some of these comparisons illuminate why we need country- or region-specific research. For example, the VAA Vote Smart in the USA has dealt with the issue of flip-flopping or dishonest politicians using a subprogram, "I Spy," which allows users to see voting records and other information about 40,000 politicians. However, it is not really possible to create an equivalent to this in Korea, where records of politicians' behavior are much less complete and much more difficult to access. This means other solutions may be needed (or

we may need to become a more transparent society for VAAs to really be useful here).

This book acts as a solid starting point for refining VAAs in Asia. Regardless of their ability to perfectly achieve their lofty goals of improved political engagement and issue-based voting, VAAs seem like they will likely continue to be used in future elections and may become more popular in Asia and have some effect on voter behavior. Therefore, for those of us who study political opinions and how they are formed, understanding and evaluating the effects of VAAs will become important area of study. This ambitious, cross-cultural book provides a solid platform on which to build future studies and attempts to improve VAAs in East Asia.

### **Biographical Note**

**Sung Kyum Cho** is the first president of the Asian Network for Public Opinion Research (ANPOR) and the current president of the Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies (KSJCS). He is the publisher of AJPOR. He is a professor in the Communication Department at Chungnam National University and has written many papers on political communication behaviors. He has advised the television station KBS about pre-election surveys.

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